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**Jonathan Edwards's Judeo-centric and Cosmic
Vision of the Millennial Kingdom**

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract

The present study addresses the less-well-known subject of Jonathan Edwards's millennialism from his redemptive-historical vision. By situating him in the Reformation and post-Reformation contexts, taking into considerations of his interaction with the intellectual challenges posed by some of the Enlightenment thinkers, this study attempts to provide a more nuanced and extensive investigation of Edwards's anticipation of the millennium.

To put them in a nutshell, as a typical example of a dramatic paradigm shift in millennialism for the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, what Edwards expected was neither a political nor America-centric utopia as some scholars presented. Conversely, his vision of the millennium is a Christ-reigning, Judeo-centric and cosmic kingdom arriving on earth in distant future. As indispensable parts of Edwards's theological system, the less-known facts of the Christological, Judeo-centric and cosmic nature of Edwards's millennialism in Edwardsean scholarship highlight the greatness of God's divine sovereignty, the magnificence of His glory as well as the capaciousness of His kingdom. This millennial vision departed significantly from the Reformed tradition in certain ways. In particular, while some of his Protestant predecessors and Puritan contemporaries tended to centralize, or even sacralize their present time and nations, Edwards decentralized England and New England in terms of time, space and people.

This study sheds new light on a number of neglected and controversial issues.

Firstly, this research provides a fresh and extensive review of Edwards's millennial theology and provides another outlook on Edwards's continuity in and departures from his Reformed tradition.

Secondly, this study explores Edwards's Christocentric conviction as well as his artful communication of this conviction in his millennialism. This offers a groundbreaking perspective to the correlation between Edwards's Christology and his eschatology.

Thirdly, the presentation of the Judeo-centric and cosmic nature offers an innovative interpretive key to his millennialism and provides a background to current debates on Israel and end times.

Finally, this study ventures into two less well-known subjects: Israel and China in Edwards's millennialism vision. Particularly, it provides new insights into his conviction of Israel's restoration on the Promised Land and his eschatological hope for China and the heathen world.

Key Words: *Jonathan Edwards, Millennialism, Judeo-centric, Cosmic, De-centralization, redemption*

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Lay Summary

The purpose of this study is to establish the integrity of Edwards's Judeo-centric and cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom. It has six chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of Edwards's millennialism in the Reformed tradition; Chapter Two discusses his Christological focus in his millennialism, with reference to his literary strategies and typological interpretation in his *History of the Work of Redemption*; Chapter Three demonstrates Edwards's conviction of the progressive realization of the kingdom and refutes the prevailing misinterpretation of Edwards's anticipation of the imminent millennium; Chapter Four explores Edwards's Judeo-centric millennial view, presenting his Canaan-oriented millennial vision, in which the eschatological restoration of the people of Israel forms an essential part; Chapter Five explores Edwards's cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom that extends from New England and Israel to China and other parts of the heathen world; and Chapter Six examines the contemporary relevance of Edwards's millennialism in terms of the interaction with Jürgen Moltmann and the Chinese Back to Jerusalem Movement.

Edwards serves as a typical example of a dramatic paradigm shift in millennialism for the period of 16th-18th centuries. As a summary and climax of this shift, what Edwards expected in his millennialism, is an earthly kingdom arriving in the future. This futuristic and terrestrial millennial view, starting with a broad and international revival and ruled by Christ in his spiritual presence, will stand for about one thousand years before culminating with Christ's physical return on earth at the end of millennium. While it is an imperfect millennium endangered by sin and death, what Edwards expected is a prosperous millennial kingdom filled with absolute peace, love, spiritual and material prosperity.

In several aspects this millennial view departed from his Reformed predecessors such as Luther and Calvin. While Edwards largely aligned with what his Puritan colleagues asserted, the divergences between them are quite evident in various ways. Notably, Edwards held a Judeo-centric millennial view while trying to keep a distance from the Israel-superiority conviction. For him, the land of Israel would be the ideal location of the millennial kingdom on earth; and the people of Israel, after their restoration, will play critical and decisive roles in the commencement of the millennium. Edwards's millennial vision is also cosmic. According to him, the arriving millennial kingdom would embrace both European countries and China among the heathen world. This kingdom will affect heaven and hell.

While less-well-known in Edwardsean scholarship, the Judeo-centric and cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom shows another significant aspect of Edwards's millennialism. His millennialism is neither America-centric nor politically utopian. On the contrary, Edwards actually deflates the notion of an America-centric utopianism. In this sense, Edwards neither originated nor advocated the notion of the redeemer nation as is frequently regarded. On the contrary, he de-centralized both England and New England from the illusion of being the redeemer nation for the rest of the world. Furthermore, this Judeo-centric and cosmic vision is an indispensable part of Edwards's theological system. At least three theological loci can be highlighted in Edwards's millennialism: the greatness of God's divine sovereignty, the magnificence of His glory and the capaciousness of His kingdom.

Introduction

1. Edwards and His Millennialism

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) is known as “America’s greatest theologian and philosopher.”¹ As a Puritan theological heavyweight, his collected works span seventy-three volumes and have been carefully investigated and dissected by many scholars from numerous perspectives.² While many scholars have carried out critical research on his theology, only a small portion has focused on Edwards’s eschatology. In particular, from Edwards’s own day till now, no published monograph is available that *directly* and *solely* addresses Edwards’s millennial view. The works that have addressed this subject are scattered in articles and book chapters. They usually incidentally discuss Edwards’s millennialism when exploring his theological system or tracing the American and/or Puritan millennial tradition.

More importantly, within the existing researches on Edwards’s millennialism, scholars seem to have failed to reach agreement on various issues, including Edwards’s awareness of the millennial chronology and geography, his contributions to Puritan millennial thought, as well as whether he held a political millennialism. In this research, we will provide a brief survey on these controversial viewpoints.

¹ John E. Colwell, “Edwards, Jonathan (1703-58),” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2000), 174; Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 193.

² To date, Jonathan Edwards’s edited published works are twenty-six volumes. Both Edwards’s published works and his raw manuscripts can be found under the title *Works of Jonathan Edwards On Line* on the website of Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University: <http://edwards.yale.edu>. Most of research can be noted in M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three parts, 1729-2005* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U. K.: Eerdmans, 2008). Lesser’s book briefly introduces over three thousand published and non-published resources by dividing them into three periods: 1729-1978, 1979-1993, and 1994-2005.

H. Richard Niebuhr's *The Kingdom of God in America* (1937) is probably the first work in the twentieth century that briefly addresses Edwards's eschatology.³ In this book, Niebuhr presents the notion of the kingdom of God---"sovereignty of God"---as the "dominant idea in American Christianity."⁴ Based on this belief, he maintains that divine sovereignty is the "explicit foundation" in Edwards's thought, which is clearly expressed in Edwards's conversion experience in "Personal Narrative" and his millennial expectation in *A History of the Work of Redemption* (abbreviated as *HWR* hereafter).⁵ Unlike the early Calvinists and the left-wing protestants, who were inspired by the Great Awakening, Edwards showed strong and evident "millenarian tendency" and his interest remarkably "shifted from the eternal kingdom into which souls enter one by one to the kingdom on earth."⁶ For Niebuhr in particular, Edwards seemed to anticipate an imminent millennium that would arrive in America shortly after the Great Awakening.⁷

Niebuhr was followed by Perry Miller who covers various eschatological views from the Newtonians in the seventeenth century to atomic physicists in the twentieth century in his *The End of the World*.⁸ Without little scholarly support, Miller declares that Edwards was "the greatest artist of the apocalypse" in America.⁹ Noticeably, he argues that in his *HWR* Edwards actually refuted the mechanical-moral model advocated by the "apocalyptic physicists" such as Thomas Burnet and William Whiston.¹⁰ In contrast to their conviction that the millennium is the reward of destruction, Edwards, by placing the millennium before the Final Judgment,

³ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago: Willet, Clark & Co., 1937), see pages 101-103, 113-16, 135-45 for Edwards's eschatology.

⁴ Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, xii.

⁵ Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 101.

⁶ Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 143.

⁷ Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America*, 141-42.

⁸ Perry Miller, "The End of the World," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 8 (April 1951): 171-91.

⁹ Miller, "The End of the World," 186.

¹⁰ Miller, "The End of the World," 188.

demonstrated that mankind would definitely “fall back into depravity” even after the thousand years of “a conditioning in righteousness.”¹¹ Miller is convinced that this placement of the millennium before the judgment is the “hidden point” of Edwards’s *HWR*.¹²

Based on his reading of *An Humble Attempt* and *HWR*, C. C. Goen (1959) asserts that Edwards’s eschatological doctrine was a new departure from his Reformed predecessors.¹³ With “a radical innovation” of anticipating “the church’s golden age” before the dawn of the millennium and the final consummation, Edwards actually, though unintentionally, departed from the Protestant opinion commonly held for two centuries.¹⁴ Edwards’s proposal of the imminent millennium that will begin in America, made on the basis of Whitby-Lowman exegesis, is a “definitive factor in the religious background of the idea of progress.”¹⁵ Therefore, Goen regards Edwards as the “first major post-millennial thinker” and declares that Edwards’s historical millennium furnishes “a strong impetus” to the “radical utopianism” in American tradition.¹⁶ This article by Goen has had significant impact in the following three decades. In the 1960s, Goen’s thesis of Edwards’s contribution to the utopianism is echoed by Ernest Lee Tuveson in his brief discussion of Edwards’s eschatology in his *Redeemer Nation* (1968).¹⁷ In reading Edwards’s *HWR*, Tuveson uncovers that Edwards was seeking a kingdom of God on earth. Thus, his millennium is more like “a form of utopia” of great “temporal prosperity.”¹⁸

¹¹ Miller, “The End of the World,” 188.

¹² Miller, “The End of the World,” 187.

¹³ Clarence Curtis Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” *Church History* 28 (March 1959): 25-40.

¹⁴ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” 25, 35-37.

¹⁵ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” 26, 37.

¹⁶ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” 38-39.

¹⁷ Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 27-30, 55-57.

¹⁸ Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 30.

James Davidson (1977), in his *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, provides a more detailed analysis of Edwards's millennialism than his predecessors of the past four decades, though his examination contains a mere 25 pages.¹⁹ By tracing Edwards's millennial thought in *An Humble Attempt*, "Notes on the Apocalypse" and *HWR*, Davidson argues that Edwards largely remained consistent since 1723 in his major eschatological views, though there was some developments and modifications in his later years. In particular, the "combination of gloom and hope" always existed in Edwards's millennial expectation and remained as "central to the entire millennial rhetoric,"²⁰ though Edwards expected a rather optimistic future before the millennium and placed the slaying of the two witnesses as a past event (Revelation 11:7-12).²¹ More importantly, Davidson reads Edwards's millennialism from its correlation with his thinking on conversion and social order. Edwards's *HWR*, as the New England's "grandest summary" of the divine redemptive plan, places individual conversion within the "larger and more important" historical context of redemption.²² The consequence of this inseparable connection between personal experience of conversion and the divine redemptive actions in history is a "conversion-oriented millennial outlook."²³ And this "conversionist millennium" is "simply apolitical in its impact" on social reform, because Edwards believed that in the millennial kingdom "any number of different social or political orders would work well in a regenerate world."²⁴ Holding completely different views from Goen on Edwards's millennial chronology and geography, Davidson maintains that

¹⁹ James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 150-60, 166-75, 217-21.

²⁰ Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 157.

²¹ Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 151.

²² Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 168.

²³ Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 220.

²⁴ Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 220.

Edwards actually anticipated the millennium arriving around the year 2000.

Furthermore, the millennium would be located at the land of Canaan. However, Davidson's presentation on these two issues is surprisingly brief (less than one page) and it does not mention any of Goen's views.²⁵

In the same year of 1977, Nathan Hatch raised the similar argument of Edwards's apolitical millennialism in his *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*.²⁶ Hatch illustrates the differences between the "civil millennialism" of the Revolution and Edwards's "apocalyptic expectations of the Great Awakening."²⁷ While the Revolutionary millennialist's apocalyptic hope is based on the "civil and religious liberty" ensured by America's victory over Britain, Edwards's millennial kingdom is built upon the "spread of vital piety" and the work of God's spirit in "widespread revivals."²⁸ In this sense, unlike what Goen and Tuveson believe, it is questionable to trace civil millennialism *directly* back to the Great Awakening or take the religious piety as its "origins" and "main source."²⁹ According to Hatch, Edwards optimistically anticipated that the millennium would soon begin in America, and his anticipation of the imminent and America-centric millennium has strong impact on later millennialists such as Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), despite the fact that Beecher showed "little resemblance to Edwards's apolitical millennialism."³⁰ Nevertheless, after the Great Awakening, forced by the decline of piety, Edwards came to have a broader apocalyptic vision and "look beyond the Atlantic" for the site of the millennial kingdom.³¹

²⁵ Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 153.

²⁶ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 24-36, 170-73.

²⁷ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 24.

²⁸ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 24.

²⁹ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 25-26.

³⁰ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 170.

³¹ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 32-33, 35.

One more important work that appeared in 1977 is Stephen Stein's informative introduction to the fifth volume of the works of Edwards.³² In it Stein carefully traces various aspects in Edwards's eschatology and his reading of the Book of Revelation: the apocalyptic tradition in Edwards's time, the formulation of his "Notes on the Apocalypse" and its implication and application in his ministry and his millennialism, the significance of his *An Humble Attempt*, Edwards's theology of the apocalypse and the sources on which he relied (Moses Lowman, Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry, etc.), as well as the analysis of the manuscripts and the original text. Notably, Stein provides a historical development of Edwards's millennialism, from his early career till the end of his life.³³ Based on Edwards's public writings and personal reflective notes, Stein argues that by the 1750s Edwards already possessed "a coherent theology of the Apocalypse."³⁴ Stein asserts that Edwards's continuous apocalyptic thinking is an "intriguing and complex, but sometimes contradictory" system mixed by both private reflections and public presentations.³⁵ In this mix,

³² Stephen J. Stein, "Editor's Introduction," in *Apocalyptic Writings: "Notes on the Apocalypse" and An Humble Attempt, The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 5 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), 1-93. Hereafter when the Yale edition is cited, it will be indicated as *WJE* followed by volume and page number.

³³ In his early pastoral career in New York, Edwards began his comments on Revelation in his "Theological Miscellanies." In 1723, Edwards began a separate notebook on the apocalypse with a comprehensive analysis of Revelation on the first page. Starting from 1729, he extensively used Revelation in his homiletical ministry for various purposes including consolation, imprecation, as well as preparation for the battles and the sacrament. Nevertheless, the subject of the millennium was not found in his early sermons preached before 1734, though it was an important topic in his private reflective works. Even during the period of 1734 to 1735, Edwards avoided linking the revival with the beginning of the millennium. Importantly, sermon series Edwards delivered in 1739, published posthumously as *HWR* (1774), stands as the primary public record of his apocalyptic reflections. As showed in his *HWR*, Edwards did not take the millennium as the ultimate goal of the divine redemptive work, but merely "an earnest of the heavenly state" that is the full realization of the kingdom of God (Stein, *WJE* 5:24). By 1743, owing to his role as the prominent leader in the revivals, it was not possible for Edwards to keep his apocalyptic interest as a private matter. In his *Some Thoughts* of 1743, while he did not use the term "millennium" itself, Edwards publicly revealed his commitment to millennialism. When his *An Humble Attempt* was published in 1748, Edwards expressed even more his private reflections on Revelation and his speculations on the arrival of God's kingdom. In 1757, Edwards disclosed in his letter to the Princeton trustees his plan of writing a body of divinity in which his apocalyptic reflections would be integrated as an indispensable part. See Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:10-49.

³⁴ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:50.

³⁵ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:15.

Edwards held a more political millennialism to envision how “both civil and ecclesiastical governments will be overthrown” when the millennial kingdom is established around year 2000 in the land of Canaan.³⁶

This discussion of politicization of Edwards’s millennialism is continued into the 1980s, as Ruth Bloch’s *Visionary Republic* (1985) shows.³⁷ Bloch asserts that Edwards, different from other revivalists, was a postmillennialist.³⁸ Particularly, among his American contemporaries, Edwards acted as “the most authoritative and articulate” interpretation of revivalism in the light of the millennium.³⁹ Following Goen, Bloch believes that Edwards expected the imminent and America-centric millennium and thus viewed the Awakening “as a sign that the millennium would come soon, and . . . it would probably begin in America.”⁴⁰ Consequently, while Edwards’s expectation of “the inaugural role of America” in the coming millennium is more evangelical and like a form of proto-nationalism, his “intense and widespread” millennialism still played a significant role in American political revolution.⁴¹

Goen’s conviction of Edwards’s “new departure” in eschatology was challenged by John Wilson in 1988.⁴² While recognizing the immense influence of Goen’s interpretation, Wilson argues that Goen neglected both the background and foreground of Edwards’s postmillennialism. Without the delineation of both the millennial thoughts in the pre-Edwardsian England and New England and the

³⁶ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:18.

³⁷ Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16-21.

³⁸ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 18.

³⁹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 16.

⁴⁰ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 17.

⁴¹ Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, 18, 20.

⁴² John F. Wilson, “History, Redemption, and the Millennium,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds. Nathan Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 131-41.

consequent development of postmillennialism in the post-Edwardsian era, Goen's presentation of Edwards's millennialism is nothing but "a religious version of the doctrine of providence."⁴³ In contrast to Goen, Wilson claims that Edwards's postmillennialism is "far less innovative" than Goen thought, particularly, in both the New England millennialism and the context of Independency in England.⁴⁴ Wilson declares that Edwards's postmillennialism represented "nothing remarkably new until the Enlightenment transformed it."⁴⁵

Goen's interpretation of Edwards's millennialism is further challenged by Gerald McDermott in his *One Holy and Happy Society* (1992).⁴⁶ For McDermott, Goen "misconstrues" Edwards's singularity and mistakenly regards him as the first postmillennialist in New England. Reading Edwards's millennialism from the perspective of his public theology, McDermott maintains Edward's "new departures" in two aspects: taking the millennium as central in his theology; and his millennialism acting as "social critique" and "prophetic voice" at his time.⁴⁷ In surveying Edwards's millennialism, McDermott examines Edwards's commitment in studying the millennium, his detailed millennial expectations, and his awareness of the premillennial revivals. Importantly, McDermott clearly points out that unlike what Goen asserts, Edwards did not expect the imminent arrival of the millennium in America. Instead, he was hoping for a Canaan-oriented, global millennium in the distant future.⁴⁸

⁴³ Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium," 133-34.

⁴⁴ Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium," 140.

⁴⁵ Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium," 139.

⁴⁶ Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 37-92. See page 90, n. 150 for McDermott's comment on Goen's advocacy of Edwards's "new departure."

⁴⁷ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 91.

⁴⁸ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 51-63.

Stephen Stein made two more important contributions in his recent survey. In 2002, in his review of the American apocalyptic traditions from the seventeenth century, Stein compared Jonathan Edwards with David Koresh (1959-1993) of Waco.⁴⁹ As the “unlikely pair,” the divergences in the Edwards’s apocalyptic ideas and that of Koresh are rather evident.⁵⁰ Edwards’s exegetical and hermeneutical patterns are “within the Anglo-American Puritan tradition,” and his eschatology stands as “quite mainstream” as a result, though he believed that revivals were the “start of something special.”⁵¹ In contrast, Koresh’s decoding of the Seven Seals and his exposition of the Book of Revelation are simultaneously rejected by the commentators and “denounced” as “radical and marginal.”⁵² In 2005, Stein zoomed in and explored Edwards’s eschatology.⁵³ Aiming to find its “continuities and discontinuities,” Stein divides Edwards’s eschatological reflections into three periods: his early years (1716-1733), his years of involvement in the revivals (1734-1748), and his “most productive” era, the last decade of Edwards’s life.⁵⁴ While Edwards’s eschatology is not “systematically expressed,” Stein makes five observations:

First, the “connection” between creation and end times is the “controlling principle” of Edwards’s eschatology;

Second, the progress between the two ends is governed by divine providence;

⁴⁹ Stephen J. Stein, “American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism,” in *Imagining the End: Visions of Apocalypse from the Ancient Middle East to Modern America*, eds. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 187-211.

⁵⁰ Stein, “American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism,” 190.

⁵¹ Stein, “American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism,” 188.

⁵² Stein, “American Millennial Visions: Towards Construction of a New Architectonic of American Apocalypticism,” 190.

⁵³ Stephen J. Stein, “Eschatology,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 226-42.

⁵⁴ Stein, “Eschatology,” 227.

Third, the Holy Spirit acts as the “primary agent” who enables the Kingdom of Christ to advance on earth;

Fourth, the opposition to the divine redemptive work is from the forces of evil; and

Fifth, the final stage, viz. Christ’s return, final judgement, the consummation of the union between Christ and the saints, and the condemnation of the sinners in hell, “will not, in fact, be final.”⁵⁵

While the above observations are insightful, concerning Edwards’s millennialism, they probably do not add much to Stein (1977).

Stein’s contributions are followed in 2011 by a short but excellent chapter on Edwards’s eschatology in the most recent encyclopedic work by Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott.⁵⁶ McDermott and McClymond regard Edwards as “one of the most eschatological thinkers in the history of Protestantism,” because his theological thinking was fundamentally and essentially eschatological by “conceiving of all history being drawn toward the end.”⁵⁷ In the few pages on Edwards’s consciousness of the premillennial era and the millennium, the authors mainly survey *An Humble Attempt* and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (abbreviated as *Some Thoughts* hereafter).⁵⁸ According to them, Edwards followed “the afflictive model of progress” by Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706), expecting a long and gradual premillennial period mixed of both revivals and tribulation.⁵⁹ Notably, the authors affirm what McDermott asserts in his *One Holy and Happy*

⁵⁵ Stein, “Eschatology,” 238-40.

⁵⁶ Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, “Eschatology,” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 566-579.

⁵⁷ McClymond and McDermott, “Eschatology,” 566.

⁵⁸ McClymond and McDermott, “Eschatology,” 572-77.

⁵⁹ McClymond and McDermott, “Eschatology,” 572. For the detailed introduction to Mastricht, see Adriaan Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2009).

Society that Edwards's millennium is neither imminent nor America-centric. In fact, Edwards did not expect that Northampton would be the city knitting together the whole of Protestant America and thus bringing the world into the millennium. Instead, for him the millennium "would be everything that Northampton was *not*."⁶⁰ Additionally, Edwards anticipated that in the millennium, "a spiritual federalism" would be established under Christ's *spiritual* reign. While sin, death and imperfections will still remain, the nations will be united and become "a global community" though retaining their "self-governing integrity."⁶¹

In addition to the published works, two dissertations are worthy of note, because they are probably the only doctoral works that *directly* and *solely* address Edwards's millennialism.⁶² The first one is "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards" by Christopher Smith (1992).⁶³ By examining Edwards's *HWR*, *Distinguishing Marks*, *Some Thoughts*, *An Humble Attempt*, and "Notes on the Apocalypse," Smith asserts that Edwards consistently advocated a postmillennial theology of history throughout his life time,⁶⁴ serving as an eschatological preacher who paved the way for the defeat of Antichrist.⁶⁵ In contrast to Goen's thesis of "the imminent millennium," Edwards actually always expected the millennium at around the year 2000.⁶⁶ In fact, what Edwards

⁶⁰ McClymond and McDermott, "Eschatology," 576. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ McClymond and McDermott, "Eschatology," 577.

⁶² Other doctoral dissertations that incidentally survey Edwards's millennialism include: Christopher Merriman Beam, "Millennialism in American Thought, 1740-1840," (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1976); Tracy Dean Reule, "The Changing Character of New England Puritan Eschatology: 1682-1758," (PhD diss., Florida State University, 1993). While Beam presents Edwards's millennium as being America-centric and imminent, Reule asserts that Edwards's millennial kingdom was located in the land of Palestine and would arrive in distant future (around the year 2000). See Beam, "Millennialism in American Thought," 28-50; Reule, "The Changing Character of New England Puritan Eschatology," 162-68.

⁶³ Christopher Ralph Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," (PhD diss., Boston College, 1992).

⁶⁴ Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," 38.

⁶⁵ Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," 147-61.

⁶⁶ Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," 23-39.

consistently anticipated, Smith advocates, is imminent revival that would encourage the Puritan activism. Therefore, the greatest portion of Smith's dissertation is discussing Edwards's view of revivals. Edwards believed that revivals will bring the downfall of Antichrist's kingdom,⁶⁷ and he hoped for another great revival even after the Great Awakening.⁶⁸

Another doctoral dissertation is Michael David Peters' "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism" (2000).⁶⁹ In this dissertation, Peters challenges Nathan Hatch's claim of Edwards's apolitical millennialism, and it covers Edwards's *HWR*, *Some Thoughts*, *An Humble Attempt*, and "Notes on the Apocalypse" to highlight the politicization of Edwards's millennialism that enabled the Revolutionary clergy to find "a sacred cause of liberty" to justify the War for American Independence.⁷⁰ Starting from this thesis, Peters traces that Edwards, during the last fifteen years of his life, shifted the emphasis from promoting revival to military means to destroy the Antichrist and fulfill the millennium.⁷¹ And this shift greatly impacted the development of the "revolutionary ideology."⁷² By politicizing his millennialism, Edwards identified the Pope as the Antichrist and thus justified the military actions against Roman Catholics.⁷³ And this is why Edwards, taking the battle against the French as the destruction of the Antichrist, encouraged his congregation to fight during King George's War (1744-1748).⁷⁴ Therefore, Peters insists that while Edwards did not deny the significance of prayer in promoting the

⁶⁷ Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," 65-88.

⁶⁸ Smith, "Postmillennialism and the Work of Renewal in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards," 107-25.

⁶⁹ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," (PhD diss. Saint Louis University, 2000).

⁷⁰ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 1.

⁷¹ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 1-44.

⁷² Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 45-92. Quotation is found on pages 1, 51, 80.

⁷³ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 97-138.

⁷⁴ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 139-201.

millennium, he did politicize his millennialism to justify the war against the French as well as to ensure the millennium commencing in America.⁷⁵

2. Goal of Study

Scholars in the past half a century seem to have come to take note of Edwards's millennialism as an inseparable ingredient in his theological system. However, there are still many disputations on numerous issues on Edwards's millennialism, and these range from the specific features to the nature of his millennialism. One specific aspect of their differences focuses on the millennial chronology and geography. And there are two opposite camps: while some like H. Richard Niebuhr, C. C. Goen, James Davidson and Ruth Bloch advocate that Edwards expected an America-centric and imminent millennium, others like Gerald McDermott and Michael McClymond insist that Edwards's millennium is Canaan-centric and arriving in the distant future. Similar disagreement is found in the assessment of the nature of Edwards's millennialism. While C. C. Goen, Ernest Tuveson and Stephen Stein maintain that Edwards's millennialism is political, a few others like James Davidson and Nathan Hatch assert that Edwards's millennialism is apolitical. Edwardsean scholars thus disagree over what Edwards expected in his millennialism, i.e. whether Edwards anticipated an America-centric political utopia or a spiritual kingdom of God. And did Edward's millennialism really contribute to the formation of the American dream of "the redeemer nation"? Furthermore, a number of significant issues on Edwards's millennialism are still to be addressed. To be specific, what are the roles of Christ in Edwards's millennium? What did Edwards envision about the land and people of Israel in the millennial kingdom when much (maybe too much) scholarly discussion

⁷⁵ Michael David Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 2, 202-7.

focused on his view of New England? What was his perspective of “the heathen world” such as China in his millennial expectation? To sum up all these specific questions, what is the singularity of Edwards’s millennialism among his Reformed forefathers and Puritan colleagues, particularly during the shift in the millennial thought from the Reformation to post-Reformation eras, i.e. from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century? And how did Edwards incorporate his millennialism into his redemptive-historical vision?

