

## ABSTRACT

Identifying with the Lowly: Jonathan Edwards, Charity, and the Stockbridge Mission.

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Jonathan Edwards is commonly thought of as a cold but brilliant theologian, a fire-breathing railer, quick to use his genius with words to reprove, a man bookishly removed from the daily concerns of life. However, recent scholarship incorporating a larger corpus of his works, only now easily accessible, has revealed a more multifaceted man, a pastor who, in fact, preached and wrote volumes on Divine Love and its outworking in Christian charity. He laid both the philosophic and aesthetic groundwork to convince the Christian of the necessity of a charitable disposition and its required fruit. Throughout his first thirty years as a pastor, he returned often to the imperatives of charity. This thesis highlights the ways in which he specifically addressed the need for active charity to the neediest in the community, the poor and disenfranchised no matter their race. As he identified an increasingly pervasive lust for gain in the colonies and in Northampton he censured such selfish motives through his pastoring and preaching. After years of wrangling over such issues, his teaching tended to emphasize that the most practical way to tune our hearts to a joyful obedience of this duty is to reject selfish ambition and to identify with the lowly. Not only did Edwards teach these virtues often in both his New York and Northampton pulpits, but he personally and tirelessly worked for the cause of the poor. This thesis will show that Edwards' choice to minister at Stockbridge after his dismissal at Northampton was consistent with his focus on charity throughout his life and exemplifies identifying with the lowly and despised of society. By examining his work with and on behalf of the Stockbridge Indians, it is apparent that these years were not just a "quiet retreat" or a "forced exile" as some scholars posited, but instead these years are a powerful example of choosing to identify with the marginalized. Although he was never a perfect man, Jonathan Edwards' Stockbridge years offer much for modern Christians to consider and to emulate in their own lives and ministries.

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IDENTIFYING WITH THE LOWLY:  
JONATHAN EDWARDS, CHARITY, AND THE STOCKBRIDGE MISSION

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

#### *Inspiration for the Project/The Research Process*

This thesis is in many respects a product of various areas of personal growth and interests taken up throughout my four years as a University Scholar. I enjoyed all of the books I read in Great Texts courses and from my independent reading list, but it was the works of theology I read which most especially caught my attention and drew me into further study via the Religion courses I increasingly enrolled in. One such book was Søren Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*. While studying abroad at St. Andrews, I took an interest in Jonathan Edwards, at first for his treatises and reflections on the human will, but increasingly also for his rich writings on the affections and the soul's delight in God. Beyond the rigor of his arguments, I saw how deeply he adored the beauty of God and how he sought to communicate that inner sense of beauty to the senses of his listeners and readers. Indeed, Edwards' sermons, especially those delivered at Stockbridge, contain some of the most beautiful use of metaphor to express divine things; nothing less could be expected from a man who said he was not "ashamed" to "believe that the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy scriptures" are as "full of divine things as language is of words."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 11: Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1993), 7.

I began my preliminary research semester knowing that I wanted to write about Jonathan Edwards, or a topic very close to him, with the average modern American Evangelical in mind. I proceeded then with the goal of discovering 1) something about Edwards which differs from people's common perception of him and 2) something which might speak to the American Evangelical experience today. In the course of studying Edwards' life and theology in books such as George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* and McClymond and McDermott's *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, my interest was piqued by the various aspects of Edwards' views on society. I refined my search in works such as Perry Miller's "Jonathan Edwards' Sociology of the Great Awakening" and McDermott's *One Holy and Happy Society*. I was surprised by the degree to which Edwards seemed to perceive and criticize the social and economic practices of his own day, something for which a preponderance of evidence is also provided in Ronald Story's book *Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love*. Edwards' writings on eschatology and the millennium also followed a similar tendency to touch on themes of what one might call social justice, although his concern was based in something far deeper and more encompassing than mere ethical outrage. I knew from Marsden's biography that Edwards had turned his pastoral capacity towards missions after his dismissal from Northampton by his own congregation, relocating himself and his family to Stockbridge, the wilderness "mission town" where Indians were living alongside English settlers to learn of the English people's religion, language, and way of life. I saw a feasible connection between Edwards' focus on Christian charity toward the disadvantaged and his choice to minister at Stockbridge, yet found little more than a cursory

acknowledgement of Edwards' years at Stockbridge even in books such as *Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love*. Why is this?

### *The Thesis*

This thesis will examine the time Edwards spent at Stockbridge, along with its attendant successes, controversies, and gradual failure, through the lens of Edwards' commitment to Christian charity which had characterized his career as a minister from the earliest years in New York and throughout the turbulent 23 years at Northampton. To do this, I will first show how deep rooted love and charity were in Edwards' philosophical framework of virtue, examining also how the works of charity expounded upon in the 1738 sermon series *Charity and its Fruits* became a standard towards the end of the Great Awakening by which Edwards sought to evaluate people's claims to having religious experiences. Second, I will give an overview of how Edwards' theology of charity concretely informed his attitudes toward the rich and the poor, as well as his expectations of his congregation expressed in the sermons he preached during the Northampton years. Third, I will examine the development of the Stockbridge Mission, showing the reduced straits of the Indians and how the waning effectiveness of the mission was owing to a lack of love on the part of the first minister and an abundance of self-interest on the part of families such as the Williams family. I will also show how Edwards' decision to move to Stockbridge arose from a genuine commitment to missions and a desire to live among and serve the abused and despised of society. Lastly, I will examine aspects of Edwards' ministry at Stockbridge through the lens of identifying with the lowly.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Rule of Charity

*If I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ~  
I Cor.13*

On February 11, 1729, Jonathan Edwards took over the pastorate of Northampton from his predecessor, Solomon Stoddard, who had died that day at the age of 85. Thus began a more than two decade ministry which would see revival come and go and which would culminate in a dismissal accompanied by much contention between factions of the church supporting him and others of his flock who wanted him gone. The early years, spanning the early 1730s, was characterized by discord and social unrest. Edwards addressed in his sermons what he saw as covetousness and malice, and was vigilant to call out economic exploitation and callousness towards the poor among his parishioners and in the community at large. From 1734 to 1736, Northampton experienced one of several periods of deep revival followed by what Edwards judged to be an attendant rise in the piety of the townspeople. After these revivals associated with the Great Awakening subdued in intensity, Edwards lamented a return of cold-hearted religion and worldliness in his congregation.

### *Charity and Self-Interest in Edwards' Preaching*

In 1738, Edwards preached a sermon series on 1 Corinthians 13 titled *Charity and its Fruits*. In it, Edwards systematically lays out the philosophical and aesthetic foundation of Christian ethics and applies that in particular ways to various aspects of human relationships and one's relationship to God. In the first sermon of the series, called "Love the Sum of All Virtue," Edwards asserts that "all...virtue which is saving, and distinguishing of true Christians from others, is summed up in Christian or divine love."<sup>2</sup> Edwards unpacks this statement of doctrine in the following pages of his sermon, emphasizing the all-encompassing, inherently relational, and active nature of divine love. First, he points out that Christian love, being so essential that not even faith itself can be worth anything without it, must be a single principle from which flows all the Christian's "exercises of heart, and works of life."<sup>3</sup> This principle, he says, can be nothing other than God Himself: "God is love, and he who has God dwelling in him by his Spirit will have love dwelling in him."<sup>4</sup> Christian love proceeds from God (who is love) and is reflected back in human hearts towards God, but Edwards adds that love of God is at the same time and by the same virtue expressed towards one's fellow men: "There are not two works of the Spirit of God, one to infuse a spirit of love to God and another a spirit of love to men.

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8: Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsay (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1989), 131.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 132.

But in doing one he doth the other.”<sup>5</sup> This is because God is “the foundation of gracious love to men,” it being the case that all people bear some likeness and relation to God, having “the nature or spiritual image of God,” either “...as his children, as his creatures, as those who are beloved of God, or those to whom divine mercy is offered...”<sup>6</sup> Whatever a man or woman’s relation to God may be, they are still worthy of the love of others.

At their roots, divine love and its absence were to Edwards fundamentally a matter of consciousness, or perception. In another sermon in the series titled “Charity Contrary to a Selfish Spirit,” Edwards identifies the chief corruption of the Fall as being a change of man’s perception of his relation to everything around him:

...whereas before [man’s] soul was under the government of that noble principle of divine love whereby it was, as it were, enlarged to a kind of comprehension of all his fellow creatures; and not only so, but was not confined within such strait limits as the bounds of the creation but was extended to the Creator and dispersed itself abroad in that infinite ocean of good and was, as it were, swallowed up by it, and became one with it.... those nobler principles were immediately lost and all this excellent enlargedness of his soul was gone and he thenceforward shrunk into a little point, circumscribed and closely shut up within itself to the exclusion of others.<sup>7</sup>

The root of self-love, and therefore the root of sin in general, then, is a spiritual alienation from God, and consequently from everything surrounding one’s self. Self-love in itself isn’t, however, inherently evil. Self-love, Edwards says, is a natural instinct necessary to human preservation, and is as inseparable from a person as their very existence.<sup>8</sup> There is a difference between self-love, which can in fact be quite selfless, and selfishness. God’s

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 133.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 254.

grace does not efface the love of one's self, but rather fulfills it, and by reshaping the soul into God's image, "infuses" divine love again into it.<sup>9</sup>

There is no inconsistency between seeking one's own happiness, glorifying God, and seeking the good of others; in fact, it is only in serving God and others that the goal of self-love, happiness, can be achieved. It is only when self-love, lacking the "superior principle of divine love" to properly direct itself, grows inordinate and confined to one's self qua an individual, that it becomes selfishness.<sup>10</sup> When divine love is implanted into the Christian's heart, his/her concept of "self" begins to fundamentally change: "A man's self is as it were extended and enlarged by love. Others so far as beloved do, as it were, become parts of himself; so that wherein their interest is promoted he looks on his own as promoted, and wherein their interest is touched his is touched."<sup>11</sup>

*The Virtue of Charity Worked out in the Lives of Christians*

It may seem reasonable to suspect that such high minded philosophy, though stirring to hear, may prove difficult to concretely emulate. Edwards did find it difficult to answer what precisely defines divine love, and Ronald Story describes a point in Edwards' life when he admitted that "as to a definition of divine love, things of this nature are not properly capable of a definition." Rather, Edwards continued, "They are better felt than defined."<sup>12</sup> Religious experience was at the heart of true charity, but that

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 253, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 256-257.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 263.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, vol. 21: Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 2003), 173. Cited in Ronald Story, *Jonathan Edwards and the Gospel of Love* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 106.

did not mean that there is no concrete way to seek after it and evaluate one's own life on its standard. In "Grace Tends to Holy Practice," a later sermon in *Charity and its Fruits*, Edwards reasons, "If grace be a principle, of what is it a principle but of action?"<sup>13</sup> In the same sermon Edwards goes on to drive home that action is a test of true faith: "[Practice] is one thing which very much distinguishes that faith which is saving from that which is only common. A true faith is a faith which works, whereas a false faith is a barren and inoperative faith."<sup>14</sup> In "Love the Sum of All Virtue," Edwards ends with a counsel to self-examination: "If you call yourself a Christian, where are your works of love? Have you abounded, and do you abound in them? If this divine and holy principle is in you, and reigns in you, will it not appear in your life, in works of love?"<sup>15</sup> Over the course of the Great Awakening, discerning true religious experience from false experience occupied the thoughts of both skeptics of the Awakening and its defenders, such as Edwards. Paul Ramsey points out how the virtues outlined in *Charity and Its Fruits* at many points parallel the "marks" or "signs" of true religious experience found in Edwards' reflections on the Great Awakening, rising to the point of "verbally identical expression, not merely similar meaning."<sup>16</sup>

By the time that he wrote *The Religious Affections* (1746), one of several works written during this time when he was sorting out the events of the Awakening and responding to its critics, works of charity were to him not just indicators of a person's spiritual state but subtly became the condition upon which a person's account of religious

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<sup>13</sup> Works 8: 298.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 299.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 3.

experience was to be judged. Gerald McDermott argues that, as Edwards “had been soured by the ambition and selfishness in many of his ‘converts,’”<sup>17</sup> the Northampton minister no longer displayed any “reluctance” to draw a line in the sand with his congregation. In *Religious Affections*, Edwards unequivocally lays out his standard for evaluating claims of religious experience:

