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Research Paper

Jonathan Edwards's Controversy at Northampton

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by

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Introduction

Joseph Tracy in *The Great Awakening* in 1841 recognized Jonathan Edwards's profound theological and intellectual legacy. Tracy viewed Edwards and George Whitefield as the leaders of what he called the "Great Awakening." Edwards had "done more than any other man to awaken the ministry and the churches," Tracy wrote, "and to produce the movement which had now become general."¹ Due to Tracy's religious analysis and in more modern works from Perry Miller and in George Marsden's critically acclaimed biography, Edwards's immutable character, intellectual gravitas, and timeless writings are in sharp focus. However, in his own time, Edwards experienced struggle and hardship. Edwards was rejected as pastor at Northampton in 1750. Afterwards, he was relegated to a church and a mission to the Indians at Stockbridge. In the end, Edwards died of a smallpox inoculation in 1758, after having only been the President of the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) for two months.²

As James Trumbull wrote in his authoritative history of Northampton, sometimes the "real cause is hidden by the mists of years."³ The communion controversy was the primary cause of the religious upheaval at Northampton, but there are other plausible reasons for Edwards's "unceremonious dismissal" as well.⁴ The other leading contributory causes include the following: quarrels over Edwards's salary, the "Young Folks' Bible" controversy, "conflicts with the

¹ Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (1841) (reprinted, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 213.

² George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 361, 364, 494.

³ James R. Trumbull, *History of Northampton, Massachusetts, from Its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing, 1898, 1902), 1:200.

⁴ Douglas L. Winiarski, "Jonathan Edwards, Enthusiast? Radical Revivalism and the Great Awakening in the Connecticut Valley," *Church History* 74, no. 4 (2005): 735.

Williams family, and the paternity case of Elisha Hawley.”⁵ Because of Edwards’s vast contributions to evangelical and Calvinistic life, Northampton’s religious history, economic climate, and the previously stated reasons for his dismissal are now peripheral and out of focus. As Douglas Winiarski challenged, Edwards’s “moderating revival zeal...in that notorious affair remains an unexplored issue that demands close attention from scholars seeking to reconstruct the radical underworld of the Great Awakening.”⁶ Edwards’s rejection of his grandfather’s communion practices because of his awakening whiplash led to his downfall as the Northampton pastor. For the Northampton congregation, the half-way covenant was not history; it was memory. For them, Edwards’s repudiation of the way Northampton had practiced the half-way covenant was not a revolutionary approach to combat declension; it was rebellious to all they had ever known.

Northampton

To reclaim a “usable past,” historians sometimes fail to grasp the historic nature of people, towns, and churches.⁷ Edwards began his pastorate seventy-four years from the town’s founding, but his family’s involvement with the town went back seventeen years from its founding. On May 3, 1653, twenty-four people petitioned the General Court of Massachusetts to found Northampton:

our humble petitioners hauing some Knowledge of the place by reason of the propinquity of our habitation to be a place desirable to erect a towne in for the furtherance of the publick weale by prouiding Come and raising cattell not only for their owne but Likewise for the good of others the probogating of the gospell the place promising in an ordinary

⁵ Douglas L. Winiarski, “New Perspectives on the Northampton Communion Controversy I: David’s Hall’s Diary and Letter to Edward Billing,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 282.

⁶ Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 735.

⁷ Thomas S. Kidd, “Jonathan Edwards: A Life,” in *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 2014), 37.

way of gods providence a Comfortable Subsistance whereby people may Liue And Attend vpon God in his holy ordinances without distraction.⁸

In 1658, Eleazar Mather was made the minister of Northampton and put on a three-year “way of Tryall in dispensing his gift.”⁹ Mather was the son of Reverend Richard Mather, a brother to Increase Mather, and an uncle to Cotton Mather of Cambridge. Eleazar Mather was a “zealous preacher,” a “staunch upholder of the Congregational way,” and a “most exemplary man.”¹⁰ Mather was also a member of the 1662 Synod that adopted the “half-way covenant.”¹¹ Sadly, on July 24, 1669, Mather died, ending his pastorate of eight years at the young age of 32. By the time of his death, 228 of the approximately 300 townspeople had been granted “full communion.”¹² Jonathan Edwards described Eleazar Mather as “one whose heart was much in his work, abundant in labors for the good of precious souls; he had the high esteem and great love of his people and was blessed with no small success.”¹³

On March 18, 1670, Solomon Stoddard married Mather’s widow, Esther.¹⁴ Stoddard accepted the call to become Northampton’s pastor on February 7, 1672, and he was ordained on September 11, 1672.¹⁵ During the first four months of his pastorate, 104 people “personally took

⁸ Trumbull, 1:6.

