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A preacher may be wrapped in the robes of learning, and his study walls may be decked with diplomas. His home may be filled with travel souvenirs from many lands, and he may wear all the trappings of ecclesiastical prestige and pageantry. But he cannot function without unction.

–VANCE HAVNER

I can forgive the preacher almost anything if he gives me a sense of God.

–D. MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

AN EMPTY THREAT: JONATHAN EDWARDS ON Y2K AND THE POWER OF PREACHING

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> I hope the time is hastening, when God's people in the different parts of the world, and the whole earth shall become more sensibly, as it were, one family, one holy and happy society, and all brethren, not only all united in one head, but in greater affection, and in more mutual correspondence, and more visible and sensible union and fellowship in religious exercises, and the holy duties of the service of God; and so that in this respect, the church on earth will become more like the blessed society in heaven, and vast assembly of saints and angels there.[1]
>
> Jonathan Edwards, November 1745

Jonathan Edwards' vision of the future, in which the gospel triumphs through preaching, displays a radically different face from the doomsday approach often found among today's theologians. The pessimism of the modern worldview is exemplified by the hype associated with the Y2K bug. Some have cast a dark shadow upon the coming millennium, the future of technology, and the effectiveness of Christ's kingdom. Many have built compounds in the mountains or on their farms as a refuge from what they perceive as a time of coming chaos or even war. Those who anxiously anticipate a Y2K disaster have accumulated food supplies, generators, ammunition stockpiles, and even absurdities such as Y2K hairspray, breath mints and so on. The best place to find such thinking is over the internet where "end of the world" predictions can be published for

free, and books by "experts" have no end.[2]

To make matters worse, many going by the name of Christianity have joined these kinds of movements. Though it seems that the majority of Christian leaders are promoting a balanced approach to the Y2K problem, there are still many who seem to resist balance and rush to predictions of antichrists, earthquakes, and the mark of the Beast. The message many Christians deliver is one of escaping the sufferings of this world, rather than the wrath of an angry God.

Rest assured, Y2K extremism is still the extreme and not the norm, but it seems to stem from a common belief that the world is getting worse. Christians generally hold to one of three modern views of the last days: premillennialism, amillennialism and postmillennialism. A brief overview of these positions may help us to clarify the distinctions of Edwards' view.

The premillennial position, in its most basic form, proposes that Christ's millennial reign will occur in the future when Christ returns and establishes his kingdom. It is "pre" millennial in that Christ's return is before the millennium. His return ushers in a literal one-thousand-year reign in which he will rule the entire earth. Sometimes premillennialists place an emphasis on Israel as God's chosen people for his earthly reign (known as dispensationalism), and other times the whole of God's people (Israel and the Gentiles) is emphasized. The key point for this view is that the millennial reign is in the future and Christ will be physically present. Those who promote this view are often accused of a negative perception of the future; that is, they believe that the Scriptures predict an increase in sin and a world in which Christ is rejected before his physical return.

Adding an "a" to millennialism negates the millennium. However, since amillennialists do believe in a millennium, the name amillennial does not truly capture the

position. To those who hold this view the millennium is the time between Christ's first and second comings. The millennium is not literally one-thousand years; rather, the "1000 years" refers figuratively to a long expanse of time. At the second coming Christ does not set up the millennium (because it has been occurring since the first coming); instead, he sets up his eternal kingdom. This view is also often given the pessimistic label due to its belief that the world is on a decline. Christ will come to a world which is overwhelmingly unredeemed and will sit on his throne to judge the nations.

The last view and probably the minority view, postmillennialism, is very similar to both views, but primarily related to amillennialism. In the past, the distinction between these views was not recognized as it is today. The postmillennial view is usually given an optimistic label because those who adhere to its basic points believe that the world will be Christianized. This does not mean that every human being will be a Christian, but that the majority will be converted and world leaders will be subject to laws from a Christian perspective. The millennium is ushered in through Christ's church on earth. His reign is spiritual (through his people), and after (post) the one-thousand-year reign Christ will return. The millennium begins with Christ's reign through his church. Many variations of postmillennialism exist today.