...the Scripture is as plain as it is possible it should be, that none are true saints, but those whose true character it is, that they are of a disposition to pity and relieve their fellow creatures, that are poor, indigent, and afflicted ...this I affirm, and shall affirm, until I deny the Bible to be anything worth, that everything in Christians that belongs to true Christianity, is of this tendency, and works this way; and that there is no true Christian upon earth, but is so under the prevailing power of such a spirit, that he is properly denominated from it, and it is truly and justly his character...<sup>18</sup>

Edwards seems occupied with corralling the rampant focus on personal experience in his congregation as he continues, saying that ministers “have no warrant from Christ” to confirm people on the basis that “they tell a fair story of illuminations and discoveries” if their “character and behavior” do not reflect the holy dispositions described above, and that they in fact “set up their own wisdom against Christ’s by so doing.”<sup>19</sup> Regardless of any claims of spiritual experience, men and women’s spiritual condition must be measured with objective and verifiable standards: “We must learn the way of bringing men to rules, and not rules to men, and so strain and stretch the rules of God's word, to take in ourselves, and some of our neighbors, until we make them wholly of none

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<sup>17</sup>Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2: Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1959), 133–134.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

effect.”<sup>20</sup> Edwards identifies the root of this tendency to warp God’s requirements as one of self-centeredness. Whereas a true Christian first and foremost encounters the objective excellency of God and is captivated by it, false Christians first see God in relation to themselves and their “private interest,” and only second do they acknowledge His attributes, which is even then only in relation to their private interest.<sup>21</sup>

### *Edwards’ Call to Active Charity*

Edwards’ belief that all Christian virtue is inherently relational and active had far reaching social implications, especially in a community where most not only called themselves Christians but claimed to have powerfully experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives as a result of the Great Awakening. charity, the “sum of all virtue” and the heartbeat of Christian living, must be practiced in society. “A man of a right spirit,” Edwards preached on one occasion, “is not of a narrow, private spirit; but he is greatly concerned for the good of the public community to which he belongs, and particularly of the town where he dwells.”<sup>22</sup>

The standards Edwards laid out in *Religious Affections* were not intended as mere throwaway condemnations of his congregation, but constituted for Edwards the foundation of a truly good society. There was for Edwards no discussion of a truly good society without the primary focus being on the individuals who comprised that society. Without divine love, no person can view themselves properly in relation to those around them. As we have seen earlier, self-interest distorts the individual’s perception of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>22</sup> Works 21: 260.

themselves such that their existence and therefore their interests are “circumscribed” not to include that of others. Through the Holy Spirit however, God “infuses” his nature, that is Love, into the heart of the individual, thereby transforming their perception of both God and their neighbor, uniting their eternal and temporal interests as one. Joined in common interest and being, they bear no bitterness, wrath, malice, or envy towards their neighbor. Shunning any actions that would cause their neighbor harm, they are disposed by divine love rather to dwell in humility and peace with their neighbor, thinking higher of others than themselves. Whatever the composition of society may be, divine love redeems the relationships within that society. Disposed by divine love to fulfill their duties to one another, Christian citizens should live in perfect harmony and mutual goodwill in every manner of relationship:

[Love] would dispose a people to all the duties which they owe their rulers, to give them all that honor and subjections which is their due. And it would dispose rulers to rule the people over whom they are set justly, sincerely seeking their good.... Love would dispose to all suitable carriage between husbands and wives; and it would depose children to obey their parents; parents not to provoke their children unto wrath; servants to be obedient to their masters, not with eye-service, but in singleness of heart; and masters to exercise gentleness and goodness towards their servants.<sup>23</sup>

The neglect of one’s duty towards others which results from a selfish spirit bore to Edwards an unequivocally negative effect on the community. In his 1733 sermon “The Duty of Charity to the Poor,” Edwards has scathing words for those dominated by self-interest, and stresses especially the effect that individualism has on the community: “He that is all for himself and none for his neighbors deserves to be cut off from the benefit of human society, and to be turned out among wild beasts, to subsist as well as he can. A

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 136.

private, niggardly spirit is more suitable for wolves and other beasts of prey, than for human beings.” The harshness of Edwards’ judgment makes some sense when one considers the far reaching nature of Edwards’ goals, and the degree of universal revival it would require to accomplish them, such that every single person counted in building that community.

### *How Edwards’ Millennial Belief Informed his Ideals of Charity*

To understand Jonathan Edwards’ motivation to hold his congregation to a high standard, it is important to understand how much of an impact Edwards’ eschatology, or more specifically his beliefs concerning the millennial kingdom, had on his view of society and his hopes for the future. Edwards believed the millennial kingdom would come to fruition in history before Christ returns to bring final judgement. This time of prosperity and near-universal holiness would be brought about, not by any sudden intervention in history, but “by the preaching of the gospel, and the use of the ordinary means of grace,” and thus “be gradually brought to pass.” In a letter to William McCulloch in 1744, Edwards sought to rebut the claim that he anticipated an imminent millennium during the Great Awakening, saying “There are many that know that I have from time to time added, that there would probably be many sore conflicts and terrible convulsions, and many changes, revivings and intermissions, and returns of dark clouds, and threatening appearances, before this work shall have subdued the world, and Christ’s kingdom shall be everywhere established and settled in peace...”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 4: The Great Awakening*, ed. Clarence C. Goen (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1972), 560.

The millennium, “like a grain of mustard seed,” would grow imperceptibly, yet exponentially, leading to the Holy Spirit being “gloriously poured out for the wonderful revival and propagation of religion...accomplished, not by the authority of princes, nor by the wisdom of learned men, but by God’s Holy Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> Heathens would be “enlightened, with glorious light, and delivered from all their darkness...”<sup>26</sup> and Satan, dreading being cast out of the world, would gather “all the forces of Antichrist [presumably referring to Roman Catholicism], and also Mohammedanism and heathenism” to oppose Christ and his Church in every way, but ultimately be decisively and universally defeated, and his followers judged.<sup>27</sup> All heresies, including “Socinianism and Arianism and Quakerism and Arminianism” and Deism would be “abolished,” and all people would finally “agree in the sure, great, and important doctrines of the gospel.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, the millennial age would be characterized by prevailing and universal knowledge of religion among men, such that “it may be hoped that many of the Negroes and Indians will be divines, and that excellent books will be published in Africa, in Ethiopia, in Turkey...”<sup>29</sup> Not only would knowledge of God abound, but “Religion shall not be an empty profession as it now mostly is, but holiness of heart and life shall abundantly prevail.” Every aspect of people’s lives would be devoted to the Glory of God, and “so God’s people then, as they shall be eminent for holiness of heart, so they shall be for holiness of life and practice.” As Robert Westbrook

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<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 9: A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1989), 458–460.

<sup>26</sup> Works 9:474.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 462-465.

<sup>28</sup> Works 9: 467.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Other Jonathan Edwards: Selected Writings on Society, Love, and Justice*, ed. Gerald McDermott & Ronald Story (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 91.

puts it, “Edwards’ ideal society has no existence or character outside of the individuals who comprise it.”<sup>30</sup> Similarly to how personal religious experience was emphasized during the Great Awakening, Westbrook says that Edwards viewed the substance of the millennial society as necessarily flowing from the “radical, personal, immediate sense that the saved individual has of divine excellence.”<sup>31</sup>

In Edwards’ conception of the millennium, charity and its fruits would be properly expressed between all men and women, and technological advancements, formerly invented and used by men for covetous purposes, would be used to better connect and bind all nations in harmony, causing war and bloodshed to cease. Kings would rule justly and lovingly, and the wealthy would, laying down their wealth, “devote all to Christ and his church.”<sup>32</sup> While Edwards doesn’t question any of the social structures as they are or indicate any change in the usual divisions between countries and languages, Edwards expressed that there would be a complete realization of his hopes for Northampton and for the whole world.

Even as Edwards acknowledged that the millennium was unlikely to occur soon, and that even then it was only temporary and meant to point to the perfections of Heaven, the millennium played a key role in informing Edwards’ faith that “history is moving toward the actualization”<sup>33</sup> of his ideal society. In one of his miscellanies, Edwards mused: “It is a great encouragement to [Christian] endeavors, to think that such times are coming wherein Christianity shall prevail over all enemies; and it would be a great

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<sup>30</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, “Social Criticism and the Heavenly City of Jonathan Edwards,” *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 59, no. 4 (1976): 397.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>33</sup> Westbrook, “Social Criticism and the Heavenly City of Jonathan Edwards,” 397.

discouragement to the labors of nations or pious magistrates and divines, to endeavor to advancing of Christ's kingdom, if they understood that it was not to be advanced.”<sup>34</sup>

While he may have denied anticipating the arrival of the millennium during the Great Awakening, Edwards certainly viewed the Awakening as a time when, he hoped, the community could come together around a mutual experience of God and commitment to charity, transforming every relationship and action into something befitting the future kingdom. The next chapter will explore how Edwards specifically pushed his Northampton congregation to be more charitable, showing concern for the spiritual wellbeing as well as the physical wellbeing of their neighbors in need.

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<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 13: The “Miscellanies,” Entries a-z, Aa-Zz, 1-500*, ed. Thomas A. Schaefer (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1994), 427.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Particular Charity to the Poor and Lowly

*But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. ~  
John 13:14*

*Teaching the Importance of human welfare  
and advocating public commitment to Charity*

Beginning in 1723, when he was a young pastor at his first church in New York, Edwards began teaching the importance of physical acts of charity to those in need. He insisted that a Christian disposition is to be one of “liberality, open handedness, ready to lay out ourselves for the benefit and comfort of others.”<sup>35</sup> He then juxtaposes this largeness with a “niggardly and selfish” dissembling that he found to be common within the church.<sup>36</sup> In a 1746 sermon, he teaches that true Christian love applies to both the spiritual and physical needs of people:

Some men show a love to others as to their outward man, they are liberal of their worldly substance, and often give to the poor; but have no love to, or concern for the souls of men. Others pretend a great love to men's souls, that are not compassionate and charitable towards their bodies. The making a great show of love, pity, and distress for souls, costs 'em nothing; but in order to show mercy to men's bodies, they must part with money out of their pockets.<sup>37</sup>

Throughout the years, Edwards railed often against those who tried to redefine care for the poor as something less than both physical and spiritual care.

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<sup>35</sup> Works 14: 238.

<sup>36</sup> Works 14: 547.

<sup>37</sup> Works 2: 369.

Gerald McDermott describes how, since the beginning of the eighteenth century, an “increasing psychological distance” between the rich and the poor was occurring in New England society. Some instances of this occurring in Northampton included the town’s decision in 1705 to abandon its earlier practice of housing the poor in “wealthier homes,” planning instead to construct a poorhouse, which for unknown reasons was never actually built. Therefore, during Edwards’ ministry in the town there was neither poor house nor community remuneration for housing the poor individually. Another example McDermott points to of this societal shift is the decision in 1715 to leave out the former provision in the town’s distribution of land that the wood on “common fields” be available for public use.<sup>38</sup> As the population increased and land became more valuable, Northampton had sold off all its communal lands by 1731.<sup>39</sup> Without wooded lands nor wood from public lands the poor were without fires to keep warm in the winter and on which to cook.

Mark Valeri attributes the social strife Northampton experienced in the 1730s to its burgeoning economy and the socioeconomic mobility it provided to many. The covenant of faith signed by the majority of Edwards’ congregation on March 16, 1742 gives the reader a good idea of how radically Edwards wished to reform the practical dealings of his congregation during the Great Awakening revivals. In it, the Northampton parishioners, referencing the recent revivals and lamenting their past backslidings, committed among other things to practice equity in all business dealings, never to “wittingly violate justice for private interest,” and never to make “worldly gain

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<sup>38</sup> McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 158-159.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Valeri, “The Economic Thought of Jonathan Edwards,” *Church History*, 60, no. 1 (1991): 40.

or honor” or “getting the better of any that are...in any respect our competitors” their “governing aim.”<sup>40</sup>

By the mid 1740s, the economy had taken a turn for the worse, however, and even the fervor of the Great Awakening revivals could not prevent people from turning to their own interests, becoming increasingly testy with Edwards as he requested added financial support to keep up with the rising inflation and called on the wealthy in his congregation to give 25 percent of their worth to provide shelter and education for the poor of the community. As Edwards came to better understand the economic forces which were causing his congregation to backslide on their previous commitments to charitable living, he began to condemn the fundamental structure of the market forces which, placing self-interest rather than Christian charity as the standard for prices, caused inflation and encouraged people to profit from the misfortune of others.<sup>41</sup>

### *Answering Objections*

In 1733, Edwards preached a four part series on “The Duty of Charity to the Poor” wherein he again established that giving to the poor is a duty as vital to a Christian’s faith as worship, prayer, and the sacraments. Here, he again teaches the duty to help not only “thy poor brother” but also those outside one’s nationality and even one’s enemies. Story points out that “much of this sermon is reiteration of points made a decade earlier, but Edwards here adds an emphasis on social unity and the family of man,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 49-50.

a concept that grows over the years to acquire immense significance for him.<sup>42</sup> After he establishes that all men are made in God’s image, Edwards teaches that “we are all nearly allied one to another by nature” with like desires, needs, and aversion to pain.<sup>43</sup> In an intriguing way, Edwards turns people’s self-interest into grounds for unity and mutual sympathy. Edwards notes the many times the Bible calls the needy “our brothers”: “We are to look upon ourselves as related to all mankind . . . to look upon ‘em as brethren and to treat them accordingly.”<sup>44</sup>

On the theological foundation of God’s command of charity and the philosophical foundation of common humanity, Edwards builds in this sermon an argument against seven motives of self-interest and calls his hearers to self-examination. Because, Edwards notes, “Men are exceeding ready to make objections against such duties,” he devotes nearly 80 percent of the sermon series to answering a list of eleven possible objections to charity to the poor that may come to the minds of his hearers. The list has special consideration as it addresses many concerns people still have today regarding charity to the poor.