⁹ Ibid., 1:74.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1:203.

¹¹ Ibid., 1:201.

¹² Ibid., 1:107, 203.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire, in New England*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (1834) (reprinted, Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:347.

¹⁴ Trumbull, 1:211.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:213.

the covenant” or others were admitted to a “state of education.”¹⁶ Within six months, “fifty children had received this rite, and during the next four years one hundred more were baptized.”¹⁷

In two meetings in December 1668 and February 1669, the Northampton congregation had “fully accepted” the “half-way covenant...in accordance with the result of the Synod of 1662.”¹⁸ The half-way covenant was a sea change within Congregational churches in the eighteenth century. The covenant “argued that faith sufficient to justify the baptism of children was ample to admit the parents to the church as full communicants.”¹⁹ The covenant made them members, but it did not afford participation in the Lord’s Supper.²⁰ With this challenge, Stoddard had a solution. Stoddard argued that “the Lord's Supper was instituted to be a means of regeneration.”²¹

Stoddard was intimately involved not only in the church, but he also assisted with the building of the town’s first sawmill in 1670. Joseph Hawley’s account book showed that he taught Mary and Hester Stoddard, Stoddard’s daughters. Stoddard’s children were among the first recorded students in the town’s school.²² The Hawley family’s extensive history with the Stoddard’s would prove significant in Edwards’s pastorate as well.

Stoddard was among the first to extend the renewal of the covenant in New England, but Stoddard’s advocacy of Presbyterian and Reformed approaches to communion later caused

¹⁶ Trumbull, 1:214.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2:53.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:213.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:214.

²⁰ Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 159.

²¹ Trumbull, 1:214.

²² Ibid., 1:222.

Edwards much trouble.²³ The Hawley family would be among his opponents. Perry Miller observed in *Errand into the Wilderness* that Stoddard had offered the Lord's Supper to anyone who would partake of it at his Northampton church. With this distinctive "Stoddardean doctrine," Stoddard oversaw 5 "harvests," as he called them, in 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712, and 1718.²⁴ Despite vehement opposition from the Mathers of Cambridge, as Miller observed, "In the Connecticut Valley Stoddard's success was envied and imitated."²⁵

At a "reforming synod" in 1679, Stoddard advocated substituting the phrase "making a profession of their faith and repentance" instead of the phrase, "making a relation of the work of God's spirit."²⁶ This debate against Increase Mather, Eleazar's younger brother, centered on whether people who had been baptized as a part of the half-way covenant were "fit for the Lord's Supper" as well.²⁷ Stoddard maintained that they were and advocated for a much more liberal church admittance policy.

On October 5, 1690, Stoddard preached a sermon from Galatians 3:1 on the Lord's Supper "as a converting ordinance."²⁸ Stoddard maintained that "The Lord's Supper is appointed by Jesus Christ, for the beginning of grace as well as for the strengthening of grace."²⁹ The effect was that "persons were admitted into the church, and to the sacrament, not under the notion of

²³ Marsden, 30.

²⁴ Miller, 160.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Philip F. Gura, "Going Mr. Stoddard's Way: William Williams on Church Privileges, 1693," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1988): 491.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis, *Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard: The Nature of the Lord's Supper* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 129.