Jonathan Edwards did not share the conviction that the world is going to fall deeper into sin. He saw a different picture of the world and believed there were bluer skies ahead. Edwards realistically expected trials ahead for the church, but he also concluded that the gospel would rise to triumph over the anti-Christian governments of the world. Revivals would usher in the last vials of the book of Revelation and ultimately climax in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth through the church. Edwards'

position is an optimistic postmillennial approach to the history of the work of redemption: The gospel will triumph through the preaching of God's Word in revival and eventually lead to the triumph of Christianity throughout the world. The year 2000 carries a radically different meaning for Edwards than it does for those who fear it today. Along with other Christians from the past, Edwards follows the scheme in which the seven days of creation typify God's plan for the history of the world. Each day represents a thousand years, and as the seventh day was the Sabbath day bringing rest, so the "seventh thousand years" of creation (beginning with the year 2000) will be the millennial rest.[3] Edwards believes that at that point the millennial kingdom will be established, and peace, not chaos, will be found throughout the world. There will be one holy and happy, not hostile, society.

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The millennium and the preaching of the gospel are inseparable for Edwards. The former is accomplished by the latter. Preaching and the gospel revival are preparatory for the millennium. Previous work on Edwards' understanding of the millennium gives a picture of Edwards anticipating an imminent millennium. However, Edwards actually looked for an imminent revival which would pave the way for the coming millennial reign of Christ. In 1959, C.C. Goen wrote "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," where he, based on an important passage found in Edwards' *Some Thoughts Concerning Revival,* concluded that Edwards was preaching an imminent millennium which would begin in America.[4] Edwards writes:

> And 'tis worthy to be noted that America was discovered about the time of the Reformation, or but little before: which Reformation was the first thing that God did towards the glorious renovation of the world, after it had sunk into the depths of darkness and ruin under the great antichristian apostasy. So that as soon as this new world is (as it were) created, and stands forth in view, God presently goes about doing some great thing to make way for the introduction of the church's latter-day glory, that is to have its first seat in, and is to take its rise from that new world.[5]

Recent scholarship by Gerald McDermott and John Wilson has challenged the conclusion of Goen.[6] McDermott says Edwards was not expecting the millennium to occur at any moment, and noted that the word "millennium" never occurs in the passage from *Some Thoughts.*[7] In a letter to William McCulloch, Edwards answers the accusation that he believed the millennium had already begun with the revivals of Northampton.[8] He writes:

> It has been slanderously reported and printed concerning me, that I have often said that the millennium was already begun, and that it began at Northampton: a doctor of divinity in New England has ventured to publish this report to the world, from a single person, who is concealed and kept behind the curtain; but the report is very diverse from what I have ever said. Indeed, I have often said, as I say now, that I looked upon the late wonderful revivals of religion as forerunners of those glorious times so often prophesied of in the Scripture, and that this was the first dawning of that light, and beginning of that work which, in the progress and issue of it, would at last bring on the church's latter day glory.[9]

Edwards did not teach that the beginning of the millennium had come, but that the church was in the process of entering those glorious days of preparation for the millennium. In this letter he calls the revivals "forerunners" to the "glorious times," and says that it is the "first dawning of that light." Revival does not equal the millennium; rather,

it leads to the millennium.[10] As God's Word is preached hearts are changed, and with every changed heart the world progresses toward the millennium. As will be demonstrated in this article, Edwards believed that a revival of true religion was imminent. This revival would be concurrent with and made possible by the unleashing of the vial judgments found in the book of Revelation. Through the preaching of God's Word, revivals will increase in intensity and eventually (by the conversion of the world) will overthrow the kingdom of Satan.

THE HISTORY OF THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

Edwards teaches that God's plan for history means triumph for the gospel through preaching. This does not mean that times of oppression will not exist. An example of this can be found in the vial judgments of the book of Revelation. The apostle John is told in the book of Revelation that he will be shown what is shortly to come to pass. The apostle was given radical imagery which indicated, among many things, what judgments God was to bring upon the earth. Many Christians have taken these judgments to be literal, while others have taken them to be symbolic of something spiritual. These judgments appear in sequence and are represented by consistent symbols. In one case, seven trumpets blow in sequence and at each trumpet a judgment is released. In another instance, seven vials are poured out upon the earth, and at each vial a judgment is released. Theologians today often conclude that the vial judgments in Revelation are part of a future seven-year tribulation period. These judgments, taken literally, can hardly be seen as a glorious time in church history.