The focus of this research project addresses Edwards’s millennialism in light of his Christological, Judeo-centric and cosmic theological vision. While deeply rooted in the Reformation and post-Reformation tradition, Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom is complex and departed significantly from the Reformed tradition in certain ways. This vision was informed by his redemptive-historical consciousness and affected by a variety of factors: his reading of the biblical texts, his engagement in the Reformed tradition, his intellectual interactions with the Enlightenment thinkers, and his conviction of God’s glory as the ultimate goal of the realization of the millennial kingdom.

In short, this study attempts to provide a more nuanced and extensive examination of Edwards’s millennialism. It will shed new light on some neglected and highly controversial issues. These issues include Edwards’s understanding of the chronology and geography of the millennium, his insights into the significance of the land and people of Israel in God’s kingdom, his consciousness of God’s sovereignty and His glory manifested in history and nature, his contribution to the awareness of the capacious divine kingdom that incorporates China and the heathen world, his departures from America-centric theology of history, and the contemporary relevance of Edwards’s millennialism.

3. Methodology

This research will situate Edwards in his intellectual and theological context in order to gain a more perceptive vision of his millennialism. Living in eighteenth-century colonial New England, Edwards was faced with theological and intellectual challenges that were “corrupt opinions” in his own words.⁷⁶ One threat came from the heretical teachings of Arminian, Arian, Socinian and Latitudinarian writers.⁷⁷ Another intellectual challenge came from Deism, humanistic rationalism and religious skepticism. All of these heretical doctrines and intellectual/philosophical challenges have at least one thing in common: they undermine God’s sovereignty and Christ’s lordship that has been revealed in the divine redemptive work leading to the end time.⁷⁸ Consequently, Edwards found himself facing a “growing de-Christianization” tendency and a “de-divination of the historical process.”⁷⁹ In particular, he would often encounter the writings of skeptical historians and philosophers who attempted to separate history from the divine work, thus attributing the governing force of history to an “impersonal law”⁸⁰ or “self-actuating powers.”⁸¹ As Avihu Zakai observes, in Edwards’s time, history-writing tended to minimize or eschew any sense of a divine purpose in the realm of history, while also abandoning the biblical narratives as a major source for interpreting historical events.⁸² In this

⁷⁶ *WJE* 9:424, 430.

⁷⁷ *WJE* 9:430-32.

⁷⁸ *WJE* 9:430-32. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 51-56; Oliver D. Crisp and Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to His Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 11-28.

⁷⁹ Michael McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65.

⁸⁰ McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 79.

⁸¹ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 487. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 567, 571.

⁸² Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 226-34.

context, Christian eschatological hope for the millennium was in danger of being reduced to nothing but an imaginative construct.

In confronting these theological and intellectual challenges, Edwards kept revising his view of eschatology, particularly in relation to his expectation of the millennium, in order to express his belief that “God is truly sovereign and not dependent on human volition to accomplish His ends.”⁸³ In his millennial anticipation expressed in his *HWR* and other manuscripts, Edwards aimed to do three things.

First, he invited his congregation to share his eschatological vision by constructing “a singular sacred history based ... solely on God’s redemptive activity.”⁸⁴

Second, he enabled his audience to re-view their own time in the light of the grand stream of redemptive history in which God’s sovereignty and Christ’s centrality are progressively revealed.

Third, he viewed history from the perspective of its *telos*, in order to establish “the re-enthronement of God as the sole author and Lord of history.”⁸⁵

As a historical rather than philosophical or systematic theological project, this dissertation will investigate, synchronically and diachronically, the development of the Reformed tradition of millennial thinking, in order to provide a critical exposition and examination of Edwards’s millennialism. In evaluating Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom, for each theological locus under discussion, we will examine its historical transformation in Reformation and post-Reformation tradition as well as its development in Edwards’s own theological system, in order to compare Edwards’s

⁸³ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 30.

⁸⁴ Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 234.

⁸⁵ Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 5.

views with those of his Reformed predecessors and Puritan contemporaries.

Although the main focus will be on the historical development of Reformed millennial thinking, we will also explore his engagement in some of the theological and intellectual debates of the Enlightenment, in particular his interaction with the Deists. Hence, by situating him in the Reformation and post-Reformation context and by taking into account his interaction with the intellectual challenges posed by Enlightenment thinkers, we aim to discover Edwards's agreements with and his departures from the Protestant and Puritan tradition.

As for the selection of primary resources, we will take Edwards's *Some Thoughts, An Humble Attempt*, "Notes on the Apocalypse," *HWR*, and the *Miscellanies* as our key texts, consulting Edwards's other published works and his raw manuscripts when necessary.⁸⁶ Since *HWR* is Edwards's only published work in his time that provides sufficient description of his millennial expectation and depicts a full scope of his redemptive-historical vision, we treat this volume in Chapter Two which focuses on the literary and typological communication of Edwards's Christological focus in his millennialism.

4. Scope of Study

This study treats Edwards as a typical example of a dramatic shift in the millennial views during the period between Reformation and post-Reformation. What Edwards advocated in his millennialism is a terrestrial millennial kingdom in the distant future. While it is an inchoate millennium endangered by sin and death, it will stand for about one thousand years as a prosperous millennial kingdom with great peace,

⁸⁶ Respectively, see the fourth, fifth, ninth, thirteenth, eighteenth, twentieth, twenty-third volumes of the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*.

love, spiritual and material prosperity, before reaching its culmination with Christ's physical return at the end of millennium. Based on the fundamental features of Edwards's millennial view, the scope of this study is confined to the following.

First and foremost, this study presents Edwards's Christological focus in his millennialism. We shall take his *HWR* as an instance to illustrate: literarily speaking, Edwards presented Christ's centrality through the structural construction of this work; hermeneutically, he emphasized his Christocentric concern by applying Christological typology and in his nature typology.

Secondly, this study highlights Israel in Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom. We shall demonstrate his Judeo-centric view of the millennium, while being aware of the danger of promoting Israel-superiority. Geographically speaking, unlike the America-centric millennium held by some of his Puritan colleagues, Edwards's millennial kingdom is centered on the *land* of Israel. Anthropologically, he had a zealous eschatological hope for the *people* of Israel, believing that they would return to their homeland and experience a national conversion. Israel's restoration is essential in Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom, because it will determine the destiny of the world. This conviction of the theological significance of Israel in God's kingdom marks a remarkable departure from the supersessionism of his contemporaries and reflects his rejection of anti-Semitism.

Thirdly, this study stresses the cosmic scope of Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom. He demonstrated the extensiveness of God's kingdom at the broadest possible level in space, over time and among people. While his millennial kingdom vision is Canaan-centered, it covers the whole earth with both visible and invisible dimensions extending to heaven and impacting hell. Departing from the Puritans who claimed the imminent millennium, Edwards had the conviction that its

progressive realization encompasses the whole of human history and will be fully accomplished in the remote future. Additionally, when Edwards focused on how the millennial kingdom was to be realized among the redeemed and the church of God, he was fully aware of the involvement of various nations including both the elect and the heathens. In fact, Edwards believed that the millennial kingdom would not be accomplished without the general conversion of the heathen world. Particularly, he demonstrated God's successive revelation in Chinese philosophical and religious classics. Nevertheless, Edwards's cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom does not lead him into the trap of Deist natural theology. Conversely, by confronting with the Deists who took China as an example to reject God's redemptive work, Edwards remarkably presented the necessity of God's biblical revelation and His redemption.

Finally, we shall show that Edwards's theology is "an unusual combination of traditionality and originality."⁸⁷ This claim applies fittingly to his millennialism. While Edwards was aligned with his Puritan colleagues in various specific features of his millennialism, his anticipation of the millennial kingdom actually deflated the America-centric theology of history. In contrast to his Puritan contemporaries who centralized their present time and nation, Edwards de-centralized the time, space and people of England and New England. Specifically, by expecting a millennial kingdom arriving in the distant future, Edwards departed from those who advocated the imminent millennium and thus de-centralized the present time of his historical epoch. By insisting on the land of Israel as the ideal location of the millennium, Edwards departed from his Reformed forefathers and Puritan colleagues who envision the millennial kingdom being realized in England or New England.

⁸⁷ Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, "Overture to a Symphony," in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

Consequently, he de-emphasized the over-inflated significance of both English and American territories in God's kingdom. By highlighting the critical role played by the people of Israel in the millennial kingdom, Edwards departed from those held to a belief in American-superiority and de-centralized the people of England and New England from an over-stressed contribution in redemptive history. Therefore, what Edwards expected was neither a political nor an America-centric utopia. Conversely, his vision of the millennium is a Christ-reigning, Judeo-centric and cosmic kingdom arriving on earth in the distant future.

5. Contributions

This research breaks new ground in Edwardsean scholarship in the following ways:

In the first place, by examining Edwards's millennialism from his redemptive-historical vision, this research provides a fresh and extensive review of Edwards's millennial theology. This has not been thoroughly attempted before by other scholars.

Secondly, by stressing his literary strategies and typological interpretation to explore Edwards's Christocentric conviction in his vision of the millennial kingdom, we examine Edwards's artful communication of his Christological focus in his millennialism. This offers a groundbreaking perspective to the less-researched subject of the correlation between Edwards's Christology and his eschatology.

Thirdly, by presenting and summarizing the Judeo-centric and cosmic nature of Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom, we offer an innovative interpretive key to his millennialism which brings his view into line with some of his contemporaries. This also provides a background to current debates on Israel and the end time.

Fourthly, by situating him in the historical and intellectual context, particularly by focusing on the transformation of millennialism in his period, we fill in a gap in research on Edwards's millennialism: his interaction with his Reformed friends and his Deist foes. In so doing, it provides another outlook on Edwards's continuity in and departures from his Reformed tradition.

Fifthly, this study ventures into two less well-known subjects: Israel and China in Edwards's millennial vision. Particularly, we provide new insights into his Canaan-oriented millennium, his conviction of Israel's restoration and his eschatological hope for China and the heathen world.

In each of the chapters, we take up a less-trodden topic: Chapter One addresses Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom in the Reformed tradition; Chapter Two investigates his Christological focus in the millennial kingdom; Chapter Three explores God's glory in the progressive realization of the millennial kingdom; Chapter Four stresses Edwards's conviction of the significance of both the land and the people of Israel in the millennial kingdom; Chapter Five studies his cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom that encompasses China and the heathen world; and Chapter Six examines the contemporary relevance of Edwards's millennialism, particularly by having an interaction with Jürgen Moltmann's millenarian eschatology and the Chinese Back to Jerusalem Movement.

Chapter One

“This Lower World Shall be All Over Covered with Light”:

Edwards’s Vision of a Terrestrial and Future Millennial Kingdom¹

1. Introduction

As presented in the previous chapter, Edwardsean scholars are divided over Edwards’s millennialism. Particularly, some hold a rather favorable view of Edwards’s distinctiveness in his millennial awareness. C. C. Goen, for instance, regards Edwards as “America’s first major postmillennial thinker.”² Others, in contrast, simply deny Edwards’s singularity and align his millennialism with that of any other Puritan. This is what Joel Beeke and Mark Jones did in their recent encyclopedic work. Following John Wilson’s claim that there is “nothing remarkably new” in Edwards’s millennialism, they contend that Edwards’s millennial expectation is “by no means unique” in comparison with other notable Puritan-minded divines of his day.³

Therefore, in addition to providing a bird’s-eye view, the present chapter aims to produce an in-depth evaluation of the distinctiveness of Edwards’s millennialism. By placing him in the historical development of the millennialism in the Reformed tradition, we examine Edwards’s vision of the terrestrial and future millennium. To fulfill our task, we will start with a brief review of the development and transformation of millennialism in the period between Reformation and post-

¹ An extract from section 3 of this chapter is published in *The Miscellanies Reader*, ed. Robert Boss (Fort Worth, TX.: JESociety Press, 2018), *forthcoming*. The quotation in this chapter title is found in *Misc.* 26, *WJE* 13:212.

² Goen, “Jonathan Edwards,” 38.

³ Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 784. See also Wilson, “History, Redemption, and the Millennium,” 139.

Reformation (from 16th to 18th century), evaluating the early reformers' symbolic approach and the Puritans' literal approach to the millennium. Then we present Edwards's vision of the millennium, exploring his departure from Calvin and others amongst his reformed predecessors as well as variations in the Puritans' postmillennial camp.

In so doing, we will see Edwards as a typical example in the above historical transformation of millennialism. Edwards actually held a vision of the earthly and future millennial kingdom that would stand for approximately one thousand years. This vision evidently departs from that of his Reformed forefathers. It is similar to that of his Puritan colleagues, however, with many variations from that of their millennial awareness. Consequently, it is not wise to either overstate or underestimate Edwards's uniqueness in his millennialism.

2. Millennium in the Reformed Tradition

Some early church fathers such as Justin Martyr (110-165 AD), Irenaeus (120-202 AD) and Tertullian (145-220 AD) held a literal reading of the millennium in Revelation 20 (Rev. 20:1-6). For them, it was a reliable promise that Christ would physically return before the final resurrection and judgment, and He is to rule a millennial kingdom of love, peace and righteousness.⁴ For instance, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin stated that Christ would dwell in Jerusalem for one thousand years before the Final Judgement. He wrote,

And further, there was a certain man with us, whose name was John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him, that those who believed in *our Christ would dwell a thousand years in Jerusalem*; and that *thereafter the general, and, in short, the eternal resurrection and judgment of all men would likewise take place*. Just as our

⁴ Douglas A. Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 164.

Lord also said, ‘They shall neither marry nor be given in marriage, but shall be equal to the angels, the children of the God of the resurrection.’⁵

Similarly, Irenaeus was convinced that “in the times of the kingdom,” the earth would be “called again by Christ [to its pristine condition]” and Jerusalem would be “rebuilt after the pattern of the Jerusalem above.”⁶ Consequently, “the creation shall be free from the bondage of corruption, [so as to pass] into the liberty of the sons of God,” and “the righteous man who is upon the earth shall then forget to die.”⁷

However, not long after, this literal view was gradually replaced by the allegorical reading of Revelation upheld by Augustine (354-430). Many works, including those by Stephen Stein, Glenn Richard Kreider, and Le Roy Edwin Froom, have contributed to this historical transformation of the exegesis of Revelation.⁸ In his *City of God*, Augustine maintained that it “would not be objectionable” to believe the saints would “enjoy a kind of Sabbath-rest during that period” of a thousand years, as long as “it were [was] believed that the joys of the saints in that Sabbath shall be *spiritual*.”⁹ The actual and earthly millennium claimed by those Augustine addressed as the “Millenarians,” however, should be rejected as being secular and material. He wrote,

But, as they assert that those who then rise again shall enjoy the leisure of immoderate carnal banquets, furnished with an amount of meat and drink such as not only to shock the feeling of the temperate, but even to surpass the measure of credulity itself, *such assertions can be believed only by the carnal*.

⁵ Justin Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 240. Emphasis added.

⁶ Irenaeus of Lyons, “Irenaeus against Heresies,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 565.

⁷ Irenaeus, “Irenaeus against Heresies,” 567.

⁸ Stephen Stein, “Apocalyptic Tradition,” *WJE* 5:1-8; Glenn Richard Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1--8:1* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 37-87; Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers: The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation*, 4 vols. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946-54).

⁹ Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God,” in *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 426. Emphasis added.

They who do believe them are called by the spiritual Chiliasts, which we may literally reproduce by the name Millenarians.¹⁰

Realizing that “It were a tedious process to refute” the Millenarians’ opinions “point by point,” Augustine applied an allegorical interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 to “show how that passage of Scripture should be understood.”¹¹ According to his interpretation, both the binding of Satan and the saints’ reign with Christ are “during the same thousand years” and should be “understood in the same way,” that is the period between Christ’s first and second coming.¹² Consequently, the millennium “symbolized the present militant age of the church on earth.”¹³ As Augustine’s allegorical interpretation became prevalent, from the fourth to the sixteenth century, many church fathers believed that the millennium was in the past. For them, the actual millennial age had recently come to an end or was nearly at an end. Christ’s reign in this historical millennium, in this sense, refers to the church’s *spiritual* reign at the present age.¹⁴ Therefore, they were actually expecting Christ’s imminent return in the near future. Of the long interval between Augustine and Reformation, we are not concerned, but may refer interested readers to the works mentioned above.

During the period between the Reformation and post-Reformation, again, the history of millennial thought witnessed a dramatic transformation in both hermeneutical interpretation and theological awareness. While there were several hundred treatments of Revelation flourishing in European countries in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,¹⁵ the mainstream interpretation of the millennium was

¹⁰ Augustine, “The City of God,” 426. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Augustine, “The City of God,” 426. For Augustine’s interpretation, see pages 426-32.

¹² Augustine, “The City of God,” 429.

¹³ Stephen Stein, “Apocalyptic Tradition,” *WJE* 5:2.

¹⁴ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 163. See also Bernd Engler et al., “Transformation of Millennial Thought in America, 1630-1860,” in *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630-1860*, eds. Bernd Engler et al. (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), 11.

¹⁵ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 164. See also Engler et al., “Transformation of Millennial Thought in America,” 11.

moving from the symbolic to the literal. Consequently, while many reformers in the early sixteenth century turned away from the future and earthly millennium, it enjoyed a renaissance from the late sixteenth century and flourished among the Puritans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Below we will provide a brief examination of this transformation of millennialism in the Reformed tradition.

2.1 Rejection of Chiliasm: Calvin as a Typical Example

While there were some variations, many leading reformers in the sixteenth century held a rather conservative reading of the Book of Revelation, even hesitated to recognize its canonicity. For instance, it took Martin Luther (1483-1546) a long time to slowly overcome his hostility to the contents of Revelation; Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) rejected the canonicity of Revelation.¹⁶ Concerning the millennium described in the Revelation, many early reformers were Protestant Augustinians and usually held a less literal view of this golden age at the end of the world.

Concerning this rejection of a literal reading of the future millennium in Revelation, John Calvin (1509-1564) stood as a typical example and merits careful examination. While it is not proper to address Calvin's view as amillennial or with any modern eschatological terms, as shown below, he was evidently more non-millenarian than being Chiliastic.

Calvin firmly believed that God *spiritually* reigns in the world by dwelling in the hearts of Christians.¹⁷ Therefore, it is not surprising that Calvin spiritualized the word "millennium" and refuted the Chiliastic notion of the one-thousand-year earthly

¹⁶ Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 9.

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, ed. Thomas Myers (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 75. See also J. H. van Wyk, "John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology," *In die Skriflig* 35, no. 2 (2001): 203.

millennium.¹⁸ In his *Institutes* (Book iii, xxv 5), Calvin asserted that Chiliasm is one of the falsifications with which Satan befuddled men's senses.¹⁹ For Calvin, the Chiliasts' belief of a one-thousand-year millennial kingdom is no more than a "fiction" that is "too childish either to need or to be worth a refutation."²⁰ According to him, the Chiliasts erred both hermeneutically and theologically. Specifically, according to Calvin, their errors were fourfold.

The first error is *exegetical*. Calvin thought that the Chiliasts were exegetically incorrect in interpreting the Book of Revelation. On the one hand, he thought that the Chiliasts' vision of the one-thousand-year millennium is a misreading of the Scriptures. Confronting the Chiliastic view that limited the reign of Christ to merely one thousand years, Calvin reiterated the view that "all Scripture proclaims that there will be *no end* to the blessedness of the elect or the punishment of the wicked."²¹ On the other hand, he asserted, if Scripture was to be read correctly, it would be impossible to claim a millennial *golden age* of international peace and spiritual prosperity. Because the number "one thousand" in Revelation 20:4, according to Calvin, only applies to "the various disturbances that awaited the church," instead of "the eternal blessedness of the church."²²

Secondly, as for the prophets' vivid expression of Christ's kingdom found in other volumes of the Scriptures, with the hermeneutical principle of accommodation, Calvin refuted the Chiliasts' literal interpretation. For instance, concerning Daniel's

¹⁸ van Wyk, "John Calvin on the Kingdom of God and Eschatology," 198. See also Goen, "Jonathan Edwards," 164.

¹⁹ The word "Chiliasm" is from the Greek word *chilioi* that means "thousand." This view is based on Rev. 20:1-6 and asserts that Christ, after his second coming, will reign on earth for a thousand years. See Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 85.

²⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 995.

²¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 995. Emphasis added.

²² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 995.

description of Christ's kingdom (Daniel 7:27), Calvin affirmed that it was indeed "exceedingly extravagant" and referred to nothing more than imagery of a spiritual and invisible reality.²³ Instead of depicting an earthly millennial kingdom, this imagery points to the "spiritual blessedness which Christ has afforded to us, and which we now possess through hope in him."²⁴ For Calvin, it was essential to apply the principle of accommodation to comprehend the Prophet's representation of the splendor of Christ's kingdom. Because of human sin, it is impossible to perceive Christ's kingdom and his dignity by either carnal eyes or intellect. For sinful humanity, "nothing is more contrary to our natural judgment than to seek life in death, riches in poverty and want, glory in shame and disgrace . . ."²⁵ In fact, all these are simply beyond our comprehension. Therefore, by applying the earthly analogies, God communicates with us "the visible image of Christ's kingdom," to "accommodate" his kingdom "to our dullness."²⁶

Thirdly, Calvin affirmed that a temporally limited kingdom would undermine God's nature as spiritual, infinite and constant. For him, the kingdom of God was to be "eternal" and "already exists in Christ."²⁷ Therefore, if Christ descends and reigns *visibly* in an earthly millennial kingdom, he will become a *mortal* being with a temporal kingdom. Calvin argued,

Those who assign the children of God a thousand years in which to enjoy the inheritance of the life to come do not realize how much reproach they are casting upon Christ and his Kingdom. For if they do not put on immortality, then Christ himself, to whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into undying glory [1 Cor. 15:13 ff.]. If their blessedness is to have an

²³ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 73.

²⁴ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 73.

²⁵ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 73.

²⁶ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 73. Emphasis added. See also Andrew Davis, "A New Assessment of John Calvin's Eschatology" (PhD Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998), 243-44.

²⁷ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 995-96. See also David E. Holwerda, "Eschatology and History: A Look at Calvin's Eschatological Vision," in *Calvin's Theology, Theology Proper, Eschatology*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York & London: Garland Publishing, INC, 1992), 146-47.

end, then Christ's Kingdom, on whose firmness it depends, is but temporary.²⁸ Similarly, in his exposition of Daniel 7:27, Calvin refuted, in a rather harsh way, the notion of establishing an earthly kingdom in the millennium. Taking the Rabbi Abarbanel as a target, Calvin observed that this theory merely amounts to "foul and senseless comments" that will only "adulterate the purity of Scripture."²⁹ The fatal danger of the earthly-millennial view, again, is to deny the divine and unchanging nature of God. According to this theory, Calvin argued, the kingdom of God will be reduced from a spiritual and eternal one to an "earthly," "temporal" and "perishable" dominion.³⁰ Consequently, this will render God's spiritual nature as fleshly: God must transfigure himself into "human nature" and becomes "an ordinary mortal" in order to reign in this earthly-established millennial kingdom.³¹

Finally, Calvin believed that the Chiliasts' hope of a millennial kingdom with fixed duration would definitely lead to the rejection of God's glory in the eternal punishment. For Calvin, if God's kingdom is temporal, the punishment for sinners will consequently be confined to a limited period of time. As a result, God's justice and his majesty that are *eternally* violated by the sinners will be significantly underestimated. As Calvin argued in his *Institutes*,

Even a *blind man* can see what *stupid nonsense* these people talk who are afraid of attributing excessive cruelty to God if the wicked be consigned to eternal punishment! If the Lord deprives of his Kingdom those who through their ungratefulness have rendered themselves unworthy of it-that, forsooth, will be too unjust! Yet their sins, they say, are temporal. Granted. But God's majesty, and also his justice, which they have violated by sinning, are eternal. Therefore it is right that the memory of their iniquity does not perish. Yet thus the punishment will exceed the measure of the transgression. This blasphemy is not to be borne, when God's majesty is so little esteemed, when the contempt of it is valued less than the loss of one soul.³²

²⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 995-96.

²⁹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 75. Here Calvin referred to Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508), though he mis-spelled the name as "Abarbinel." For Rabi Abarbanel, see page 496 of this volume.

³⁰ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 75.

³¹ Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 2, 75.

³² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 996. Emphasis added.

Calvin concluded that the perfected kingdom of God would only be fulfilled “when sin is blotted out, death swallowed up, and everlasting life fully restored.”³³ As for those “triflers” who are hoping for a millennial kingdom on earth, they are either “utterly ignorant of everything divine” or “trying by a devious malice to bring to nought all the grace of God and power of Christ.”³⁴

In sum, Calvin, standing as a non-millenarian Protestant minister and theologian, exemplified the rejection of the Chiliasts’ expectation of a future and earthly millennial kingdom. For Calvin and the Protestant followers of non-millenarianism, Chiliasm was a false fiction stemming from their misinterpretation of the relevant biblical texts and their distorted theology of the divine nature and its attributes.

2.2 The Wide Diversity of Puritan Millennial Views

From the late sixteenth century, some scholars departed from Calvin, starting to anticipate a terrestrial millennium appearing in time and history. John Bale (1495-1563), for instance, expected an *earthly* millennium, though he still regarded the millennium as a past event.

Bale was convinced that the millennium happened in the first thousand years after Christ’s first coming. It was followed by Satan’s release when Pope Sylvester II (ca. 946-1003) took his power in year 999. Bale wrote in his *The Image of Both Churches* in 1540s,

And whereas it is here said that *after these thousand years Satan must be let loose again* for a certain time, consider it to be the promise of God which must in effect be fulfilled—not that he shall again loose him which hath once bound him forever, but that he shall permit other to do it according to his threatening promise, the unthankfulness and malice of wicked-doers requiring none other. *In*

³³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 996.

³⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 996.

*the end of these thousand years reigned in the papacy at Rome the aforementioned necromancer Sylvester, which was both a black monk and also a Frenchman born. This beastly antichrist, boasting himself not only to be Christ's vicar in earth, but also to be equal with him in majesty and power, set first the Devil at large by his necromancy, which took from the hearts of men the living word of the Lord lest they should be saved.*³⁵

For Bale, the Book of Revelation is mainly a record of the historical events that already happened in the past. Therefore, the millennium acting as a past event is “much more characteristic of his exegesis throughout the *Image*,” as Gretchen Minton, the editor of *The Image of Both Churches*, observes.³⁶

John Foxe (1516-1587) and the producers of the Geneva Bible (1560) followed Bale's placement of the terrestrial millennium in the past. They believed that Satan's binding recorded in Revelation 20:2 was a past event which happened in the first thousand years “from Christs nativitie [nativity] unto the time of Pope Sylvester the seconde.”³⁷ Therefore, they were confident that during this earthly millennium, the saints already “lived, & reigned with Christ a thousand yere [year]” (Rev. 20:4).³⁸ They explained this millennial reign as a historical event in the marginal annotation: “That is, whiles they have remained *in this life*.”³⁹

In the seventeenth century, the allegorical exegesis gave further way to the literal approach to Revelation. And this resulted in a flourish of the futuristic standpoint in the Puritans' millennialism. In particular, three Puritan divines and their works played an essential role in this shift of exegetical and theological paradigms, marking “the beginning of a new, sober, academic millenarian tradition

³⁵ John Bale, *John Bale's 'The Image of Both Churches'*, ed. Gretchen E. Minton (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2013), 352. Emphasis added.

³⁶ Bale, *John Bale's 'The Image of Both Churches'*, 16.

³⁷ *Geneva Bible: Notes*, vol. 2 (Geneva: Rovland Hall, 1560), 121.

³⁸ *Geneva Bible* (Geneva: Rovland Hall, 1560), Re 20:4.