²⁹ Ibid., 131.

their being true saints, or that they had any real goodness.”³⁰ This represented a “legitimate outgrowth” of the half-way covenant, but it was also antagonistic and antithetical to some Puritan churches in New England at that time.³¹

Philip Gura challenged assumptions that Stoddard had “little success in persuading other clergymen to adopt his views on church discipline” and church membership.³² Stoddard’s son-in-law, William Williams of Hatfield, Massachusetts, was greatly influenced by his work. Williams is often credited with stoking the flames of the “Little Awakening” of 1734-35 because of his sermons on *The Duty and Interest of the People* and “*Directions for Such as Are Concerned to Obtain a True Repentance and Conversion to God*,” and a letter from Edwards to Boston’s Benjamin Colman describing the recent awakening of religious interest in the valley.”³³ Gura placed Williams’s importance as early as 1693 in a letter addressing the interrelated topics of communion and church membership. Williams’s opinion fell in line with Stoddard’s: “the benefits of all the ordinances (including the Lord’s Supper) were available to any who sought them in good faith.”³⁴ Stoddard was not alone in his approach to communion, church membership, and church privileges. Stoddard defended membership practices throughout his life and defended them in a 1709 work entitled, *An Appeal to the Learned, Being a Vindication of the Right of Visible Saints to the Lord's Supper, Though they be destitute of a Saving Work of God's Spirit in their Hearts: Against the Exceptions of Increase Mather*.³⁵ Certainly, Stoddard was

³⁰ Trumbull, 2:55.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Gura, 489.

³³ Ibid., 490-1.

³⁴ Ibid., 497.

³⁵ Trumbull, 2:57.

“novel” in the way he addressed declining church attendance, but he was not in “intellectual isolation in the Connecticut Valley.”³⁶

This was the religious and political climate that Jonathan Edwards walked into when he became Stoddard’s assistant at Northampton in 1727. The church was the first significant building block for a settlement and served “as the foundation of the political as well as the spiritual life of the community.”³⁷ Stoddard had pastored the church and helped build the town for fifty-eight years. His wife, Esther, was the only pastor’s wife the church and town had ever known. On February 11, 1729, Stoddard died at the age of eighty-six just two years after Edwards came to Northampton. At the funeral, William Williams delivered the eulogy.³⁸ In total, 630 people were admitted to the Northampton church during Stoddard’s pastorate.³⁹

Between 1729 and until his death in 1741, Williams was the intellectual leader of the Connecticut Valley.⁴⁰ After his death, Jonathan Edwards would take up the mantle. On September 2, 1741, in Hatfield, Massachusetts, Edwards delivered Williams’s eulogy, saying that “Judiciousness and Wisdom were eminently his Character” and that “his words were none of them vain, but all were weighty.”⁴¹

³⁶ Gura, 498.

³⁷ Trumbull, 1:209.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:54.

⁴⁰ Gura, 490.

⁴¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Resort and Remedy of Those That Are Bereaved by the Death of an Eminent Minister*, September 2, 1741, in *Works*, 2:967.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

On July 8, 1741, Jonathan Edwards gave arguably the most famous sermon in evangelical history: *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Edwards gave this sermon in Enfield, Connecticut, a little over twenty-five miles south on the Connecticut River. George Marsden discovered that Edwards “had preached the sermon at least once before, in June to his Northampton congregation...but he had ended on a more pastoral note.”⁴² Edwards warned the approximately two hundred attendees at Enfield, “natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell.”⁴³ For Edwards, his theological emphasis was still strictly Calvinistic. As Winiarski observed, “*Sinners* was not exclusively a hellfire sermon, since it focused as much on the omnipotence of God in saving sinners as on the eternal misery of the damned.”⁴⁴ Edwards’s hope was that “the use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation.”⁴⁵ Edwards focused more on God’s powerful hold on sinners from certain damnation than on man’s choice in the matter. Edwards concluded, “Therefore, let everyone that is out of Christ, now awake and fly from the wrath to come.”⁴⁶

Edwards, like his grandfather before him, extended communion to anyone who would take it in the nearby town of Suffield, where he also baptized “ten children ranging in ages from five days to eleven years old.”⁴⁷ Edwards administered the sacrament to “about 470 Communicants” in total, and “93 persons chiefly middle Aged [were] admitted to the Lord’s

⁴² Marsden, 224.

⁴³ Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God*, July 8, 1741, in *Works*, 2:9.

⁴⁴ Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 706.

⁴⁵ Edwards, *Sinners*, 21.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁷ Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 698.