The first objection involves who is required to do works of charity; if a person feels they are unregenerate, will they not do these works out of a wrong spirit and reap only condemnation? Edwards asserts that such actions will not condemn them but will instead be a means “to be prospered and blessed in your affairs” in the same way as all moral virtues, such as diligence, justice, and temperance will bring blessing. Also he adds, “Showing mercy to the poor does as much belong to the appointed way of seeking

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<sup>42</sup> *Story, JE and the Gospel of Love*, 57.

<sup>43</sup> Works, 17:376.

<sup>44</sup> Works, 17:373.

salvation as any other duty whatsoever,”<sup>45</sup> and he directs the unregenerate as Daniel did Nebuchadnezzar to seek mercy by breaking off “thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor.”<sup>46</sup>

What if being generous becomes a legalism that does more hurt to the church than good? Edwards answers this by pointing out that every religious duty can be done in self-righteousness and legalism, especially prayer, church going, and Bible study. Legalism and self-righteousness are things to avoid, but charity to the poor is still as imperative a duty as the rest of God’s commands.

One might object that in personal experience giving to the poor is promised in the Bible to bring prosperity, but personal pay-back from the Lord does not always follow. Edwards responds that some may “look out for the fulfillment of the promise too soon,” and that God’s timing is not our own. He says that more often the giver was so grudging and greedy in their giving as to make the act in itself a “matter of covetousness,”<sup>47</sup> and he points out that there is no blessing promised for covetousness!

Some people may object to giving to those who are not completely indigent; that there must be some test of who is really deserving of charity. Here, Edwards appeals again to the family relationship that we have to all people. We are brothers and sisters on a journey and must bear each other’s burdens to fulfill the law of Christ. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will not wait until they are in extreme distress before we give our aid.

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<sup>45</sup> Works, 17:390.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel 4:27

<sup>47</sup> Works 17:392.

Should “ungrateful” or “ill-tempered” people be rewarded with charity? Yes, says Edwards; not only did Christ love us when we were yet enemies, but Christ taught us in the parable of the Good Samaritan that our enemies are to be included in our care and concern. Edwards points out that it is Pharisaical to believe that charity extends only to friends and “those of the same people and region.”<sup>48</sup>

What if some members of the church have nothing to spare, should they be expected to give too? Edwards admits that those who are more destitute than the recipient of the charity could be pridefully pretending their financial situation is better than it is and thereby jeopardizing their duty to their own dependents by making a publicity of charity. On the other hand, he cautions that being truly unable to give would be a rare occurrence if people evaluated rightly their definition of enough. Suffering with our neighbor means taking their burden upon ourselves. Those under heavy burden already, he encourages, can at least help to make his neighbor’s burden “more supportable.” He also reminds them that the Apostle commended the Macedonians for their generosity “though they were in deep poverty themselves.”<sup>49</sup>

What if we do not know for certain that a person is in truth needy? What if we suspect that the person may have caused his own misery through laziness or overspending or that the person is lying about his need? Don’t jump to conclusions as Nabal<sup>50</sup> did, Edwards warns, but instead take the time to interact with the person to learn the truth of his or her situation. If there is no time or opportunity for such certainty, give anyway because “tis better to give to several that are not objects of charity, than to send

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<sup>48</sup> Works 17:395.

<sup>49</sup> Works, 17:398.

<sup>50</sup> I Samuel 25 recounts the story of Nabal who refused helped to King David, but his wife Abigail acted wisely in responding generously to David’s request for food and provisions.

away empty one that is.”<sup>51</sup> After all, those who entertain strangers as Paul speaks of in Hebrews 13:2 “did not know the persons they entertained, nor their circumstances; else how could it be unawares?” Edwards asks.

Is there any obligation to give unless the person asks? Edwards says that it is best to give before being asked, thus maintaining the dignity of those in need. True charity does not force someone to become a beggar, he says, and he again appeals to the family relationship of all mankind.

What if we know the person has brought himself down by his own fault? Still give, says Edwards. If the fault be lack of wisdom or business sense, consider these skills a gift no different than sight or mobility: if you possess them, freely help those who don’t. If they have done wrong, treat them in loving forgiveness and affection as you would your own family. And finally, even if they persist in “folly and wickedness” at least look to relieve their dependents.

Some may object on grounds that the duty belongs to others who are shirking it, perhaps closer relatives or wealthier people. There are situations where others may even be to blame for the poverty through corrupt business dealings or theft. Shouldn’t we first hold those people accountable before we relieve the one distressed? Edwards answers that “whether that fault be a commission or a neglect, that alters not the case.”<sup>52</sup> We must first provide relief as the Good Samaritan did. If others are doing less, even more reason why we should do more.

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<sup>51</sup> Works, 17:400.

<sup>52</sup> Works, 17:402.

Finally, people may object on the grounds that our taxes are already going to provide for these situations. We now have the government for such charity, so the obligation is no longer on the individual or the church as it was in New Testament times. Government programs, Edwards argues, were never intended to “cut off all occasion for Christian Charity,” and they are obviously unable to help in many situations or to more than a subsistence degree. Here Edwards recounts his previous arguments that the fact that others have a duty to give is not a valid excuse, that people must not be destitute to qualify for our charity, and that it is a degradation of a person’s dignity to turn them away to other sources.

“The Duty of Charity to the Poor” clearly defines who are to be considered for charity: our family and neighbors, those within our churches, the poor among us. But Edwards also expanded his definition more fully in this sermon than in his earlier sermons to emphasize that the strangers among us and those outside our race and faith should be objects of our love and care. By teaching the importance of human welfare to the church and by answering common objections and more fully defining who are “the poor,” Edwards countered the rising materialism and commercial enterprise that characterized New England at that time.

#### *Showing the repulsiveness of Self-interest*

Edwards often used his pulpit to expose what he saw as a national trait of selfishness that arose from “having too narrow notions of Christianity.”<sup>53</sup> He laments in his 1738 sermon series *Charity and Its Fruits* that his contemporary English colonists,

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<sup>53</sup> Works, 8:271-272.

despite all their trappings of Christianity, would not be recognized as such by New Testament Christians. “We in this land are trained up from generation to generation in a too niggardly, selfish spirit and practice.”<sup>54</sup>

A recurrent trope of Edwards’ sermons was to juxtapose worldliness and charity using the contrast of the humble poor to the arrogant rich, to call out those who are prideful and “impudent.” The very lowest levels of hell will be reserved for the “exalted” in life who hypocritically make great pretense their care for the poor as a “cloak” for their covetousness.<sup>55</sup> Those who will not “suffer a little in their estates and names and worldly convenience” belie the fact that they “han’t confidence enough in God to dare to trust him with a little of their estates, bestowed to pious and charitable use.”<sup>56</sup> In many sermons, he particularly targets officeholders, who seek to “enrich and advance themselves” by making the “public weal” their “private designs.”<sup>57</sup> He hammers those who in their business dealings exploit people in their need and through other “fraudulent and deceitful” dealings. Ronald Story says, “In Edwards’ sermons, he inveighs against taking commercial advantage of people’s ignorance, of selling defective or overpriced goods, of bargaining that might create real hardship.”<sup>58</sup>

Edwards was quick to identify the presence of sinful self-interest when people are “all for themselves” without thought for the need of their neighbor but rather “all their contrivance is to aggrandize themselves.”<sup>59</sup> He continually reminds his congregation that

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Works, 8:550.

<sup>56</sup> Works, 2:370.

<sup>57</sup> Works, 14, 491.

<sup>58</sup> Story, *JE and the Gospel of Love*, 73. [here and below, make sure to include shortened title]

<sup>59</sup> Works, 9:341.

social standing is worthless, that everyone will come to the same place in death, without their money, honor, pleasures, friends, property, or whatever else they cling to. He puts it graphically in one sermon from 1737: “One rotting, putrefying corpse” resembles another, and “the worms are as bold with one carcass” as with the other.<sup>60</sup> Edwards disparages wealth and all its vanities as worthless when compared to the things of the spirit: “Has God nothing better to bestow upon you, when he had made you his children, than a little money or land, that you seem so much to behave yourselves as if you thought this was your chief good?”<sup>61</sup> To the rich, Edwards has dire warnings: “When you look upon your buildings, your cattle, your stores that you have laid up, you may consider that brimstone is scattered upon them all. When you sit down at a full table, yet there is God’s bow bent, His arrows ready, the dart pointing at your heart all the while you are satisfying your appetite.”<sup>62</sup> Of all those “servants of Mammon” that Edwards railed against, those who use “their temporal prosperity” to hold, in pride and disdain, themselves above others in the community faced particular censure.

*Rebuke for esteeming one above another*

Ronald Story in his study of Edwards’ teaching on charity notes that “Edwards’ criticism of wealth, worldliness, and profit-seeking fluctuated a little from decade to decade.”<sup>63</sup> Story marks intense surges on the topic in the late 1720s and early 1730s,

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<sup>60</sup> Works, 19:745.

<sup>61</sup> Works, 22:219.

<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 579a" in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 56: Sermons, Series II, WJE Online*, accessed February 23, 2017, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy41NDoxNi53amVv>.

<sup>63</sup> Story, *JE and the Gospel of Love*, 68.

again in the late 1730s, and again by the early 1740s. The times of low ebb on this topic coincided with Edwards' years of focus on the soul and during the Great Awakening. Perhaps the highest spike on the topic surrounded the bitter pew dispute involved with building the new church in 1736-37.<sup>64</sup> The deacons had designed the new seating based on wealth first, age second, and "usefulness" within the community lastly. Edwards was not consulted by the committee, perhaps because he would have contested an arrangement where the highest ranking sat at the front with their backs to the pulpit and perhaps because he would have disagreed with not putting age first as had been the tradition. Marsden explains how ingrained the social hierarchies were, even for Edwards, in this time period: "Not to honor social distinctions, even in church, was to them as unthinkable as it would be today for persons in the military not to honor differences in rank."<sup>65</sup>

Though he was not consulted on the arrangement, he makes his judgements known about it in sermon after sermon for the next many years. In his first sermon upon occupying the new building, Edwards warned the haughty who possessed the "higher seats in the meetinghouse" to seek rather a high seat in heaven. The next three years were filled with such sermons. He was still preaching this in 1740: "Now you sit forward in the meeting house, and have a higher seat than your poor, inferior neighbours, yet hereafter you shall be set in a lower place in hell than those wicked men who now sit behind you."<sup>66</sup> It is entertaining for the reader to imagine the stony faces and downcast eyes of those hearing these words as they sat in their high-ranking boxes facing the eyes

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 186.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 579a."

of the rest of the congregation. The sheer number of such negative references to wealth and rank in Edwards' sermons had to take a toll on the most influential in the congregation. Story conjectures, "It seems plausible to suggest that Edwards never entirely recovered from this episode [the pew controversy], which represented, by its enshrining of wealth, an institutional rejection of his vision of other forms of honor and worth and foretold the long and gradual estrangement of pastor and congregation that ended in dismissal."<sup>67</sup>

*Building respect for the marginalized by praising  
their humility and contributions.*

If Edwards directed his significant literary genius at castigating those with selfish ambition and greed, he also used his rhetorical skill in creating empathy and building esteem for those of lowly estate in his sermons. The wealthy may become smug in their positions of honor and power, but the poor are the blessed ones: "God hath chosen the poor of this world," Edwards teaches in 1731 and only the poor "to be joint heirs with Jesus Christ."<sup>68</sup> He portrays the poor as being more Christlike in their humility, as Story puts it, "humble like Christ himself, unassuming like Christ, respectful of superiors and obedient to authority like Christ."<sup>69</sup> The poor are admirable, Edward says, in their endurance of hardship, lack of bitterness, modesty "in speech and behavior," and for the way they "don't take it heinously" when they are snubbed and rebuffed.<sup>70</sup> Edwards even praises the ways the poor can contribute to the health of the community when he says that

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<sup>67</sup> Story, *JE and the Gospel of Love*, 68.