³⁹ *Geneva Bible: Notes*, vol. 2, 121. Emphasis added. See also Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43-44.

arising within mainstream Protestantism.”⁴⁰ The first one is Johannes Piscator (1546-1625), “one of the main architects of the thriving Calvinist academy in Herborn.”⁴¹ Appearing in 1613, his commentary on the Apocalypse may be seen as “an extensive defense” of millennialism.⁴² Two additional works were “simultaneously and independently published” in 1627.⁴³ One is *Diatribes de Mille Annis Apocalypticis* by Johann Heinrich Alsted (1588-1638), on which Piscator’s impact is rather obvious; another is *Clavis Apocalyptica* by Joseph Mede (1586-1639) of Cambridge.⁴⁴ As the “joint founders of the Reformed millenarian tradition,” Mede and Alsted formulated “the basic lineaments of a *new* eschatological system.”⁴⁵ In particular, they provided a biblical, apolitical and non-utopian image of the millennium.⁴⁶ Hence, both are of great significance in the historical development of millennialism in the seventeenth century. Alsted provided “the best available single source” for the emergence of a Reformed millennialism.⁴⁷ On the other hand, with the “startling originality, ingenuity, and plausibility” shown in his *Clavis*, Mede significantly influenced later American, English, Scottish, and Irish millennial traditions, which stretched into the nineteenth century.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Howard Hotson, *Paradise Postponed: Johann Heinrich Alsted and the Birth of Calvinist Millenarianism* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science+Business Media, 2000), 9.

⁴¹ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 4.

⁴² Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 16.

⁴³ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 4. See also Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 164-66; Reiner Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” in *Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (New York: Continuum, 1999), 39-41; Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550-1682* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000), 21-58.

⁴⁴ Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis* (Frankfurt am Main, 1627, 1630); German trans. by Sebastian Franck, *Diatribes de mille annis apocalypticis. Christlicher und wolgegründeter Bericht von der kunfftigen tausendjährigen Gluckseligkeit der Kirchen Gottes dieser Erden* ([Frankfurt am Main], 1630); English trans. by William Burton, *The Beloved City, or, The Saints Reign on Earth a Thousand Years* (London, 1643). Joseph Mede, *Clavis apocalyptica* (Cambridge, 1627; revised 1632; frequently reprinted); English translation by Richard More, *The Key of the Revelation* (London, 1642).

⁴⁵ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 5-6. Emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 5-8.

⁴⁷ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 15.

⁴⁸ Hotson, *Paradise Postponed*, 12.

With this paradigm shift, many European and New England divines such as John Cotton (1585-1652), Samuel Sewall (1642-1730), Increase Mather (1639-1723) and his son Cotton Mather (1663-1728), departed from Augustinian interpretation and started to take a more futuristic view of the millennium. Nevertheless, the Puritans seemed to have had difficulties in reaching an agreement on specific aspects in their millenarian view. In what follows, we will discuss three key issues that caused divergence among the Puritans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, namely, the millennial chronology, the first resurrection of the slain saints, and Christ's presence in the millennium.

First, let us start with the millennial chronology. While the future millennium became prevalent among the Puritans, there were evident disagreements. Some Puritan divines still insisted on the *preterist* system of Augustine.⁴⁹ This camp includes Thomas Parker (1595-1677) who followed John Bale and Thomas Brightman (1562-1607). These authors asserted that the events recorded in Revelation 20 had already taken place at certain times in history, therefore, Satan's binding was a past event. For them, Satan's binding probably began when Constantine was crowned as the first Christian emperor of Rome (ca. 306) and ended with Wycliffe's reformation (ca. 1300). Thus, Christ's millennial reign in his spiritual presence started from the year 1300 and was already in progress in the lifetime of these preterists.⁵⁰

The followers of the *futurist* system, however, would not accept this

⁴⁹ The term "*preterist*," as a combination of the Latin words *praeter* (past) and *ire* (to go), refers to that which belongs to the past. Therefore, the preterists apply a symbolic interpretation of the Book of Revelation and assert that the events recorded in Revelation relate to "that which occurred in the past but has no reference to the present and future." See Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, vol. 20, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 38-39.

⁵⁰ Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 38-39, 45.

assertion. They all expected a millennium arriving in the future but fell into at least two camps. Some like Cotton Mather in his mature eschatology represented in his *Threefold Paradise* (1727) may be regarded as premillennialists if we categorize them with nineteenth-century labels. According to Cotton Mather, Christ will physically appear at the beginning of the millennium to inaugurate this golden age, and he will come at the end of the millennium for the Final Judgment.⁵¹

Others, including Daniel Whitby (1638-1726), Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803) were postmillennialists. They believed that Christ would not appear *until* the end of the millennium. For them, with the church's effort in her spiritual improvement and social reform, the millennium will be ushered in *before* Christ finally descends for the Final Judgment.⁵² Jonathan Edwards belonged to this camp, though some of his arguments are not consistent with the modern definition of postmillennialism. We shall discuss this in more detail in later sections of this chapter.

Secondly, with respect to the first resurrection of the slain saints in Revelation 20:4-6, the Puritans found themselves in disagreements with each other. Many like Thomas Brightman, Johann Alsted and John Cotton claimed that the first resurrection refers to the "spiritual re-birth" of the individuals and the reformed church.⁵³ However, others such as Joseph Mede, Increase Mather and Cotton Mather took a literal approach and asserted that the first resurrection would be the actual and bodily resurrection of the slain saints at Christ's second coming to inaugurate the

⁵¹ Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 39, 49.

⁵² Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 39-40. See also Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 350, n. 4.

⁵³ Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 41.

millennium.⁵⁴

Finally, there was a dispute over whether Christ would, in the millennium, reign in his physical presence or in a spiritual form. Some believed that Christ would reign in his spiritual presence in the church. These include Cotton Mather, Daniel Whitby, John Eliot (1604-1690) and Thomas Shepard (1605-1649). For instance, Cotton Mather insisted that the millennium would emerge from the faithful preaching by the Spirit-filled ministers rather than from Christ's personal and physical presence.⁵⁵ However, their opponents such as John Davenport (1597-1670) argued that Christ, in his physical and visible presence, would appear at the beginning of the millennium and reign together with the saints.⁵⁶

3. Edwards's Vision of the Millennial Kingdom

From our brief documentation of the transformation of the millennialism from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries in the previous section, one may see the early reformers' reluctance and conservativeness in accepting the millennium as well as the messiness, vagaries, and diversity within Puritan millennialism. In this section, we move on to discuss Edwards's vision of the millennium. To explore how Edwards departed from his sixteenth-century reformed forefathers in his millennialism, we will start this section with a brief survey of Edwards's sources in Part One. In Part Two, we will compare his view with that of Calvin. To end this section, we will examine Edwards's position in various millennial themes that caused constant

⁵⁴ Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth Joseph Mede (1586-1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism*, ed. SpringerLink Dordrecht (The Netherlands: Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 114-17. See also Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 783.

⁵⁵ J. F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1975): 233. See also Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 780-781.

⁵⁶ Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 44, 49.

divergence and controversy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

3.1 Edwards's Sources

Edwards's millennialism rests on his interpretation of the biblical apocalyptic writings. And many Puritan commentators significantly influenced his reading of the Book of Revelation, the Book of Daniel and other apocalyptic volumes in the Scriptures.⁵⁷ Among the commentaries on Revelation, many were produced by applying the literal approach in their exegetical works. In particular, two works were widely accepted by many Puritan divines and extensively cited by Edwards in his *Apocalyptic Writings* (in both "Notes on the Apocalypse" and *An Humble Attempt*). These are the works by Moses Lowman (1680-1752) and Matthew Poole (1624-1679).

As an English clergyman, Lowman was well known for his scholarship. Since early 1739, Edwards was continually influenced by Lowman's commentary *Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation of St. John* (1737, abbreviated as *Paraphrase and Notes* hereafter). By 1746, in his note "No. 94 Extracts from Mr. Lowman," Edwards had accumulated about forty pages of citations from Lowman's *Paraphrase and Notes*.⁵⁸ Note, however, Edwards did not accept Lowman's commentary without offering his own criticism. As shown in his "Remarks on Lowman," Edwards criticized Lowman's denial of synchronisms, declaring this denial is contrary to both "the method of almost all the prophecies of Scripture" and "the manner of this prophecy of the Revelation."⁵⁹ And he observed that Lowman

⁵⁷ For more details of Edwards's sources of his interpretation of the Apocalyptic writings, see Stephen Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:54-74.

⁵⁸ *WJE* 5:219-50.

⁵⁹ *WJE* 5:251.

himself “makes many SYNCHRONISMS.”⁶⁰ In contrast, Edwards was “siding with Joseph Mede in the tradition” of synchronism, as Stein observes.⁶¹ Specifically, he upheld “a synchronic understanding” of the Book of Revelation that “recognized strategic repetitions in the text that cycle back and then expand upon the book’s main themes (the destruction of the Antichrist, preparing for the millennium, Judgment Day, and the coming of the New Jerusalem).”⁶² Besides, Edwards did not agree with Lowman on two specific issues: Lowman’s interpretation of the three woes and that of the seven trumpets.⁶³ But all of these are no more than minor divergences between these two divines on the interpretation of Revelation. Apparently, Edwards believed that Lowman’s *Paraphrase and Notes* was a work of “Great Expectation,”⁶⁴ and even the “best available interpretation of the Apocalypse.”⁶⁵ In fact, many of Edwards’s views were significantly altered after reading this volume, such as his perspectives of millennial chronology, the sequence of eschatological events, etc.⁶⁶

Matthew Poole was from Emmanuel College, the Puritan stronghold in Cambridge since its foundation, and was educated under John Worthington (1618-71) the editor of Joseph Mede’s works.⁶⁷ As a biblical exegete and annotator, Poole’s massive commentary *Synopsis Criticorum aliorumque Sacrae Scripturae Interpretum* (1676) includes extracts from diverse places such as Roman Catholic works and rabbinical sources. It was popular among the New England divines and became one of Edwards’s favorite sources on Revelation and the formation of his

⁶⁰ *WJE* 5:252.

⁶¹ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:57.

⁶² Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 169. For Edwards’s exegetic and hermeneutical interpretation of the Book of Revelation, see pp. 160-71.

⁶³ *WJE* 5:251-53. See also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:57.

⁶⁴ *WJE* 5:201.

⁶⁵ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:56.

⁶⁶ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:56-59.

⁶⁷ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:59.

millennialism.⁶⁸ In his “Apocalypse,” Edwards consulted the English translation of this work *Annotations upon the Holy Bible*.⁶⁹ In addition to gaining familiarity with the thought of traditional commentators such as Joseph Mede, many of Edwards’s reflections on Revelation in his early years were fostered by Poole’s *Annotations*. These included the durable period of the persecution before the millennium and the calculation of apocalyptic chronologies.⁷⁰

Two other major authors had a substantial impact on Edwards: John Foxe and Matthew Henry (1662-1714). In his “Notes on the Apocalypse,” Edwards quoted Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* and obviously inherited the anti-Catholic spirit of the “Book of Martyrs.”⁷¹ While Henry’s *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments* heavily informed Edwards’s biblical interpretation in his *Notes on Scripture* and *Blank Bible*, this volume was cited twice in the “Notes on the Apocalypse,” both referring to the millennial timetable: one is entitled “Concerning the time of the millennium,”⁷² another indicates, “as Mr. Henry observes.”⁷³ Additionally, given their importance in the emergence of Calvinist millennialism, as discussed in the previous section, Edwards was familiar with the names of Piscator, Alsted and Mede, though he did not directly quote their works on the Apocalypse.⁷⁴ In particular, he noticed Mede’s influence on Moses Lowman, as shown in his extract of Lowman’s commentary.⁷⁵ In various aspects of his millennialism, as shown in this chapter,

⁶⁸ *WJE* 5:146.

⁶⁹ *WJE* 5:125-30. See also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:61.

⁷⁰ Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:61.

⁷¹ *WJE* 5:112. See also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:67-68.

⁷² *WJE* 5:123.

⁷³ *WJE* 5:212.

⁷⁴ Edwards mentioned Piscator’s name in the appendix of his *An Humble Inquiry*, see *WJE* 12:344. And he was fascinated with Alsted’s *Geometry* in his Yale’s days and quoted Alsted’s works in his discussion of the canon of the New Testament in his later years. See respectively Edwards’s letter to his father Timothy Edwards (*WJE* 16:33) and his miscellany entry “CONCERNING THE CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT” (*Misc.* 1060, *WJE* 20:403-404).

⁷⁵ *WJE* 5:222-23. See also *WJE* 26:132 for Edwards’s familiarity with Mede’s *The apostasy of the latter times, in which, according to divine prediction, the world should wonder after the beast, the*

Edwards aligned himself with Mede.

3.2 An Earthly Millennial Kingdom: Edwards's Departure from Calvin

Edwards has been regarded as “the greatest English speaking Calvinistic theologian” and the most significant advocate of New England Calvinism among the American Puritans.⁷⁶ However, his departure from Calvin's eschatology is also noticeable, as Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott observe in their recent encyclopedic work on Edwards's theology: “Edwards's eschatology was a break from Calvin and other early Reformed understandings of the millennium.”⁷⁷ It was during the paradigm shift of millennialism from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, as mentioned in the previous section, that Edwards's departure from Calvin in his millennial awareness took place. And furthermore, this can be seen as a typical example of this paradigm shift. Despite its importance, however, few careful comparative studies have been carried out on the divergences between Edwards's millennial awareness and that of Calvin. Therefore, proceeding from the claim of McClymond and McDermott, in this section, our purpose is to show that Edwards significantly departed from Calvin in two ways, both hermeneutical and theological. In so doing, we also provide a case study on the dramatic transformation in millennialism from the reformation to the post-reformation eras.

We have briefly noted Calvin's reluctance to recognize an actual millennium.

In sharp contrast, for Edwards, this actual millennium was one of his central

mystery of iniquity should so farre prevaile over the mystery of godlinesse, whorish Babylon over the virgin-church of Christ ... (London, 1641).

⁷⁶ Drew Curley, “New Calvinism, Part I: An Historical Understanding and Theological Critique,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* (Spring-Winter) 18, no. 55 (2014): 252. See also C.

Jeffrey Robinson, “The Home Is an Earthly Kingdom. Family Discipleship among Reformers and Puritans,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry: Theological Perspectives on Marriage and Children* 3, no. 1 (2012): 23.

⁷⁷ Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 669-70.

theological loci. Like many of his Puritan colleagues, Edwards followed the Alsted-Mede approach in taking a literal interpretation of the millennium. And he was quite enthusiastic about the arrival of the millennium. In his “Personal Narrative,” Edwards confessed “great longings for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in the world.”⁷⁸ His private prayer “used to be in great part taken up in praying for it.”⁷⁹ Therefore, in both his private notes and public sermons and discourses, Edwards frequently shared his contemplation of the subjects of a latter-day glory at the end of the world.

It has been a well-known fact that while Calvin made diligent efforts in commenting on the Scriptures, he left Revelation untouched. In sharp contrast to Calvin’s reluctance to tackle Revelation, in most of his lifetime, Edwards usually spent many hours in his studying of this volume and kept questing for the most appropriate interpretation.⁸⁰ Consequently, his running but unpublished commentary entitled “Notes on the Apocalypse,” as the record of his thoughts on Revelation, was continuously expanded and revised since it began in 1723, until his death in 1758.⁸¹ This personal commentary, along with his other works concerning the millennium as contained in *An Humble Attempt* (1747) and *HWR* (1739), all stand as a proof of Edwards’s abiding enthusiasm for the millennium. Additionally, Edwards’s fascination with the Book of Revelation was not only manifested in his private commentary, but also revealed in his homiletical ministry. In fact, he preached on Revelation throughout his ministry and life, from 1729 until 1756. In all, he left behind sixty-six sermons that covered a wide variety of issues concerning the end

⁷⁸ *WJE* 16:797.

⁷⁹ *WJE* 16:797.

⁸⁰ Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:1.

⁸¹ *WJE* 5:95-306.

time.⁸² All these are Edwards's "private and public doctrinal articulation" of his millennialism, to quote Stephen Stein.⁸³

Furthermore, it is notable that Edwards's millennium is Chiliastic, which evidently departed from that of Calvin. In contrast to Calvin's conservative stand on Revelation and symbolic reading of the millennium, Edwards was expecting an earthly millennium and this millennium would have a specified duration.

On the one hand, in contrast to Calvin's firm refutation of the earthly millennium, according to Edwards, the millennial kingdom would definitely be established on earth. In the millennium, "the *whole earth* may be as one community, one body in Christ," he asserted.⁸⁴ And it would be in "*this world*" that the saints would spend significantly more time on spiritual business than their ordinary things.⁸⁵ And the divine knowledge will be "diffused *all over the world*" including "the most barbarous nations" and the "ignorant heathen lands."⁸⁶ He wrote,

How happy will that state be, when neither divine nor human learning shall be confined and imprisoned within only two or three nations of Europe, but shall be diffused *all over the world*, and *this lower world* shall be all over covered with light, the various parts of it mutually enlightening each other; when the most barbarous nations shall become as bright and polite as England. . .⁸⁷

On the other hand, Edwards saw the millennium as being an actual period in a future timeline. It is a significant fact that Edwards insisted that the phrase "a thousand year" in Revelation (Rev. 20:2) should be "literally understood."⁸⁸ In this sense, for him the duration of the millennium would be approximately one thousand years. In his "Miscellanies" entry 1224, "MILLENNIUM, or sabbatism of the world," Edwards observed that it will *not* be much more than a thousand years. Otherwise, in

⁸² See Stephen Stein and Thomas Schafer, "Appendix B: Sermons on the Apocalypse," *WJE* 5:440-43.

⁸³ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:15.

⁸⁴ *Misc.* 262, *WJE* 13:369. Emphasis added.

⁸⁵ *Misc.* 26, *WJE* 13:212. Emphasis added.

⁸⁶ *Misc.* 26, *WJE* 13:212. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ *Misc.* 26, *WJE* 13:212. Emphasis added.

⁸⁸ *Misc.* 836, *WJE* 20:50.

a prolonged millennium, God's mighty work and his glory will not be so manifest.

Edwards made the following four assertions:

1. Humankind would forget the corruption of nature, would be insensible of the dreadful ruin sin has brought on the nature of man, would not be so sensible of the great benefit of the redemption of Christ.

2. The curse of God on this world, consisting in the calamities of it, would not be very sensible. The world would scarcely appear as a great wilderness in the way to a land of rest. God's people would be under great temptation not to behave themselves as pilgrims and strangers on earth, forget to live as not of the world and to lay up treasure in heaven.

3. 'Tis not probable that so much of the Scripture would have been calculated for the church in a suffering state, and both for the church and the world in a state of so great pollution, temptation and danger.

4. The distinguishing grace of God in election would grow much out of sight.⁸⁹

In another entry to the "Miscellanies," numbered 836, Edwards offered more reasons why he thought the millennium should be around one thousand years. In short, he maintained that it is by God's wisdom that the millennium would be set to an actual one thousand years. In this way, the earth will be more appropriately preserved for its created residents. More importantly, God's glory and his grace in creation and redemption will be more evidently manifested to forgetful humankind.⁹⁰

To conclude this part, as McClymond and McDermott observed recently, unlike Calvin and his Protestant followers who took eschatology as "a theological appendage," Edwards treated it as "both central and integral" to his theological vision.⁹¹ And Edwards's enthusiasm for the millennium evidently reveals its critical role in his eschatology. Unlike Calvin's rejection of Chiliasm, Edwards advocated and presented a future millennial kingdom that would be expanding on earth---this kingdom stands for approximately one thousand years. Furthermore, Edwards applied his millennialism in his "professional involvement in the church and society

⁸⁹ *WJE* 23:156.

⁹⁰ See *Misc.* 836, *WJE* 20:50-52.

⁹¹ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 579. See also Mark C. Rogers, "A Missional Eschatology: Jonathan Edwards, Future Prophecy, and the Spread of the Gospel," *Fides et historia*, 41 (2009): 23.

at large,”⁹² by proclaiming his millennial expectation in both his private writings as well as in his publications and homiletical ministries.

3.3 A Future and Inchoate Millennial Kingdom: Edwards’s Divergences from His Puritan Colleagues

While clearly, he departed from Calvin and other early reformers in his millennialism, by taking a literal approach to Scripture, Edwards was consistent with the general Puritan belief in an earthly millennium of definite duration. This is not to say that his millennial awareness is identical with that of his Puritan colleagues. But his variations are mainly found in specific issues. In the light of our previous discussion about variations in the Puritan millennium, this part will explore three issues: the first resurrection of the slain saints, Christ’s presence in the millennium, and the millennial chronology.

With regard to the first resurrection of the slain saints, Edwards was convinced that the millennial kingdom is the “exceeding glorious” dispensation in the latter days, or “a most peaceful, happy and glorious state of things,” as he phrased it in a sermon of 1726 entitled “Christians under Special Obligations to Be Universally Holy.”⁹³ Here he allegorized the first resurrection in Revelation 20:4-6 and believed that it referred to an international revival in the millennium. He said categorically in his “Notes on the Apocalypse” that it is “evident” that the first resurrection is “a *spiritual* resurrection.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, this spiritual resurrection will be a worldwide spiritual regeneration, or “a wonderful renovation of the world

⁹² Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:15.

⁹³ *Jonathan Edwards Sermons*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 1726), 1 Peter 1:15.

⁹⁴ *WJE* 5:144-45. Emphasis added.

upon spiritual accounts.”⁹⁵ Here Edwards somehow departed from Joseph Mede, Increase and Cotton Mather, by reverting to the earlier and Augustinian approach which was followed by Thomas Brightman, Johann Alsted and John Cotton.

Why did Edwards have such confidence? It appears that his confidence rested upon his interpretation of Revelation 20:6 and Isaiah 26:19. By reading Rev. 20:6 (“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power.”), he believed that the first resurrection in Rev. 20:5 and the second death in Revelation 20:14 “answer one to another,” that is, both verses are spiritual, though the second death is also eternal.⁹⁶ In his *Blank Bible*, Edwards provided more reasons for his comparing Revelation 20:5 and Isaiah 26.19 (“Thy dead men shall live; together with my dead body shall they arise.”). For him, the prophet Isaiah was “speaking of a spiritual resurrection” and included the resurrection of the body in the later part of his prophecy.⁹⁷ In Revelation 20, Edwards argued that the Apostle John merely repeated this prophetic pattern by identifying the first resurrection as spiritual and the second as bodily.⁹⁸ Therefore, Edwards concluded that those who participated in the first resurrection would definitely experience the first death, viz. the bodily and natural death. However, they will have the eternal life and will “never die the second, or the spiritual and eternal death.”⁹⁹

Secondly, Edwards believed that in the millennial kingdom, Christ would reign on earth by His Spirit while His body would remain in heaven.¹⁰⁰ In his miscellany entry on “Millennium,” Edwards clearly presented his view of Christ’s

⁹⁵ *WJE* 5:145.

⁹⁶ *WJE* 5:144-45. Quotation is on page 144. The Bible verses quoted in the present study, unless otherwise indicated, are consistent with what found in the primary sources.

⁹⁷ *WJE* 24:1241.

⁹⁸ *WJE* 24:1241.

⁹⁹ *WJE* 5:145.

¹⁰⁰ *WJE* 18:537. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 576; Goen, “Jonathan Edwards,” 37.

spiritual reign on earth. He started by claiming: “It is a greater privilege to the church on earth to have Christ, her head and Redeemer, in heaven at the right hand of God, than for him to be in this lower world.”¹⁰¹ Edwards sought to justify this position from the perspective of the divine glorification. He argued that God’s glory would be more effectively manifested by Christ’s spiritual presence in His churches. If, on the other hand, Christ comes down and physically dwells on earth during the millennium, it would be “a second humiliation, a descending from a higher glory to a lower.”¹⁰² Furthermore, Christ’s spiritual reign will be more beneficial for the church, because that would be a “greater privilege to the church on earth to have Christ, her head and Redeemer, in heaven at the right hand of God,” and because it would “strengthen their faith, and greatly to encourage and comfort them.”¹⁰³ Thus God will be greatly glorified in the church. “Christ’s reigning on earth by his Spirit,” Edwards asserted, “is more *glorious* and *happy* for his church than his human presence would be.”¹⁰⁴ By insisting on Christ’s spiritual reign in the millennium, Edwards rejected John Davenport’s view and followed that of John Cotton, Daniel Whitby and Cotton Mather. In fact, Edwards was very confident in his standpoint on Christ’s spiritual reign. So he went further by saying that there should be *no* Christian who “considers things aright will desire that he [Christ] should leave heaven” before the close of the millennium.¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, Edwards was actually expecting an inchoate, or an imperfect millennium. For Edwards, the millennial kingdom would be “a mixture of the saints in heaven ruling through their spiritual successors over their mortal and sinful

¹⁰¹ *Misc.* 827, *WJE* 18:537.

¹⁰² *Misc.* 827, *WJE* 18:537.

¹⁰³ *Misc.* 827, *WJE* 18:537.

¹⁰⁴ *Misc.* 827, *WJE* 18:537. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵ *Misc.* 827, *WJE* 18:537.

counterparts on earth.”¹⁰⁶ It should be noted, however, that Edwards was not the only one who held this view. Many Puritan divines in the seventeenth century, including Joseph Mede, John Cotton, Thomas Shepard and Cotton Mather expected an inchoate millennium.¹⁰⁷ For them, before the second resurrection at the end of the millennium, the saved nations were not free from imperfection of the fallen world. Instead, saints and sinners would still suffer from mortality, sin, disease and death.

However, Edwards had a much more promising perspective on the millennium. While there is sin and death, the inhabitants on the earth will enjoy a life of abundant material and spiritual blessings. As Edwards claimed, they will live “under such great universal and uninterrupted prosperity, health and long life.”¹⁰⁸ More importantly, in his view, this will be a long time for several generations, and those living on earth will live in a world freed from both natural and humankind-created catastrophes. They will not be “diminished with wars, pestilences and other desolating calamities which now waste humankind.”¹⁰⁹

Finally, Edwards insisted that Christ’s physical appearing will not occur until the end of the millennium. From this perspective, Edwards may be categorized as a postmillennialist, if we can use this nineteenth-century-label anachronistically. Here he clearly departed from the *preterist* camp which included John Bale, Thomas Brightman and Thomas Parker. Furthermore, in contrast to the pessimistic premillennialists such as Cotton Mather who foresaw the darkest and most hopeless days before the millennium, Edwards’s postmillennialism was evidently optimistic. He believed that through the progress of Christianity, Satan’s kingdom on earth would be gradually overthrown. Meanwhile, history will progressively but definitely

¹⁰⁶ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 59.

¹⁰⁷ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 41-50.

¹⁰⁸ *Misc.* 836, *WJE* 20:51.

¹⁰⁹ *Misc.* 836, *WJE* 20:51.

move towards the golden age of the millennium. In his *An Humble Attempt*, Edwards wrote,

[T]he world would stand six thousand years; and then, the seventh thousand years should be the world's rest or sabbath. The ruin of the popish interest is but a small part of what is requisite, in order to introduce and settle such a state of things, as the world is represented as being in, in that millennium that is described Rev. 20, wherein Satan's visible kingdom is everywhere totally extirpated, and a perfect end put to all heresies, delusions and false religions whatsoever, through the whole earth, and Satan thenceforward "deceives the nations no more" [v. 3], and has no place anywhere but in hell.¹¹⁰

However, Edwards's millennialism is not exactly in accordance with modern postmillennialism. For one thing, he argued in *HWR*, that the millennium would be the *third* coming of Christ to set up his kingdom "at the destruction of Antichrist."¹¹¹ As for the other comings, the first is "Christ's appearing... in the apostles' days," the second is "that which was accomplished in Constantine's time in the destruction of the heathen Roman empire," and the fourth is Christ's coming to the Final Judgment at the end of the millennium.¹¹² Instead of returning to earth to inaugurate the millennium at an obvious moment, Christ's appearance in his first three comings will introduce a new phase of spiritual revival and thus enhance the historical advancement towards the millennial kingdom. And Christ's final coming will bring the world into the culmination of his kingdom. Edwards's assertion of Christ's four comings actually ensures that the distinction between premillennialism and postmillennialism loses most of its pertinence, as McClymond observes.¹¹³ For another, while Edwards preferred postmillennialism, he did not accept the strict futurist interpretation of Revelation. In fact, he often took the preterist approach in interpreting certain prophecies as the symbolic representation of actual historical

¹¹⁰ *WJE* 5:410.