Contrary to this evaluation of Revelation, Edwards proposes that these judgments are a part of God's plan to bring victory to the church. The judgments are not limited to a future period, but occur throughout the history of redemption, especially between the first and second comings of Christ. Edwards' interpretation of the various vial judgments described in the book of Revelation is that these judgments are brought upon those who opposed Christ. With each judgment Christ punishes those who fought against his gospel. The work of Christ to free his church from oppression and give them the ability to preach his word is especially given through the last three vials–the fifth, sixth, and seventh. Revelation 16:10-11 describes the fifth vial:

> The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness; people gnawed their tongues in agony, and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds.

Edwards views this with historical meaning. Prior to the Reformation the gospel was oppressed. Preaching was inhibited by what Edwards believes was the antichrist's governing body: the Roman Catholic Church. So God poured out his fifth vial to loosen Rome's grip on the truth and to free his people to preach the gospel unadulterated. Edwards writes:

> The vial of God's wrath is poured out on the throne of the beast, i.e., on his authority and dominion, to weaken it and to diminish it, both in extent and degree. And their policy shall fail them, to maintain and support it. God will scatter darkness before them. They that have the management of the affair of the beast's kingdom, will stumble and be confounded in the enterprises, purposes and management of the affairs of the kingdom; as if the kingdom were full of darkness, and they could not see whither they went.[11]

God's vial did not bring about a full destruction of the Roman Church, but it weakened its authority and ability to oppress the truth of the gospel. Therefore, the Roman Church continued its persecution because

> . . . "they repented not of their deeds" [Revelation 16:11]. Their impenitence and obstinacy, or their wicked deeds, especially appeared by what they did in the Council of Trent, presently after light was so clearly held forth to them by Luther and other servants of God.[12]

However, the triumph of the gospel will become even more obvious by the events of the sixth and seventh vials. As Edwards writes:

> All the seven vials bring terrible judgments upon antichrist; but there seems to be something distinguishing of the last three, the fifth, sixth and seventh, viz., that they more directly tend to the overthrow of his kingdom, and accordingly each of 'em is attended with a great reviving of religion.[13]

Before proceeding to Edwards' view of the sixth vial it is necessary to demonstrate how he correlates the fifth vial with the two witnesses of Revelation 11. In this passage, the witnesses oppose the Beast (the Roman Church) with the preaching of the gospel (11:7). However, they are persecuted for it, killed, and their bodies lie dead in the streets for three and a half days (11:8-9). This dark time of persecution and martyrdom of the witnesses is interpreted by Edwards as the time the true church was oppressed before the Reformation. But the account in Revelation 11 does not end with death. After lying in the streets for three and a half days, the two witnesses rise from the dead (spoiling the celebration of the beast) and are raised into the clouds (11:11-12). To Edwards, this symbolizes the victory of the Reformation. This corresponds to the fifth vial in that the resurrection of the two witnesses and the fifth vial are the same event: just as the fifth vial loosened the hold that the Roman Church had on the gospel, so also the resurrection of the two witnesses symbolizes the raising of the church and her gospel to safety. Edwards relates the two as follows:

> The church that was kept before under the power of the throne of the beast shall now be out of his reach. The same that is spoken of here, as God's church's being secured by their enemies being smitten with blindness or covered with darkness, is signified (Revelation 11:12) by the witnesses being taken up to heaven in a cloud in sight of their enemies, where they were out of their reach.[14]

With the fifth vial in the past and only a few centuries until the year 2000, Edwards looks for the sixth vial found in Revelation 16:12. "And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared." Edwards concludes that this is an allusion to the strategy used by King Cyrus when he conquered Babylon. In order to take Babylon, Cyrus dried up the river Euphrates which ran through the city and then used the dry riverbed as a highway to bring his army into the city.[15] Edwards expounds on the significance of the sixth vial and the Euphrates in relation to the kingdom of the spiritual Babylon (Rome). He writes:

> And therefore 'tis natural to suppose, that by drying up the waters of the river Euphrates, in the prophecies of the destruction of the new Babylon, to prepare the way of her enemies, is meant the drying up her incomes and supplies; and the removal of those things that hitherto have been the chief obstacles in the way of those that in this book are rep-

> resented as at war with her and seeking her destruction (spoken of Revelation 19:11-21, and ch. 12:7), that have hindered their progress and success, or that have been the chief impediments in the way of the Protestant religion.[16]

Though Edwards views vials five and six in terms of loss of political control it is ultimately for the progression of the gospel of the "Protestant religion." The fifth vial strikes the power of the Beast and the sixth vial strikes his wealth, but both work toward the freedom to preach the gospel to the world and to free it from the hands of the anti-Christian government whose power allows oppression. The preaching of the gospel is central to the use of the vials as they prepare the way for the establishment of the kingdom of Christ. Edwards writes:

> The fifth vial was attended with such a revival, and reformation, that greatly weakened and diminished the throne or kingdom of the beast, and went far towards its ruin. It seems as though the sixth vial should be much more so; for 'tis the distinguishing note of this vial, that it is the *preparatory* vial, which more than any other vial prepares the way for Christ's coming to destroy the kingdom of antichrist, and set up his own kingdom in the world. A great outpouring of the Spirit accompanied that dispensation that was preparatory to Christ's coming in his public ministry, in the days of his flesh: so, much more, will a great outpouring of the Spirit accompany the dispensation that will be preparatory to Christ's coming in his kingdom.[17]

The reformation and revival of true religion accompanies the use of each vial. Edwards believed that the sixth vial was long overdue and expected it would occur at any moment, bringing revival in America. Referring to the work of Moses Lowman, a theologian who wrote *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelations of St. John*, Edwards writes,

"Mr. Lowman shews with great evidence, that the fifth vial, the last before this, was poured out in the time of the Reformation; and he shews that there has ordinarily been about 200 years distance between one vial and another."[18] Since more than two hundred years had passed, Edwards concludes that the sixth vial could occur at any moment or even that the revival of Northampton and all of the Great Awakening may be a part of that sixth vial. So Edwards set out to look for the revival of true religion and for evidence of the sixth vial. He recorded, largely from newspaper clippings, any sign of the loss of revenue or supplies to the Roman Church in his "An Account of Events Probably Fulfilling the Sixth Vial." For example: "*Gazette*, November 22, 1748. Paris, September 13. 'Letters from Rochelle import that 5 ships are just arrived there from Martineco, the remainder of 12 which set out together from thence, the other seven having fallen into the hands of the English.'"[19] But these signs of the sixth vial were only complete with revival of religion that had to occur with them. Therefore, Edwards kept records of any sign of revival in his "Events of an Hopeful Aspect on the State of Religion." The preaching of the gospel and the transformation of lives encompasses Edwards' entries. One typical entry reads, "the account given, that many of the clergy of the Church of England having lately appeared to preach the doctrines of grace, in Mr. Robes letter of April 7, 1748."[20] Another entry reads,

> *Scots Magazine* for January, 1751, pp. 8-9. On the affairs of Russia. "The college established in the Asiatic provinces for the propagation of Christianity, continues to meet with success in that work. During the first six months of the year, they baptized into the faith of the Greek Church 5344 persons, who were formerly pagans or Mahometans."[21]

Preaching in revival is the real key for understanding

Christianity's conquering of the world. The victory of Christ is won over the hearts of men and women. Edwards believed God's Spirit would be poured out on the world very soon (if it had not begun already) and "great multitudes" would "forsake . . . vice and wickedness" and this outpouring "shall cause that vital religion, which is now so despised and laughed at in the world, to revive."[22] Ultimately, no military defeat nor depletion of wealth will accomplish this, but "the gospel shall begin to be preached with abundantly greater clearness and power than had therefore been" and "this great work of God shall be brought to pass by the preaching of the gospel. . . ."[23] This revival will move throughout the earth tipping the balance of religion.