<sup>68</sup> Works 10:502.

<sup>69</sup> Story, *JE and the Gospel of Love*, 62.

<sup>70</sup> Works, 2:337.

“a poor man in a cottage that walks with God” may do more than those in powerful government office when he prays fervently for his community and when he brings the Lord’s blessing on the whole land by his faithful obedience to God.<sup>71</sup> On this basis, the poor deserve to be included in the decisions and activities of the town because like the widow with her two mites, “even a mean and obscure, little known and taken notice of” person can bring “showers of blessing on all around him.”<sup>72</sup>

Edwards also built esteem for the marginalized when he acknowledged their place in the church by addressing them directly in his sermons. In the 1740 sermon based on the Matthew 22 parable of the wedding feast, Edwards’ tone is markedly changed in his call to those of lower rank. In it he puts more focus on empathizing with their plight and reminding them that they are blessed than he does to the others he addresses in the sermon, including children and elderly congregants. He addresses the servants and slaves in the balcony and the poor and illiterate crowded into the general seating pews:

However you may be had in but little esteem, may be despised and slighted and accounted of no great consequence in the world, and have not that respect shewn to you that many of your neighbours have, yet the great king sends forth his messengers to invite you to come... In the high ways we shall meet many that are very low in the world, many poor and despised. Christ sends his ministers to gather up such, and such as being poor vagrants sleep under hedges like the beasts as having no house of their own, and be so despised that none will take them in.

Christ himself, when he was upon earth, confined himself to your condition. He did not appear in the world in the circumstances of a man of note, but in the state of the poor and despised. He was of low parentage: his mother was a young woman of low degree, her husband Joseph was not one of their men of influence, but an obscure person...

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<sup>71</sup> Works, 17:313-314.

<sup>72</sup> Sermon 557, WJE Online Vol.55.

The great God has a greater respect for one saint, though mean and despised among men, than He has for the greatest wicked monarch on the earth, and will show a thousand times greater regard to him in what He will do for him. The saints are His jewels, but the wicked men, however rich, learned, and great, are of no account with Him...

So you that are weak in understanding and are comparatively ignorant, and are upon that account no much accounted of, you see that your judgment of things is not much regarded, what you say in conversation is not so much taken notice of, your voice is not so much heard as others on publick affairs. Hearken this day to the call of Christ, and set yourself with all your might to seek and follow him. If you will give up and do so, Christ will make no objection of your weakness and your ignorance; you shall be as freely and as readily accepted as if you excelled in human learning and wisdom. Christ does as much invite you as any of the politicians, philosophers, or divines of the world.<sup>73</sup>

The pattern and tone of this address to those of low estate in his Northampton church is typical of his later sermons to the Indians of Stockbridge. There is no bow bent for their hearts, no fires licking at their feet as is for the men of business and for the middle class in this sermon. For the poor, there is empathy for their lot in life and admiration for their position of blessedness with God.

According to Amy Schragger Lang, Edwards' tendency to include the marginalized and to affirm their experiences during the Great Awakening is something which stood out from that of his contemporaries.<sup>74</sup> While liberal New England ministers such as Charles Chauncy condemned the number of the illiterate poor, "weak-minded" women and girls, and "even Negroes" partaking in the revivals and stepping out of their proper place, Edwards saw it fitting that God should work first in the "weak and foolish."<sup>75</sup> Lang says

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<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 579a."

<sup>74</sup> Amy S. Lang, "'A Flood of Errors': Chauncy and Edwards in the Great Awakening" in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 169.

<sup>75</sup> Works 4: 295, cited in Lang, 169.

that “While for Chauncy what links women, children and boys is their ‘silliness,’ their susceptibility to error, for Edwards they are related by their powerlessness.”<sup>76</sup> Edwards’ pamphlet on the conversion story of a four year old girl Phoebe Bartlett, spotlights his insistence that even such a one of no account in a poor family as little Phoebe experienced supernatural conversion that was evidenced not only by her seeking to learn of the things of God but also by her manifesting an “uncommon spirit of Charity” and expressing “bowels of compassion” for an even poorer farmer who lost his only cow.<sup>77</sup>

### *Identifying Christ with the Lowly*

In all Edwards’ pervasive and persistent focus on charity to the poor there is always a harkening to life of Christ, to the identification of Christ with the lowly. Ronald Story says of Edwards’ description of Christ incarnate: “The beauty of Christ, a ‘poor, obscure, despised, afflicted man,’ was precisely in his ‘meekness’ and ‘lowliness’ and ‘condescension to the mean and vile, and compassion to the miserable’.”<sup>78</sup> In sermon after sermon, Edwards describes Christ’s “obscure life among laboring men” where he experienced such “pinching poverty” that even in his ministry he was often without a place to sleep and dependent on the “charity of his followers.”<sup>79</sup> In sermons throughout the 1730s and 1740s, Edwards focused on those Christ chose to identify with. During this time Edwards preached sermons that focus on Mary, Christ’s young and uneducated mother; the disciples and apostles, who were mostly “illiterate, simple, undesigning” day laborers; early Christians, who ate the first Lord’s suppers in conditions of often

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<sup>76</sup> Lang, 169.

<sup>77</sup> Works 4: 204.

<sup>78</sup> Story, *JE and the Gospel of Love*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Works 25: 637.

“pinching” hunger and possessed “all things in common” of necessity from the meagerness of their resources; and the beneficiaries of Christ’s miracles, those who from the “bodily corruptions” of disease and disability would have been the most needy in Christ’s day and in Edwards’ day.<sup>80</sup> If Christ came from the glories of his rank above all in the heavenlies to live and serve those of such lowly estate and such pitiful need, shouldn’t these same be the focus of every Christian, argues Edwards.

Edwards in a 1739 sermon holds up Christ’s willing abasement in identifying with the lowest of society as a model of Christian calling:

He was the heir of God the Father's kingdom, yet such was his humility that he did not disdain to be abased and depressed down into lower and viler circumstances and sufferings than ever any other elect creature was; so that he became least of all and lowest of all. The proper trial and evidence of humility is stooping or complying with those acts or circumstances when called to it that are very low and contain great abasement. But none ever stooped so low as Christ, if we consider either the infinite height that he stooped from, or the great depth to which he stooped.<sup>81</sup>

Even as Edwards links the identity of Christ with the lowly, we see that he links the lowly with the Native Americans. In a letter to the Reverend Benjamin Colman in 1735, Edwards recounts the effects of the recent awakening in his region. Among the many evidences of sincere change that he sees resulting is that many who testify of being awakened by the Spirit of God claim a new love for evangelization and for works of compassion to such a degree as to put the needs of “the meanest of mankind” and of “any Indian in the woods” above their own.

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<sup>80</sup> Taken from sermons found in Works, 19:626, 22:385, 17:265 & 409, 13:507, 23:324, 24:53, 15:316-17.

<sup>81</sup> Works 9: 322.

Marsden says that although Edwards in many ways viewed Native Americans “through typically English categories,” he also “refracted his vision through the lenses of Scripture and his theology, which made his evaluations considerably different from those of the English who had other priorities.”<sup>82</sup> According to Marsden, Edwards’ New Light theology led him not to view people primarily in terms of nationality, but rather in the spiritual terms of “regenerate” and “unregenerate.” Such terms had nothing to do with being English or Native; as Edwards’ experiences before Stockbridge had shown him, a great many English people were unregenerate. This influenced his preaching, leading him in his preaching to emphasize the equality of Indians and English before God. Gerald McDermott elaborates further on this concept, saying that Edwards’ New Light theology subverted the hierarchical framework which dominated New England thought by “shifting the locus of religious authority from the external social structure to the internal place of the regenerate heart.”<sup>83</sup> As opposed to his “liberal contemporaries” who held that temporal esteem and authority correlated with spiritual enlightenment, Edwards taught that those occupying a lower place in society had a greater dignity than those above them if they but possessed a “godly sense of heart.”

Any honest discussion of Edwards and charity cannot proceed without an acknowledgement and examination of Edwards’ choosing to own African slaves and defending slavery as something biblically permitted. It is difficult to reconcile the belief that all people are created in God’s image and deserve to have their good promoted as if it were one’s own with the practice of buying slaves who were taken from their homes and families against their will. Edwards’ views of slavery and practice of slaveholding

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<sup>82</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 394.

<sup>83</sup> McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 164.

however are not surprising given the kind of society Edwards grew up in. As Kenneth Minkema says, Edwards' family background entailed that he was raised both in a household and in a larger social circle where slaveholding was a "symbol of social rank."<sup>84</sup> Marsden's assessment of the time is that "If some New England slave owners had uneasy consciences, their most common way of dealing with the subject was to avoid it..."<sup>85</sup> One instance of Edwards writing on the topic of slavery, composed in 1741 was a response to congregants at a Northfield church who had boasted of stumping their minister, Benjamin Doolittle, by condemning his practice of slaveholding. Edwards shows "deep ambivalence" in his response, at once dismissing the entire accusation as disingenuous, defending the institution of slavery as something biblical, condemning the African slave trade as a violation of the moral law, and skeptically asking the dissident church members why they consider it morally consistent to benefit by purchasing products created by the unpaid work of slaves.<sup>86</sup> While Edwards shared the hypocrisies of his generation when it came to slaveholding, the content of his sermons on race and the inclusivity displayed towards Christian slaves at his Northampton church highlight that he at least viewed Africans and Indians as spiritually equal to Whites.<sup>87</sup> That Edwards however seemed to ignore the plight of slaves due to his hierarchal system of thought and other culturally inherited assumptions reveals a tragic pitfall in his application of the principles of charity. The next chapter will examine the founding and

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<sup>84</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards's Defense of Slavery," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 4 (2002): 24; also, "Edwards' Family," *WJE Online*, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://edwards.yale.edu/research/about-edwards/family-life>.

<sup>85</sup> George M. Marsden, *A Life*, 20.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 257–258.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

early years of the Stockbridge mission, showing how self-interest and the “othering” of the Mohican Indians living at Stockbridge contributed to growing tensions and future conflicts.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Background and Motivations for the Stockbridge Mission

*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ~ Philippians 2:3*

#### *Motivations of the Mission Founders*

The Massachusetts Bay Settlement charter of 1628 had cited the goal that the Puritan settlers “may be soe religiously, peaceable, and civilly governed, as their good Life and orderlie Conversacon, maie wynn and incite the natives of Country, to the KnowIedg and Obedience of the onlie true God and Savior of Mankinde...”<sup>88</sup> as a primary intention of the colony from its inception. When their initial efforts to evangelize the natives were met with resistance and indifference, many settlers began to think less often of the stated objective of their charter. Disillusioned and insulted by the Indians’ apparent lack of interest in their example of “piety”, the New Englanders succumbed to disdain for their “heathen” neighbors, some even saying that the natives were of another entire “spiritual species,”<sup>89</sup> ones who would be excluded from God’s

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<sup>88</sup> “The Charter of Massachusetts Bay: 1628,” Text, *The Avalon Project*, (December 18, 1998), [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th\\_century/mass03.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/17th_century/mass03.asp).

<sup>89</sup> John B. Carpenter, “New England Puritans: The Grandparents of Modern Protestant Missions,” *Missiology* 30, no. 4 (October 1, 2002): 521, doi:10.1177/009182960203000406. Quoted in April C. Armstrong, “Last Were the Mahicans: Jonathan Edwards, Stockbridge, and the Native Americans,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 48, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 22.

millennial kingdom.<sup>90</sup> Many, such as John Winthrop the first governor, even held that the land the natives occupied could be taken without payment or assent, as they did not properly own it because they did not cultivate it.<sup>91</sup> Rachel Wheeler states that, “One mission promoter observed that many New Englanders would as soon kill the Indians as Christianize them.”<sup>92</sup> While many settlers cared little for the souls of the Indians, others cared only so far as their conversion would make their own farms and businesses more safe and profitable.