¹¹¹ *WJE* 9:351.

¹¹² *WJE* 9:351.

¹¹³ Michael James McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73.

events. For instance, he viewed the martyrdom of the two witnesses in Revelation 11 as the persecution that fell upon the church during the Reformation, and their resurrection as Antichrist's failure to reverse the Reformation.¹¹⁴

To sum up our presentation in this section, Edwards expected a terrestrial and inchoate millennial kingdom arriving at a certain point of redemptive history in future---this kingdom will stand approximately for one thousand years. Evidently, in many aspects this literal view of a future and earthly millennium, Edwards followed his Puritan contemporaries in expecting the adversaries of Christ's kingdom to be destroyed and in looking forward to "a golden age of heightened spirituality before the Final Judgment and eternity."¹¹⁵ While it can be identified as postmillennial in the modern sense, in various specific aspects, Edwards's millennialism differs from that of his Puritan colleagues. Specifically, in the chronology of the millennium he departed from the preterist camp of John Bale, Thomas Brightman and Thomas Parker. By holding the spiritual resurrection, Edwards disagreed with Joseph Mede, Increase Mather and Cotton Mather. By expecting Christ's spiritual reign in the millennial kingdom, Edwards rejected Christ's physical presence in the millennium as held by John Davenport. Furthermore, while believing in an inchoate millennium, Edwards expected a more prosperous millennial kingdom with great peace, love, spiritual and material prosperity.

4. Conclusion

During the period between the Reformation and post-Reformation, a dramatic paradigm shift in millennialism took place. Edwards may be seen as typical of his

¹¹⁴ *WJE* 5:105. See also *Misc. uu*, *WJE* 13:191.

¹¹⁵ Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1877), III, 723. See also Goen, "Jonathan Edwards," 33-34.

time. As the summary and climax of this shift, Edwards's millennial expectation points to nothing but a millennial kingdom. This millennial kingdom, with a fixed duration of approximately one thousand years, has three features: it is earthly, inchoate and arriving in future. In particular, this millennial kingdom will start with a general and international revival, and it will be ruled by Christ in his spiritual presence, and it will reach its culmination with Christ's physical return at the end of millennium. This *did* represent a significant departure from Calvin and his fellow reformers. However, it would go too far to suggest that Edwards was a radical innovator among the Puritans. Certainly, he was not the first among the American postmillennialists that Goen asserted back in the 1950s.¹¹⁶ On the contrary, we will argue that as far as this theological locus is concerned, Edwards's similarities with his Puritan colleagues are more than apparent. Contrary to the usual misunderstanding, Edwards aligned himself with various groups among his Puritan contemporaries in specific aspects.

Meanwhile, we want to emphasize that Edwards's millennialism also diverged from that of his Puritan contemporaries in some specific respects and these include particularly three aspects: the millennial chronology, the first resurrection of the slain saints and Christ's spiritual reign on earth. Therefore, due to his variations and minor departures from his Puritan colleagues, it is hazardous to simplify or over-generalize Edwards's millennialism with any other Puritan, as it has been done by some like John Wilson, Joel Beeke and Mark Jones.¹¹⁷

As we have observed earlier in this chapter, Edwards's millennialism was informed by his hermeneutical approach and his theology. It was informed by his

¹¹⁶ Goen, "Jonathan Edwards," 38.

¹¹⁷ See Wilson, "History, Redemption, and Millennium," 139-40; Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 784.

literal interpretation of the apocalyptic volumes of the Scriptures. This hermeneutical approach differed from that of Calvin and many early reformers but was similar to that of most of his Puritan friends. In the meantime, Edwards highlighted God's glorification in his millennialism. For him, the whole progress of the realization of the millennial kingdom is to manifest the glory of divine sovereignty, wisdom and sufficiency of God. Moreover, Edwards's millennialism was formulated by his theology of redemptive history, from which he predicted a durable but advancing process of the realization of the millennial kingdom. In the next two chapters, we will stress Edwards's Christocentric focus in his millennialism and examine his conviction of God's glorification in the progressive realization of the millennial kingdom.

Chapter Two

“Christ in all things has the preeminence”: Edwards’s

Christocentric Focus in His Millennialism¹

1. Introduction

Having provided an introduction and evaluation of his vision of the millennial kingdom in chapter one, in this chapter, we will examine Edwards’s Christocentric awareness in his millennialism. Despite the pronouncement by Stephen Stein that, “it is impossible to ignore the Christological focus in Edwards’ theology of the Apocalypse,”² not much has been done in this area. Since *HWR* is the only one of Edwards’s works published in the eighteenth century that provides a full picture of his millennial thought that is incorporated in the scope of his redemptive-historical vision, we treat this volume in the present chapter. As one of the most well-known and influential works by Edwards, *HWR* has been extensively researched in the past three hundred years.³ Nevertheless, in this chapter we adopt a different perspective,

¹ The quotation in this chapter title is found in *WJE* 9:518.

² Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:52.

³ The existing works on Edwards *HWR* include: Jonathan Edwards Jr., “Preface,” in *A History of the Work of Redemption, Containing Outlines of a Body of Divinity, in a Method Entirely New* (Edinburgh: W. Gray, 1774), iii-v; Edward William Grinfield, “Appendix II: Review of Edwards’s History of Redemption,” in his *The Nature and Extent of the Christian Dispensation, with Reference to the Salvability of the Heathen* (London: C. & J. Rivington, 1827), 427-58; Herbert Wallace Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930), 102-55; H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1937), 135-43; Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), 307-330; Miller, “The End of the World,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 8 (April, 1951): 171-91; Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial American* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966); 89-105; William J. Scheick, “The Grand Design: Jonathan Edwards’ History of the Work of Redemption,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1975): 300-14; John F. Wilson, “Jonathan Edwards as Historian,” *Church History* 46 (March 1977): 5-18; Wilson, “Jonathan Edwards’s Notebooks for ‘A History of the Work of Redemption,’” in *Reformation Conformity and Dissent: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, ed. R. Buick Knox (London: Epworth Press, 1977), 239-54; Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:1-109; Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65-79; McClymond, “A Different Legacy?: The Cultural Turn in Edwards’s Later Notebooks and the Unwritten History of the Work of Redemption,” in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, eds. David W. Kling

focusing on Edwards's literary and typological presentation of his Christological awareness in his millennialism presented in *HWR*.

It is not without good reasons that we address Edwards's Christocentric focus from the perspective of his literary and hermeneutical strategies. Occasionally, Edwardsean scholars notice Edwards's artistic skills shown in presenting his theological thoughts. Some early authors on Edwards would commend him as a "literary artist."⁴ In contrast to Perry Miller who sees Edwards separately as the theologian and the artist, recent commentators such as Michael McClymond maintain that Edwards is an "artful theologian"---his religious thought is a "brilliant exercise in 'artful theology'" and his artistry is demonstrated "most tellingly in his prodigious attempt" to reinterpret the "intellectual traditions of the Eighteenth century."⁵ Despite scholarly effort to appreciate Edwards's artistry, much remains to be done in order to build the connection between his theology and his artful expression. In particular, concerning Edwards's *HWR*, while a handful of researchers have endeavored to analyze Edwards's literary strategies as well as exegetical and/or hermeneutical characteristics, few have analyzed it from the perspective of his eschatology. For example, in his "Editor's Introduction" to *HWR*, John Wilson offers an overview of the literary structure and typological interpretation of this sermon series. However, limited space does not allow Wilson to present a detailed study of Edwards's use of typology in comparison with his predecessors and contemporaries.⁶

and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 16-39; Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 221-71; Wilson, "History," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 210-25; McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 181-90. Additionally, in his influential work, Sang Hyun Lee placed Edwards's historical view in a philosophical structure, but he scarcely mentioned *HWR*. See *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 211-41.

⁴ John Griffith, "Jonathan Edwards as a Literary Artist," *Criticism* 15, no. 2 (1973): 156-73.

⁵ McClymond, *Encounters with God*, 8.

⁶ Wilson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 9:40-61.

Similarly, Stephen Clark briefly points out that *HWR* is “in most regards thoroughly in keeping with early New England historiography.”⁷ Yet he has not provided many details in support of this claim.

Therefore, by comparing his literary strategies and typological approaches with his Protestant predecessors and Puritan contemporaries, this chapter will examine Edwards’s Christocentric focus revealed in his vision of the millennial kingdom. The structure of this chapter is as follows. The first section provides a brief overview of Edwards’s contribution to the Reformed covenant theology, particularly, his Christological focus in the covenant of redemption. Section Two engages with the literary structure of *HWR* to gain insights into two issues. The first one concerns the structure and genre of *HWR* by tracing it back to the less-well-known Scottish divine Robert Millar (1672-1752). The second one deals with the inner theological logic between Edwards’s literary structure and his Christocentric focus. Section Three studies two issues relating to Edwards’s use of typological interpretation to express his Christocentric focus in the millennialism. First, we will compare and contrast Edwards’s innovation in his use of Christological typology with the reformers and Puritans. Second, we will examine his natural typology and consider whether this might challenge the authority of divine revelation.

In examining Edwards’s Christocentric focus in his millennialism, we are interested to see how he expressed his Christological passion in his millennialism with both literary and typological strategies. We will argue that Edwards intentionally structured his *HWR* to communicate his Christocentric concerns. In the meantime, this concern is expressed in both his Christological and natural typology.

⁷ Stephen M. Clark, “Jonathan Edwards: The History of the Work of Redemption,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (1994): 47. In particular, Clark notices that Edwards’s *HWR* shows some similarity with *A Chronological History of New England, in the Form of Annals* (1736) by Thomas Prince (1687-1758).

2. Edwards and Covenant Theology

It is generally agreed that Edwards held a “high and conventional Christology,” and that his Christology is “classically orthodox.”⁸ For instance, John Wilson asserts that Edwards “stood securely in the Calvinist tradition, and his Christocentric position is evident.”⁹ Similarly, Oliver Crisp observes that Edwards remained within the Chalcedonian tradition and never rejected “this traditional doctrine of Western Christianity.”¹⁰ Consequently, as he “endorses Chalcedonian teaching on the person of Christ,” and “embraces federal theology, and makes a thoroughly traditional use of typology,” the only distinctive contribution made by Edwards, as Daniel Pals argues, probably is his “unique emphases on aesthetics and idealism,” though Pals admits that “aesthetics and idealism certainly do not exhaust the complexities of Edwards's Christology.”¹¹

These conventional features of Edwards’s Christology as put forward by the above authors apply neatly to his covenant theology. For instance, McClymond and McDermott argue that, “Contrary to what most Edwards scholars thought in the

⁸ John F. Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:54. The recent works on Edwards’s Christology include Donald L. Gelpi, S.J. “‘Incarnate Excellence’: Jonathan Edwards and an American Theological Aesthetic,” *Religion and the Arts* 2 (1998):443-66; Robert W. Jenson, “Christology,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 72-86; Oliver D. Crisp, “Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Idealism and Christology,” in *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), 43-89; Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, “The Person and Work of Jesus Christ,” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 244-61; Craig Biehl, *The Infinite Merit of Christ: The Glory of Christ's Obedience in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Pilgrim's Rock Press, 2014); S. Mark Hamilton, *A Treatise on Jonathan Edwards, Continuous Creation and Christology* (Fort Worth, TX.: JESociety Press, 2017).

⁹ Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:54.

¹⁰ Oliver D. Crisp, *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Farnham, UK; Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2013), 44-45.

¹¹ Daniel L. Pals, “Several Christologies of the Great Awakening,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 72 (1990), 418, 423.

mid-twentieth century, Edwards embraced covenantal theology.”¹² They point out that, “Edwards inherited this classical federalism from his Puritan forbears, accepted it in principle, and used it extensively.”¹³ Edwards followed the distinction of three covenants in the Reformed tradition: the covenant of redemption by which the three Persons of the Triune God reached an agreement from eternity on redeeming humanity; the covenant of grace through which the humanity receives eternal life by faith; and the covenant of works in which Adam’s perfect obedience is required to receive God’s promise of life.¹⁴

Nevertheless, one should not overlook Edwards’s contributions to traditional Reformed covenant theology. In fact, Edwards, in at least three points, departed from his Reformed tradition of covenant theology.

In the first place, in his Miscellany entries in 1723, the young Edwards challenged the distinction between the covenant of grace and that of redemption. He argued that “the *wrong* distinction... between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption” would lay “the foundation of Arminianism and Neonomianism.”¹⁵ It will make people “value themselves for their own righteousness,”¹⁶ Edwards observed, because this distinction makes faith a condition of the divine redemptive work and “make us apt to depend on our own righteousness.”¹⁷ Edwards surmised

¹² McClymond and McDermott, “Edwards’s Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants,” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 321. The authors in this chapter provide a brief development of Edwards’s thinking on Reformed covenant theology, as well as showing that Edwards embraced “not only the covenants of works, grace, and redemption but also the church and national covenants.”
¹³ McClymond and McDermott, “Edwards’s Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants,” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 324.

¹⁴ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Belfast; Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald International, 2002), 112. See also Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 405. For the details that Edwards departed from his Reformed predecessors, see Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 247; Kin Yip Louie, *The Beauty of the Triune God: The Theological Aesthetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 118-23.

¹⁵ *Misc. 2, WJE* 13:198.

¹⁶ *Misc. 2, WJE* 13:198.

¹⁷ *Misc. 2, WJE* 13:199.

that the covenant of works is the only covenant between God and humanity. He said, “God never made but one with man, to wit, the covenant of works; which never yet was abrogated, but is a covenant [that] stands in full force to all eternity without the failing of one tittle.”¹⁸ In this sense, the covenant of grace, rather than acting as “another covenant made with man upon the abrogation” of the covenant of works, is merely “a covenant made with Christ to fulfill” it.¹⁹ And this covenant of grace “cannot be called a new covenant, or the second covenant, with respect to the covenant of works,” because the covenant of works “is not grown old yet but is an eternal immutable covenant, of which one jot nor tittle will never fail.”²⁰ Edwards insisted that the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption are the same. “The covenant that God the Father makes with believers is indeed the very same with the covenant of redemption made with Christ before the foundation of the world.”²¹ Edwards therefore proposed that we “leave off distinguishing the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption”²² and take a “proper alternative.”²³ In his own words,

There have never been two covenants, in strictness of speech, but only two ways constituted of performing of this covenant: the first constituting Adam the representative and federal head, and the second constituting Christ the federal head; the one a dead way, the other a living way and an everlasting one.²⁴

In this sense, “the second covenant” [of redemption] “is as much a covenant of works as the first [covenant constituting with Adam]”.²⁵

Secondly, from 1739 onwards, Edwards continued to develop this framework of covenant theology. In particular, he aligned himself with Scottish

¹⁸ *Misc.* 30, *WJE* 13:217.

¹⁹ *Misc.* 30, *WJE* 13:217.

²⁰ *Misc.* 35, *WJE* 13:219.

²¹ *Misc.* 1091, *WJE* 20:477-478.

²² *Misc.* 2, *WJE* 13:199.

²³ McClymond and McDermott, “Edwards’s Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants,” 325.

²⁴ *Misc.* 35, *WJE* 13:219.

²⁵ *Misc.* 2, *WJE* 13:197.

divines such as Thomas Boston (1676-1732) who maintained that the covenants of redemption and grace are *one and the same*. Yet, as we observed earlier, Edwards did not agree with Boston's claim that Christ is the condition of the covenant of grace.²⁶ In contrast, he was convinced that if there is any true covenantal condition, it should be perfect obedience required in the covenant of works and fulfilled by the incarnate Christ.²⁷ "By Christ's performing the condition of the covenant [of works]," Edwards asserted that, "the condition is as if it were performed by them" who are the church, "His mystical body."²⁸

While Edwards noted Christ's subordination in meeting the condition of the covenant of works, he highlighted the ontological equality of the three Persons at the same time. In Christ's fulfilling the covenantal condition through His perfect obedience, "there is a subordination of the persons of the Trinity." Edwards observed that, "one acts from another, and under another, and with a dependence on another," particularly, in the divine redemptive work in which "the Father in that affair acts as Head of the Trinity, and Son under him."²⁹ Nevertheless, this subordination and order of acting in economic Trinity does not undermine the ontological equality in the immanent Trinity, because it is "not from any proper natural subjection one to another," but is "established by mutual free agreement," so that "the Son... acts as

²⁶ McClymond and McDermott, "Edwards's Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants," 326. For Boston's *A view of the covenant of grace from the sacred records*, see *A view of the covenant of grace from the sacred records: wherein the parties in that covenant, the making of it, its parts conditional and promissory, and the administration thereof, are distinctly considered. Together with the trial of a saving personal in-being in it, ... To which is subjoined a memorial concerning personal and family-fasting ...* By ... Thomas Boston (Edinburgh: Reprinted in the year 1747. and sold in North-Britain by most part of the booksellers in towns or country, who formerly sold the other parts of the author's works). For Edwards's use of this volume (Edinburgh, 1734), see *WJE* 26:224.

²⁷ McClymond and McDermott, "Edwards's Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants," 325.

²⁸ *Misc.* 2, *WJE* 13:199.

²⁹ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:430.

one wholly in his own right... being not under subjection or prescription in his consenting to what is proposed to him..."³⁰

In his *Discourse on the Trinity*, which was continually drafted and gradually developed from the early 1730s to mid-1740s, Edwards utilized social language to further elaborate the economy of the persons of Trinity.³¹ At the same time, he also employed a psychological analogy to describe his understanding of the intra-Trinitarian relationship: God, the idea of God, and the delight in God.³² According to this analogy, Christ is depicted as God's self-knowledge: the "most perfect idea" and "an exact image and representation of himself."³³ While this self-knowledge is a "spiritual idea" that "must necessarily be conceived to be something distinct from his mere direct existence," it is "an express and perfect image" of the Godhead.³⁴ By using this analogy, Edwards emphasized the ontological equality of the three Persons: "all the persons should be co-eternal... they are every way equal in the society or family of the three... equal in honor..."³⁵ Even though each Person has "his peculiar honor in the society or family" and "personal glory entirely distinct", for Edwards, this is not a "distinct essence."³⁶ Each Person may "have a peculiar personal dignity that another has not," but the three Persons "appear as equal in their personal dignity."³⁷ For instance, while the "Father and the Son principally stand in

³⁰ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:431, 436.

³¹ *WJE* 21:107-45. In the *Discourse*, there are other materials deserving discussion (e. g. Edwards's view of essence and person, his understanding of the eternal generation of the second person, as well as his ascetic contribution to the doctrine of Trinity), but we will leave these topics to our further research on his view of the Trinity.

³² Some may argue that it may be read as another analogy, viz., the social analogy. But we agree with Strobel that *here* Edwards does not intend to provide two distinct models of Trinity. For further detail, see Kyle C. Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013; paperback edition in 2014), 68-69.

³³ *WJE* 21:113.

³⁴ *WJE* 21:114.

³⁵ *WJE* 21:135.

³⁶ *WJE* 21:135, 146.

³⁷ *WJE* 21:146-47.

the place of lords, and the Holy Ghost is servant to them both, and commanding chiefly belongs to them,” Edwards also argued, “the Holy Ghost has this peculiar honor: that sinning against commands is most heinous and unpardonable when leveled against the Holy Ghost.”³⁸ Therefore, this ontological equality may be found both in their “personal glory” and their “economical glory.”³⁹ And this equal glory is expressed in the work of redemption in which “God designed to accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree... and to glorify each person in the Godhead.”⁴⁰ In particular, it is God’s design in this redemptive work to “glorify his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ” and “by the Son to glorify the Father.”⁴¹ This mutual glorification in the work of redemption is accomplished on the basis of the “execution of the eternal *covenant of redemption*.”⁴²

Thirdly, as Edwards “was not satisfied with its customary forms,” he stressed the necessity of the covenant of redemption.⁴³ Undoubtedly, the Father “merely by his economical prerogative, can direct and prescribe to the other persons of the Trinity in all things not below their economical character.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, “the Father can’t prescribe to other persons” to fulfill a certain task “that imply something below the infinite majesty and glory of [the] divine person,” because such a task would require one of the three Persons to lay aside “the divine glory, and stooping infinitely below the height of that glory.”⁴⁵ Under this condition, Edwards argued, it is beyond the Father’s authority to direct or prescribe any of the other two Persons, *unless* there is “a new establishment by free covenant empowering him [the

³⁸ *WJE* 21:146-47.

³⁹ *WJE* 21:147.

⁴⁰ *WJE* 9:125.

⁴¹ *WJE* 9:125.

⁴² *WJE* 9:118. Emphasis added.

⁴³ McClymond and McDermott, “Edwards’s Calvinism and Theology of the Covenants,” 324.

⁴⁴ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

⁴⁵ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

Father] so to do.”⁴⁶ This is exactly what happened in Christ’s incarnation and humiliation, during which “his descending to a state infinitely below his divine dignity.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the Father “has no right to prescribe to him with regard to those things, unless as invested with a right by free covenant engagements of his Son.”⁴⁸ And this is the covenant of redemption. Owing to the establishment of the covenant of redemption and Christ’s voluntary agreement of his abasement, the work of redemption becomes possible.

Edwards went further and asserted that with the establishment of the covenant of redemption, there is a significant advancement in Christ’s economical seat. In arguing that “by the covenant of redemption the Son of God is... advanced into the economical seat of another person, viz. the Father,” Edwards further claimed that, “in being by this covenant established as the Lord and Judge of the world in the Father’s stead, and as his vicegerent, and as ruling in the Father’s throne, the throne... belongs to him (Christ) in his economical station.”⁴⁹ In other words, by the establishment of this intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption, the Father institutes the Son as *Lord* and *Judge*. Christ’s voluntary entry to this covenant, in fact, enables him to realize and demonstrate his central role in the process of his accomplishing the work of redemption. On the basis of his voluntary engagements in this covenant, the Son “acts altogether freely... in undertaking the great and difficult and self-abasing work of our redemption.”⁵⁰ In return, the Father makes promises and grants Christ “the honor and reward” which originally belonged to the Father.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

⁴⁷ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

⁴⁸ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

⁴⁹ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:435.

⁵⁰ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

⁵¹ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:436.

It might seem that Edwards's understanding of covenant theology is "not at all unique or original," because many of his predecessors such as Johannes Cocceius and Kaspar Olevianus held similar views.⁵² Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that in Edwards's covenant theology, particularly in his discussion and development of the covenant of redemption, there is a clear and evident Christocentric focus and stress. This arguably results in one innovative development coupled with a strong emphasis upon two further themes embedded in the tradition he inherits.

First of all, Edwards is innovative in *justifying* the need for this covenant of redemption in an intra-Trinitarian structure, which constitutes a "unique" contribution to the Reformed covenantal tradition.⁵³ In so doing, Edwards stressed that the redemptive work is unique, requiring a specific intra-Trinitarian covenant. More importantly, he provided an interpretative framework for addressing the apparent theological inconsistency in the Reformed reading of the Triune relationships and the divine redemptive work, which reflects a tension between the ontological equality of the three Persons and Christ's abasement in His incarnation and atonement.

Secondly, Edwards argues that the covenant of redemption is a "crucial preparation" for Christ's work of redemption as the "emanation of God's glory ad extra."⁵⁴ On the basis of this preparation, when the fall altered the relationship between God and creatures, there is "no mercy exercised towards fallen man but

⁵² Michael David Bush, *Jesus Christ in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (PhD. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003), 84.

⁵³ Louie, *The Beauty of the Triune God*, 119.

⁵⁴ See Bush, *Jesus Christ in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 111. Bush believes that Edwards "contended for the rest of his life that the only covenant between God *per se* and the saints that ever was made was the covenant of works, and the covenant of redemption is an inner-Trinitarian agreement between the Father and the Son about how the covenant of works would be fulfilled", p. 106.

through a mediator.”⁵⁵ The terms of the covenant of redemption were triggered and “Christ began to do the part of an intercessor” immediately afterwards.⁵⁶

Thirdly, Edwards stressed the ontological equality of the three Persons in the covenant of redemption. Since “the persons of the Trinity are not inferior one to another in glory and excellency of nature,” Christ, as the Son, is “not inferior to the Father in glory.”⁵⁷ In contrast, Christ’s economic seat was advanced when he voluntarily entered into the covenant of redemption and fulfilled the perfect obedience in the divine redemptive work. This advancement of Christ’s status further confirms the necessity of the covenant of redemption. Since “by the economy of the Trinity it is *the Father’s province* to act as the Lawgiver and Judge and Disposer of the world,”⁵⁸ Christ, either as the Lord or as an incarnate servant, is not “equivalent to the status of the Son within the immanent or economic Trinity.”⁵⁹ Again, an intra-Trinitarian covenant is required, which is the covenant of redemption that “settles the economy of the persons of the Trinity” and ensures that an agreement was reached among the Persons when they “entered into establishing their order of acting in that affair [of redemption], and assigning each one his part and office in that [redemptive] work.”⁶⁰

In the following sections, we will explore Edwards’ presentation of Christ’s centrality in his millennialism, particularly, by examining his use of literary strategies and typological interpretation.

⁵⁵ *WJE* 9:130.

⁵⁶ *WJE* 9:130. See also Bush, *Jesus Christ the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 107-8.

⁵⁷ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:430.

⁵⁸ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:435..

⁵⁹ Louie, *The Beauty of the Triune God*, 129.

⁶⁰ *Misc.* 1062, *WJE* 20:434-35.

3. Edwards's Literary Presentation of Christ's Centrality

In this section, we focus on Edwards's literary presentation of Christ's centrality in his millennialism in *HWR*. This section contains three parts. Part One traces a hitherto missing link between Edwards and the now obscure minister Robert Millar, which suggests Edwards's possible reliance on Millar in his *HWR*. Part Two demonstrates the structural divergences between the two scholars in their historical works, namely Millar's *History of the Church* and Edwards's *HWR*. Part Three discusses the genre differences between the two works and examines the "organizational motif" theory. It will be followed by Part Four which explains these structural and genre divergences by examining Edwards's Christocentric focus in the millennial kingdom.