Table,” joining the church that same day.⁴⁸ Previously in the Northampton revivals of 1734-35, Edwards claimed to have admitted eighty communicants at one time, but at Suffield, he oversaw perhaps the “largest one-day church admission ritual ever observed in colonial New England.”⁴⁹ Winiarski argued that Edwards’s sermon should be seen as the culmination of cumulative “radical religious enthusiasm” of his ministry in the days before the sermon.⁵⁰

Edwards, at first, remained faithful to Stoddardean doctrine, but he lamented the error to which some had fallen. Edwards wrote, “The main benefit that is obtained by preaching is by impression made upon the mind in the time of it, and not by the effect that arises afterwards by a remembrance of what was delivered.”⁵¹ Edwards “condemned the excessive zeal of both pro-revival ministers and their lay adherents, the spiritual pride and erroneous principles that fueled their bold claims of immediate revelations, absolute promises of divine election, uncharitable practice of judging the spiritual experiences of others, and special calls to preach and exhort.”⁵² Edwards believed that genuine expressions of worship would not be a “noisy showy humility,” but characterized instead by “deep humiliation, brokenness of heart, poverty of spirit, mourning for sin, solemnity of spirit, a trembling reverence towards God, tenderness of spirit, self-jealousy and fear, and great engagedness of heart, after holiness of life, and a readiness to esteem others better than themselves.”⁵³

⁴⁸ Samuel Phillips Savage Manuscript, “Extract from Letter, Suffield, July 6, 1741,” complete transcript in appendix of Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 736.

⁴⁹ Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 683-4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 686.

⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, in *Works*, 1:394.

⁵² Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 730-1.

⁵³ Marsden, 284.

After the death of William Williams in October 1741, Edwards experienced an awakening whiplash. In a letter to Moses Lyman, Winiarski found that “just a few short weeks after his visit to Enfield ‘Concerning the great stir that is in the land,’ Edwards said that the ‘work’ that he had witnessed in the upper Valley exhibited ‘mixtures of natural affection...and some imprudences and irregularities.’”⁵⁴ “Satan took the advantage” and had thrust his Northampton congregation into “enthusiasm and error.”⁵⁵

In his attempt to keep his congregation “from running wild,” Edwards instituted a moral covenant for the community in 1742 “to transform the volatile euphoria of revival into a more stable spirituality” and “to institutionalize the spirit of revival.”⁵⁶ In 1744, when the “Young Folks’ Bible” scandal broke out, those involved earned Edwards’s stiff Calvinistic rebuke because they had read “a book that they called the Bible in a laughing way.”⁵⁷ Edwards read “from the pulpit the names of the young people implicated,” and “no discrimination was made between the accused and those who were merely cited as witnesses.”⁵⁸ This started to unravel the community’s unanimity for their minister because those mentioned from the pulpit were “members of the oldest and most influential families in the town, as well as of others nearly allied to them.”⁵⁹ Consequently, given the wide nature of the controversy, the church abandoned the investigation because of the parents’ embarrassment, and “the authority of both pastor and

⁵⁴ Winiarski, “Enthusiast,” 731.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 732.

⁵⁶ Marsden, 260, 262.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 298.

⁵⁸ Trumbull, 2:202.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

church was greatly weakened.”⁶⁰ As Dwight wrote in the *Life of Edwards*, “the town was suddenly all in a blaze.”⁶¹

On June 19, 1748, Edwards’s trials as pastor at Northampton came to a head after Colonel John Stoddard, a son of Solomon Stoddard, died unexpectedly. As Marsden observed, “the major turning points of Edwards’s life were precipitated by the death of his patrons.”⁶² Colonel Stoddard was Northampton’s representative to the General Court, and he supported his nephew’s views during the controversies in the Great Awakening of 1741-42. Colonel Stoddard headed the committee that voted “by a great majority to a generous inflation-proof” salary for Edwards, making Edwards “one of the highest paid pastors in the region.”⁶³

Edwards praised his uncle in his funeral oration: “Perhaps never was there a man that appeared in New England to whom the denomination *great man* did more properly belong.”⁶⁴ Edwards called John Stoddard “a father to this part of the land, on whom the whole county had, under God, its dependence on all its public affairs, and especially since the beginning of the present war.”⁶⁵ Edwards continued, we should “show respect and kindness to his family...out of respect to him and to his father, your former eminent pastor, who in his day was in a remarkable manner a father to this part of the land in spirituals, and especially to this town, as this his son has been in temporals.”⁶⁶ Edwards charged that the “strong rod was broken and withered”

⁶⁰ Trumbull, 2:203.