Edwards believes that the world contains the kingdom of the antichrist (Rome) and its control throughout the world, the kingdom of Islam and the kingdom of the other pagan religions. The seventh vial brings a major blow to these kingdoms. Revelation 16:17-21 details the effects of the seventh vial:

> The seventh angel poured his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peels of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake. The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. God remembered great Babylon and gave her the wine-cup of the fury of his wrath. And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found; and huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, dropped from heaven on people, until they cursed God for the plague of the hail, so fearful was that plague.

This vial unleashes thunder, lightning, earthquakes, the

fall of cities, the destruction of islands and mountains, and great hail from heaven. The seventh vial will root out all these kingdoms, though not all at once. The first will be the kingdom of the antichrist (Rome), followed by its presences throughout the rest of the world, and then Islam and the other pagan religions.[24] The elimination of these world religions and the revival of true religion will begin with the sixth vial which will "go on and on in a wonderful manner, and spread more and more."[25] But prior to the seventh vial Satan and his followers will become concerned about the large numbers of those converted and will attempt a "great effort" in order to "save his kingdom from being overthrown."[26] His attempts will fail, as Revelation 16:17 makes clear when it announces the seventh vial with the words "It is done." To Edwards this means that "the business is done for Satan and his adherents. When this victory is obtained all is in effect done."[27] The language of the seventh vial uses imagery of earthquakes and cities falling, which Edwards understands as the victory of the Word of God. He comments, "The word of God shall have a speedy and swift progress through the earth; as it is said, that on the pouring out of the seventh vial, 'the cities of the nations fell, and every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.'"[28] The seventh vial makes it possible for "the heathen nations" to "be enlightened with the glorious gospel."[29] By the preaching of the gospel the heathen will be "brought out of darkness into marvelous light."[30]

For Edwards, God does not defeat the anti-Christian governments of the world by taking away their land, wealth, and power (as the vials accomplish). These are merely means to bring out the true conqueror of the world: the gospel. Edwards writes:

> For we know that Antichrist is to be destroyed by clear light, by the breath of Christ's mouth, [by the] brightness of his

> coming, that is, by plain reason and demonstration, deduced from the Word of God. We know likewise, that he is to be destroyed by the sword that comes out of the mouth of him that sits on the horse (ch. 19:15). And what is this but the Word of God, and the clear light of the gospel.[31]

In the time of Constantine God made a "glorious change in the empire" which was possible only by the "power of God's Word, the prevalence of the glorious gospel."[32] So likewise, the fifth, sixth and seventh vials will bring change as they make way for the preaching of the gospel and the conversion of the sinner. Edwards concludes that the blowing of the trumpets and the destruction of the walls of Jerico in Joshua 6 typify "the blowing of the trumpet of the gospel and preaching the Word of God" by which Satan's kingdom will fall.[33] God uses the preaching of Scripture to translate men from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ. The vials create the opportunity, and the work of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God secures it.

THE PREACHING OF REVIVAL

Each vial is attended by reformation and revival. The sixth vial is accompained by revival on a greater scale than the fifth, and the seventh is greater than the sixth. The change brought about by the gospel is not as simple as the preached word. Even an unregenerate person can be affected by the preached word, but this does not mean that one experiences conversion at the preaching of the Word of God. Edwards writes in his *Religious Affections*:

> though men's religious affections [discernible manifestations of virtue that come with true conversion] truly arise from some instruction or light in the understanding, yet the affection is not gracious unless the light which is the ground of it be spiritual.[34]

It is possible that "men may be much affected from common illuminations of the Spirit of God, in which God assists men's faculties to a greater degree" but ultimately this does not bring about change because "these affections are not spiritual."[35] Simply hearing the Word of God preached is not enough to change a person's soul. God's changing of the world through the preaching of his Word and the truth of the gospel occurs hand in hand with the infusion of his Spirit into the soul of the person to be converted.