3.1 Edwards's Possible Reliance on Robert Millar

While it is a challenging task to assess how original Edwards was in employing the narrative structure in his *HWR*, scholars have made great efforts in identifying the possible sources from which Edwards drafted his *HWR*. Among the very few who have made an important contribution is John Wilson, the transcriber of *HWR*. As a result of his search, Wilson identified a few names that include Eusebius (A.D. 260/265-339/340) and Moses Lowman. One was an ancient church historian and the other a seventeenth-century divine.⁶¹

However, one important author that has escaped Wilson's attention is a Scottish clergyman named Robert Millar. And this missing link has recently been

⁶¹ See *WJE* 9:392, n. 4; 394, n. 3; 412, n. 3; 422, n. 3; 457, n. 8.

filled by Darren Schmidt.⁶² Schmidt declares that Edwards relied heavily on Millar's *History of Christianity* and *History of the Church*.⁶³

It is worthwhile to provide a brief introduction to Millar, given his influence on Edwards, his obscurity as a “minister of the gospel at Paisley” and his almost total oblivion among modern thinkers.⁶⁴ For instance, there is only a very short entry (less than one page) on Millar in the *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, introducing him as “apologist and historian” and briefly mentioning his *History of Christianity* and *History of the Church*.⁶⁵ And T. F. Torrance in his well-publicized *Scottish Theology* only mentioned Millar and his works in one short sentence.⁶⁶ In fact, during the first half of the twentieth century, John Foster is the only one who provided some details on Millar's life and works in a short article published in the *International Review of Mission* (1948). According to Foster, Millar's massive two-volume 900-page *History of Christianity* is “one of the earliest books in the English language written with a concern for the evangelization of the world.”⁶⁷

⁶² Darren Schmidt, “‘Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean’: Jonathan Edwards, Robert Millar, and Transatlantic Influence on a History of the Work of Redemption.” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 5, no. 1 (2015): 21-43.

⁶³ For Robert Millar's two works, see *The History of the Propagation of Christianity and the Overthrow of Paganism. Wherein the Christian Religion is Confirmed. The Rise and Progress of Heathenish Idolatry is considered. The Overthrow of Paganism, and the Spreading of Christianity in the several Ages of the Church is Explained. The Present State of Heathens is inquired into; and Methods for their Conversion proposed*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed by Thomas Ruddiman, 1723); and *The History of the Church under the Old Testament, from the Creation of the World: Wherein Also the Affairs and Learning of Heathen Nations before the Birth of Christ, and the State of the Jews from the Babylonish Captivity to the Present Time, Are Particularly Considered: To Which Is Subjoined, a Discourse to Promote the Conversion of the Jews to Christianity*, ed. John Hutton (Edinburgh: Printed by Mr. Thomas and Walter Ruddimans, 1730).

⁶⁴ Ronald E. Davies, “Robert Millar---an Eighteenth Century Scottish Latourette,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1990): 144.

⁶⁵ I. D. Maxwell, “Millar, Robert,” in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 562.

⁶⁶ Torrance writes: “In 1723 Paul [Robert] Millar, a predecessor of John Witherspoon at Paisley Abbey, published a two volume work *A History of the Propagation of Christianity*, followed by another work *A History of the Church under the Old Testament*. . .” See Thomas F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: from John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 229.

⁶⁷ John Foster, “A Scottish Contributor to the Missionary Awakening: Robert Millar of Paisley,” *International Review of Mission* Vol. 37, n. 2 (1948): 138. In addition, a handful of writers mentioned Millar in their works with rather limited circulation. See Gustav Warneck, *Outline of a History of Protestant Missions: from the Reformation to the Present Time* (Edinburgh: Oliphant Anderson &

This relative neglect by modern scholars is in strange contrast to Millar's fame in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the first place, his *History of Christianity* had a wide readership in Scotland and England in the eighteenth century. In a classic work on mission in the nineteenth century, George Smith (1886) regarded Millar's book as "a work of remarkable fervor and scholarship."⁶⁸ Due to the frequent trans-Atlantic traffic in theology, his work quickly drew the attention of American Puritans shortly after its publication in 1723. According to Ronald E. Davies (1990), a number of well-known writers and preachers were influenced by Millar. These included Cotton Mather, Jedidiah Morse (1761-1826) and Jonathan Edwards.⁶⁹ As Harry Stout (2006) discovered, "Edwards turned to the volumes of the historian Robert Millar for information bearing on the expansion of Christianity in the period after the New Testament."⁷⁰ The "volumes" here refer to Millar's *History of Christianity*. Secondly and more direct to our purpose, Edwards actually recorded this book by Millar in his "Catalogue of Reading" and "Account Book."⁷¹ This strongly suggests that he might well have possessed and read this work. In this sense, Schmidt's recent study echoes and supports early scholars' claims on the link between Millar and Edwards. Notably, Schmidt discovers that in addition to *History of Christianity*, Edwards, in his writing and preaching, was evidently inspired by

Ferrier, 1901), 73, n.1; Olav Guttorm Myklebust, *The Study of Missions in Theological Education: An Historical Inquiry into the Place of World Evangelisation in Western Protestant Ministerial Training with particular reference to Alexander Duff's Chair of Evangelistic Theology* (Oslo: Egede Instituttet, 1955), 36, n. 19; 50, n. 2, etc.; Johannes van den Berg, *Constrained by Jesus' Love: An Inquiry into the Motives of the Missionary Awakening in Great Britain in the Period between 1698 and 1815* (Geboren Te Paterson, NJ: J. H. Kok N. V. Kampen, 1956), 58; J. A. DeJong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial expectations in the rise of Anglo-American missions 1640-1810* (Geboren Te Paterson, NJ: J. H. Kok N. V. Kampen, 1970), 113.

⁶⁸ George Smith, *Short history of Christian missions from Abraham and Paul to Carey, Livingstone, and Duff* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), 157-58.

⁶⁹ Davies, "Robert Millar---an Eighteenth Century Scottish Latourette," 144-45. For Edwards's Scottish connections, see Harold P. Simonson, "Jonathan Edwards and His Scottish Connections," *Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 3 (1987): 353-76. But Simonson does not mention anything about Robert Millar.

⁷⁰ For details, see Harry S. Stout, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 24:71.

⁷¹ *WJE* 26:185, 340-41.

another of Millar's works: *History of the Church*, though this has not been mentioned even in the published collection of Edwards's works. In fact, after conducting a careful parallel reading of the two works, Schmidt claims that Edwards in his *HWR* not only cited historical data and its interpretation found in *History of the Church*, but also "adopted more fundamental elements" from Millar, including the latter's "historical framework."⁷² For instance, in Period I of *HWR*, Edwards closely followed Millar's *History of the Church* dividing Old Testament history into six lesser periods with "essentially the same markers: creation or the fall; the flood; Abraham; Moses or Israel's exodus from Egypt; David or Solomon; and the exile to Babylon."⁷³ From these facts, Schmidt concludes that Millar had a remarkable impact on Edwards concerning the "construction of his superstructure" in *HWR*.⁷⁴

3.2 Edwards versus Millar: Structural Divergences

Nevertheless, a more careful reading reveals that in certain aspects Edwards's *HWR* and Millar's *History of the Church* are *structurally* not similar, particularly when one lays the two works side by side.

First, the two works are plotted and structured in different ways. While Millar textured his narrative chronologically and closely following the movements of historical events, Edwards selected specific biblical and historical events and figures in order to *plot* his *HWR* as a redemption drama. Due to this difference in emphasis, Millar presented the historical and biblical events in great detail, but Edwards's narrative is more selective, simplified and critical. In particular, while Millar chronologically arranged the historical events in nine continuous chapters, Edwards

⁷² Schmidt, "Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean," 29.

⁷³ Schmidt, "Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean," 33.

⁷⁴ Schmidt, "Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean," 36.

divided the progress of redemptive history into three periods: Period I, from the fall of man to Christ's incarnation, describes how God prepared the way for Christ's incarnation and his atonement; Period II, from Christ's incarnation to his resurrection, is about how redemption was accomplished; Period III, from Christ's resurrection to the end of the world, concerns the effective application of the accomplished redemption and the final realization of Christ's kingdom.⁷⁵ Each period in turn is split into several smaller sections or "lesser periods."⁷⁶

Secondly and more importantly, the two works cover a different time-span in their narrative base. Although both start from the creation, Edwards ends with the church entering heaven, whereas Millar's *History of the Church* concludes with the events of his own time, i.e. the eighteenth century.⁷⁷ Thus, we can see that while Millar described with great effort the biblical and historical events of the past, Edwards allotted over one sixth of his *HWR* to the events that would occur in the future.⁷⁸ Noticeably, Edwards did *not* divide the three periods evenly. Instead, he paid particular attention to the third one. In fact, despite his belief that the second period is "so much the greatest,"⁷⁹ almost half of *HWR* is allotted to Period III.⁸⁰

From our comparison, although it seems that Schmidt is right about Edwards's reliance on Millar, *HWR* and *History of the Church* are rather different--- and this has not been stressed much in the literature. The structural differences between these two works are rather evident. They are found in overall frameworks, divisions of historical periods and the texture of their narrative base.

⁷⁵ *WJE* 9:127.

⁷⁶ *WJE* 9:129. For a detailed structure analysis by Wilson, see *WJE* 9:74-79.

⁷⁷ *WJE* 9:505-10. Millar, *History of the Church*, 574-610. It is worth noting that Millar's *History of Christianity* ends with a description of events in the fifteenth century. See *History of Christianity* vol. 2, 227-404.

⁷⁸ *WJE* 9: 455-510.

⁷⁹ *WJE* 9:127-128. Emphasis added.

⁸⁰ *WJE* 9:345-528.

3.3 Edwards versus Millar: Genre Divergences

All these structural differences above naturally lead to our examination of the different genres of the two works. Evidently, *History of the Church* is a kind of historical narrative, recording the biblical and world events from the creation (chapter I) to the eighteenth century (chapter IX).⁸¹ *HWR*, on the other hand, is organized as a treatise. Hence, it contains four aspects: observation of text, articulation of doctrine, exposition of doctrine, and application of doctrine.

We must admit at the outset that neither work is historical writing in the modern sense, though both have a historical shape in their narratives of biblical and historical events. Fundamentally, Millar's *History of the Church* is more "historiographical" when viewed from its contents. Edwards's *HWR*, in contrast, is structured like a proto-treatise and plotted as a divine drama based on Edwards's wholistic understanding of God's redemptive work, though it was preached as a sermon series in 1739. Examined from its literary structure and plot, *HWR* has the nature of something between historical writing and a treatise produced by the Puritans. As Wilson observes, the "literary characteristics of the Redemption Discourse [*HWR*] clearly suggest that we can see it as a proto-treatise."⁸² In fact, Edwards's *HWR* is more theological (and less historical) than *History of the Church*, and more historical (and less theological) than a typical Puritan treatise such as John Owen's *Biblical Theology*.⁸³ It is based on the "historical meta-narrative" and is intermingled with various theological ingredients found in the treatises.⁸⁴ As a result, in a dramatic form and along the movement of redemptive history, Edwards weaved

⁸¹ See Millar, "Contents," *History of the Church*, ix.

⁸² Wilson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 9:61.

⁸³ John Owen, *Biblical Theology, or, the Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth: In Six Books*, ed. Stephen P. Westcott (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

⁸⁴ For a detailed discussion of historical metanarrative, see Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:4-12.

a story that “introduced all the major tenets and philosophical underpinnings of Christian theology.”⁸⁵

This is by no means odd, however. One should bear in mind that when Edwards preached this Redemption Discourse in 1739, he probably had a plan to develop it into a proper treatise. Indeed, in his letter to the trustees of the College of New Jersey written on October 19, 1757, Edwards shared his ambition for the projected *A History of the Work of Redemption*: “I have had on my mind and heart (which I long ago began, not with any view to publication) a great work,” he wrote, “which I call *A History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entire new method...”⁸⁶ Therefore, it is quite natural for him to present the Redemption Discourse as a series of sermons that is actually a “single” and “self-contained” theological project.⁸⁷ In this way, he could consider “the affair of Christian Theology... in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ” and demonstrate it as “the grand design of God, and the summum and ultimum of all the divine operations and decrees...*in their historical order*.”⁸⁸ In fact, the project Edwards had in mind for later years, as indicated in his three notebooks on this topic, basically would be a “theological program” rather than a piece of history writing, no matter what it would be called, “History” or “Scheme of Progress” of the Work of Redemption.⁸⁹ In this sense, his *HWR* of 1739 could readily be developed from a proto-treatise into a treatise. And from its form, one may see that “Edwards intended from the outset so to develop it.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Harry S. Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:10.

⁸⁶ *WJE* 16:727. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:10.

⁸⁸ *WJE* 16:727-28. See also Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:10, 62-63.

⁸⁹ For the details of Wilson’s survey of Edwards’s three Notebooks, see “Appendix B: Jonathan Edwards’ Notebook for *A History of the Work of Redemption*,” *WJE* 9:543-56.

⁹⁰ Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:61.

And this leads to our examination of the feasibility of the “organizational motif” theory. It seems that when he was working on his *HWR*, Edwards began to apply the biblical-theological approach in his construction of the treatises and proto-treatises. In fact, it has been observed, that by 1739 the work of redemption, as Edwards’s “imaginative construal” of the biblical story inscribed in the Scriptures, had become the real authority of his theological work which captured his main theological ideas.⁹¹ Nonetheless, one cannot go too far, as Stephen Clark does, to make the claim that *HWR* functions as an “organizational motif” for Edwards’s other treatises that fall along the history-of-redemption time line.⁹² Edwards never wrote a systematic theology or had any intention to write a series of systematic theological works, to the best of our knowledge.

More importantly, there is little evidence to indicate that Edwards had a life-long writing plan of systematically developing his understanding of the divine redemptive work. On the contrary, most of his writings were carried out in response to the urgent needs of his congregations. And this Redemption Discourse is an illustration of this context. In the late 1730s, Edwards experienced numerous internal and external challenges. In particular, many of his parishioners were overwhelmed once again by religious depression and spiritual dullness. In his letter to the Reverend Benjamin Colman on May 19, 1737, Edwards reported, “there is an evident appearance of a general languishing of persons’ lively affections and engaged-ness of heart in religion.”⁹³ However, owing to his reflection on the “little revival” of 1734 to 1735 and his continual perusal of Moses Lowman’s commentary on

⁹¹ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 146, 180.

⁹² Stephen M. Clark, “Jonathan Edwards: The History of the Work of Redemption,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. Spring (1994): 45-58.

⁹³ *WJE* 16:67. See also Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 486-87; Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:22; Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 210-12.

Revelation, Edwards gained a clearer redemptive-historical vision in the years after 1738.⁹⁴ With this redemptive model in place, by 1739 Edwards sensed that he had participated in a grand redemptive historical moment. He thought that he might be able to spark another revival in his congregation.⁹⁵ Therefore, in his preaching he came back to the theme of redemptive history, as he wanted to “keep his congregation focused on the need to preserve the revival spirit.”⁹⁶ So from this perspective, Edwards’s *HWR* is mainly a timely response to the disconcerting reality of a dismal spiritual decline in his congregation, though it *is* a periodical summary of his thinking of redemptive history.

Finally, as a redemptive-historical thinker, in *HWR* Edwards did provide a broad frame of reference in which he made sense of much of the rest of his theology. One may argue that this Redemption Discourse outlines Edwards’s redemptive-historical vision. Hence, it is very important for understanding what would have become his most influential biblical-theological project. Nevertheless, it is still a little presumptuous to argue that this work is the organizational or controlling motif for all his thoughts. In fact, while *HWR* is the closest thing we have to Edwards’s proposed theology cast in the form of a history, it was not until his last years that Edwards finally realized that the biblical-theological approach, expressed in the historical mode, was “the only one suited to the expression of his vast accumulation of theological thought.”⁹⁷ Edwards declared this in his methodological notation written in his notebook in the 1750s:

⁹⁴ For Edwards’s reading of Moses Lowman, see Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:55-59.

⁹⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 189-93; see also Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:22.

⁹⁶ Harry S. Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:37.

⁹⁷ Wilson H. Kimnach, “General Introduction to the Sermons: Jonathan Edwards’ Art of Prophesying,” *WJE* 10:257. See also Kimnach, “The Literary Techniques of Jonathan Edwards,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 377.

Particularly to enquire concerning the things which make a history of past ages to be credible in a present age.

Show how parallel, in many instances, historical evidence of a past age, by the testimony handed down to us, is to the evidence we have of what is presently of the existence and estate of a distant country or nation that we have never seen.

And consider what may be argued from this, that we see, ourselves, to what degree truth is maintained in narration of things past, in our age, and so may argue how it will be through many such ages. For the ages are all continuing. The last half of our age is the first half of another, and so all are interlaced as it were.

We argue in the same manner as that concerning the truth of narrations concerning distant places; so far as we travel, we have opportunity to see with our own eyes how far truth is kept in its carriage through such a distance, etc.⁹⁸

In short, we have argued for two things in this section. The first one is that the works of Edwards and Millar are of different genres. Despite its historic characteristics, *HWR* is something like a proto-treatise, whereas *History of the Church* is more historiographical. Second, while *HWR* provides many insightful clues in our understanding of Edwards's biblical-theological approach, it is not quite appropriate to regard this work as the "organizational motif" for his later writings.

3.4 Christ's Centrality in the Millennial Kingdom

To be fair, it is not Schmidt's major purpose to identify the variances between *HWR* and *History of the Church*. There are a number of angles by which one can address the structural and genre differences, but here we will only suggest one---Edwards's emphasis on Christology in the establishment, expansion and culmination of the divine kingdom. In this section, we will see how Edwards highlighted his Christocentric conviction in the three periods of his *HWR*. In particular, we will focus on his theological approach to Christ's mediatorial work and His Kingship in the millennial kingdom.

⁹⁸ MS notebook, "Things to Be Particularly Inquired Into and Written Upon," Edwards Collection, (Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University), 24, 26, cited by Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:8 and Kimmach, "General Introduction to the Sermons," *WJE* 10:257.

The purpose of *HWR* is to display God's sovereignty over the redemptive work. For Edwards, God is "the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending of all things" and is in immediate control of every moment of the whole scheme of his divine providence.⁹⁹ In particular, an essential unifying factor in Edwards's *HWR* is Christ's centrality in the whole process of the establishment and expansion of the divine kingdom. According to Edwards, "Christ in all things has the preeminence."¹⁰⁰ Christ's preeminence is highlighted at every stage of the redemptive work. Accordingly, *HWR* is *structured* to highlight the centrality of Christ.

Firstly, at the beginning of his Redemption Discourse, Edwards repeatedly stressed that *as soon as* man fell, Christ embarked on his mediatorial work:

As soon as man ever fell, Christ the eternal Son of God clothed himself with his mediatorial character and therein presented himself before the Father. He immediately stepped in between a holy, infinite, offended majesty and offending humankind, and was accepted in his interposition; and so wrath was prevented from going forth in the full execution of that ensuing curse that man had brought on himself.¹⁰¹

Edwards believed that it is due to God's mercy that Christ started his redemptive work *immediately*. He argued that after man's fall, God the Father "would no more have any immediate concern with this world of humankind... but only through a mediator."¹⁰² Therefore, Christ as the mediator must step into this critical situation without delay, standing between the sinful man and the righteous God, because there is "no mercy exercised towards man but what is obtained through Christ's intercession."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *WJE* 9:515.

¹⁰⁰ *WJE* 9:518.

¹⁰¹ *WJE* 9:130.

¹⁰² *WJE* 9:131.

¹⁰³ *WJE* 9:130.

Secondly, Edwards asserted that Christ was to continue His mediatorial work “throughout all ages of the world.”¹⁰⁴ The work of redemption began with man’s fall and will culminate in a glorious eternity. During the whole process, Christ is the very center of all historical events. All in all, Edwards mentioned Christ’s person and His work more than 1,500 times in *HWR*. In the progress of the divine redemptive work, Christ executes all his offices in his care about fallen man: teaching them in the exercise of his prophetic office, interceding for them in the exercise of the priestly office, and administrating them in the exercise of his kingly office.¹⁰⁵

Structurally, Edwards demonstrated the importance of the incarnate Christ’s life and His work in his uneven division of the three periods. While the second period covers merely around thirty years---rather short in comparison with other two that extend over thousands of years---it stands equally as one indispensable and essential part of three historical periods. As Edwards admitted,

It may be some may be ready to think this is a very unequal division, and it is so. Indeed in some respects *it is so because the second period is so much the greatest*. For though it be so much shorter than either of the other, being but between thirty and forty years whereas both the other contain thousands, yet in this affair that we are now upon it is indeed more than both the other.¹⁰⁶

And this unequal emphasis is further illustrated by Edwards’s understanding of the purpose of each period. For him, all dispensations in the first period are merely preparatory for Christ’s coming, because “though there were many things done in the affair of redemption... there was nothing done to purchase redemption.”¹⁰⁷ All these things done in this period, according to Edwards, as “lesser salvations and deliverances,” were “all but so many images and forerunners of the great salvation,”

¹⁰⁴ *WJE* 9:130.

¹⁰⁵ *WJE* 9:130.

¹⁰⁶ *WJE* 9:127-128, Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁷ *WJE* 9:128, 295.

and the great salvation would be executed by Christ in the second period.¹⁰⁸ The third period, similarly, serves as the accomplishment and the consummation of Christ's redemptive work, displaying "the great effect or success of Christ's purchase."¹⁰⁹

By arranging the periods in such a manner, Christ's humiliation and his purchase of redemption in the second period are rightly focused and strongly highlighted. This explains the fact that Edwards gave a lengthy and careful exposition on Christ's humiliation and exaltation in the second period.¹¹⁰ He placed considerable emphasis on this "most remarkable article of time" because he firmly believed that it is not only Christ's death that is important, but also the entire life that made the purchase of redemption.¹¹¹ It is during the period of Christ's humiliation, from his incarnation to his crucifixion, that the purchase of redemption was achieved. Christ's ascension, together with his resurrection, secured the success of his purchase.¹¹² Therefore, Edwards declared that "both Christ's satisfaction for sin and also his meriting happiness by his righteousness were carried on through the whole time of his humiliation."¹¹³

Thirdly, in his *HWR* Edwards depicts Christ as the eschatological king. Christ's divine administration of redemptive history naturally leads to completely different destinies for creatures. While the duration of God's enemies is limited and "short-lived," the continuance of Christ's church is "forever" and everlasting.¹¹⁴ This is to show that, unlike Millar's *History of the Church*, Edwards's *HWR* is highly

¹⁰⁸ *WJE* 9:129.

¹⁰⁹ *WJE* 9:344.

¹¹⁰ *WJE* 9:294-362.

¹¹¹ *WJE* 9:294.

¹¹² *WJE* 9:295.

¹¹³ *WJE* 9:306, 344-45.

¹¹⁴ *WJE* 9:113-16.

teleological and eschatological in nature. In fact, from the very outset, Edwards intended to approach his subject from the teleological and eschatological perspectives. In the first sermon of *HWR*, he declared that “the time which God continues to carry on the work of salvation for his church [is] both with respect to the beginning and the end.”¹¹⁵ By making this statement, Edwards insisted that the establishment and expansion of Christ’s kingdom is “not ending till these generations end at the end of the world.”¹¹⁶ In his letter to the trustees in 1757, Edwards intended to continue to apply, in his projected work, the historical mode to express his teleological and eschatological vision. This projected work would surely point to the end of the world: “till at last we come to the general resurrection, last judgment, and consummation of all things...”¹¹⁷ As what he did in his *HWR*, Edwards would conclude his redemptive-historical scheme “with the consideration of that perfect state of things, which shall be finally settled, to last for eternity.”¹¹⁸

In fact, this eschatological perspective is closely linked with Edwards’s understanding of God’s design of redemption. From the very beginning, Edwards listed the “main things as designed to be accomplished...when the whole work [of redemption] will appear completely finished.”¹¹⁹ This comprises God’s final triumph over his enemies, the restoration and reconstruction of all things destroyed in the fall of man, the unification of God’s creation in Christ, the glorification of the whole church, and the glorification of the Trinity.¹²⁰ Obviously, none of these can be completely achieved until the end of the world. Based on this understanding of God’s grand design of His redemptive work, Edwards’s scheme in *HWR* is to manifest the

¹¹⁵ *WJE* 9:116.

¹¹⁶ *WJE* 9:116.

¹¹⁷ *WJE* 16:728.

¹¹⁸ *WJE* 16:728.

¹¹⁹ *WJE* 9:122-26, citation is on 122-23.

¹²⁰ *WJE* 9:122-26.

whole, rather than the partial, process of the work of redemption. This fact explains why Edwards ended his Redemption Discourse with the church entering heaven, while Millar's *History of the Church* came to an end in his own time and *History of Christianity* ends with his description of the historical events of the fifteenth century.¹²¹

More importantly, the teleological focus in *HWR* reveals Edwards's Christocentric conviction. Edwards viewed the very purpose of God's creation as to prepare a kingdom for Christ---the design of Christ's atonement is to lay a foundation for the overthrow of Satan's kingdom. To the extent that Satan's reign is defeated, and the kingdom of Christ is set up in the world, the world is brought to its end, and the eternal state of things will be set up. Therefore, Edwards allotted almost half of *HWR* to Period III.¹²² In this period, one can clearly see Edwards's awareness that Christ is the eschatological King. In this period, Christ accomplished the thing that is much greater than what he has done while he was on earth.¹²³ The two most essential issues, viz. the full realization of the millennial kingdom and the destruction of Satan's kingdom, are accomplished in this period. Finally, Christ will have "his most perfect triumph over sin, and Satan...and death and hell" and thus he will be "most perfectly glorified."¹²⁴ Christ will appear in his kingly glory to receive the redeemed church. He will bestow upon his people the heavenly blessedness and glory. Meanwhile, as the "glorious judge," Christ will pronounce a final condemnation to his enemies, i.e. the devil and the wicked. In this way, Edwards demonstrated that while the end time is the fulfilment and "sum of God's works of

¹²¹ *WJE* 9:479; 505-10. Millar, *History of the Church*, 574-610.

¹²² *WJE* 9:345-528.

¹²³ *WJE* 9:345.

¹²⁴ *WJE* 9:509.

providence,” it is also the full realization of Christ’s millennial kingdom,¹²⁵ during which Christ’s kingly glory will be most significantly manifested, as what Edwards quoted from the Book of Revelation, “It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Rev. 22:13).¹²⁶

To sum up, by employing various literary techniques including structural and genre strategies, in *HWR* Edwards succeeded in displaying Christ’s centrality in the establishment and realization of His millennial kingdom. In particular, Christ began his mediatorial work from the very beginning; his indispensable involvement continues in the whole process. As his ascension inaugurated the glorious latter days, Christ’s kingship will be fully revealed when his millennial kingdom is completely realized at the end of the world. In so doing, Edwards stressed his Christocentric focus in his vision of the millennial kingdom. For him, “all the purposes of God are purposes which he hath purposed in Christ” and that Christ is “before all, and above all” because “all things [are] consist by him, and are governed by him, and are for him.”¹²⁷

4. Typological Interpretation of Christ’s Centrality in Edwards’s Millennialism

In section two, we focused principally on the structural and genre divergences between Edwards’s *HWR* and Millar’s *History of the Church* and have investigated how Edwards’s thinking of Christ’s centrality impacts the literary strategies of his Redemption Discourse. Having done so, we will now explore how he communicated his Christocentric focus through a typological approach. In particular, we will discuss his Christological typology and natural typology against a Reformed

¹²⁵ *WJE* 9:513.

¹²⁶ *WJE* 16:728.

¹²⁷ *WJE* 9:502-9, 518.

backdrop. At the end of this section, we will attempt to answer the question whether his natural typology will end up undermining the authority of divine revelation.

4.1 Typology in the Reformed Tradition

In his article mentioned above, Schmidt correctly recognizes Edwards's use of typology: "Scripture for both authors contained keys by which to unlock the meaning of, and to organize, their historical material...Repeatedly, Edwards's identification of types agrees with Millar's."¹²⁸ To justify this claim, Schmidt provides a number of examples to demonstrate the "typological correlations" between Millar's interpretation and that of Edwards.¹²⁹

Millar is not the only influence on Edwards's typological view, however. Conversely, at the time when Edwards was composing his *HWR*, he was deeply rooted in the Puritan-Protestant figural tradition. In fact, even the reformers did not "entirely reject the validity of typological interpretation," as Wallace Anderson observes.¹³⁰ For instance, in examining the differences between the two Testaments, John Calvin stated that the Old Testament types are "in the absence of the reality" and "showed but an image and shadow in place of the substance;" whereas "the New Testament reveals the very substance of truth as present."¹³¹ And Calvin stressed that in his works this difference would be "mentioned almost wherever the New Testament is contrasted with the Old."¹³² Martin Luther went further and stated that he would agree with the traditional four-sense approach---seeking for the historical,

¹²⁸ Schmidt, "'Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean,'" 31-32.