Those who founded the Stockbridge mission, many sitting under the teaching of Edwards that was detailed in the last chapter, seemed to have genuine concern for the souls of natives, especially after the first waves of the Great Awakening, but even these men were able to find wider support for their project by appealing to the material motivations of the colonial settlers and governments. In 1730, Massachusetts governor Jonathan Belcher lamented that the colony had “done little to live up to the goal of its charter.”<sup>93</sup> That year he proposed to the New England Company, a London based organization of philanthropists, that they commit some of their funds to purchasing land on which to employ and settle a minister and schoolmaster for the natives. After Belcher was chosen as Commissioner of the United Colonies for the New England Company in 1734, the effort gained support. Col. John Stoddard, the uncle of Jonathan Edwards and deacon in his Northampton congregation, who had extensive experience with the Iroquois

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<sup>90</sup> McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards and American Indians: The Devil Sucks Their Blood,” *The New England Quarterly* 72 (1999): 548. Cited in Armstrong, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Armstrong, 22. Rachel Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope: Mohicans and Missionaries in the Eighteenth-Century Northeast* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 30.

<sup>92</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 30. citing Samuel Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs Relating to the Housatonic Indians* (Boston S. Kneeland, 1753) 165.

<sup>93</sup> Patrick. Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 18. Wheeler, 32.

tribes as a chief negotiator regarding land dealings with the Mohicans since 1724, agreed to lead the project. John Stoddard was able to promote the project with several non-spiritual reasons: it would open up more lands for settlements as many widespread groups of natives would be consolidated into town settlements, it would provide protection by having friendly Indians in periphery settlements, and it would combat the forays of the French missionaries into the eastern lands. John Stoddard may have felt the need of protection from raiding Indian tribes more acutely than others as he was the only member of his family to not be captured or killed in the Deerfield Massacre of 1704.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore, political motivations for founding the mission settlement were inextricably interwoven with spiritual motivations from the beginning, even in the minds of strong spiritual leaders such as John Stoddard, who was clearly motivated by evangelism as a primary goal. By all accounts Col. John Stoddard was well respected by the Indians and was the most qualified man in New England to negotiate for the mission project. It is interesting to note that Col. Stoddard sat for many years under the preaching of his father, the famous Solomon Stoddard, grandfather and mentor to Edwards, who was outspoken in his condemnation of New England's apathy toward Indian evangelism. Some of Reverend Stoddard's reproaches include his 1723 sermon titled "Question Whether God is not Angry with the Country for Doing so Little Toward the Conversion of the Indians?" In it, he speculates whether the calamities of wars and raids they were experiencing with the natives were not a punishment from God for their negligence in loving and converting the natives. In the same sermon he challenges his congregation to learn from the Christian Indians as they possess even in their darkened spiritual state

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<sup>94</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 19.

many characteristics to be emulated and which speak to their standing as image bearers of their creator. Stoddard's sermon lists their skillful use and care of their environment, their abilities as farmers, artists, hunters and boatmen, and especially "the chief ornament of them is their hospitality" as reasons they should be respected by whites.<sup>95</sup> McDermott says that Solomon Stoddard even longed for the ideal of a mixed race congregation at Northampton.<sup>96</sup> After his father died, Col. Stoddard sat under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards for many of the sermons about charity to the needs of the poor that were discussed in the last chapter. It seems reasonable to connect the very founding of the mission to the direct teachings of Rev. Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards. John Stoddard, with his profound knowledge and venerable relationship with the local Indian groups, convinced the mission sponsors to first approach a smaller more peaceable Mohican tribe known as the Housatonic Indians, among whom he knew French Catholic influence to be minimal.<sup>97</sup>

### The Situation and Motivation of the Natives

According to their own tribal history, the Mohican Indians originally came from west of the Hudson River, where they enjoyed what Wheeler, characterizing Aupaumut's words, describes as "an Edenic existence of peace and prosperity,"<sup>98</sup> but famine forced them to migrate east, until they arrived at the Hudson river, which reminded them of the "flowing and ebbing" waters of the Mouhheakunnuck, from whence they came. In 1609 Henry Hudson established the first contact between the Europeans and the Mohican

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<sup>95</sup> Quoted by Ralph Coffman, *Solomon Stoddard, 1978*, 171. Referenced by Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 393.

<sup>96</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 543. Cited in Armstrong, 22.

<sup>97</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 24.

tribes. They soon struck up a “lively and sometimes contentious trade” of fur goods and other items.<sup>99</sup> Although the Mohicans initially prospered in the fur trade as middlemen between the inland tribes and the Europeans, the next century brought many misfortunes through disease, alcoholism, and periodic wars with the neighboring Mohawk tribes and the French and their allies in King William’s War.<sup>100</sup> The fur trade began drying up at the same time that the natives had become dependent on European goods. By 1722, Mohicans were faced with a dwindling population and with pressures from decreased game and trade. Rachel Wheeler claims that throughout their history, the Mohicans were particularly adept at cultural assimilation as a way of living at peace with the tribes around them.<sup>101</sup> Their neighbors were now English settlers in growing numbers, so becoming knowledgeable of the English culture may have played the largest part in their desire for interaction with the missionaries. The promise of teaching their children the English language and culture was seen by the Mohicans as an opportunity that would open up the European world for themselves and their progeny. Literacy, they hoped, would also help protect them against fraud.<sup>102</sup>

While open to learn the ways of the English for their own survival and prosperity, many within the tribes expressed reservations about allowing their people to learn the new religion and to abandon their old religion. Other leaders within the tribes observed the relative prosperity in population increase of the Christians compared to the dwindling Mohican numbers.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps by converting to Christianity, they reasoned, they might

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 24-25.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 25. Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 4–11.

<sup>101</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 39.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>103</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 17.

secure the blessings of this Christian god. It is interesting that Patrick Frazier makes a further connection to Edwards at this point in the history of the mission when he speculates that the Mohican Indians may have become curious about Christianity through the testimony of other Indians who had been among those being swept up in the spiritual awakenings of the 1730s.<sup>104</sup>

The Indians' weakened situation in population and allies forced them to enter into a relationship with the English that was based on submission to the Whites. The address of the highest Mohican chief Ampamut to Governor William Burnett in 1722 underscores the serious straits that may have led the Mohicans to try to secure peace and prosperity by seeking protection from the English.<sup>105</sup> Wheeler points out how revealing their exchange is of the "paternalistic" relationship between the Mohicans and the English. She recounts the exchange between the English and Indian leader in her book:

"Father," Ampamut started, "We look upon you as a great Tree under whose Branches we desire to shelter, and if there should happen any sudden Tempest or Thunder Shower we hope we shall be admitted to take shelter under that great Tree and be shadowed by the leaves therefore, that no drops may fall on us but that we may live in Peace and safety."<sup>106</sup> Burnett in turn addressed Ampamut and the Mohicans by the paternal epithet of "children," praising them for their past obedience and "warning his 'children' against intemperance."<sup>107</sup>

The abject and humble state of the Mohicans as "dependents" under their English "fathers" does not establish the settlement on a basis of mutual respect.

While the Mohican Housatonics may have been eager to develop a relationship with the Christian settlers as their own prospects dwindled and they faced abject poverty

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<sup>104</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 50.

<sup>105</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 25.

<sup>106</sup> E.B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the colonial History of the State of New York*, vol. 5 (Albany: Weed, Parsons, and Co., 1853-87). p. 663. Quoted in Wheeler, 25.

<sup>107</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 25-26.

and ravaging disease, the Indians were still cautious as they deliberated over the offer of Col. Stoddard and the mission leaders to start a mission settlement on their lands in 1734. Two local chieftains, Umpachenee and Konkapot, led the negotiations with the English concerning the lands on which the mission settlement of Stockbridge would be built. In a series of meetings with tribal leaders within the wider Mohican alliance and with the English delegates, many tribal leaders voiced concerns and grievances that had arisen in their dealings over the last decade with their English neighbors. They found fault with the Christians for keeping slaves and feared that they and their children could also be enslaved. The debtors' prisons had been abused in the past, and although these prisons had been ended in 1672, some colonists got around it by forcing their debtors to sign contracts of indenture.<sup>108</sup> They were also suspicious of a religion whose followers sold them alcohol, cheated them in land deals,<sup>109</sup> and led immoral lives as evidenced by their "ill conversations" and conduct.<sup>110</sup>

At the negotiations with the English at Deerfield in 1733, the Housatonic Mohicans "sought assurance that if they consented to live in a mission town, not only would they be granted the same privileges as the English but they would also enjoy protection from the English," says Wheeler.<sup>111</sup> After much deliberation, the Housatonic leaders decided "not to reject the offer before they should try it, and let it be preached in one certain village, and let every man and woman go to hear it and embrace it; if they think best ..." <sup>112</sup> Wheeler says that this agreement was viewed differently by the two

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<sup>108</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 33.

<sup>109</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 26.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 42.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

parties: The missionaries saw it as a decision “as a nation to submit to instruction”<sup>113</sup> while the natives saw it as a test of efficacy. Wheeler characterizes their thinking as, “If Christian profession and practice proved effective in solving the various challenges faced by the Mohican community, then the religion would be embraced.”<sup>114</sup> This disconnect between the expectations of each party would lead to persistent conflicts in the management of the mission settlement over its entire existence.

### *Work and Conflict at Stockbridge Before Edwards Came*

By 1733, the New England Company had enough funds available to establish the mission, complete with a minister, a schoolmaster and workers who could apprentice Indian children in the English trades. The mission was to be led by a young Yale tutor named John Sergeant. Sergeant seemed desirous to see salvation and learning brought to these indigenous people whom he viewed as barbarous yet friendly toward the English.<sup>115</sup> Sergeant at first took an optimistic but cautious approach, and decided to test the genuineness of the Housatonic Indians’ spiritual willingness by traveling to meet them at a temporary mission. The devotion of those first Indians inspired him and the mission leaders to proceed with the building of the permanent settlement. The first buildings in what would become Stockbridge were a large winter meetinghouse and some huts. Sergeant and another minister lived with the Indians in their huts for six weeks and spent

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>115</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 19.

Sundays teaching them about Christianity and baptizing as many as accepted the new message, including several important tribal leaders and their families.<sup>116</sup>

One of the first challenges for Sergeant came in December when Dutch rum traders began visiting the area. Not only did a number of Mohicans begin drinking, but they became so drunk that several days later they were still unable to attend the Sunday service. The Dutch traders also began a rumor that Massachusetts law wished to restrict Indian freedoms, exemplified by the government restricting the sale of rum to the Indians. The nearby European settlers continued to take advantage of the Indians' unfamiliarity with English property laws, swindling them of their lands with each individual trade.<sup>117</sup> In addition to the abusive treatment they had often received at the hands of English Christians, many within the Housatonic Mohican tribes found Christian civilization to be effeminate compared to that of the Indians and criticized Umpachenee and Konkapot for allowing the mission to be built on their lands.<sup>118</sup> Soon after Sergeant began his work there, several Indians, who were in regular contact with Sergeant and the school teacher Woodbridge, became ill and a rumor arose that someone had poisoned them. Konkapot and Umpachenee were so distressed that two of their men had died that they feared other Mohicans would 'hate us for what we have done' in accepting the mission.<sup>119</sup> Because these Housatonic leaders were deciding against the recommendation of the larger River Indian Confederacy in accepting the mission town, there was much tension with their Indian neighbors and even threats on their lives from other Mohicans in

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 21-29.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 30.

the first years.<sup>120</sup> Despite these and many other conflicts and challenges surrounding the mission work, the ravaged and dispersed remnants of the Housatonic tribes were being gathered to a permanent settlement in the town, were regularly hearing the preaching of the gospel, and by December of 1735 were being baptized in the scores.<sup>121</sup> Wheeler points out that their decision to establish a mission town ultimately enabled the Housatonics to survive on their land and to create a distinctly Housatonic Mohican identity as “The Stockbridge Indians.” Their chief historian, Aupaumut claimed that the Stockbridge Indians were the only Mohicans to remain on the land by 1803, and to, as Wheeler summarizes, “be the sole surviving definers of Mohican tradition.”<sup>122</sup>

At first, Sergeant lived among the Indians, learned their language, and labored hard over their souls. Unfortunately, after the first four years, he became discouraged and began complaining of having sacrificed “a great many agreeable Amusements of Life . . . to expose myself to many Fatigues and Hardships . . . among a barbarous People.”<sup>123</sup> For the previous two years, Sergeant had been attempting to woo Jonathan Edwards’ sister Hannah to join him as his companion in his life in the wilderness. When she continued to spurn his advances, Sergeant fell into despair with his life and into discouragement that these natives were even worth his efforts. By 1737, he appealed to the mission leaders to send English families to the settlement with an objective of modeling Christianity to the Indians for their more rapid assimilation of English ways

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<sup>120</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 35, 36.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 47.

and with perhaps a secret hope of finding a wife to ease his loneliness.<sup>124</sup> By 1738, four English families had relocated, among them the enterprising Williams family whose daughter Abigail soon became the minister's wife.