In his sermon "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God," Edwards gets to the heart of why the gospel changes the person. He writes that "those convictions that natural men may have of their sin and misery is not this spiritual and divine light."[36] The unregenerate person is morally unable to choose the things of God in the way a true Christian may. The Spirit of God must be infused into the soul of the person and change that person's inclination away from sin and toward Christ. As Edwards writes, "The Holy Spirit operates in the minds of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties."[37] God's Spirit is infused into the soul and enables one to love Christ and his Word. When the Spirit changes the person internally, enabling him or her to embrace Christ, then the preached word takes effect and the person is converted. Edwards explains how a person is convinced of the truth of God's Word:

> As the prejudices that are in the heart, against the truth of divine things, are hereby removed; . . . the mind becomes susceptive to the due force of rational arguments for their truth. The mind of man is naturally full of prejudices against the truth of divine things: it is full of enmity against the doctrines of the gospel; which is a disadvantage to those arguments that prove their truth, and causes them to lose their

> force upon the mind. But when a person has discovered to him the divine excellency of Christian doctrines, this destroys the enmity, removes those prejudices and sanctifies the reason, and causes it to lie open to the force of arguments for their truth.[38]

The vials which destroy the material control of the antichrist are accompanied by revival which destroys the spiritual control of the antichrist. Revival is made possible by the movement of the Spirit of God upon the person's soul, making him or her susceptible to the "superlative" nature of the preaching of the gospel's truth.[39] Once the person embraces the gospel he or she is transformed into Christ's kingdom, thereby making the kingdom of Satan smaller and the influence of its control weaker.

True revival emphasizes the need of the person to embrace the gospel and raises the Word of God above all else. In regard to the revival occurring in New England, Edwards established what he called *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God*. One mark that Edwards finds to be true in times of revival is that "the spirit that operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity, is certainly the Spirit of God."[40] He continues to argue that the Devil never points anyone to the Word of God. It is counteractive for him to do so. Edwards argues,

> Would the prince of darkness, lead men to the sun? The devil has ever shown a mortal spite and hatred towards that holy book of the Bible: He has done all in his power to extinguish that light; and to draw men off from it: he knows it to be that light by which his kingdom of darkness is to be overthrown.[41]

Just as no kingdom exists without citizens, so also there

is no war between kingdoms without soldiers. Edwards views the minister of the gospel as an important soldier for the overthrow of Satan's kingdom: "Christ's design in the appointment of the order and office of ministers of the gospel was, that they might be lights to the soul of men."[42] "Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of darkness," but as Edwards juxtaposes, "Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of light . . . his people *are not of the night, nor of darkness,* but are *children of the light.*"[43] The gospel minister is the tool by which God spreads his message. As Edwards writes, "But if he [the minister] approves himself in his ministry, as both a burning and a shining light, this will be the way to promote true Christianity amongst his people."[44] With this role comes incredible responsibility. Edwards relays the gravity of this position in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion:*

> But, above all, is God's eye upon the *ministers* of the gospel, as expecting of them, that they should arise, acknowledge, and honor him in such a work as this, and do their utmost to encourage and promote it. For this is the very business to which they are called and devoted; it is the office to which they are appointed, as co-workers with Christ. They are his ambassadors and instruments, to awaken and convert sinners, and establish, build up, and comfort saints; it is the business they have been solemnly charged with, before God, angels, and men, and to which they have given up themselves by the most sacred vows.[45]

Promoting true religion among the congregation is a theme found in Edwards' *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. This work documents the revival of 1734 and 1735 at the First Church of Christ, Northampton, Massachusetts, which was then under Edwards' care. The role of the minister in promoting true revival of religion is

taken very seriously by Edwards. He teaches that the "central vehicle for revivalism" is "pulpit oratory."[46] The Northampton congregation gained a craving for the preaching of God's Word. As Edwards remembers:

> Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth; the assembly in general were, from time to time, in tears while the Word was preached; some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.[47]

God's Spirit changes one's soul, and the power of the gospel presented to a person exposes his or her sin and wickedness and lights the path toward Christ, the only hope. The preacher administers God's Word and "is the principal means that God has appointed for carrying on his work on the souls of men."[48] The "glorious revival of religion, and reformation of the world" that will be brought about completely in the year 2000 by the work of the fifth, sixth, and seventh vials will be "principally the labours of his ministers."[49]

IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY: CHRIST AND CULTURE

The diversity of Christian viewpoints on Christ's plan for this world was well described in the 1950s by H. Richard Niebuhr who wrote a book titled *Christ and Culture*. In this work he analyzes five basic approaches that Christians have taken throughout church history when viewing culture. These five approaches–Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ the transformer of culture (Edwards' view)–capture the essential worldviews held by

most Christians.