¹²⁹ Schmidt, "'Different Streams . . . Into the Same Great Ocean,'" 32.

¹³⁰ Wallace E. Anderson, "Editor's Introduction to 'Images of Divine Things' and 'Types,'" *WJE* 11:5-6. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 177.

¹³¹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 453.

¹³² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 453. See also Anderson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 11:5-6.

allegorical, typological and anagogical meaning behind the biblical texts---as long as it would not be applied in the process of “establishing a doctrine of faith.”¹³³

Among the Puritans, Samuel Mather (1626-1671), the son of Richard Mather (1596-1669) and the brother of Increase Mather, was undoubtedly a master in the typological interpretation of Scripture. His most influential work, *The figures or types of the Old Testament* was published in Dublin in 1683 and had three reprints owing to its popularity. The significance of Mather’s work is widely recognized by modern scholars. While Mason Lowance thinks that it “systematized typological exegesis for the New England Puritans in a new way,”¹³⁴ others see it as a “standard authority” in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹³⁵ The second edition, which appeared in London in 1705, was listed in Edwards’s “Catalogues” and his “Account books.”¹³⁶ This proves Edwards’s possession of this work and his possible study of it.

4.2 Christological Typology in Edwards’s Millennialism

Being born in this typological tradition, Edwards remarked that types are “a certain sort of language, as it were, in which God is wont to speak to us.”¹³⁷ His writings on typology are mainly collected in but not confined to three notebooks: “Types,” “Image of Divine Things” and “Types of Messiah.”¹³⁸

¹³³ Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, eds., *Lectures on Galatians: Luther’s Works, Volume 27* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1964), 311. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 177.

¹³⁴ Mason I. Lowance, *The Language of Canaan: Metaphor and Symbol in New England from the Puritans to the Transcendentalists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 80-81.

¹³⁵ Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 11:27.

¹³⁶ Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament, by Which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel Were Preached and Shadowed to the People of God of Old. Explained and Improved in Sundry Sermons*, ed. Nathaniel Mather (London: Printed for Nath. Hillier, 1705). See also *WJE* 26:128, 340. The first edition of this work was published in 1683. In this chapter, we follow what Edwards did and cite from the edition of 1705 whenever necessary.

¹³⁷ *WJE* 11:150.

¹³⁸ See *WJE* 11:50-328.

Particularly, Edwards laid much emphasis on Christology in his typological interpretation. He insisted that types in the Old Testament “could be interpreted as signifying truths that Christ made manifest and which are revealed through the New Testament.”¹³⁹ And he believed that the reader of the Old Testament would frequently find providential, personal and institutional types of Christ.¹⁴⁰ As a matter of fact, in his early years, Edwards declared in his “Miscellanies” entry No. 362 that in the Old Testament “*Almost everything... was typical of gospel things*” concerning Christ’s person and the divine work of establishing His kingdom. Specifically, he argued that

[P]ersons were typical persons, their actions were typical actions, the cities were typical cities, the nation of the Jews and other nations were typical nations, the land was a typical land, God’s providences towards them were typical providences, their worship was typical worship, their houses were typical houses, their magistrates typical magistrates, their clothes typical clothes, and indeed the world was a typical world.¹⁴¹

Owing to his emphasis on Christ’s person and work, Glenn Richard Kreider rightly points out that the role of Christology in Edwards’s typology indicates Christ’s centrality in his theological system. Therefore, Edwards’s use of typology is regarded as a particular hermeneutical form and is labelled as “Christological typology.”¹⁴² And it is clear that in drafting his *HWR*, particularly in the first period of redemptive history, Edwards intensively applied this Christological typology to manifest Christ’s central role in the preparation of His kingdom. The following three examples illustrate his methodology.

Firstly, many great *events* in the Old Testament are the providential types of Christ. One instance is Israel’s Exodus. Edwards read it as the type of Christ’s divine

¹³⁹ Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 11:6.

¹⁴⁰ *WJE* 9: 284-85. See also Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:59; Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 11:6.

¹⁴¹ *Misc.* 362, *WJE* 13:435. Emphasis added.

¹⁴² See Glenn Richard Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1--8:1* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), 287.

work and his triumph over sin and Satan.¹⁴³ As Edwards announced, “the redemption of the children of Israel out of Egypt... indeed it was the *greatest type of Christ’s redemption* of any providential event whatsoever;” and the church was brought out of Egypt and redeemed “from hard service and cruel bondage, as Christ redeems his people from the cruel slavery of sin and Satan.”¹⁴⁴

Secondly, the biblical giants and heroes in the Old Testament repeatedly serve as the personal types of Christ, in order to depict Christ as a conqueror and redeemer. For instance, Joseph’s salvation of the house of Israel was “very much a semblance of the salvation of Christ,” and his ups and downs foreshadow Christ’s humiliation and exaltation.¹⁴⁵ Joshua stood as “an eminent type of Christ” and even “bore the name of Christ.”¹⁴⁶ And the story of Gideon’s victory with only 300 hundred warriors pre-figures Christ’s conquering the world “with a little handful of disciples.”¹⁴⁷ Most significant of all, King David, as the “greatest personal type of Christ,” typifies Christ’s reign for which the crown of Israel is preserved in the same family until Jesus Christ came to be crowned in his baptism.¹⁴⁸

Thirdly, for Edwards, Christ is the antitype of the significant symbols that are the institutional types found in the Old Testament. For one thing, the institutional sacrifices are the first types to foreshow Christ’s coming, by which Christ especially “exhibited himself in his visible church in his priestly office.”¹⁴⁹ For another, Edwards thought the temple was “a great type of three things”: in addition to the church of Christ and heaven, Christ, particularly His human nature, is the antitype of

¹⁴³ *WJE* 9:175-78, 244-49.

¹⁴⁴ *WJE* 9:175. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵ *WJE* 9:171.

¹⁴⁶ *WJE* 9:192.

¹⁴⁷ *WJE* 9:231.

¹⁴⁸ *WJE* 9:204, 223.

¹⁴⁹ *WJE* 9:136-37.

the temple.¹⁵⁰ According to Edwards, the central function of the temple is closely connected with Christ's person and his work: it is "the house where Christ dwelt till he came to dwell in the temple of his body;" it is the place of worship and sacrifice being offered till the incarnate Christ comes; it is where the pouring of the Holy Spirit took place after Christ's ascension; and it is in the temple that the apostles kept teaching and preaching about Christ's atonement and his work of redemption.¹⁵¹

Therefore, by finding providential, personal and institutional types in the Old Testament, Edwards highlighted Christ's centrality in the whole process of the preparation of His Kingdom. Note, however, Edwards's Christological typology is already implanted in the Reformed tradition of typological interpretation of Christ's centrality in God's providence and redemption. Calvin, for instance, on many occasions would interpret the Old Testament texts typologically and refer many of them to Christ. As with Edwards, Calvin also argued that the Egyptian bondage of Israel must be seen "as a type of the spiritual captivity in which all of us are held bound," until Christ "our heavenly Vindicator, having freed us by the power of his arm, leads us into the Kingdom of freedom."¹⁵² And he thought that King David was a type of Christ, though this "surely does not apply to others," he insisted.¹⁵³ Another example is Samuel Mather who emphatically defined type as "*some outward or sensible thing ordained of God under the Old Testament, to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New.*"¹⁵⁴ Mather argued that every type must be interpreted in the light of Christ's person and His work: "we must look beyond the

¹⁵⁰ WJE 9:224.

¹⁵¹ WJE 9:224-26.

¹⁵² Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 381.

¹⁵³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, 885.

¹⁵⁴ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 52. Emphasis original.

shadow, to the Substance, to the Truth and the Mystery of it: *And this is Christ and the Gospel*, as future, and hereafter to be exhibited.”¹⁵⁵

Nevertheless, Edwards viewed typology more expansively than his Protestant and Puritan forefathers and peers. This may explain why in his writings Edwards often interchangeably used various terms, including *image*, *shadow*, *type*, *representation*, and *symbol*.¹⁵⁶ In particular, Edwards used Christological typology more frequently and extensively than most of his Puritan colleagues. For instance, Kreider observes that for Edwards not only the Old Testament, but “all of Scripture is typical of Christ and his work of redemption.”¹⁵⁷

More importantly, Edwards frequently directed his Christological typology to eschatological events. In fact, as Edwards was distinctively finding types in the two Testaments, he applied Christological typology to communicate his thinking of the realization of the millennial kingdom. Wilson notices that Edwards sought to “utilize the New Testament passages and events in the life of the Christian church... to interpret more fully the future.”¹⁵⁸ Lowance also observes that by 1739 Edwards had realized that he could use the biblical types and prophecies to interpret the relationship between the present and the inauguration of the millennium. In 1739, Edwards wrote the following words,

My heart has been much on the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in the world... When I have read histories of past ages, the pleasantest thing in all my reading has been, to read of the kingdom of Christ being promoted.... And my mind has been much entertained and delighted, with the Scripture promises and prophecies, of the future glorious advancement of Christ’s kingdom on earth.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 11:8-9.

¹⁵⁷ Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards’s Interpretation of Revelation 4:1--8:1*, 287, 285.

¹⁵⁸ Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:47;

¹⁵⁹ *WJE* 16:800.

Indeed, this eschatological tendency can be easily found in his *HWR* where Edwards evidently emphasizes the progressive realizing of Christ's kingdom alongside his application of typological interpretation. One of the numerous examples that Edwards cited relates to the destruction of the Roman Empire as Christ's judgment. And he regarded Rev. 6:12 as a type of the Day of Judgment. He wrote,

Now is come the end of the old heathen world in the principal part of it, the Roman empire. And this great revolution and change of the state of the world, with that terrible destruction of the great men that had been persecutors, is compared in the sixth chapter of Revelation to the end of the world, and Christ coming to judgment in Rev. 6:12, . . . though it more remotely has respect to the day of judgment, or *this was a type of it*.¹⁶⁰

Owing to Edwards's eschatological focus in his Christological typology, some scholars such as McClymond and McDermott rightly regard this typological interpretation as "*apocalyptic or eschatological*."¹⁶¹

To conclude this section, Edwards Christological typology is deeply rooted in his Protestant and Puritan typological tradition. In *HWR*, his use of Christological typology contributes to Christ's centrality in both the preparation and realization of His kingdom. Particularly, Edwards's Christological typology shows an evident *apocalyptic or eschatological* focus. Frequently, his application of typological interpretation points to the full realization of the millennial kingdom at the end of the world. Moreover, by incorporating nature and history, his use of Christological typology is more extensive than that of his Reformed forefathers and peers. This leads to a discussion of his natural typology in the next section.

¹⁶⁰ *WJE* 9:397. Emphasis added.

¹⁶¹ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 176. Emphasis added.

4.3 Christ's Centrality Communicated via a Natural Typology

Having examined Edwards's Christological typology, in this section we shall investigate the issue of his Christocentric focus expressed through a natural typology.

There are two parts in this section. In Part One, we explore how Edwards communicated his Christological concern through a natural typology that functions as a "vertical typology." It will be followed by Part Two in which we discuss Edwards's departure in his natural typology from his Reformed colleagues. In particular, we will evaluate Edwards's defense of this standpoint in the controversy over his natural typology.

4.3.1 Christocentric Focus Expressed via a Natural Typology

Perry Miller is probably among the first to notice Edwards's natural typology. Miller observes that while Edwards's "readings of the types within the Bible seem to be quite traditional," he actually moved beyond his Reformed and Puritan predecessors by extending his use of typology "into nature and history."¹⁶² This discovery has also been made independently by other scholars such as Wallace Anderson, John Wilson, Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott.¹⁶³

In fact, Edwards asserted that the system of beings could be divided into "the typical world and antitypical world."¹⁶⁴ The inferior, more external and imperfect part of the universe, for Edwards, is merely "typical of the superior, more spiritual, perfect and durable part of it."¹⁶⁵ More importantly, for Edwards, the relationship between the created world and spiritual things is "much of the same kind as is

¹⁶² See the detailed discussion in Perry Miller, "Introduction," *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, ed. Perry Miller (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1948), 27ff. Quotation is on page 27.

¹⁶³ See Anderson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 11:3, 9-10; Wilson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 9:48-50; McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 125-29.

¹⁶⁴ *WJE* 11:191.

¹⁶⁵ *WJE* 11:191.

between the types of the Old Testament and their antitypes.”¹⁶⁶ Therefore, he declared “the material and natural world is typical of the moral, spiritual and intelligent world, or the City of God.”¹⁶⁷ And he was convinced that God by His wisdom deliberately created this inner logic and connection between the inferior creatures and superior ones:

And it’s agreeable to God’s wisdom that it should be so, that the inferior and shadowy parts of his works should be made to represent those things that are more real and excellent, spiritual and divine, to represent the things that immediately concern himself and the highest parts of his work.¹⁶⁸

Based on this conviction, Edwards observed the resemblance between beasts and men, as well as that between plants and animals:

So it is God’s way in the natural world to make inferior things in conformity and analogy to the superior, so as to be the images of them. Thus *the beasts are made like men*: in all kinds of them there is an evident respect had to the body of man... Thus they have the same senses, the same sensitive organs, the same members... And from the lowest animal to the highest you will find an analogy, though the nearer you come to the highest, the more you may observe of analogy. And so *plants*, that are yet an inferior set of beings, *they are in many things made in imitation of animals*.¹⁶⁹

Moreover, Edwards used many natural things as shadows, images and types to refer to God’s being and His work. For example, in his “Miscellanies,” Edwards used the sun as an image of the Trinity:

We have a lively image of this Trinity in the sun. The Father is as the substance of the sun; the Son is as the brightness and glory of the disk of the sun; the Holy Ghost is as the heat and continually emitted influence, the emanation by which the world is enlightened, warmed, enlivened and comforted. The various sorts of rays and their beautiful colors do well represent the various beautiful graces and virtues of the Spirit, and I believe were designed on purpose.¹⁷⁰

In this sense, Edwards’s natural typology is a “vertical typology.”¹⁷¹ Being deeply influenced by Newton’s works and the new science, Edwards’s typological

¹⁶⁶ Misc. 362, *WJE* 13:434.

¹⁶⁷ *WJE* 11:191.

¹⁶⁸ Misc. 362, *WJE* 13:434.

¹⁶⁹ *WJE* 11:55-56. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁰ Misc. 362, *WJE* 13:434.

¹⁷¹ Kinnach, “General Introduction to the Sermons,” *WJE* 10:229–230.

interpretation reflects his view of reality. He believed in a single cosmos and insisted upon the “actual organic unity, temporal and spatial, of the cosmos.”¹⁷² Therefore, he regarded the created world as shadows and signs of the spiritual things. And he noticed that the relationship between the created world and spiritual things is similar to the Old Testament types and their New Testament antitypes. Therefore, in his use of natural typology, Edwards was seeking shadows and signs from the lower physical universe and showing how these could represent the highest (spiritual) realities.¹⁷³ As he wrote in his “Miscellanies” entry No. 362,

For indeed *the whole outward creation, which is but the shadows of beings, is so made as to represent spiritual things.* It might be demonstrated by the wonderful agreement in thousands of things, much of the same kind as is between the types of the Old Testament and their antitypes, and by spiritual things being so often and continually compared with them in the Word of God.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, types found in nature and history merely demonstrate God’s wisdom in using “the inferior and shadowy parts of his works” to represent two kinds of things: those “that are more real and excellent, spiritual and divine” as well as those “that immediately concern” God and “the highest parts of His work.”¹⁷⁵

By 1739 when Edwards started working on his Redemption Discourse, he had already departed from his Reformed figural tradition. Of primary importance, in addition to the Scriptures, Edwards included non-biblical history and nature in his typological interpretation in *HWR*. And his use of natural typology is both Christological and eschatological.

First and foremost, Edwards was not confined by his typological interpretation within the two Testaments. In fact, Edwards went beyond them and

¹⁷² *WJE* 10:229-230, n. 8. For the details of Newton’s impact on Edwards, see Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 11:15-17.

¹⁷³ *WJE* 10:229-230, n. 8.

¹⁷⁴ *Misc.* 362, *WJE* 13:434. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁵ *Misc.* 362, *WJE* 13:434.

read earlier historical events from a prophetic perspective, regarding them as an anticipation of the latter days that would be the glorious time when Christ would defeat Satan and realize His millennial kingdom. For example, he interpreted the period of peace under the Roman emperor Constantine as Christ's triumph over Satan and the destruction of the heathen world as the fulfilment of the Father God's promise to the Son Christ.¹⁷⁶

Secondly, Edwards included natural types in his *HWR*. Noticeably, he used light as an image of the progressive expansion of Christ's kingdom. It begins, as the light of the moon and stars, continually increases day by day, until it finally gives way to the light of the sun that is the "greatest of all natural type of Christ."¹⁷⁷ Along its progress, the various parts of Scripture are added in the course of history and the whole scheme of Christ's millennial kingdom is more fully and plainly revealed through the writing and speaking of the prophets, kings and apostles.¹⁷⁸

One has to bear in mind that the antitype, in whatever sources Edwards found, is always Christ and His kingdom. In fact, the basic images of nature appeared in *HWR*, including the flowing of a river, the growing of a tree, the interconnection of wheels, the building of a structure---all express the "same point in other ways" that "Christ *is* redemption. Redemption *is* Christ."¹⁷⁹ In this sense, Edwards's interpretation of the biblical texts, nature and history all have a Christocentric focus.¹⁸⁰ More often than not, these typological interpretations are eschatological at the same time.

¹⁷⁶ *WJE* 9:396-97.

¹⁷⁷ *WJE* 15:340.

¹⁷⁸ *WJE* 9:365-67; 522.

¹⁷⁹ Wilson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 9:61.

¹⁸⁰ Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1-8:1*, 285.

4.3.2 Edwards's Departure and His Self-defense

It is Edwards's natural typology, particularly, his finding images and types in non-biblical history and the natural world, where his departure from the traditional typological framework lies. But what did his Reformed colleagues think about his natural typology? And how did Edwards defend his position? We will discuss this in this part of the section.

It is not surprising that Edwards's Reformed predecessors and contemporaries would have been rather uneasy at his highly extensive use of typology. As mentioned above, Protestant theologians between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries accepted typological interpretations, but most of them would ensure that the Bible warrants such use of typology. While they read certain Old Testament texts as biblical types, traditionally they would *only* search the corresponding antitypes *within* the texts in the New Testament.¹⁸¹ Two cases may illustrate this practice. One is Cotton Mather who occasionally showed his interest in the spiritualized symbols in nature. Throughout writings such as *Magnalia* and *Biblia Americana*, his typological interpretation is tightly confined by the reading of the two Testaments and thus is "Characteristically Puritan" and "traditional."¹⁸² Another is his uncle Samuel Mather. Samuel held a similar position and strongly warned that, "Men must not *indulge their own Fancies*, as the Popish Writers used to do, with their Allegorical Senses, as they call them."¹⁸³ In addition, Samuel set a restriction, "except we have some Scripture ground for it."¹⁸⁴ Otherwise, he asserted, "It is not

¹⁸¹ Anderson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 11:3, 6.

¹⁸² Lowance, *The Language of Canaan*, 177. For Mather's two works, see *Magnalia Christi Americana, or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England: From Its First Planting in the Year 1620 Unto the Year of Our Lord, 1698: In Seven Books* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, at the Bible and Three Crowns in Cheapside, 1702); and *Biblia Americana: America's First Bible Commentary. A Synoptic Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, 4 vols, ed. Reiner Smolinski (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

¹⁸³ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 55. Emphasis original.

¹⁸⁴ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 55.

safe to make anything a Type merely upon our own fancies and imaginations.”¹⁸⁵

And he concluded this statement with a strongly emphatic expression to warn his reader, “it is *God’s* Prerogative to make *Types*.”¹⁸⁶ In this respect, Edwards’s incorporation of nature and history in his use of typology was not only unconventional or anti-traditional, but even blasphemous, according to the principles laid down by Samuel Mather. But one may well ask whether Edwards’s really undermined the authority of the divine revelation, by exalting nature and history “to a level of authority co-equal with revelation,” as Perry Miller argues.¹⁸⁷

Edwards must have anticipated such objections from his Reformed and Puritan friends. But it seems that he did not take these potential criticisms too seriously. At least, no evidence shows that he had any public writing for self-defense. While what we find is merely a small number of fragments Edwards jotted down in his private notes, it appears fairly clear that Edwards was quite confident in his typological approach. This statement is based on the following observations.

Firstly, Edwards disagreed with Samuel Mather’s principle that certain things are not types unless Scripture has *expressly* said so. In fact, he challenged Mather’s restriction and regarded it as being “*unreasonable*.”¹⁸⁸ According to him, “by the Scripture it is plain that innumerable other things are types that are not interpreted in Scripture.”¹⁸⁹ This is what Edwards concluded from his reading of 1 Corinth 13:2, “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge.” “This implies that there were [an] abundance of mysteries then not understood,” Edwards asserted.¹⁹⁰ “By ‘mysteries,’” he continued to explicate, “is

¹⁸⁵ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 55.

¹⁸⁶ Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 55. Emphasis original.

¹⁸⁷ Miller, “Introduction,” 28.

¹⁸⁸ *WJE* 11:152. Emphasis added.

¹⁸⁹ *WJE* 11:152.

¹⁹⁰ *WJE* 11:151.

especially meant divine truths wrapped up in shadows and mysterious representations.”¹⁹¹

In fact, Edwards went further and maintained that nature and history are full of types. Hence, he was “*not ashamed to*” confess that “*the whole universe, heaven and earth, air and seas, and the divine constitution and history of the holy Scriptures,*” are literarily “*full of images of divine things.*”¹⁹² And what he mentioned in his writings is but “a very small part of what is really intended to be signified and typified,” because one may find increasingly more types, but has no way to discover all of them, even to the end of the world.¹⁹³

Edwards’s confidence relies on his thinking of the divine communication with humankind. In fact, he believed types have “affective value.”¹⁹⁴ According to his understanding of human nature, humankind has a “natural delight in the imitative arts, in painting, poetry, fables, metaphorical language [and] dramatic performances.”¹⁹⁵ As a result, a person is easily attracted by images or whatever is consistent with his sensory experience. For instance, Edwards observed, human beings are most likely to be affected by the things that they have seen with their eyes and heard with their ears, and had actual experience of.¹⁹⁶ This disposition, he thought, appears early in one’s childhood. Therefore, he asserted that types could be a suitable method of instruction. Subjects taught by types can be more enjoyable, acceptable and memorable, as he wrote, “it tends to enlighten and illustrate, and to convey instruction with impression, conviction and pleasure, and to help the

¹⁹¹ *WJE* 11:151.

¹⁹² *WJE* 11:152.

¹⁹³ *WJE* 11:152.

¹⁹⁴ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 123.

¹⁹⁵ *WJE* 11:191.

¹⁹⁶ *WJE* 14:140.

memory.”¹⁹⁷ In another word, types can be used as an effective and affective way for God’s communication with human beings. Here one may note that Edwards was using “the mode of accommodation” introduced by Calvin.¹⁹⁸ Due to humankind’s finite capacity of comprehension, everything concerning God’s being and his work are “utterly beyond our understanding, and seem impossible” for us to comprehend.¹⁹⁹ Therefore, God accommodates his truth “to our received notions and principles” and expresses it in a more accessible and attractive way.²⁰⁰ The use of types is only one such example.

Secondly, for Edwards it was not right to say, “we must interpret prophecy, or prophetic visions and types, no further than the Scripture has interpreted it to our hand.”²⁰¹ Therefore, he declared that once a person has received sufficient instruction, it will be “*unreasonable*” to confine his interpretation within what “the Scripture has interpreted.”²⁰² Nevertheless, this is not to say that Edwards’s typological interpretation is indiscriminate or unsystematic. As Lowance points out, Edwards’s natural typology probably developed from that tendency to detect divine providence in nature and history that flourished in the late seventeenth century.²⁰³ However, while he was more creative than his Puritan predecessors and contemporaries in searching types in nature and history, Edwards would not interpret them unsystematically. On the one hand, he affirmed, “The Book of Scripture is the interpreter of the book of nature.”²⁰⁴ Therefore, in contrast to radical typologists such as John Flavel (1627-1691) who saw types in nature and history as a “new source of

¹⁹⁷ *WJE* 11:191.

¹⁹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 227, 463.

¹⁹⁹ *Misc.* 583, *WJE* 18:118.

²⁰⁰ *Misc.* 583, *WJE* 18:118. See also McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 122-23.

²⁰¹ *WJE* 11:146-147.

²⁰² *WJE* 11:146-147.

²⁰³ Lowance, *The Language of Canaan*, 64.

²⁰⁴ *WJE* 11:106.

revelation,” Edwards actually agreed with conservative exegetes such as Samuel Mather and Thomas Taylor (1642-1729).²⁰⁵ Edwards stated that the New Testament provides the final guideline for typological interpretation, so he suggested that one should not “fix an interpretation unless warranted by some hint in the New Testament of its being the true interpretation.”²⁰⁶ In this sense, he “never went beyond what the rule of faith allowed, and he always read types in light of later biblical teaching,” as Douglas Sweeney observes in a recent work.²⁰⁷ Therefore, Perry Miller is wrong to declare that Edwards exalted nature and history “to a level of authority co-equal with revelation.”²⁰⁸ On the other hand, for Edwards God has not “expressly explained all the types of Scriptures,” but the Creator has taught us whatever is sufficient to interpret types.²⁰⁹ Edwards warned that one must be properly trained before one can do any typological interpretation. Additionally, he insisted that even a trained person should be “exceeding careful” in typological interpretation, in case he may “give way to a wild fancy.”²¹⁰ While Edwards’s use of natural typology is based on his belief that God has “the ceaseless desire to communicate” Himself to the creature, through all time and in all of His creation,²¹¹ it is humankind’s responsibility to interpret God’s language “in a way similar to the typological interpretation of Scripture.”²¹²

Thus, Edwards evidently accentuated his Christocentric focus through his natural typology, particularly, when he was applying such typology to interpret the

²⁰⁵ Lowance, *The Language of Canaan*, 67.

²⁰⁶ *WJE* 11:148.

²⁰⁷ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 72.

²⁰⁸ Miller, “Introduction,” 28.

²⁰⁹ *WJE* 11:151.

²¹⁰ *WJE* 11:146-148.

²¹¹ Janice Knight, “Learning the Language of God: Jonathan Edwards and the Typology of Nature,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1991): 551. See also *WJE* 8:434.

²¹² Anna Světlíková, “Edwards’ Natural Typology and the Problem of Subjectivity,” *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 3, no. 1 (2013): 28.

realization of the millennial kingdom. While his Puritan colleagues might not tolerate his extensive application of natural typology, Edwards insisted that it was reasonable to rely on a wider source to find types. In fact, his natural typology is consistent with his belief that “there is no proper substance but God himself.”²¹³

5. Conclusion

The present chapter has explored Edwards’s Christocentric focus in his millennialism. By situating him in the Reformed tradition and viewing him as an artful theologian, we have investigated this issue from both the literary and typological perspectives Edwards adopted in the *HWR*.