The year of Sergeant's marriage looked promising as far as the success of the mission went. Sergeant was optimistic that the Indians would finally embrace "Christian civility" as he noted the twenty-five settled Indian families plowing and tending their own plots of land, practicing English husbandry and industry, and learning to read and write in English. The meeting house, where Sergeant would preach in the Mohican language and baptize sixty native members, was completed by November of 1739.<sup>125</sup> In June of that year, the legislature incorporated the town and named it Stockbridge, causing the Indians consternation as to why their town, named Muh-he-con-nuk, was now named after some small town in Hampshire, England. With incorporation, the Indians were expected to take up civil duties that had not been previously discussed. This civil and social change, along with the infusion of new English families, threatened to undo the long-standing traditions of the natives and to rob them of even more of their lands. Wheeler implies that when the Housatonics were told that there would now be "two or three English Familys there besides the minister and schoolmaster, to be company for them and their wives . . . and to help and instruct the Indians in their husbandry,"<sup>126</sup> it would have been blatantly clear to the Indians that their company could never content the whites. She says, "An act of supposed benevolence came to be quite profitable for the

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 56.

English parties involved, while requiring the Indians to give up more land than they had intended -- all in the name of bringing “civilization” to the Indians.”<sup>127</sup>

Soon their missionary’s concern and care for their interests grew cold as he became more enmeshed with the English settlers. Shortly after his marriage, he built a fancy house on the hill above the village where all the white settlers lived. Wheeler points out that at the same time Sergeant was distancing himself from his Indian congregation, he began planning to “distance the Indian children from their parents” in a move away from shepherding the adults of the village and toward focusing on “civilizing” the children instead, by removing the Indian children to a boarding school where they would be immersed in English culture. The Mohicans, who were very family centered, were offended by the prospect of splitting up their families. Sergeant’s belief that the Indians would not be full participants in Christian life unless they adopted the English ways was increasingly a wedge between his congregation and the gospel he hoped to plant there. Wheeler says that early in his ministry Sergeant had hinted at a “fundamental equality between Indian and white” citing his lament in a letter to a friend in 1739 that the Indian had been “treated with too much neglect by us who in grace alone has been made to differ from them.”<sup>128</sup> Unfortunately, a few years later, says Wheeler, “he attributed what he saw as Indian backwardness to the immutable color of their skin.”<sup>129</sup> Instead of identifying with these Native people, Segreant labeled them “other” and was lured into seeking his own self-interests over theirs.

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 63, citing a letter from John Sergeant to Stephen Williams, Housatunnuk, May 14, 1739.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 63.

Another indicator that the mission had lost the hearts of the Mohicans was the growing warm relations between Moravian missionaries and the Stockbridge Indians by the mid 1740s. Moravian missionaries who had come to Pennsylvania from Germany in 1741 created a mission called Bethlehem on the estate of George Whitefield. The Moravian missionaries had enjoyed much success with the Mohicans in those regions and, as many Stockbridge Indians had relatives living in the Moravian missions and had trade in those regions, they were frequently interacting with these missionaries, even inviting them to preach in their homes at Stockbridge. The Moravian witness of the gospel appealed more to the existing cultural ideals of the Indians than the Calvinists' focus on creeds and catechisms did.<sup>130</sup> The Moravians preached a gospel centered on Christ's healing blood and his love for them, and Moravian missionaries were known for their loving care of those they served. One telling indictment of what Sergeant's mission had become is found in Wheeler's account of an Indian's explanation of the growing popularity of Moravian missionaries among his people, an explanation given boldly in person to John Sergeant, who recorded the Indian's reprimand in his journal:

I think they (Moravians) preach the Truth, right better than ye; when I hear them it is always so with me that I feel they speak downright to the matter that must in the Heart, but the contrary ye always go a roundabout way.' Further he likened Sergeant to a bad husbandman, charging that 'you let your People go and have no care of them, if they Love god or if they perish.'<sup>131</sup>

It seems that the message of the Moravian missionaries resonated with the Mohicans not only for its direct dealing with matters of the heart, with a focus on healing and

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<sup>130</sup> Wheeler, 86.

<sup>131</sup> Wheeler, 199.

deliverance from demonic oppression through the blood of Christ, but also for its being accompanied by a loving involvement with the Indians in their homes and on their terms.

Wheeler points out that it is not surprising that John Sergeant soured in his commitment to the Indians and their causes considering that he had set out with expectations of not enjoying his work, a common attitude of many Anglo-Protestant missionaries of that time.<sup>132</sup> Wheeler says, “Anglo-Protestant missionaries often set off to their mission posts with heavy hearts buoyed only by the assurance that their work was an act of self-denial and dutiful obedience to God. . . Missionaries like Sergeant, Brainerd, and Hawley generally got what they expected -- hardship, frustration, and a lack of social opportunities.”<sup>133</sup> Wheeler believes their mindset made them miserable as much as the conditions of their work, especially when compared to the experiences of the Moravian missionaries. Though many Calvinist missionaries were passionate about seeing the natives come to saving faith and acquiring the ability to read God’s Word, they did not persevere in identifying with these people as Christ did with the oppressed and marginalized of his day. Wheeler notes that the first Moravian missionary Christian Rauch impressed the Indians by his preference to live with them instead of with the surrounding German farmers, sending “a powerful message that perhaps Rauch was capable of appreciating Indian humanity.”<sup>134</sup> Wheeler says that the Moravian missionaries “proved to be quite different from the Dutch and English Christians” in their behavior and gospel presentation.<sup>135</sup> Unlike the Congregationalist missionaries, the Moravians tended to agree with the Indians about the abuses of the professing Christians

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<sup>132</sup> Wheeler, 44-47.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>135</sup> Wheeler, 84.

around them and tried to distance themselves from their European counterparts and culture by modifying and reinterpreting the Christian sacraments and experiences to fit the Indian traditions and by emphasizing “the fraternity of believers rather than obedience to divine authority” as Wheeler puts it.<sup>136</sup>

How converts during the first fifteen years of the mission at Stockbridge fared spiritually is hard to tell as the scant records Sergeant kept tended more toward crops planted and harvested, tools accounted for, and land acquired. By the time of his death in 1749, Sergeant partially blamed his weakened relations with the Stockbridge Indians and stagnant growth of his church membership on “interference” of the Moravian ministers.<sup>137</sup>

#### *Edwards’ Motivations for Coming to Stockbridge*

Jonathan Gibson argues that Edwards’ motivation for accepting the position at Stockbridge was a deep commitment to missions in general and to this mission in particular.<sup>138</sup> He cites Edwards’ personal involvement in the committee establishing the community in 1736 and notes that Edwards was charged with handling the funds for the school at Stockbridge from 1743 to 1747 as evidence that Edwards would have had a continuing concern for the wellbeing of the project through its first fifteen years.<sup>139</sup>

Marsden indicates that Edwards would have felt keenly the need for the mission to thrive

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>138</sup> Jonathan Gibson, “Jonathan Edwards: A Missionary?,” *Themelios*, 36, no. 3 (2011), accessed Sep. 20, 2016, Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, vol. 11 (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1993), 152..

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Hopkins, *Historical Memoirs Relating to the Houstunnuk Indians* (Boston 1753), 134, cited on page 18 of George Claghorn, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Letters and Personal Writings*, WJEOnline.

at the critical junction in the life of the mission after the death of John Sergeant and the building of the new school.<sup>140</sup> A letter Edwards wrote in late 1749 to Thomas Foxcroft corroborates his concern that a strong spiritual leader, a man “of sound principles and pious character,” be found to lead the mission after the loss of Sergeant, especially considering the importance of the church there “in gradually propagating the Gospel among the Indians.”<sup>141</sup>

Marsden emphasizes that Edwards’ motivation was ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of the natives: “Edwards was sure that a combination of education and the gospel would be the key to enlightening the native peoples.”<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, Gibson notes that Edwards’ secret passion from his youth was for missions. Edwards confesses his early yearning for evangelism in his personal narrative written in 1739: “I had great longings for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in the world and my secret prayer used to be, in large part, taken up in praying for it.”<sup>143</sup> His continued focus on evangelizing is evidenced by his position as a trainer of missionaries throughout his years at Northampton and his special affinity for David Brainerd. Young men such as Job Strong, Joseph Bellamy, Gideon Hawley, and Samuel Hopkins all lived with Edwards and studied theology under him on their way to various mission fields.<sup>144</sup> Edwards’ admiration for the missionary David Brainerd is abundantly clear in his editing and publishing of Brainerd’s diary. Both men were firmly committed to the millennial hope

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<sup>140</sup> Marsden, 382.

<sup>141</sup> George S. Claghorn in “Editors Introduction and Notes,” *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 16: Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>142</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 390.

<sup>143</sup> Gibson, 384.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

that true Native American converts would be a part of God's design in bringing all nations together in the worship of Christ.<sup>145</sup>

Rachel Wheeler, in her article "Friends to Your Souls," claims that Edwards had come to identify more with the disadvantaged after experiencing the ingratitude of his privileged flock at Northampton. Wheeler claims that Edwards' dismissal by his Northampton congregation affected both his choice to come to Stockbridge and his approach to ministry when he arrived.<sup>146</sup> Edwards shook the dust off his feet leaving a congregation who had been blessed with every advantage, from living in a place where morality was taught and the gospel was preached to even witnessing and claiming to experience the work of the Holy Spirit during the Great Awakening. These blessings had not exempted them from the universal and utter corruption of human nature. Wheeler says that it was this sense of being unappreciated which disposed Edwards towards the idea of bringing the gospel to those without the advantages of his English congregants: after all, if Christ chose to minister among the most rejected of society, why not himself? While challenges surely lay ahead, Edwards anticipated greater satisfaction at seeing the work of the Holy Spirit in those who hadn't yet been given a chance, the disenfranchised, abused, and even despised Indians. He certainly chose this outback mission with its slack track record of success over more prestigious settings on par or better than his position at Northampton.<sup>147</sup> Considering all these reasons, it seems plausible that Edwards' choice of Stockbridge, rather than being a last resort or a retreat from the work of pastoring,

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<sup>145</sup> Norman Pettit, "Editor's Introduction," *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 7: The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1985), 1.

<sup>146</sup> Rachel Wheeler, "'Friends to Your Souls': Jonathan Edwards' Indian Pastorate and the Doctrine of Original Sin," *Church History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 745.

<sup>147</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 364.

actually arose from his deep desire to identify with the poor and lowly. His choice of Stockbridge exemplifies his ideals of charity as the chief Christian virtue

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Edwards' Ministry at Stockbridge as Identifying with the Lowly

*Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.*  
~ Prov 16:19

#### *Identifying with the Natives in Advocacy*

Iain Murray, in his 1987 biography, portrays Edwards' early years at Stockbridge as a time in which the practical, social, and spiritual concerns of the ministry took active daily involvement on Edwards' part, a portrayal that stands in contrast to the impression of these years as a study and writing retreat that earlier scholars had proposed.<sup>148</sup>

Marsden also remarks on how multi-faceted Edwards' role as minister was, considering that he also produced four major treatises during his time at Stockbridge. Marsden says, "The Edwards who emerged at Stockbridge after passing through the fires of Northampton, while hardly without flaws, was truly an extraordinary figure."<sup>149</sup>

When Edwards arrived at Stockbridge, tensions were already mounting over an issue which Marsden says characterized "every mission to the natives during the era of English and American expansion." The issue was that wherever missions began, settlers quickly followed "who, even if sympathetic to the mission, had stronger interests in their

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<sup>148</sup> Murray, 387-420. On page 372, Murray highlights the regular daily interactions and classes that Edwards had with the Indians and white congregants alike, in addition to the four sermons he preached each Sunday.

