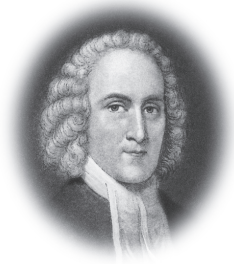


A Model of Faith and Thought



Jonathan Edwards
AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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PREFACE

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) is the most influential thinker in all of evangelical history. He worked as a parish pastor, missionary and college teacher. He mentored younger pastors and he published many books. By the time he had died, at the age of fifty-four, he had sparked a new movement of Reformed evangelicals who played a major role in fueling the rise of modern missions, preaching revivals far and wide, and wielding the cutting edge of American theology. Edwards' works are read today on every continent in the world (except Antarctica, of course). He has never gone out of print. Younger Christians, in particular, continue to flock to seminars and conferences on him.

Hundreds of books and articles exist on Jonathan Edwards (not to mention the many doctoral dissertations written about him).¹ He remains one of the best-studied figures in our past. But few have written books on Edwards aimed at fellow Christians, people looking for a state-of-the-art discussion of his life in order to use him as a model of Christian faith, thought and ministry.

This is such a book. I have written it with Christians at the forefront of my mind: pastors, students and everyone else who wants a brief, accessible book, full of essential information and explicitly Christian comment on this most important founder of the evangelical movement.

¹See M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

I have tried through most of the chapters to convey the rich story of Edwards' life and varied labors (chapters one, two, four, six and part of chapter seven). But I have also set up this story with a tour of Edwards' world and its profoundly biblical structure that I hope will help my readers imagine Edwards' life more vividly and think more comprehensively about its distance from theirs (the introduction). I have also devoted two chapters to the things that mattered most to Edwards himself as he pursued his ministerial vocation: his study of the Bible (chapter three) and his theological passions (chapter five). My book concludes with reflections on the legacy of Edwards and suggestions about what we can learn from him (chapter seven).

I am an academic specialist on Edwards and his times. But I have worked hard to make these pages clear, concise and compelling. I have had the help of friends who live outside of the academy and challenged me to render Edwards' life in lucid prose. Special thanks in this regard go to the following individuals whose input was invaluable: Pastor Steve Farish, Pastor Brian Farone, Pastor Steve Mathewson, Ben Peays, Lynae Peays, Dr. Greg Scharf (a former pastor, now a teacher), Pastor Greg Strand, Wilma Sweeney, and hundreds of students at Trinity.

I should also thank the churches that put up with my remarks on Edwards' ministry over the years (and thus contributed inadvertently to this volume): St. Mark Lutheran Church, Lindenhurst, Illinois; Moody Church, Chicago, Illinois; Winnetka Bible Church, Winnetka, Illinois; Arlington Heights Evangelical Free Church, Arlington Heights, Illinois; Lancaster Evangelical Free Church, Lancaster, California; Crossroads Church, Grayslake, Illinois; Lakeview Presbyterian Church, Vernon Hills, Illinois; Libertyville Evangelical Free Church, Libertyville, Illinois; New Life Church, Vernon Hills, Illinois; Village Church of Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire, Illinois; St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Waukegan, Illinois; First Church of Christ, Bethlehem, Connecticut; Bethesda Lutheran Church, New Haven, Connecticut; and First Lutheran Church, Nashville, Tennessee.

Hearty thanks go to the following academics and librarians, each of whom made major contributions to this project: Gary Deddo (my editor at InterVarsity Press), Scott Manetsch (who reads everything I write with great discernment), Ken Minkema (the most important Edwards scholar ever), Jackie Pointer (a great librarian-detective here at Trinity), Wolter Rose (a Dutch scholar who loves Edwards and the Bible, although not in that order), and Robert Yarbrough (a frequent partner in crime).

I am grateful to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, for granting me its Jonathan Edwards Research Fellowship (2003–2004). I am grateful to the Jonathan Edwards Center, also at Yale, for its continual support of my research.

Last but certainly not least, eternal gratitude is due to Terry Breum and Bill Shields, my pastors at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Lindenhurst, Illinois. They exemplify the best of Edwards' ministerial legacy. I dedicate this book to them with love and appreciation.