Compared to Robert Millar’s historical work *History of the Church*, Edwards’s *HWR*, standing as a proto-treatise, is carefully structured to stress his Christological concerns in the whole process of the establishment, expansion and consummation of the millennial kingdom. Meanwhile, Edwards applied both a Christological and natural typology to communicate his Christocentric focus in the preparation and realization of this millennial kingdom. Notably, his customary typological interpretation was both Christological and eschatological. Furthermore, Edwards departed from the Reformers including Luther and Calvin as well as the Puritans such as Samuel Mather and Cotton Mather. In particular, while his natural typology was somewhat disturbing for most of his Protestant and Puritan predecessors and contemporaries, owing to his faithfulness to and familiarity with the biblical framework, Edwards skillfully and successfully avoided the danger of undermining the authority of divine revelation.

²¹³ *WJE* 6:215.

With regard to both the literary and typological aspects, we have found that Edwards was both traditional and innovative. On the one hand, he was deeply embedded in the Reformed tradition by virtue of the Christological focus in his millennialism. On the other hand, he often departed from this tradition by developing an innovative way of expressing his unique and creative insights into Christ's centrality in the establishment of the millennial kingdom. Therefore, we can see that Edwards's Christological passion in his vision of the millennial kingdom is central in his *HWR*. Meanwhile, his literary and typological communication of his Christocentric concern may be said to be innovative, though far from being radical. In this respect, Edwards may be seen as developing and enlarging the Reformed tradition rather than breaking with it in his typological readings of Scripture, nature and history.

Chapter Three

“As the Cold Increases . . .”: Edwards’s Conviction of the Progressive Realization of the Millennial Kingdom¹

1. Introduction

In Chapter Two, we examined Edward’s literary and typological presentation of his Christocentric focus in the millennial kingdom. The purpose of this chapter is to explore his insistence on the progressive realization of the millennium, thus continuing with Edwards’s millennialism.

We found in Chapter One that Edwards agreed with one or another group of his Puritan colleagues in his millennialism. However, he *did* have a fundamental divergence from one camp: the imminent millennialism. The question whether Edwards belonged to this camp caused controversies among his commentators, as presented in the introductory chapter. In fact, one of the most serious misinterpretations of Edwards’s millennialism is its similarity with the imminent millennium. This misinterpretation used to be prevalent and still *is* occasionally advocated among the scholars in Edwards and Puritan studies.

The present chapter, therefore, by examining Edwards’s expectation of a millennium arriving in the distant future, will provide a corrective reading of the claim that Edwards held to an imminent millennium. We will start with a brief historical review of the imminent millennialism, giving particular attention to the over-emphasis of the eras of Reformation and post-Reformation. Then we move on to examine Edwards’s thinking of the time scale of the millennium, attempting to

¹ An extract from section 3 of this chapter is published under the title of “Jonathan Edwards and Chinese Millennial Movements” in *The Global Edwards*, ed. Rhys S. Bezzant (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 43-58. The quotation in this chapter title is found in *Misc.* 356, *WJE* 13:429.

probe more deeply into three theological issues that significantly impacted Edwards's millennialism, namely, spiritual warfare, revivals and God's glorification. From this chapter, we can see that Edwards, by believing in an earthly millennial kingdom that will be realized in the distant future, indeed diverged from his optimistic Reformed colleagues who were expecting an imminent inauguration of the eschatological golden age. Particularly, we argue that Edwards in his millennialism actually was to reject the over-optimism of the Reformation and Puritan ages.

2. The View of the Imminent Millennium

In the English apocalyptic tradition, many Protestant and Puritan divines highlighted the correlation between history and biblical prophecies. They applied the prophetic passages as the source to explain the historical progress, and interpreted the historical events with the divine prophecy. In this sense, history and prophecy were interweaved and actually became one. Some scholars such as Avihu Zakai address this as "the creation of the sacred time" or the sacralization of time.² With this description, Zakai probably applies a generalized and even simplified term to label a trend of great variety. Consequently, it is risky for him to draw "global conclusions" out of a limited number of samples, as Janice Knight points out, and his depiction of the "monologic" Puritan culture is misleading.³ Additionally, Zakai made certain misinterpretations concerning the millennial awareness of some specific historical figures. For instance, he mistakenly depicted John Bale, John Foxe, the producers of the Geneva Bible and Thomas Brightman as those expecting the immediate and future millennium.⁴ In fact, as mentioned in Chapter One, all of them belonged to the

² See Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 12-56.

³ Janice Knight, "Reviewed Work(s): *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America*," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): 242.

⁴ Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 26-55.

preterist system of Augustine. For them, the millennium was a historical event, instead of “an attainable, historical goal to be realized in an immediate future,” as Zakai wrongly claimed.⁵

Nevertheless, Zakai is right to observe that from both the Protestant and Puritan camps, there *are* some divines who over-emphasize and over-state the significance of their period. In fact, they attempted to situate their time at the end of providential history and regard it as the most critical period before the end of the world. In the sixteenth century, this is particularly true for the scholars including Bale, Foxe, and Brightman.

Both Bale and Foxe placed the millennium in the past. They believed that they were living in the penultimate period right before the end time. Therefore, they regarded their Reformation epoch as such a significant period in redemptive history that it would lead to the arrival of the Final Judgment. For instance, Bale believed that he was living in the era of the sixth seal and thus expected that his time of Reformation would lead to the consummation of God’s kingdom: a Sabbatical age of peace and spiritual prosperity that results from the imprisonment of Satan and the condemnation of the false prophets. He wrote in his *The Image of Both Churches*,

Since Christ’s ascension hath the church continued by six other ages of much less time comprehended in the six seals, in the latter end of whom we are now. And this shall conclude with such a sabbath of peace in the freedom of God’s word as hath not been since the beginning. Satan shall be tied up and the true believers shall occupy in much quietness, the beast condemned with all his false prophets, and this is the number of the sixty.⁶

This is echoed by John Foxe. While Foxe was rather cautious in predicting the duration of the Reformation, he did argue that it was the last period before end times and thus regarded the battle with the Roman Catholic Church as the final one before

⁵ Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 51.

⁶ Bale, *John Bale’s ‘The Image of Both Churches’*, 239.

the consummation of the divine kingdom.⁷

While both Bale and Foxe highlighted their time as the critical and penultimate moment of redemptive history, it was Brightman who went further to claim that the divine kingdom would be fully realized in his age. In fact, he regarded Queen Elizabeth's accession to the throne as the "first blast of the seventh Trumpet in the year 1558."⁸ Therefore, he claimed that while the former kingdoms of Christ were either destroyed by the war or changed to Antichristian dominions, yet "from this beginning there should never want *Christian Princes*, who should keep the truth safe & sound with in their dominions."⁹ Brightman's confidence lies in his conviction that he was already living in the age of the end time. In his *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, he saw his time as that of Christ reigning on the earth, accompanied by the complete defeat of Christ's enemies, as he firmly maintained,

For now is that time begun when Christ shal raigne in all the earth, having all his enemies round about subdued unto him and broken in peeces, of which Danile speaketh, chap. 2.44. So also do the prophets comonly speake of it in so many places, & that with words of so great honour & Majesty...¹⁰

Brightman had rather strong influence upon the Puritan divines in the seventeenth century, particularly, among those who highlighted the significance of their time and thus believed that the millennial kingdom was at hand.

John Cotton probably was one of the most influential advocates of this belief of the imminent millennium. According to Cotton Mather, as early as in 1630s,

⁷ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments of Matters Most Special and Memorable, Happening in the Church: With an Universal History of the Same: Wherein Is Set Forth at Large, the Whole Race and Course of the Church, from the Primitive Age to These Later Times of Ours, with the Bloody Times, Horrible Troubles, and Great Persecutions against the True Martyrs of Christ, Sought and Wrought as Well by Heathen Emperors, as Now Lately Practised by Romish Prelates, Especially in This Realm of England and Scotland* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1684), vol. I, 4-5. See also Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 33.

⁸ Thomas Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, A Revelation of the Apocalypse, Revelation of S. John illustrated with an analysis & scholions* (Leyden: Iohn Class i.e. J. Claesson van Dorpe, 1616), 490, 497.

⁹ Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 491. Emphasis original.

¹⁰ Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 491.

John Cotton was already rather excited at the spiritual prosperity in New England. In writing to John Davenport who was travelling in Holland in 1637, John Cotton reported that “*the order of the churches and the common wealth was now so settled in New-England,*” which reminded him of “*the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.*”¹¹ In early 1640s, Cotton anticipated that, around 1655 the millennium would start with the Antichrist’s downfall and Satan’s binding. In commenting on Revelation 13, he wrote,

I will not be too confident, because I am not a Prophet . . . but so far as God helps by Scripture lights, about the time 1655, there will be then such a blow given to this beast, and to the head of this beast . . . as that we shall see a further gradual accomplishment and fulfilling of this Prophecy here . . . yet a more full accomplished shall be when the Church shall be delivered from this whore of Rome, and the Church of the Jews shall be called again.¹²

By 1651 Cotton became quite convinced of his anticipation. As described in his *The Churches Resurrection*, by 1655 God would send “powerful ministers into the church” to bind Satan “by the chain that is to say the strong chain of God’s Ordinances, Word, and Sacraments, and Censures.”¹³ In fact, anticipating an imminent millennium arriving in a short time, Cotton excitedly encouraged his congregation in New England to be prepared and to repent their sins, in case that they would be left in the deadness during the millennium. He preached,

If we do not now strike a fast covenant with our God to be his people, if we do not abandon whatsoever favors of death in the world, of death in lust and passion, then we and ours will be of this dead hearted frame a thousand years; we are not like to see greater encouragements for a good while than now we see.¹⁴

¹¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Book III, 296. Emphasis original.

¹² John Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation. By That Reverend and Eminent Servant of the Lord, Mr. John Cotton, Teacher to the Church at Boston in New-England.* (London, 1656), 93. See also Joseph Jung Uk Chi, “Forget Not the Wombe That Bare You, and the Brest That Gave You Sucke’: John Cotton’s Sermons on Canticles and Revelation and His Apocalyptic Vision for England” (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 2008), 211.

¹³ John Cotton, *The Churches Resurrection, or, the Opening of the Fift [Sic] and Sixt [Sic] Verses of the 20th Chap. Of the Revelation by John Cotton ... And ... Corrected by His Own Hand* (London, 1642), 5. See also Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 42.

¹⁴ Cotton, *The Churches Resurrection*, 15-21.

In the imminent millennium camp, John Cotton was by no means alone. Many Puritan divines, including Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), William Hooke (1601-1678), John Davenport, John Eliot and Edward Johnson (1598-1672), held the conviction of the Fifth Monarchy Movement (1649-1660).¹⁵ They anticipated an imminent arrival of the millennium and the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. This millennial kingdom, for them, would be the fifth monarchy after four ancient ones (Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman). Therefore, in 1644 Ephraim Huit (1591-1644) predicted that the millennium would arrive in around 1650. One year later in 1645, Thomas Parker fixed 1649 as the start of the apocalyptic events.¹⁶

Similarly, other Puritans in the later years, including Samuel Willard (1640-1707), Increase Mather, Cotton Mather and Benjamin Colman (1673-1747), expected an imminent millennial reign of Christ as well. It is notable that some made great effort to date the arrival of the millennium. For instance, Cotton Mather initially anticipated that by the year 1697 the Antichrist would be completely defeated, and the world be ushered in the millennium. When this anticipation was not fulfilled, Mather followed William Whiston (1667-1752) of Cambridge who succeeded Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1726/27) to the Lucasian Chair and argued that Christ would return in 1716. Again, it did not work out as expected. Not being frustrated, Cotton Mather revised his view and maintained that the millennium could start at any time in his era. Therefore, he worked diligently and produced numerous books and articles in predicting the imminent arrival of the millennium.¹⁷ Due to the influence of Mather and others, this imminent millennial expectation was kept prevalent even

¹⁵ J. F. Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1975): 220-31.

¹⁶ Maclear, "New England and the Fifth Monarchy," 235.

¹⁷ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 781-83.

after 1740s.¹⁸

This Protestant and Puritan campaign of the imminent millennium, intentionally or unintentionally, was to seek the historical significance of the ages of Reformation and post-Reformation. By expecting the arrival of the millennium in the immediate future, these scholars actually were to highlight their time as the penultimate period in redemptive history. In the following section, we will examine whether Edwards belonged to this camp.

3. Edwards's Conviction of a Remote Millennium

Some scholars interpret Edwards's millennialism as being identical with the camp of the imminent millennium, but we will examine to what extent Edwards agreed or disagreed with his Protestant forefathers and Puritan colleagues. Specifically, did he really regard his time as the significant one leading to the millennium? Or, did he expect the millennial kingdom inaugurating in his time? By taking a historical survey of the development of Edwards's thinking of the inauguration of the millennium, we will investigate Edwards's objection to the imminent millennium and challenge the misinterpretation of Edwards's imminent millennialism.

3.1 The Imminent Millennium?

There is a long-standing tradition among scholars who hold that Edwards was as optimistic as his Puritan peers such as Willard, the Mathers and Colman, believing that Christ's kingdom was almost realized and thus hoping for an imminent millennium. This interpretation may be traced back to a particular statement made by Perry Miller who contends that Edwards's *HWR* "brought the people to the very

¹⁸ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 57, n. 64.

threshold of the millennium,” and Edwards himself “was obviously intoxicated with the prospect” of the impending millennial kingdom.¹⁹

Additionally, in an oft-cited but misunderstood passage in *Some Thoughts* written in 1742, Edwards said,

’Tis not unlikely that this work of God’s Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of humankind... we can’t reasonably think otherwise, than that the beginning of this great work of God must be near.²⁰

Based on this passage and following Perry Miller’s claim, C. C. Goen asserts that Edwards “openly espouses the imminency [imminence] of the golden age and attempts to show that many things make it probable that this work will begin in America.”²¹ While there are alternative views, Goen’s interpretation has until recently been prevalent in Edwardsean scholarship and accepted by many including Ernest Lee Tuveson, Harry Stout and others, as observed in the introductory chapter. In fact, even John Wilson believes that Goen’s description of Edwards’s standpoint is “largely correct,” though lamented Goen’s failure to present the background and the later development of Edwards’s postmillennialism.²²

This is a misinterpretation, however, and it was finally corrected by Gerald McDermott in 1992.²³ McDermott points out that Goen’s misinterpretation is based on his confusion of Edwards’s wording of “glorious work of God.” A careful analysis of the wording shows that Edwards used this phrase to refer to “a long period of intermittent revival that would lead up to the millennium,” rather than addressing the millennium itself.²⁴ More recent research by Orchard Stephen (1998),

¹⁹ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloane Associates, Inc., 1949), 318.

²⁰ *WJE* 4:353.

²¹ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards,” 29.

²² Wilson, “History, Redemption, and the Millennium,” 134.

²³ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 50-60.

²⁴ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 51.

Brandon Withrow (2001), Avihu Zakai (2003), Mark Rogers (2009) and Michael McClymond (2012), have confirmed McDermott's claim that Edwards was actually anticipating the premillennial revival when he wrote this paragraph in his *Some Thoughts*.²⁵

Despite this, some scholars still overstate Edwards's postmillennial optimism and claim that Edwards expected an imminent millennium. Most recently, in their encyclopedic work *A Puritan Theology*, Joel Beeke and Mark Jones incorrectly identify Edwards's position with the camp of the imminent millennium. They wrote,

*Edwards was convinced that the church was on the verge of entering into its day of glory and that the New England preachers had a major role in bringing that about. In A History of the Work of Redemption, Edwards explains the future state of the church as a glorious time filled with knowledge, holiness, beauty, and perfection. Instead of viewing humanity as worsening progressively, as the Mathers had, Edwards and his contemporary preachers tended to see the church becoming stronger and purer. For Edwards, that meant that the kingdom was close at hand. . . . Edwards's eschatology, which differed substantially from the Mathers', was by no means unique. It had the support of other notable Puritan-minded divines of his day, such as Samuel Willard (1640-1707) and Benjamin Colman (1673-1747).*²⁶

However, as we will show below, Edwards actually firmly and openly rejected this imminent millennial view. For him, it surely would take a long and progressive advancement to reach the millennium. In fact, Edwards held to this belief quite consistently.

²⁵ See Orchard Stephen, "Evangelical Eschatology and the Missionary Awakening," *Journal of Religious History*, 22 (1998): 138; Brandon G. Withrow, "A Future of Hope: Jonathan Edwards and Millennial Expectations," *Trinity Journal*, 22 (2001): 76-77, 93-94; Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 299-301; Mark C. Rogers, "A Missional Eschatology: Jonathan Edwards, Future Prophecy, and the Spread of the Gospel," *Fides et historia*, 41 (2009): 26, 31-33; McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 573-74.

²⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 784. Emphasis added.

3.2 Edwards's Consistent Belief in a Distant Millennium

Edwards's consistent belief of a distant, rather than imminent millennium can be substantiated by the following facts.

First, from his early career, Edwards was quite conservative and cautious with predictions of the immediate advent of the millennium. In 1723, when he was twenty years old and started his writing of "Notes on the Apocalypse," Edwards admitted that it is "very probable" to say that "Satan's kingdom in the world will not be totally overthrown, his ruin will not receive its finishing stroke *till the year two thousand.*"²⁷ In his sermon "God Never Fails of His Word" preached in 1727, Edwards believed that he was in the period before the fall of Antichrist. While he was confident that all the things "concerning Christ and his kingdom" prophesied in the Old Testament would be accomplished, there are several significant events yet to come before the millennium.²⁸ He preached,

So upon the foundation of God's word, *his people are now expecting the overthrow of Antichrist*, and the national conversion of the Jews, and the gospelizing the heathen nations. And though many have looked for these things when they have not come, yet God will surely at last accomplish them.²⁹

Based on this conviction, Edwards was rather cautious and conservative in his interpretation of the "little revival" of 1734-1735. As Stephen Stein observes, compared with some of his English contemporaries such as Isaac Watts (1674-1748) and John Guyse (1680-1761) who associated this revival with God's power and glory manifested in the latter days, Edward's assessments were indeed "restrained" and he did not suggest the revival as "a beginning or even a type of the millennium."³⁰

²⁷ *WJE* 5:129. Emphasis added. For the dating of this paragraph in Edwards's "Notes on the Apocalypse," see *WJE* 5:77 and McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 50.

²⁸ Edwards, "God Never Fails of His Word," in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons*, Mt. 24:35.

²⁹ Edwards, "God Never Fails of His Word." Emphasis added.

³⁰ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:20-21.

Next, as many scholars found, being greatly influenced by Moses Lowman's *Paraphrase and Notes*, Edwards revised his earlier eschatological timeline in about 1738. Now he thought that the Reformation was not the second, but the fifth of the seven vials that the angels would pour out on the earth the wrath of God (Rev. 16:10-11). In this sense, he actually was at the era of the sixth, instead of the third, of the seven vials. And only one vial remained.³¹ While this belief is aligned with many of his Protestant and Puritan colleagues including Bale, Foxe, Cotton and the Mathers, Edwards still believed that the millennium would be in the distant future. This is where he departed from the camp of the imminent millennium.

In fact, Edwards firmly refuted the rumor of his "imminent millennium" viewpoint in a letter to William McCulloch (1691-1771) on March 5, 1744:

It has been *slanderosly reported and printed* concerning me, that I have often said that the millennium was *already begun*, and that *it began at Northampton*. . . but the report is *very diverse* from what I have ever said. Indeed, I have often said, as I say now, that I looked upon *the late wonderful revivals of religion as forerunners* of those glorious times so often prophesied of in the Scripture, and that this was the first dawning of that light, and beginning of that work which, in the progress and issue of it, would at last bring on the church's latter-day glory: but 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, which will be *the lengthening of the millennium*, or day of the church's peace, rejoicing and triumph on earth, so often spoken of."³²

Edwards seemed quite upset by this rumor as he regarded it as a slander. Once again, Edwards stressed that the millennium would not come without various oppositions against Christ and his church. Until his later years, Edwards adhered to this position and anticipated the millennium's arrival by the year 2000. In 1747, he wrote in his *An Humble Attempt*:

If the Spirit of God should be immediately poured out, and that great work of

³¹ *WJE* 5:193-95. See also Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:36-37; Withrow, "A Future of Hope," 84; Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 166-67.

³² *WJE* 4:560, *WJE* 16:135-36. Emphasis added.

God's power and grace should now begin, which in its progress and issue should complete this glorious effect; there must be an amazing and unparalleled progress of the work and manifestation of divine power to bring so much to pass, by the year 2000.³³

Notably, This statement is consistent with what he believed in 1723 as mentioned above. In his notes on Revelation 20 in "Notes on the Apocalypse" (1748), Edwards revealed how he calculated that the millennium will start in the year 2000. He wrote,

There are these remarkable periods of time: when Abraham was called, in the year of the world 2000; Solomon's glorious kingdom settled, and temple finished, in the year of the world 3000; Christ born in the year 4000; and the millennium to begin in the year 6000.³⁴

Noticeably, for Edwards, it was not for his personal amusement to conduct such calculations about the apocalyptic events, but to manifest his awareness of the authentic correlation between the biblical prophecy and historical events, as well as to confirm his "commitment and faith" to authority of the divine revelation in the Scriptures.³⁵ In fact, it is not uncommon at that time to produce timetables to see how biblical prophecies fit with historical events. For instance, Sir Isaac Newton carried out a similar calculation and argued that the beginning of the Antichrist's reign had come with the rise of papal apostasy at year 607.³⁶ For Edwards and other divines in his time, the prophecy was highly reliable, and history thus became predictable. Consequently, they regarded their apocalyptic speculations as a serious theological practice that rested upon the divine articulation in the apocalyptic writings revealing and unlocking the future of the world.³⁷ And they would take these speculations as a guide and react accordingly in their private and corporate religious life.

³³ *WJE* 5:411.

³⁴ *WJE* 5:135.

³⁵ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:51.

³⁶ Richard Wesfall, *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 235.

³⁷ Stephen Stein has similar observation: Edwards was convinced that "the word of prophecy was a reliable guide for the affairs of the church. Apocalyptic speculation rested upon the presupposition

Despite this, however, when Edwards was talking about year 2000, he *did not* intend to provide a precise or fixed date of the arrival of the millennium. While greatly relying on Lowman in his exposition of Revelation, Edwards departed from Lowman on this particular point. In *An Humble Attempt*, in confronting Lowman's effort of giving a particular time of Antichrist's reign and of the coming of Christ's kingdom, Edwards argued,

I acknowledge that Mr. Lowman's exposition of the Revelation is, on many accounts, excellently written, giving great light into some parts of that prophecy... and especially in his interpretation of the five first vials (which he supposeth already poured out) exceeding satisfying. *But yet the opinion of Mr. Lowman, with regard to the particular time of the beginning and end of the time, times and an half of Antichrist's reign [Rev. 12:14], and of all others that pretend to fix the time, is the less to be regarded, because 'tis clearly revealed, and expressly declared by God, that that matter should be sealed up and hid. . .*³⁸

While agreeing with Lowman "the reign of Antichrist is to be no more than 1260 years," Edwards insisted that it was "*not reasonable* to expect that God should make known to us beforehand, the precise time of Christ's coming in his kingdom."³⁹ For Edwards, while the duration of the millennium is not necessarily exactly one thousand years, as mentioned in the first chapter of the present study, the historical point of its beginning and ending will be even more difficult to predict. He wrote,

When the duration of the glorious times of the church on earth after the fall of Antichrist is spoken of in the 20th chapter of Revelation as being a thousand years, the words are to be literally understood that it will be about that space of time, though perhaps it will not be so precisely; and if [it] be so precisely, *it will probably be difficult precisely to fix the beginning, and so the end of it.*⁴⁰

In short, in contrast to what is believed since Goen, Edwards's standpoint is *less optimistic and more conservative* than the camp of the imminent millennialism. Therefore, Edwards departed from many of his Puritan colleagues by expecting a

that God had made known his intentions for the future in the book of Revelation and that in time he would unlock the secrets for his people on earth." See "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:51.

³⁸ *WJE* 5:396. Emphasis added. Lowman's opinion was summarized by Edwards on page 394.

³⁹ *WJE* 5:395. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *Misc.* 836, *WJE* 20:50. Emphasis added.

distant millennium arriving around year 2000. As showed in this section, it is Edwards's consistent belief that the millennium would arrive in the remote, instead of the immediate, future. In the following section, we will discuss why Edwards expected a remote, rather than an imminent, millennium.

4. The Path to the Remote Millennium

Why was it that Edwards consistently believed that the millennium would arrive in the distant future, specifically, around year 2000? Why, in the past and still today, has his millennialism been misunderstood as the imminent millennium despite this fact? One specific reason is that this misinterpretation resulted from under-developed understanding of Edwards's redemptive-historical vision that informs his millennial awareness. Therefore, in the following sections we will, from a broader scope, explore the reason of Edwards's departure from the camp of the imminent millennium. We will examine three significant issues along the advancement of redemptive history in Edwards's theology, namely, spiritual warfare, revivals and God's glorification.

4.1 Continual Spiritual Warfare

Above all, Edwards's belief of a gradual and progressive realization of the millennial kingdom is accompanied by his awareness of the complexity of the continual warfare between God and His enemies.

Since his early years, Edwards noted the long and successive way that God would defeat His enemies before the millennium:

As the cold increases a considerable time after the sun begins to return from the southern tropic, so it's probable that vice and wickedness may increase, or at least

continue, for some time after knowledge and light begin to increase, and truth to be gloriously displayed and vindicated.⁴¹

In his *HWR*, Edwards employed mechanical philosophy's notion to describe the complex historical process. By applying Ezekiel's vision of the wheels, Edwards treats history as a giant machine consisting of numerous interlocking cogs, gears and rotating wheels, moving forward in a complex, even mysterious way.⁴² Although this "machine" frequently runs rather differently from human expectation and comprehension, it always operates exactly according to God's providential plan. In this plan, God's work of redemption is the controlling event. In this sense, God is both the creator and the operator of this "machine."⁴³ However, the divine work of redemption shows no straightforward or linear advance into glory. Instead, it is following a tortuous and obscure path. Hence, the central images in this Redemption Discourse are of a building and of a river. They illustrate the long, successive progress of the work of redemption. This progress is like a building being constructed increasingly higher from one generation to another, until the top-stone is laid when the church arrives in heaven.⁴⁴ In this process, innumerable issues and different developments are treated as many branches of a river gathering together and meeting in one, until it rushes into the same, infinite ocean that is God himself.⁴⁵ It

⁴¹ *Misc.* 356, *WJE* 13:429. Emphasis added.

⁴² *WJE* 9:118, 525.

⁴³ James Hewitson, "As ordered and governed by divine providence': Jonathan Edwards' use of the Machine as Master Metaphor," *Interdisciplinary Humanities*, vol. 24 (Spring, 2007), 6-20. Hewitson thinks that Edwards used the machine as his master metaphor to explain divine history, particularly the complicated relationship between historical events and God's providence.

⁴⁴ *WJE* 9:510-11; 506-8.

⁴⁵ *WJE* 9:517; 519-20. Additionally, David Barshinger observes that Edwards, in his sermons on the Psalms, used the type of a river to describe Christ and the Holy Spirit. For Barshinger, this indicates Edwards's singularity in his use of typology. While he was "was not unique or unconventional to envision" Christ or the Holy Spirit in the Psalms, Edwards "differed from earlier Reformed exegetes in the extent to which he used typology." Specifically, he "saw more types of Christ in the Psalms than his predecessors" and "from the imagery of the Psalms he also distinctively identified types of the Spirit." Thus, Barshinger concludes that Edwards held an "expansive view of typology" and "pursued it further than earlier exegetes." Nevertheless, Barshinger does not provide comments on Edwards's description of the long and progressive process of redemptive history with the imagery of a river or a building. See David P. Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive-*

may be observed that there are a number of phases in this continuous building-up. In each phase, God and Christ's church are inevitably confronted with various attacks and even defeats. However, whether there is success or failure, in *every* phase the work of redemption is advanced according to the divine plan. God's work of redemption, consequently, is progressed once and again by his power and authority.