⁶¹ Sereno Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards*, in *Works*, 1:cxv.

⁶² Marsden, 343.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 343-4.

⁶⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *God’s Awful Judgment in Breaking and Withering of the Strong Rods of a Community*, June 26, 1748, in *Works*, 2:39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

because of God's "divine displeasure" with the town. John Stoddard represented the last "guide" and "ornament" of Solomon Stoddard's church, and Edwards placed the blame on the town's godlessness for his death.⁶⁷ For Edwards, with the death of John Stoddard, he had lost the last anchor to the Stoddardean Doctrine. Given his accusations against the townspeople's behavior and the timing of his salary negotiations, Edwards's relationship to the church was already in a precarious situation.

An Humble Inquiry

No new members entered the church records between the time of the "Young Folks' Bible" scandal and 1749. Some applied but were rejected because of the discord between the pastor and his people. In 1749, "all the churches in the county, except two, and all the clergy, except three, approved of the lax mode of admission."⁶⁸ Edwards demanded change from his grandfather's doctrine and practice. Edwards offered to preach on the matter, but the church declined. He then insisted on writing to convey his change of heart, and he published *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, concerning the Qualifications requisite to a complete standing and full communion in the visible Christian Church*.⁶⁹

Edwards charged, "When persons only manifest their doctrinal knowledge of religion, and express the assent of their judgments, but at the same time make no pretence but that they are wholly destitute of all true love to God, and are under the dominion of enmity against him,

⁶⁷ Edwards, *God's Awful Judgment*, 2:40.

⁶⁸ Trumbull, 2:204.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

their profession, is, in some respects, very greatly to God's dishonour."⁷⁰ Edwards began his preface in *An Humble Inquiry* with this sentence:

My appearing this public manner on that side of the question, which is defended in the following sheets, will probably be surprising to many; as it is well known, that Mr. Stoddard, so great and eminent a divine, and my venerable predecessor in the pastoral office over the church in Northampton, as well as my own grandfather, publicly and strenuously appeared in opposition to the doctrine here maintained.⁷¹

It is doubtful that of the approximately twenty copies distributed at Northampton that many people made it past the first sentence of his preface to the work.⁷² Edwards wanted to prove he was theologically correct, but he had simply shown the town and church all that they had ever known was wrong. Edwards maintained, "Surely it is commendable for us to examine the practices of our fathers; we have no sufficient reason to take practices upon trust from them."⁷³ Edwards continued, "It is far from a pleasing circumstance of this publication, that it is against what my honoured grandfather strenuously maintained, both from the pulpit and press." Edwards had a "high view of sacrament", and he believed that partaking "unworthily could imperil one's soul."⁷⁴ Edwards believed his grandfather had erred in his communion practices.

The Life of David Brainerd, on the other hand, was well read in Northampton, and Edwards said Brainerd's life was "the right way of practicing religion, in order to obtaining the ends of it."⁷⁵ In 1740, Brainerd wrote the following about a Yale communion service:

⁷⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, concerning the Qualifications requisite to a complete standing and full communion in the visible Christian Church*, in *Works*, 1:447.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:431.

⁷² Trumbull, 2:205.

⁷³ Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry*, 1:431.

⁷⁴ Marsden, 353, 31.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Life and Diary of the Reverend David Brainerd with Notes and Reflections*, in *Works*, 2:456.

On Lord's day, July 6, being sacrament-day, I found some divine life and spiritual refreshment in that holy ordinance. When I came from the Lord's table, I wondered how my fellow-students could live as I was sensible most did. Next Lord's day, July 13, I had some special sweetness in religion.⁷⁶

As John Grigg found, "Edwards omitted a clause in Brainerd's original manuscript where Brainerd declared that he 'felt alone in the world like a stranger and a pilgrim.'" ⁷⁷ Edwards wanted all his congregants to feel about communion like Brainerd did, but Edwards did not want them to feel the isolation Brainerd felt. Instead, Edwards wanted Brainerd's religious experience to be "normative, not exceptional."⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the people of Northampton saw Brainerd's life as an "impossible ideal," and they believed their minister had significantly departed from his roots.⁷⁹

The Northampton congregation rebelled. On October 16, 1749, the townspeople petitioned:

that Mr. Edwards, by the Precinct, or by a committee which the Precinct shall appoint, may be in a friendly and in a Christian manner treated with and entreated to recede or come back from his principles which he has pretended to maintain in his late book, against his own practice and Mr. Stoddard's practice and principles, with respect to the admission of church members.⁸⁰

Eleven men signed the document, and "nine of the eleven signers were related by birth or marriage:" John Hunt, Gad Lyman, Ephraim Wright, Josiah Pomeroy, Jonathan Strong Jr., John Lyman, James Lyman, Jonathan Hunt, Joseph Wright, Gideon Lyman, and Seth Pomeroy.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Edwards, *Life of Brainerd*, 2:320.