<sup>149</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 378-79.

own lands, their economic opportunities, and the security of their expanding families.”<sup>150</sup> The growth of the white population from 4 families to 10 over the course of ten years may seem like a relatively small change, especially considering that there were still some 218 Indians at Stockbridge at the time of John Sergeant’s death, but problems seemed to mount up exponentially as new families arrived. The natives, being entirely unfamiliar with the English customs and laws regarding property sales, were regularly swindled of their choicest land, either by deceit or through loopholes of which the natives weren’t aware.<sup>151</sup> Edwards was wary that what had happened to the Indians at David Brainerd’s mission Bethel not happen at Stockbridge. In 1749, Edwards had written many letters of advocacy for the Bethel mission whose Indians were being ejected from their lands in large numbers. Edwards had seen the effects of a new chief justice of New Jersey, Robert Morris, who through legal technicalities was able to “drive from their fields and farms the Indians of the colony” and from even the mission lands which had been purchased with moneys from mission societies. Edwards lamented the “craft” and “forgery” of Morris, and worked throughout the early 1750s to raise money from Scotland to purchase four thousand acres in New Jersey for the displaced Indians that David Brainerd called “my people.”<sup>152</sup>

Marsden says that Edwards moved to Stockbridge with high hopes, but also a painful awareness from his treatment at Northampton that “when the Gospel light was spreading... Satan was sure to counterattack by exploiting human self-interest.”<sup>153</sup> In his time at Stockbridge, this concern would become true most evidently in the case of the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Pettit, “Editor’s Introduction,” 65.

<sup>153</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 375.

very influential Ephraim Williams Sr. and his family. While Marsden says that the Williams family on the whole held the same New Light Calvinistic convictions as Edwards (Abigail Williams being an exception) and that they may have originally held an honest desire to help in the conversion of the natives, they held at the same time “motives of self-interest and enterprise, which led the family to take for granted that they should exploit their economic opportunities.”<sup>154</sup> These two motivations were likewise present to varying degrees in some of the other white settlers, and, not being viewed as contradictory, they created blind spots in other mission administrators, such as Sergeant and Brigadier General Joseph Dwight, something which Edwards was careful to watch out for. In the more than 400 pages of letters that Edwards wrote on Indian affairs or as a voice for the Indian’s grievances during his Stockbridge years, Marsden notes a change in Edwards from his Northampton days in that he was more often involved with managing “the daily dynamics of his biracial village” and the political motions of empire that would affect his mission.<sup>155</sup>

### *Identifying with the Indians through Hospitality and Community*

One clear way that we see Edwards’ ideas of charity at play during the whole of his time at Stockbridge comes from his interactions with the Indians in ways that Sergeant had neglected. When Edwards moved to Stockbridge in 1751, he chose not to live in the fashionable colonial houses on top of Prospect Hill as Sergeant and the other whites had, but rather to move into and to expand upon the original minister’s house located down below in the town where the Native longhouses were located. It could be

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 382.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 388.

argued that Edwards lacked the funds to build a better house after a year without a regular salary in Northampton and without the ability to re-invest in another home until the sale of his house in Northampton, which took almost two more years. Certainly Edwards was deeply in debt by the time he settled at Stockbridge, a debt he confessed to his father in a letter to be more than twenty times his yearly salary at Stockbridge.<sup>156</sup> From what he could borrow or was given in charity from friends and supporters from as far away as Scotland, Edwards paid for the renovations to the house that were necessary for it to accommodate his large family and frequent visitors and to purchase a wooded lot elsewhere in the town in order to possess the firewood so vital in those days. But it is worth noting that the original house was so small that he could easily have justified starting from scratch up on the hill. The health benefits of the higher land of Prospect Hill could have been ample justification for locating there rather than in the center of a busy trading center for Indians and settlers down on the river. In fact, Edwards had a heightened interest in disease prevention. Many of his letters to his closest friends are sprinkled with medical advice, requests for potions to treat ailments, and concern for the prevention of diseases that ravage whole towns such as small pox, fevers, and tuberculosis, of which advances in understanding were limited but growing at that time. He encouraged his friends to get inoculations, a new and sometimes unsuccessful method recently out of England. Even during one of the peaks of the Great Awakening, Edwards once declined an invitation to preach in a town, saying that since his wife was pregnant, he would not risk her and the child with the potential of carrying home a contagious

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 391.

disease that had been recently ravaging that town.<sup>157</sup> He was solicitous over the health of his family, for good reason. His youngest child, Betty, was born with a heart condition that left her frail and sickly her whole childhood until her death at 13 years of age. During the Stockbridge years both Edwards and his wife suffered debilitating bouts with disease that brought them both near to death. Yet for all his interest in disease prevention and cure, Edwards not only located his family in a less healthy spot in the midst of the town, but seems to have not limited himself or his family from daily interaction with the Indians in their homes and places of business. Edwards himself led two catechism classes, one for Mohicans and one for Mohawks, weekly in the homes of the Indians. His wife and children were also often in the homes of the natives as they were completely integrated into the life of the town.

Though Edwards was protective of his family's health, he encouraged his children to play with the natives in their huts and to learn their customs and language, and even sent his son to live for months at a time in the homes of the Mohawks two hundred miles distant from Stockbridge. Over the years, Edwards also took several Mohican children into his own household.<sup>158</sup> Jonathan Jr. recounts how he spent most of his time with the Mohican children, and recalls that he knew many words in the Mohican language, the equivalent of which he didn't even know in English. As an adult, Edwards' son writes of those first years at Stockbridge, "The Indians being the nearest neighbors, I constantly associated with them; their boys were my daily school mates and playfellows. Out of my father's house, I seldom heard any language spoken, beside the Indian... It became more familiar to me than my mother tongue. I knew the names of some things in Indian, which

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 413.

<sup>158</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 390.

I did not know in English; even all my thoughts ran in Indian.”<sup>159</sup> Though the situation was highly risky given the state of continual war with the Huron and French alliance, Edwards sent 10-year-old Jonathan Jr. as an interpreter for the missionary Gideon Hawley to the Mohawks in 1755. Edwards encouraged his son to live with the Mohawks and learn all that he could of their language and culture in the hopes that he would be able to preach to the Indians in their own tongue as Edwards himself was not able to do.<sup>160</sup> Edwards learned enough of the language for use in daily contact, but felt that his preaching would be limited if he went without the aid of a translator. Even as a young child, Jonathan Jr. often served as his interpreter for his father in informal conversation with the Indians after church or at catechism classes.

Though there is much evidence that Edwards was under the worst financial straits of his life from the outset at Stockbridge all through to his move to New Jersey, there is also much evidence from Edwards’ daughter Esther’s letters and the journals of the many guests who frequented his home, that his own want did not dampen his generosity to all who came under his roof.<sup>161</sup> Sarah Edwards is given much credit on this account by Samuel Hopkins and others who witnessed and benefited from her hospitality. Though Sarah weathered an illness that brought her close to death and a riding accident that left

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<sup>159</sup> Jonathan Edwards Jr., *Observations on the Language of the Muhhekaneew Indians* (New Haven, Ct.: Josiah Meigs, 1788), reprinted as *Observations on the Mahican Language, American Language Reprints*, ed. Claudio R. Salvucci, vol. 25 (Bristol, Penn.: Evolution, 2002), 9-10.

<sup>160</sup> Although this weakness of needing a translator was often used by Edwards adversaries at Stockbridge as the sole grounds for his unfitness, Edwards always maintained that Sergeant himself had advised that the next missionary *not* spend years trying to master the language as he had.

<sup>161</sup> Murray cites the depth of the Edwards’ financial duress with references to the needle work that Sarah and his daughters undertook to help supply the family and Edwards own extreme conservation of paper, which was expensive in those days and may account for most of the sermons during this period being only in outline form, 378-379.

her in constant pain, she continued to be an inspiration in hospitality, gentility, and domestic management to everyone who came under her care. Edwards testified to this in a letter to his father, “The Indians seem much pleased with my family, especially my wife.”<sup>162</sup> Nor should it come as any surprise that a family which had been described by various guests as “the most agreeable family I was ever acquainted with,” and having “much of [the] image of God in them” should win the good opinion of the Stockbridge residents.<sup>163</sup> The actions of the Edwards family do justice to the opinions others had of them as well. Edwards and his family housed and fed both English soldiers and Indian braves as well as refugees of all races during times of war and upheaval, paid from their own pocket for the building of fortifications to protect the town, purchased land for the use of indigent Indians, and performed many other actions of caring for the physical needs of their neighbors in Stockbridge and beyond.<sup>164</sup> Murray concludes that “Edwards showed much disinterested affection for the Indians” and that he may have felt “closer to them than to those in Northampton.”<sup>165</sup> The above evidence shows that Edwards and his family accepted the natives as familiar friends, in contrast to the way most English Protestants of that period interacted with Indians.

### *Identifying with the Indians by Addressing their Needs*

Edwards was more intentional than his predecessor about meeting the natives at their need, taking especially seriously the promise to the Indians of an English education

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<sup>162</sup> Works, 16:420.

<sup>163</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, “Edwards’ Family.”

<sup>164</sup> Gerald McDermott and Ronald Story, editors. *The Other Jonathan Edwards: Selected Writings on Society, Love, and Justice* (University of Mass Press, Amherst & Boston, 2015), 15.

<sup>165</sup> Murray, 393.

of their youth. Not only was education the primary draw for the natives, but it was central to the English interests of peaceful relations with the Iroquois. It was of paramount importance that the allegiance of the natives on the border be secured, as conflict with the French was an ever-looming threat. The boarding school especially was central to this plan, as it was education which would draw in other tribes, such as the Mohawks. Addressing this intertwining of the political and spiritual motivations is a notable subtext in Edwards' first sermon at Stockbridge, in which he tells his Mohican and Mohawk listeners that the French and Dutch, by neglecting to educate them, had merely been trying to keep them ignorant and profit off of them. He then proceeded to warn them that any such physical threat or disenfranchisement paled in comparison to the threat posed by Satan, who keeps people in darkness so that, like some cannibals do, he might fatten them to be eaten!<sup>166</sup> While Edwards is acknowledging their political and social plight and encouraging his Mohawk listeners to pursue their children's education at the Stockbridge boarding school, he draws a multi-layered parallel between their temporal disenfranchisement allegedly posed by the French and their important eternal fate without the light of the gospel.

When Edwards arrived, he quickly observed that much of the funds that were being sent for the education of the native children since 1748 were being grossly mismanaged. A day school with 55 students was being run by Timothy Woodbridge, whose diligent work since the founding of the town had earned him the deep respect of the natives and earned him Edwards' praise: "By his long-proved justice and integrity, he has gained a vast esteem with the Indians, who are a people peculiar in that respect, if

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<sup>166</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 386.

once they find a man is mean and deceitful, never will trust him again; but their friendship is mightily gained by upright dealing.”<sup>167</sup> Woodbridge educated these children well on minimal pay. The boarding school, however, was a fiasco and reinforced the Indians’ fear that their children would become enslaved in an English-style boarding school. In a letter to Thomas Hubbard, Edwards expresses with frank honesty his opinion of Captain Kellogg, the man who was supposed to be running the boarding school on a salary since 1748. According to Edwards, the 62-year old, lame, and possibly illiterate Captain Kellogg had been hired by Sergeant simply because there was nobody else so readily available. Edwards even intimates that Sergeant was “extremely uneasy at some things in [Kellogg’s] conduct and accounts” and had planned to make a change before his untimely death.<sup>168</sup> Kellogg collected a prodigious salary from Isaac Hollis, a wealthy benefactor in England, and some of the boys under his care complained that he fed and clothed them poorly and put them to work on his growing estate.<sup>169</sup>

Perhaps seeing the easy money to be made for “running” a boarding school for the Indians, Abigail Williams, Sergeant’s widow, began setting up a school for Indian girls and also collecting a salary from the far-away benefactor Hollis. She was collecting money from the state to build an overly large and elaborate school on her property, which she moved her family into as soon as it was finished, and was using state funds for the project to pay her own servants and children.<sup>170</sup> In the face of this blatant self-interest, Edwards began writing letters to those in authority to block what he saw as abuse of

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<sup>167</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 399.

<sup>168</sup> Jonathan Edwards to Hubbard, March 30, 1752, Works, 16: 461.

<sup>169</sup> Frazier, *The Mohicans of Stockbridge*, 101.