The first approach, Christ against culture, is held by many who view culture as essentially evil. Niebuhr reminds us of Tertullian's objection of the use of Greek philosophy by Christians: "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" In other words, Christ and culture are antithetical. Niebuhr writes that those with a "Christ against culture" model for living

> emphasize the *opposition* between Christ and culture. Whatever may be the customs of the society in which the Christian lives, and whatever the human achievements it conserves Christ is seen as opposed to them, so that he confronts men with the challenge of an "either-or" decision.[50]

The second approach is the polar opposite of the first. Those who hold to the Christ-of-culture system "feel no great tension between church and world, the social laws and the gospel, the workings of divine grace and human effort, the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservation and progress."[51] They "interpret culture through Christ . . . [and] they understand Christ through culture."[52]

A third answer to the question of Christ and culture is a sort of mixed breed in that Christ and culture are not radically opposed like the first view holds, yet it does not accommodate culture like the second view. Christ is the ruler of culture and gives culture meaning through his grace. He condescends to culture and fills it with himself, yet he himself is separate from culture.

The fourth answer finds a paradox between Christ and culture. Two contrary worlds exist, and the Christian is to be obedient to both. This leads to conflicting demands in which Christ demands one thing and the world another. Niebuhr calls those who hold this view "dualists" and lists Luther among their ranks.[53] This view takes seriously the

sinfulness of humanity and its permeation of this world. The dualist believes that despite culture's corruption the Christian has been providentially put within his or her culture and will persevere by God's grace. Luther saw this as the sinner-saint who has his feet in both the worlds of the unrighteous and the righteous: sinner by nature, saint by Christ. Christians interact with culture and work within it to bring glory to God, but their hope is beyond the grave in eternity.

The last view posited by Niebuhr, Christ as the transformer of culture, is also descriptive of Edwards' position. This view is very much like the dualist perspective, yet the hope of the dualist is not so separated from the here and now. The transformist position holds to the innate sinfulness of humanity and its spread in culture, but finds that Christ is not against culture, nor entirely synonymous with culture; rather, Christ transforms culture. As Niebuhr writes, "hence [the transformist's] culture is all corrupted order rather than order for corruption, as perversion, and not as badness of being. The problem of culture is therefore the problem of its conversion, not of its replacement by a new creation; though the conversion is so radical that it amounts to a kind of rebirth."[54] Change begins now and not solely in the future redemption. God changes souls now and seeks to transform culture in the present. There can be a reversal of the perversion under which culture is imprisoned. Christ has come to redeem all of creation (Romans 8:19-22). Edwards teaches a view in which Christ transforms culture, and in which Christianity slowly fills the world with the truth of the gospel.

Edwards did not expect the year 2000 to be the terror that is anticipated by so many people today. Edwards expected Christ to transform culture and to raise it into one holy and happy society. Amillennialists and premillennialists have much to carry away from Edwards' eschatological

vision. Though these particular eschatological views may not allow for a world-wide conversion, they can conclude (as Edwards demonstrates) that God still works revival and reformation in the progress of redemption. Even in Edwards' time it would have been possible to believe that the world would just get worse. But it is this conclusion that Edwards writes against in his *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth.* Edwards had learned from his experience with revivals that even when times are dark God can still bring revival.

Edwards strongly believes that ministers of the gospel are to preach messages that contribute to the expansion of the kingdom of Christ. It does not matter if one's view of the future expects or does not expect an anti-Christian world before Christ comes. The objective of every minister is to point the soul toward Christ and the gospel through preaching. As Edwards writes:

> For although there are many dark clouds, and God's Spirit is greatly withdrawn from some places where it has lately been remarkably poured out, and Satan seems at present greatly to rage and prevail; yet God is still carrying on his work, if not in one place, yet in another.[55]