⁷⁷ John Grigg "Jonathan Edwards's Life of David Brainerd and the Northampton Dismissal," *History Compass* 3, no. 167 (2005): 6.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁰ Trumbull: 2:206.

⁸¹ For a fuller explanation of the interconnected nature of these families, see Trumbull, 2:206: "John, Gideon and Gad Lyman were brothers; Gad Lyman married the sister of Josiah and Seth Pomeroy. The latter were

John and Richard Lyman, ancestors of the above mentioned Lymans, “were among the early arrivals [to Northampton in late 1653], but their names do not appear” either on the petition to settle from May 3, 1653, or in the roster of the meeting to settle held on October 3, 1653.⁸² Trumbull recorded that “only fourteen of the whole number [around forty-five names total]—eight of the petitioners and six of those who attended the October meeting—ever became residents, and some of these men did not come till the place had been several years settled.”⁸³ The Lymans “were the most northerly occupants of land on Pleasant Street, though their lots did not quite come up to Meeting House Hill, as there was unappropriated land enough above John Lyman’s, four years afterwards, for a home lot of four acres for the minister.”⁸⁴ In January 1660, Eleazar Mather, the town’s first minister, and his wife, who would eventually marry Solomon Stoddard after Mather’s untimely death, accepted this “home lott of 4 acres and the house that is built vpon the home lott near John Lymans.”⁸⁵ In 1689, the property was sold to John and Moses Lyman.⁸⁶

The Pomeroy’s ancestor, Medad Pomeroy, had been among those 1674 to “set up” the second saw mill in Northampton “on the brooke on the right hand of the Cart waye goinge over

brothers; and Seth Pomeroy married the sister of John and Jonathan Hunt, who were also brothers. Jonathan Strong Jr. , and the wife of Jonathan Hunt were cousins, and James Lyman was an uncle of John, Gad and Gideon Lyman. These men were all strong opponents of Mr. Edwards. Ephraim Wright acknowledged that he was among those accused of reading immoral literature. The wife of Zadoc, son of John Lyman and nephew to Gideon and Gad Lyman, was among the number cited before the committee by Mr. Edwards. These facts indicate that much of the bitterness of feeling engendered by the unfortunate affair of five years before still lingered and was coming to the surface. Only four of the above eleven names can be found upon the church records at that time.”

⁸² Trumbull, 1:18.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1:15.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:18.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:75.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:76.

Munhan river on this side that runs into the river and whilse the mill is in vse they haue granted them ten or twilf acors of Land for a pasture.”⁸⁷ Before the Massachusetts Bay Charter was revoked, Medad Pomeroy was the last deputy from Northampton to be “elected by authority of the Governor and Council of Massachusetts Bay.”⁸⁸

When the Northampton church was founded in 1661, seven of the eleven surnames from the 1750 petition to dismiss Edwards are found in the 1661 covenant.⁸⁹ As Trumbull stated in his history on Northampton, “Many of the persons whose names are signed to this document [1661 Covenant] were ancestors of the present inhabitants of this and the neighboring towns, who still bear the same family name.”⁹⁰ Furthermore, all had strong connections to the Stoddards. John Hunt, Joseph Wright, Jonathan Strong’s father, and family members of the Pomeroy and Lymans all served with then Captain John Stoddard in Queen Anne’s War between 1704 and 1713. In 1684, Solomon Stoddard purchased his homestead from Matthew Clesson, whose presence in Northampton traces back to 1667. Matthew Clesson’s descendant, Joseph Clesson, served with Captain Stoddard in the war as well.⁹¹

Conclusion

Clearly, the townspeople were intimately intertwined with Stoddard’s life and family. Any ecclesiastical departure that Edwards offered brought disrespect to Northampton’s history, memory, and family life. On December 6, 1749, Edwards wrote to Joseph Bellamy, a pastor in

⁸⁷ Trumbull, 1:221.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:399.