<sup>170</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 398.

public trust and a threat to the integrity of the Stockbridge mission and Indian relationships. What ensued was two years of seeking justice for the Indians who had become disgusted with the Williams family and the boarding school issue. Only after half of the Mohawks had already withdrawn their children from the boarding school, Edwards was given full authority from Hollis to oversee the administration of the schools.<sup>171</sup>

Edwards' practical methods of education are in themselves demonstrations of living out the primacy of Christian love. Not only did he believe that literacy was vital to spiritual growth, he believed that the natives were intellectually equal to whites and capable of learning quickly if only the right methods were employed (in contrast to Sergeant who often complained of their inability to learn). His desire to integrate white children into the Indian schools<sup>172</sup> not only demonstrates his confidence that the races were equal in capability but also reinforces his belief that the English could learn much from the natives. Edwards, possibly drawing from his own process of learning to read at three years of age and from the education of his own many children, believed that learning to read should be exciting and rewarding. He complained that rote learning of words in English was a waste of time, for without engaging their hearts and imagination, the students would quickly forget.<sup>173</sup> He proposed the same methods he used engage his own children, a form of Socratic questioning to engage the child and to assess his developing understanding. His ideas of education were uncommon for his day in that they reflect an openness to encouraging children to speak freely in conversation with

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>172</sup> George Marsden, "Jonathan Edwards, the Missionary," *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-) vol. 81, no. 1 (2003): 14.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

their teacher, and that teachers should encourage the students to question them. He also believed that music was an educational tool especially joyful and culturally powerful to the Indians that should be daily incorporated into their lessons: “Music, especially sacred music, has a powerful efficacy to soften the heart into tenderness, to harmonize the affections, and to give the mind a relish for objects of a superior character.<sup>174</sup>”

In a letter to Joseph Paice, a merchant interested in funding the girls’ boarding school, Edwards writes favorably of the Native people’s capacity to secure their own interest, calling them a “discerning people,” and expressing his belief that, if the English can only faithfully carry out the mission of educating and evangelizing the natives, the natives will naturally see the benefits of the Protestant religion to be superior to all the money and land offered by the French. In the letter, he also says that if the English will only consistently act in this “most Christian and benevolent” manner, perhaps God will bless their efforts, rather than punishing their past negligence, “...from whence we have reason to fear God will make them a sore scourge to us as a just punishment of our cruelty to their souls and bodies, by our withholding the gospel from 'em, defrauding them of their goods, in addition to that of learning, with prejudicing them against Christianity by our wickedness; and killing multitudes of 'em, and easily diminishing their numbers with strong drink.”<sup>175</sup>

*Altering his rhetorical style to win the Indians*

Just as his tone changed when addressing the poor of his Northampton congregation, Edwards’ tone and style are different to his Indian congregants at

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Works 16:442.

Stockbridge. While Edwards often re-preached old sermons from Northampton to his English congregation, he created new sermons for his Indian congregation. Marsden says, “Rather, consistent with his advice regarding Indian education, he picked themes that involved narratives and plain vivid metaphors.”<sup>176</sup> Edwards made many rhetorical accommodations to his Native listeners, making frequent use of New Testament parables and communicating through imagery and not abstract theological terms. In one sermon in 1751 to the Native congregation Edwards uses the image of a tree and a river to illustrate how God’s grace flows for our nourishment, out of no activity on our part, but entirely from the saving mercy of God.

As the waters of a river run easily and freely so the love of Christ . . . His blood was freely shed. Blood flowed as freely from his wounds as water from a spring. All the good things that Christ bestows on his saints come to ‘em as freely as water runs down in a river . . . The tree that spreads out its roots by a river has water enough . . . great plenty of water enough to supply a great multitude of persons with drink to satisfy all their thirst, to supply the roots of a multitude of trees.

The beauty of Christ in the sermon is wrought in terms of life-giving bounty and provision that would resonate with the Indians.

Concerning his preaching to the Indians, Marsden says that Edwards, perhaps taking a lesson from David Brainerd, tended over time to emphasize God's mercy and love more than His righteous and terrible indignation over sin. Marsden suggests that Edwards may have taken to heart what Brainerd had experienced: “It was surprising to me to see how [the natives’] hearts seem’d to be pierc’d with the tender and melting

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<sup>176</sup> Marsden, *A Life*, 393.

invitations of the Gospel, when there was not a word of terror spoken to them.”<sup>177</sup> It could also be proposed that this more gentle tone was consistent with his tone to those of low estate in his Northampton years. This gentle demeanor toward the Indians could be an expression of Edwards’ growing identification with the marginalized and a modeling of Christ’s tender love for those he serves. Wheeler wonders if the “freely flowing blood” of Christ spoken of so richly in his tree-by-the-river sermon on Psalms 1:3 could be an indication that Edwards had heard the concerns of the Stockbridge Indians as they pondered the teachings of the Moravian missionaries and was addressing their need for greater understanding of Divine love.<sup>178</sup>

Whatever the cause, Edwards’ sermons put forth, in simple imagery and syntax, the doctrines of the Calvinist faith concerning original sin and the need for Divine grace to be saved. Rachel Wheeler looks to these Stockbridge sermons for keys to understanding the development of the major treatise that Edwards produced during the later years of his time in Stockbridge.<sup>179</sup> Wheeler says that *Original Sin*, understood in the context of Edwards’ pastoral concerns, comes across not as just an address to enlightenment thinkers who found the God of the Calvinists arbitrary and unjust, but also as a “theological exposition of the doctrinal applications Edwards had worked out in his Stockbridge Indian sermons.”<sup>180</sup> In the treatise, Edwards draws from many sources in his argument against John Taylor’s recent piece arguing against original sin.

Wheeler says that the source least examined among scholars is Edwards’ interaction with the Indians as Minister at Stockbridge, interactions that Wheeler believes

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Wheeler, *To Live Upon Hope*, 185.

<sup>179</sup> Wheeler, “Friends to Your Souls,” 736–765.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 737.

are the source of an “egalitarian undercurrent” in the treatises he wrote there. Taylor argued that Adam sinned alone, leaving no curse upon his posterity. The unenlightened state of any savage people group was due entirely to a rejection of the truth which was accessible to all in nature and through reason. Edwards’ response, Wheeler says, draws on his past sermons at Stockbridge: knowledge of God does not rely on one’s use of reason, but rather upon God’s act of revealing Himself through the prophets and through His Son. Besides, the knowledge of God in no way keeps “enlightened” European countries from pursuing wickedness of every kind. “The poor savage Americans are mere babes and fools,” Edwards says, “as to proficiency in wickedness, in comparison to the multitudes that the Christian world throngs with.”<sup>181</sup> Such attitudes as Taylor put forth, Edwards says, tend only towards a “foolish self-exaltation and pride.” Belief in original sin on the other hand causes “us to think no worse of others, than of ourselves,” as “we are all...companions in a miserable helpless in condition.” Having witnessed the ingratitude of his congregation at Northampton and finding further conflict stemming from greed and hard-heartedness in his white congregation at Stockbridge, Edwards was well aware of how human sinfulness could still thrive where the gospel was preached and accepted.

In many ways, the Stockbridge mission could be considered a case study of self-interest. Among people like the Williamses or Captain Kellog, for whom fraudulent and self-enriching use of donor and government money was standard fair, Edwards and his family displayed an active charity towards the lowly and oppressed by associating with them and adjusting to their way of thinking, and advocating their cause to those in power

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<sup>181</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 3: Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1970), 26.

where they couldn't. Rather than succumbing to despair or contempt towards his congregation, Edwards continued to strive until the very end to make good on the promise Stockbridge offered for the Indian.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Conclusion*

Over the course of my research, a question which I found difficult to answer was why Edwards, someone who had been so adamant about public charity and economic justice, who had loudly and repeatedly decried the self-interest of his congregation at Northampton, seemed to respond differently to the rampant self-interest evident among some of the individuals and families at Stockbridge. After my year of research, here are some reasons which seem plausible to me. First, we know from accounts of others and in his personal letters that Edwards was deferential and unassuming in personal communications, a demeanor which may be surprising if one only considers his words from the pulpit. In the research process I also discovered that, even in the copious amount of Edwards' edited and unedited writings made available through Yale's online collection, there is relatively little to be found of Edwards' sermons composed at Stockbridge, especially to his English congregation. Although in his letters Edwards was sometimes candid in his assessment of people's actions as it related to the future success of the mission, the difference between the manner of address in a letter versus a sermon makes it unsurprising that Edwards does not follow the pattern in his Northampton sermons of calling out the sins of his congregation via his letters, as it would be entirely inappropriate to do such.

There are also many differences between the nature of the situation at

Northampton and that at Stockbridge. Regarding the towns themselves, the two could not be more different. Whereas Northampton experienced struggles of a certain sort attendant with being an economic hub of the region, Stockbridge, being a mission town, was dependent on supplemental money and supplies from donors and the Massachusetts government to keep its main operation going. Considering his experiences shepherding the people of a wealthy town, such a radically different location may have been a welcome alternative to Edwards, though of course Stockbridge was in no want for its own conflicts. The Indian congregation, unlike that at Northampton, needed much more of the basics of Christianity, and besides that, they were hardly the ones in need of hearing how one should spend their worldly riches. At the mission, there was also a clearer system of authority which could be appealed to on practical matters, something which Edwards made use of, and may have found refreshing compared to the way of things at Northampton. It makes sense that, more than anything else, Edwards' ministerial activity at Stockbridge can be traced in the many letters he wrote to those in positions to make decisions regarding how the mission would be run.

Finally, after experiencing the ups and downs of revival and dealing with many fruitless controversies, it is also possible that Edwards simply came to Stockbridge a more tactful man, less willing to exacerbate controversy where he didn't think it necessary for the success of the mission. It could be owing to any number of these reasons, or to entirely other reasons that Edwards' years at Stockbridge have a markedly different tone from his years at Northampton. Of course, the fact that Edwards wrote *The Nature of True Virtue*, a treatise written during his Stockbridge years and refining and expounding upon much of the groundwork laid out over a decade before in *Charity and*

*its Fruits* (1738) may warrant some attention, but ultimately the parameters of this thesis ruled out a more detailed examination of how Edwards' pastoral context may have impacted his more scholarly pursuits.

It is not my intention in this thesis by focusing on one theme to circumscribe Edwards' life and thought, nor is it to portray Edwards as a perfect person. Rather, I wish to show how the essentials of charity motivated Edwards throughout his ministry, marking some of the ways his application of charity differed going from Northampton to Stockbridge, but highlighting the underlying principle of his exhortations and actions. I mentioned in Chapter 3 how Edwards kept slaves and defended the morality of slavery as an institution. While this may represent a personal failing or blind spot, it becomes apparent what Edwards' legacy was in relation to race and Christian charity when one considers the active and vocal role "Edwardseans" such as Samuel Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards Jr. would play in the Abolitionist movement. Hopkins would come to vehemently preach against slavery in Newport, Rhode Island, a center of slave trade and a major producer of rum, which was in turn sold in Africa for more slaves. Hopkins spoke from a deep conviction that "disinterested benevolence" (a term not too different in meaning from what Edwards meant by charity) should guide a nation's actions, and thus decried slavery as an instance of a "most criminal, contracted selfishness."<sup>182</sup> In 1776 Samuel Hopkins penned *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans*, addressing it to the Continental Congress, and exhorting that they should immediately abolish slavery if they truly valued liberty. In *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade and of Slavery*, written in 1791, Edwards Jr. condemned the slave trade as "contrary to every

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<sup>182</sup> Michael James McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 622.

principle of justice and humanity.”<sup>183</sup> Gerald McDermott and Michael McClymond also describe how the Edwardseans, inspired by millennial hopes, worked hard to propagate the gospel to the world: “The Protestant missionary movement in the United States after 1800 was closely linked to the New Divinity and its Edwardsean notions of persistent prayer, disinterested benevolence, self-sacrifice, and the church’s impending ‘glorious times.’”<sup>184</sup> While the accomplishments of the New Divinity movement are not Edwards’, the spirit of Edwards’ thought concerning charity is observable in its focus on “disinterested benevolence” and its eschatological hope for a better future through the work of the Holy Spirit. Edwards’ works on charity and his example at Stockbridge render him a person worthy of our study today just as much as he ever was before. Each generation of Christians has the responsibility, like Samuel Hopkins and Jonathan Jr., to apply the rule of charity to its present context, to look around to see where the lowly and oppressed are, and to identify with and serve that group as best they can. That is the legacy Jonathan Edwards leaves us with.

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 619.

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