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Notes

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), 180.
2. For example, by visiting http://www.shastalake.com/y2k/index.html one can find plenty of examples of communal living as a result of Y2K.
3. Jonathan Edwards, "Notes on the Apocalypse" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 5, *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen Stein (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977), 129-30.
4. C.C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure In Eschatology." *Church History*, 28 (March 1959), 25.
5. Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning Revival* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C.C. Goen (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1972), 353.
6. In 1959 C.C. Goen wrote in his article that Edwards' millennial expectations are "anything but 'old-fashioned chiliasm.'" (Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure," 25). Instead he calls Edwards' position a "novelty" and suggests that "Edwards' proposal of an imminent millennium within ordinary history was a definitive factor in the religious background of the idea of progress" (ibid., 26). He believed that Edwards saw the millennium as an "immediate" offering which will begin in America (ibid., 29). John F. Wilson, in a contrary view, rejects Goen's interpretation that Edwards was being rather innovative (John F. Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988], 131-41). McDermott also proves very well that "Edwards never expected to see the dawn of the millennium himself" (Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society* [University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992], 49). Rather, he looked forward to an age that was "preparatory" for the kingdom (ibid., 51). According to McDermott the millennium is not to begin in America as Goen and Wilson assume; rather, Edwards sees the revivals of America as part of that preparatory work of God (ibid., 60).
7. *One Holy and Happy Society*, 54.
8. Perry Miller felt that Edwards, though he said he did not believe the millennium began at Northampton, did leave people thinking he meant that. Miller wrote, "Yet from the original sections of the *History of Redemption*, the historian has little difficulty in comprehending how ordinary Yankees, whose knowledge of history was highly impressionistic, gathered from Mr. Edwards that the revival which flared up again in 1740 was the commencement of Christ's reign, and that Northampton was its capital, and thereupon surrendered themselves to ecstasies that left them writhing on the floor of the meeting-house, or found them clasped in the arms of their neighbors' wives or daughters" (Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* [Cleveland, Ohio: The World Publishing Co., 1949], 318). This is a rather extravagant interpretation of Edwards, not unlike the misinterpretations he was accused of and wrote about to William McCulloch.

9. Edwards, "A Letter to William McCulloch," in *The Works*, vol. 4, 560.
10. *One Holy and Happy Society*, 53.
11. Edwards, "Notes on the Apocalypse," 195.
12. *Apocalypse*, 199.
13. Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 5, *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen Stein (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1977), 426.
14. *Apocalypse*, 195.
15. *Humble Attempt*, 424.
16. *Humble Attempt*, 414.
17. *Humble Attempt*, 426.
18. *Humble Attempt*, 298.
19. *Humble Attempt*, 272.
20. *Humble Attempt*, 289.
21. *Humble Attempt*, 294.
22. Jonathan Edwards, "The History of the Work of Redemption" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Guildford, London: Billings and Sons, 1834; reprint, Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1979), 606 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
23. *Works, vol. 1*, 605.
24. *Apocalypse*, 175.
25. Edwards, "History of the Work of Redemption," 605.
26. *History*, 606.
27. *History*, 606.
28. *History*, 606.
29. *History*, 608.
30. *History*, 608.
31. *Apocalypse*, 118.
32. *Humble Attempt*, 402.
33. *Humble Attempt*, 130.
34. Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1986), 195.
35. *Religious Affections.*
36. Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *A Jonathan*

Edwards Reader edited by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 107.

37. *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 109.
38. *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 112.
39. *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, 113.
40. Jonathan Edwards, "Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Guildford, London: Billings and Sons, 1834; reprint, Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1979), 267 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
41. *Works*, vol.2, 267.
42. Jonathan Edwards, "The True Excellency of a Gospel Minister" in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Guildford, London: Billings and Sons, 1834; reprint, Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1979), 956 (page citations are to the reprint edition).
43. *Works*, vol.2.
44. *Works*, vol.2, 958.
45. *Some Thoughts*, 387.
46. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P Minkema eds., "Editors Introduction" in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), xvi.
47. Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God," in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, eds., John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995), 63.
48. *Some Thoughts*, 387.
49. *Some Thoughts*.
50. Niebuhr, Richard, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 40.
51. *Christ and Culture*, 83.
52. *Christ and Culture*.
53. *Christ and Culture*, 149.
54. *Christ and Culture*, 194.
55. *Letters*, 16, 183.