⁸⁹ See Appendix A for the complete 1661 Northampton Covenant with the signers of the document as well as a comparison of surnames listed in the 1661 Covenant with the 1750 Dismissal Petition.

⁹⁰ Trumbull, 1:108.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1:577, 1:312.

Bethlehem, Connecticut and his former apprentice, about his plight: “The People have a Resolution to get me out of Town speedily, that disdains all—Controul or Check.”⁹² Edwards wanted to continue his ministry at Northampton, and on May 7, 1750, he wrote to Peter Clark asking for his support in the controversy, saying, “I think you express the very same Thing, when you speak of a *credible* Profession as what entitles a man to admission; *credible* in that which is worthy of *credit* or *belief*.”⁹³ However, the damage had already been done to the congregation’s trust. No one could say or write anything to change their minds after Edwards’s awakening whiplash, his botched handling of the “Young Folks’ Bible” scandal, and his all-out refutation of the Stoddardean doctrine in *An Humble Inquiry* after John Stoddard’s death.

The church voted to dismiss Edwards as pastor with two hundred to dismiss and only twenty in favor of keeping him. The custom of the time was to then refer the matter to a council of pastors and delegates from the county to fully “dissolve the relation between pastor and people.”⁹⁴ On June 22, 1750, a council of pastors and delegates met and voted ten to nine to dismiss Edwards.⁹⁵ As Trumbull wrote, “Both pastors and delegates had decided upon their course beforehand, and each voted in accordance with the views of the party by whom he was selected.”⁹⁶ Although *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God* is Edwards’s most famous sermon, it is not definitive of his time at Northampton. Edwards’s farewell sermon in 1750 is more representative of his ministerial career at Northampton. Edwards told the congregation that

⁹² Jonathan Edwards and Stanley T. Williams. “Six Letters of Jonathan Edwards to Joseph Bellamy,” *The New England Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1928): 238.

⁹³ George Clark and Jonathan Edwards, “An Unpublished Letter by Jonathan Edwards,” *The New England Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1956): 232.

⁹⁴ Trumbull, 2:222.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:223-4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

people and pastors will meet on Judgement Day before the Judge, “whose eyes are as a flame of fire,”⁹⁷ and he added:

Then our late grand controversy—concerning the qualifications necessary for admission to the privileges of members in complete standing in the visible church of Christ—will be examined and judged in all its parts and circumstances, and the whole set forth in a clear, certain, and perfect light.⁹⁸

Edwards and his family’s time as pastors of Northampton was over, but he still preached twelve times since the congregation failed to find a full-time minister for three years.⁹⁹ On September 17, 1753, the town voted “in concurrence with the church” to extend a call to Reverend John Hooker as pastor.¹⁰⁰ Hooker advocated the Stoddardean doctrine, and Peter Reynolds of Enfield, Joseph Ashley, and Timothy Woodbridge of Hatfield were among the ten ministers and delegates on the ordination council represented on December 11, 1753. Previously, Reynolds had sided with Edwards in the 1750 council, whereas Ashley and Woodbridge had voted to oust him from the Northampton pastorate. Healing for the Northampton church was in order, and “it was largely through Mr. Hooker’s ministrations that the long existing disagreements in the community were reconciled.”¹⁰¹ Stoddard had pastored the Northampton church for almost sixty years, but Edwards’s pastorate ended after twenty-one years because he had rejected all that Northampton had ever known.

⁹⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Farewell Sermon*, in *Works*, 1:cciv.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Trumbull, 2:236.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:240.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 2:240-1.

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APPENDIX A: 1661 Northampton Church Covenant

Trumbull, James R. *History of Northampton, Massachusetts, from Its Settlement in 1654*,
Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing, 1898, 1:107.

"The forme of wordes expressing the Ch. Covenant entered into the 18 of the fourth 1661, by those that then begun that worke and afterward by such as were admitted into Ch. estate and subscribed ther names there vnto.

"Disclaiming all Confidence of, and any worthinesse in ourselves either to bee in Covenant with God, or to partake in the least of his mercyes. and allsoe all strength of our owne to keepe Covenant with him, or to pforme the least spirituall duty any further than hee by his free spirit shall asist. But relying vpon the Tender mercy, and gracious assistance of the Lord through Jesus Christ, wee doe promise and Covenant in the presence of the Lord the searcher of all hearts ; and before the holy Angells, and this company, first and chiefly, to cleave forever vnto God with our whol hearts as om- chiefe. best, yea and only good, and vnto Jesus Christ as our only Saviour, Husband, and Lord, and only High Priest, Prophet and King. And for the furthering of this holy Commvniion with God the father and Christ Jesus, his Sonne, wee promise and engage to obserue, and mainetaine according too' place and vtmost power all the holy institutions, and Ordinances which hee hath appointed for his Church, bewaileing the neglect ther of, and the sinfull defilements of the same with the Inventions and Corruptions of men....And as for this perticuler Company and society of Saints, wee promise and engage in the presence of the Lord that wee will Cleave one vnto another in brotherly love, and seeke the best Spirituall good each of other, by frequent exhortation, seasonable Admonition, and Constant watchfulnesse according vnto the rules of the Gospell. and to performe each vnto other all duties that the Lord in his word doth require of vs, as brethren in Christ, and as fellow members of the same Individuall body of Christ, as long as the Lord shall continue our Church relation each toother....And allsoe wee promise and engage mutuall subjection one to another in all the Administrations and Dispensations according vnto God of all those dutyes which by our Covenant to God. and one to another, wee are bound to the performance. . . .These things wee all promise in the sincerity of our hearts as before the Lord the examiner, and tryer of all hearts beseeching him, soe to blesse vs, as wee shall truly indeavour by his grace the faithful observation of the same, and when wee through weaknesse shall fayle, then to wayt:, and rely vpon the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon, acceptance, healing for his namesake. To this Covenant, and every part of it, wee willingly and sincerely ingage ourselues, and subscribe our names therevnto.

Northampton 18th 4. 1661.

(Signers on Next Page)

Samuel Wright
 John Marsh
 Thomas Woodford
 Kathern Wilton
Abigaile Strong
Margaret Wright
 Arthur Williams
 Mary Alford
 Sarah Bridgman
 George Allexander
 Isaac Sheldon
 Mary Sheldon
 Allexander Edwardes
 William Hanum
 Nathaniel Phelps
 Kathern Williams
 Ann Bartlet
 Deliverance Hanchet
 George Langton
 Esther Mather
Dorcus Lyman
 Ruth Baker
 Hannah Langton
 Honor Haniim
 these two were added Sarah Hanum to y'^'
 Ch. 18 of 6 (61)

Aaron Cooke
 William Holton
 Joane Cooke
 Mary Holton
 Sarah Clarke
 Susan Cunleife
 Elizabeth Woodward
 Alice Hutchinson
 Susan Allexander
Richard Lyman
Hepzibah Lyman
John Lyman
 John King
 John Ingersol
 Mary Burt
 Sary King
 Abigail Strong Junior
 Josiah Duey

Mary Strong
 John Stibbins
 Sarah Allin
 Samuel Smith
 Mary Smith
 Joseph Parsons
Freedom Strong
 Eleazar Mather
 David Wilton
 William Clarke
John Strong
 Henry Cunliffe
 Henry Woodward
 Thomas Roote
 Thomas Hanchet
 William Jeanes
 Thomas Bascum
 William Hulburd
 Avis Basconi
 Ann Hulbumd
 Elizabeth Curtis

These six last were added vnto the Ch. 14"
5 m 61

Joseph Eliot
 Clemence Mason
 Elizabeth Phelps
 Robert Bartlet, excommunicated
 and re-admitted
 Richard Weller
 Sarah Smith
 Joseph Leeds

**(Surnames that are common between the
 1661 Covenant
 and the eleven signers in the
 1750 Petition to dismiss Edwards below
 are *italicized* in both documents)**

John Hunt, *Gad Lyman*, *Ephraim Wright*,
 Josiah Pomeroy, *Jonathan Strong Jr.*, *John
 Lyman*, *James Lyman*, Jonathan Hunt,
Joseph Wright, *Gideon Lyman*, Seth
 Pomeroy.