Notably, the complexity of this "machine" of history and the mysterious occurrence of the historical events are caused by the constant conflict between Christ and Satan. Christ and his church, as Edwards observed, are confronting continuous opposition from Satan and various groups of Satan's followers.⁴⁶ Therefore, rather than being a triumphalist, in his *HWR* Edwards described a time-consuming triumph of Christ over Satan. In fact, he cited innumerable cases to demonstrate that Christ's triumph over His enemies is not without pains, failures or frustrations, but *is* frequently out of His or His church's "defeat." In addition to his description of Christ's atonement that is evidently a story about glory out of suffering, Edwards listed numerous additional instances that Christ turns failures of his Church into advancement of the divine work of redemption. Among them, the captivity of the Jews is a typical one. While the Jewish dispensation seemed to a tragic failure of God's people, Edwards argued, "it finally cured that nation of their itch after idolatry," and it "prepared the way for Christ's coming and setting [up] the glorious gospel dispensation."⁴⁷

Among Christ's opponents, one major group is the kingdom of Antichrist. Following his Reformed tradition, Edwards identified the Roman Catholic Church as Antichrist. In Sermon 26 of his *HWR*, he specifically reviewed the gradual rise of

Historical Vision of Scripture. (New York, US; Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173ff, 219ff, 361-62.

⁴⁶ *WJE* 9:412-14.

⁴⁷ *WJE* 9:251-52.

this Antichrist from the end of Constantine's time to the Reformation.⁴⁸ At the end, the papacy captured excessive authorities: "The heathen Roman emperors therefore [were] the most powerful secular princes, but [now the power of the Roman popes exceeded theirs]."⁴⁹ With this power, the Pope and his clergy took away everything from their people. They "robbed the people of their ecclesiastical and civil rights and privileges," as well as drained their riches and treated them with cruel persecutions.⁵⁰ As a result, the whole Christian world was trapped in great spiritual darkness, biblical ignorance, as superstition and wickedness became increasingly prevalent.⁵¹

As Sweeney observes, in his anti-Catholic perspective, Edwards closely followed his predecessors such as Joseph Mede and Matthew Poole, who read the Roman Catholic Church as the whore of Babylon and regarded its overthrow by Christ as being one of the essential portions in redemptive history.⁵² In this, Edwards followed the "standard Protestant belief" in his day, and adopted the historical interpretation of apocalyptic writings that predicted the apostasy of the Roman Catholic Church.⁵³ Starting from this understanding, in his sermons and writings such as *HWR*, Edwards displayed a series of vials brought by God along the development of the divine redemptive work. The kingdom of the Antichrist, as a result, was "much brought down already by the vial poured out on his throne in the Reformation" and would be "utterly destroyed."⁵⁴ His interpretation of these vials, hence, was that they stood "for every action of God which involves *progressively* destroying the Antichrist."⁵⁵

⁴⁸ *WJE* 9:412-14.

⁴⁹ *WJE* 9:414. Bracketed words are added by John Wilson the transcriber of *HWR*, as required by Edwards's rhetoric.

⁵⁰ *WJE* 9:414.

⁵¹ *WJE* 9:414.

⁵² Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 170.

⁵³ Goen, "Jonathan Edwards," 26. See also Withrow, "A Future of Hope," 81.

⁵⁴ *WJE* 9:468.

⁵⁵ Withrow, "A Future of Hope," 87. Emphasis added.

However, according to Edwards, the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy is only *one* of Satan’s kingdoms. Another major one is the “Mohammedan kingdom” which is very distinct from other heathen nations. These two kingdoms are “of great extent and strength,” Edwards argued, that they even conquered the Roman Empire: “the kingdom of Antichrist swallowing up the western empire, and Satan’s Mohammedan kingdom the eastern empire.”⁵⁶ If only one of Satan’s kingdoms fell, there would still be a long process in overthrowing another.⁵⁷

In addition to these two most powerful kingdoms, heresies and Jewish infidelity are also the inseparable parts of Satan’s kingdom. Therefore, in his “Notes on the Apocalypse,” Edwards listed the sequence of the fall of these evil forces *before* the millennium begins. He wrote,

First, Turkey in Europe shall be overthrown, and the true religion established in those parts of Europe possessed by the Turks, which will be accomplished in pouring out the 6th vial. . . . Nextly, Antichrist shall be overthrown, and the true religion embraced by the nations that formerly were the subjects of Antichrist. And perhaps religion shall begin to be gloriously propagated among heathen. Thirdly, the Jews shall be called. And fourth, this will be succeeded by an universal propagation of religion through the vast regions of the earth, that had been many ages covered with ignorance and darkness, and had as it were lain dead in paganish and Mahometan barbarism and brutality. . . Which victory shall be the revival of the world from the dead, and is the first resurrection spoken of in Revelation 20. And then the millennium shall begin.⁵⁸

Therefore, Edwards saw that it would be many years from the Christianization of Turkey to the fall of Antichrist, then to the end of the Jewish infidelity.

Additionally, he believed that there would be a final battle before the millennium arrives. In both of his *HWR* and “Notes on the Apocalypse,” Edwards clearly predicted that before the arrival of the millennium, all the evil forces of Antichrist, Mahometanism and heathenism would be united to fight against Christ

⁵⁶ *WJE* 9:410.

⁵⁷ *WJE* 9:410-11.

⁵⁸ *WJE* 5:196-97. With the help of a diagram, Stein illustrates Edwards’s conviction of the sequence of apocalyptic events. See Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:14.

and His church.⁵⁹ As a result, it will take a rather long time and overcome “great difficulties in the way” before Satan’s visible kingdom on the earth is completely destroyed.⁶⁰

In his *HWR*, Edwards addressed this warfare as the “last and greatest effort,” or the “last great opposition” of Satan against the church *before* the millennium begins.⁶¹ By referring to the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, He preached,

there shall be the spirit of popery and the spirit of *Mohammedanism* and the spirit of *heathenism* all united. By the beast is meant *Antichrist*; by the dragon in this book is commonly meant the devil as he reigns in his heathen kingdom; by the false prophet in this book is sometimes meant the Pope and his clergy, but here an eye also seems to be had to Mohammed whom his followers call the great prophet of God.⁶²

Similarly, in “Notes on the Apocalypse,” he regarded this warfare as the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:14-16) in which “the heathens and Mahometans shall join . . . with the remainder of the papists” in order to “overthrow the truth.”⁶³

Notably, Edwards was convinced that this battle would ultimately be a *spiritual* warfare between the kingdom of Satan and the Kingdom of God. He admitted that it would be impossible to determine “particularly in what manner this opposition shall be made” and assumed that it would be “probably all ways of opposition that can be.”⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Edwards insisted that this final battle of Armageddon would primarily be a spiritual warfare as well as ideological conflicts. He wrote,

⁵⁹ *WJE* 9:462-63; *WJE* 5:129, 197, 410.

⁶⁰ *WJE* 9:454, 466.

⁶¹ *WJE* 9:462-63. Noticeably, in contrast to his emphatic description of this battle before the millennium, Edwards maintained that the apostasy after the millennium would be a rather short period. As preached in Sermon 28 of his *HWR*, while he was aware that “there shall be a very great apostasy towards the close of this period” of the millennium, Edwards was convinced that it would be “a short time” during which the church would be “threatened by her enemies.” And he believed that this would “seem most remarkably to call for Christ’s immediate appearance to judgment.” See *WJE* 9:487-92, quotations appear on pages 487 and 489.

⁶² *WJE* 9:463. Emphasis added.

⁶³ *WJE* 5:117. On the same page, Edwards interpreted Armageddon as “*Har Megiddo*, or the mountain of Megiddo.”

⁶⁴ *WJE* 9:463.

And probably withal there will be great opposition of subtile disputers, and carnal reasoning, and great persecution in many places, and great opposition by virulent reproaches, and also great opposition by craft and subtilty. That devil now doubtless will ply his skill as well as strength to the utmost. The devils and those that belong to his kingdom will everywhere be stirred up, and engaged to make united and violent opposition against this holy religion that they see prevailing so mightily in the world.⁶⁵

While he foresaw there would be verbal and physical persecutions against the Christians, Edwards avoided depicting this battle before the millennium as a military warfare. In fact, he even would not interpret it as a political or economic conflict. This is not to say Edwards did not realize that the battle would be extremely intense in terms of its difficulty and cruelty. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that he would regard it primarily as a *spiritual* warfare: God would defeat demonic opposition with spiritual strategies. Using the image of spiritual warfare in the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph. 6:1-13, 17), Edwards emphatically stated that Christ would definitely conquer His enemies in this battle, *not* by political, economic or military powers, but with His Word and by the Spirit. He claimed, “When the powers of hell and earth are thus gathered together against Christ, Christ and his armies shall come forth against them *by his word and Spirit* to fight with them.”⁶⁶ This is consistent with what we found in his redemptive-historical vision that the realization of the divine kingdom is essentially by the work of God’s Spirit. We shall see this more clearly in the following sections.

4.2 Revivals and the Final Revival

In Edwards’s vision of the realization of the millennial kingdom, spiritual warfare and revivals are holding hands. For him, revivals actually are both the sign of

⁶⁵ *WJE* 9:464.

⁶⁶ *WJE* 9:464.

continual spiritual battle and the successive victory of a spiritual exodus.⁶⁷ So he argued that “Those times [of revivals] will be not be introduced without very great and general commotions and over-turnings in which professing Christians will doubtless have great trials.”⁶⁸

Regretfully, having neglected Edwards’s awareness of spiritual warfare, Goen and his followers probably overlooked the fact that Edwards paid much attention to revivals and he stressed the final revival would surely happen before the arrival of the millennium. For Edwards, in the gradual progress of the work of redemption and realization of God’s millennial kingdom, revivals play a vital role. As God’s providential plan is moving towards the consummation, instead of wars, conquests and revolutions, it is revivals that play the triggering mechanism for historical turning points.⁶⁹

Being consistent with his understanding of the essential role of revivals in this movement, by quoting the Book of Zechariah (Zech. 4:6-7), Edwards confidently declared that the divine redemptive work “shall be accomplished, not by the authority of princes, nor by the wisdom of learned men, but by God’s Holy Spirit.”⁷⁰ Therefore, he anticipated that increasing revivals, together with Christ’s culminating victory in the course of history, would progressively but definitely usher in the millennium.⁷¹

And there will be a final revival before that: the Holy Spirit “shall be gloriously poured out for the wonderful revival and propagation of religion.”⁷²

Edwards wrote in “An Humble Attempt,”

⁶⁷ Withrow, “A Future of Hope,” 98.

⁶⁸ *WJE* 22:371.

⁶⁹ Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:18.

⁷⁰ *WJE* 9:460.

⁷¹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 197.

⁷² *WJE* 9:460. See also Rogers, “A Missional Eschatology,” 30; Withrow, “A Future of Hope,” 87.

The fifth vial was attended with such a revival, and reformation, that greatly weakened and diminished the throne or kingdom of the beast, and went far towards its ruin. It seems as though the sixth vial should be much more so; for 'tis the distinguishing note of this vial, that it is the *preparatory* vial, which more than any other vial prepares the way for Christ's coming to destroy the kingdom of antichrist, and set up his own kingdom in the world. A great outpouring of the Spirit accompanied that dispensation that was preparatory to Christ's coming in his public ministry, in the days of his flesh: so, much more, will a *great outpouring of the Spirit accompany the dispensation that will be preparatory to Christ's coming in his kingdom.*⁷³

According to Edwards, this premillennial revival will bring about two significant events: first, the great “work of conversion” that will “go on in a wonderful manner”,⁷⁴ second, “Christ and his church shall ... obtain a complete and entire victory over their enemies.”⁷⁵ The mission of the church, often described as “a glorious instance of the conquering power of God and Christ,” will be undoubtedly “carried far as to be vastly beyond what Satan has done to vie with Christ.”⁷⁶ As a result, “heresies and infidelity and superstition” will be abolished, the kingdom of the Antichrist will be completely overturned, and importantly, the “national conversion of the Jews” will be witnessed.⁷⁷ In this sense, Edwards insisted that it is a “much greater and more universal”⁷⁸ revival during which the “visible kingdom of Satan shall be overthrown and the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it everywhere, throughout the whole habitable globe.”⁷⁹

Therefore, even though Edwards witnessed God's mighty work in the previous revivals, he did not regard any of them, including the “little revival” of 1734-35 and the Great Awakening in 1739, as the universal revival that would finally usher in the millennium.⁸⁰ Thus, in contrast to the common claim that Edwards was

⁷³ *WJE* 5:426. Emphasis added.

⁷⁴ *WJE* 9:460.

⁷⁵ *WJE* 9:464.

⁷⁶ *WJE* 18:146.

⁷⁷ *WJE* 9:467-69.

⁷⁸ *WJE* 9:475.

⁷⁹ *WJE* 9:473.

⁸⁰ Rogers, “A Missional Eschatology,” 31.

optimistically hoping for the “soon coming” of Christ’s kingdom,⁸¹ Edwards confessed in 1739 that he was “far from pretending to determine the time when the reign of Antichrist began,” let alone to predict when the millennium would start.⁸²

4.3. God’s Glorification in the Progressive Realization of the Millennial Kingdom

What is the ultimate goal of the progressive realization, rather than imminent arrival, of the millennial kingdom? Edwards’s answer is God’s glorification. For Edwards, God is continuously and increasingly glorified along the process of redemptive history, from creation to the Final Judgment. During this progress, all the historical movement, including “changes,” “revolutions” and “struggles and conflicts of nations” are “ordered” by God’s divine and infinite wisdom. Hence, they will progressively but definitely move to “the appointed journey’s end” of redemptive history.⁸³ The millennium, as the last stage of God’s redemptive work on earth, serves as the “culmination of all the ages of human history.”⁸⁴ Rooted in this belief, Edwards asserted that in the progressive realization of the millennial kingdom, God manifests his glory on at least four fronts.

On the first front, God’s glory will be more effectively manifested in this gradual, instead of imminent, progress. Edwards insisted that by taking a long and durable progress to realize His kingdom, the glory of God’s wisdom becomes “*more* visible to the creature’s observation.”⁸⁵ If the divine redemptive work is accomplished quickly and the millennium arrives “in an instant or in a very short

⁸¹ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards,” 33.

⁸² *WJE* 9:412.

⁸³ *WJE* 5:346.

⁸⁴ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 46.

⁸⁵ *WJE* 9:355. Emphasis added.

time,” Edwards explained, “there would not be opportunity for the creature to perceive and observe all the particular steps of divine wisdom.”⁸⁶ Therefore, God “wisely determined” to accomplish his great design of the millennial kingdom “by a wonderful and long series of events.”⁸⁷ Consequently, God will glorify himself in a more effective way: not only God’s wisdom, but his perfections “may be displayed in the whole series and ... seen as appearing.”⁸⁸

Meanwhile, in this process of self-glorification, Edwards noticed, God the Creator actually also manifests His grace and mercy towards the humankind---only if we witness and appreciate God’s glory gradually, we will be able to comprehend his being and work progressively. Otherwise, we would either ignore the successive and particular parts of God’s redemptive work or be overwhelmed and confused.

Edwards explained, “If all that glory that appears in all these events should be manifested at once, it would be too much for us and more than we at once could take notice of; it would dazzle our eyes and be too much for our sight.”⁸⁹

Secondly, Edwards believed God as a sovereign and almighty God, so he asserted that God is significantly glorified with His *full control* of the lengthy but progressive establishment of His kingdom. In the process of God’s progressive accomplishment of his redemptive work, he will triumph over Satan in a more glorious way. Based on his conviction of God’s sovereignty and His infinite power, Edwards believed that “God could easily by an act of almighty power at once have crushed Satan.”⁹⁰ However, God is acting in a seemingly obscure way: giving Satan time to “use his utmost subtlety to hinder the success of what Christ had done and

⁸⁶ *WJE* 9:355.

⁸⁷ *WJE* 9:355.

⁸⁸ *WJE* 9:355.

⁸⁹ *WJE* 9:355-56.

⁹⁰ *WJE* 9:356.

suffered,” allowing him “not defeated merely by surprise but has large opportunity to ply his utmost power and subtilty again and again,” and leaving him “to strengthen his own interest all that he can by the work of many ages.”⁹¹ Why? Edwards explained that in this way “God destroys and confounds” Satan and “sets up Christ’s kingdom *time after time*” out of the evil one’s devastation, “in spite of all his [Satan’s] subtile machination and great works.”⁹² Instead of being destroyed or destructed, Christ’s kingdom, Edwards argued by applying an imagery of building, is advanced “by every step” and goes “still higher and higher, till at length it is fully set up and Satan perfectly and eternally vanquished in the end of all things.”⁹³ In this way, God’s power and his sovereignty will be revealed and witnessed. He will be significantly glorified, while Satan and his followers will greatly be afflicted and humiliated, as Edwards concluded his *HWR*:

And how glorious is the wisdom of God appearing in that long course and series of great changes in the world, in bringing such order out of confusion, in so frustrating the devil, and so wonderfully turning all his most subtile machinations to his own glory and the glory of his Son, Jesus Christ. And in causing that the greatest works of Satan, those in which he has most gloried and prided himself, shall be turned to the very occasions of so much *the more glorious triumph of his Son, Jesus Christ.*⁹⁴

On the third front, Edwards was convinced that God controls not only the full picture, but consistently directs every specific historical phrase in the realization of the millennial kingdom. In so doing, God will be glorified. As spiritual conflict goes on day by day, the wheels of redemptive history frequently run rather differently from humankind’s expectation and comprehension. However, God will guide it to move towards his designed destiny and enable it to be exactly consistent with his providential plan. Eventually, the history of redemption will gradually move

⁹¹ *WJE* 9:356.

⁹² *WJE* 9:356.

⁹³ *WJE* 9:356.

⁹⁴ *WJE* 9:525. See also *WJE* 9:118, 128, 281-82, 492, 517-19, etc.

forward until it reveals the distinctively different eschatological end of Christ's church and that of Christ's enemies. In fact, before the arrival of the millennium, the Christian churches will not only conquer the kingdom of Antichrist, but eventually "swallow up Mahometanism and root it out of the world."⁹⁵ Specifically, in the final battle of Armageddon, Christ and his church will "obtain a complete and entire victory."⁹⁶ In contrast, Satan and his followers will be eventually defeated and trapped in ultimate hopelessness. Edwards described this in detail,

Now the business is done for Satan and his adherents; when this victory is obtained all is in effect done. Satan's last and greatest opposition is conquered, all his measures are broke, the pillars of his kingdom are fragments in sunder and will fall of course. The devil is utterly baffled and confounded, and knows not what else to do; he now sees his Antichristian and Mohammedan and heathenish kingdoms through the world all tumbling about his ears. He and his most powerful instruments are now taken captives.⁹⁷

In so doing, God clearly manifests his sovereignty and glory by guiding the historical movement according to his design and will, as Edwards maintained:

And how wonderful is the wisdom [of God] in bringing all such manifold and various changes and over-turnings in the world to *such a glorious period* at last; and so *directing all the various wheels of providence* by his skillful hand, that every one of them shall conspire, as the manifold wheels of a most curious machine, at last to strike out such an excellent issue, *such a manifestation of his glory, such happiness to his people, and such a glorious and everlasting kingdom to his Son.*⁹⁸

On the fourth front, God will be much more evidently and significantly glorified at the arrival of the millennium. On the basis of his interpretation of the apocalyptic writings, in sermon 27 of *HWR*, Edwards asserted that the millennium would be "a state of peace and prosperity" for the church.⁹⁹ It was depicted as "the principal time of the kingdom of heaven," "great peace and love" and "excellent

⁹⁵ *Misc.* 613, *WJE* 18:146.

⁹⁶ *WJE* 9:464.

⁹⁷ *WJE* 9:464-465.

⁹⁸ *WJE* 9:525. See also *WJE* 9:118, 128, 281-82, 492, 517-19, etc.

⁹⁹ *WJE* 9:479.

order in the church of Christ.”¹⁰⁰ Again, for Edwards, the final realization of the millennial kingdom would be through spiritual transformation, rather than by a political coup or military revolution. In his “Note on the Apocalypse,” Edwards symbolically interpreted the verse “the cities of the nations fell” (Rev. 16:19), as he did so throughout the chapter.¹⁰¹ Notably, some like Stein misunderstood Edwards by declaring that “Edwards toyed with the political implications of the ‘theocracy’ that will be established in the millennium, when both civil and ecclesiastical governments will be overthrown.”¹⁰² In fact, Edwards emphatically pointed out that the establishment of the theocracy would *not* be by overthrowing all of civil and ecclesiastical governments. Conversely, what Edwards did not expect to see was the reduction of the world to a non-governmental state. What he highlighted, in fact, is the deposition of tyrannical power. Edwards wrote,

There are many passages in Scripture which do seem to intend, that as well the civil as the ecclesiastical polities of the nations, shall be overthrown, and a sort of theocracy should ensue. *Not that civil government shall in any measure be overthrown, or that the world shall be reduced to an anarchical state; but the absolute and despotic power of the kings of the earth shall be taken away. . .*¹⁰³

Edwards did not clearly state the means for deposing tyrannical rulers, though it is evident that everyone will be free from both the demonic and tyrannical powers when Satan and his followers are completely defeated. Consequently, liberty, i.e. spiritual and civil freedom, will prevail in “every nation” and “throughout the earth.”¹⁰⁴ There will be various forms of governments, but none of them will be contrary to freedom; many rulers and kings will be found, but they will be

¹⁰⁰ *WJE* 9:479-84.

¹⁰¹ *WJE* 5:117.

¹⁰² Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 5:18.

¹⁰³ *WJE* 5:136. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁴ *WJE* 5:136.

transformed as servant-leaders who are pleasing to God and function like the judges in ancient Israel. Edwards depicted them in the following terms,

Kings shall rather be as the judges were before Saul (which government was that which was best pleasing to God), and as the kings of England now are in civil matters. There be no more kings after the manner that Samuel described (1 Sam. 8:11 ff.). Not but that there may be different forms of government, very many; but none shall be tyrannical, or contrary to the true liberty (Dan. 2:44-45). Such kind of authority and power, is spoken of by Christ as a part of gentilism (Matt. 20:25). . . . *nation shall be a free people, not only with a freedom from spiritual slavery, but from civil too*, from the tyrannical and absolute power of men, as well as from the power of the devil. And undoubtedly, those frequent prophecies representing the glorious liberty of these times, wherein every man shall sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, etc. [Mic. 4:4], are not understood only in a mystical and spiritual sense.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, Edwards asserted that the millennium would see “the principal fulfilment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament” and “the church of God shall then be beautiful and glorious on these accounts.”¹⁰⁶ The Christian religion will “in every respect be uppermost in the world” and all nations will enjoy the benefits of the gospel.¹⁰⁷ In short, it will be the complete realization on earth of God’s end in creation and redemption, being characterized by glorious harmony and everlasting blessings.¹⁰⁸ Noticeably, Edwards maintained that when God’s work of redemption is finally completed in the millennium, the divine self-glorification will reach its consummation on earth.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, in his other sermons and in his “Miscellanies,” he defined this period as “the glorious millennium.”¹¹⁰ It will be the “prosperous, glorious state of the church,”¹¹¹ ushering in the “eternal state of the church’s consummate rest and glory” in heaven.¹¹²

To sum up, owing to his study on the Scriptures and his multi-bearing

¹⁰⁵ *WJE* 5:136-137. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ *WJE* 9:479, 484.

¹⁰⁷ *WJE* 9:484-85.

¹⁰⁸ Michael D. Gibson, “The Integrative Biblical Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards: Empiricism, God, Being, and Postmillennialism,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64, 1 (2002): 158.

¹⁰⁹ *WJE* 9:464.

¹¹⁰ *Misc.* 702, *WJE* 18:289.

¹¹¹ *WJE* 22:369.

¹¹² *Misc.* 702, *WJE* 18:289. See also *WJE* 9:509.

theological framework of redemptive history, Edwards took many factors into consideration in presenting the time scale of the millennium. These factors include God's wisdom and his plan in the work of redemption, the complexity of warfare between Christ and his enemies, the essential role played by revivals in the advancement of the work of redemption, and God's self-glorification in the gradual but successive realization of the divine kingdom. Consequently, while he seemingly followed *some* of his Puritan predecessors and contemporaries, in contrast to the once-popular belief, Edwards's rejection of the imminent millennialism is both evident and consistent. In fact, while Edwards did not try to prophecy the precise date and time of the millennium, he was convinced that it would arrive around the year 2000. This viewpoint may seem very optimistic for those who are living in the postmodern world. However, in comparison with that of John Cotton and his followers, it is rather conservative in Edwards's time.

By highlighting God's glorification in the progressive realization of the millennium, Edwards actually insisted that God has the full control over the whole cosmos and depicted Christ as "the prince and savior of the world" and the "king of kings and lord of armies" who sophisticatedly guided "the history of the things... for the redemption of his chosen people."¹¹³ In so doing, Edwards in his millennialism reflects his understanding of God's eternal reality manifesting in the temporal domain, viz., God manifests His being and glory in His external work. In fact, as he "portrayed a dramatic contest between good and evil" in his millennial expectation, Edwards evidently and deliberately highlighted that God is "playing the triumphant role" from the very beginning to the end of the world.¹¹⁴ In this sense, Edwards's

¹¹³ *WJE* 9:291.

¹¹⁴ Harry S. Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:19.

millennialism reveals his belief of “the essence and being of God as extended forth into time.”¹¹⁵ God’s eternal glory is “reproduced and dispensed” into every single phrase of redemptive history.¹¹⁶ The millennium, as the final stage of the divine redemptive work on earth, is the fullest manifestation of God’s glory in the temporal realm.

5. Conclusion

In this chapter, we can see that in many issues, Edwards agreed with his Protestant and Puritan colleagues holding the view of the imminent millennium. He accepted the traditional view to regard the Roman Catholic Church and the papacy as the Antichrist. Accordingly, he evidently recognized the significance of the Reformation regarding it as the fifth vial. And he was greatly encouraged to witness the revivals of his time. More importantly, as his Reformed friends, he believed the correlation between the prophecy and history and thus kept seeking historical consciousness from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, Edwards held a much more conservative view of the inauguration of the millennial kingdom. In fact, he actually laid much emphasis on the long but gradual advancement of the divine redemptive work before the arrival of the millennium. This is due to his awareness of the complexity of the divine redemptive work. This is determined by his expectation of the splendor and glory of the final universal revival that will inaugurate the millennium. And this is shaped by his thinking of God’s manifestation of the divine wisdom, sovereignty and glory in the progressive realization of the millennial kingdom.

¹¹⁵ Gibson, “The Integrative Biblical Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards,” 158-59.

¹¹⁶ Gibson, “The Integrative Biblical Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards,” 158-59.

Importantly, Edwards highlighted the spiritual features of both the millennial kingdom and its progressive realization. Some like Michael Peters rightly state that Edwards, in his later years, regarded King George's War against the French (1744-1748) as an "apocalyptic conflict against the Antichrist."¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, in general, Edwards's millennial awareness is still apolitical. What he expected is not a political utopia, but a kingdom of God. And what he stressed is the apolitical essence of this millennial kingdom. This kingdom will be realized on earth through spiritual conflicts and by spiritual revivals; and both the governments and the rulers will be spiritually transformed. Consequently, the citizens in this millennial kingdom will enjoy true freedom in both spiritual and civil terms.

By anticipating an earthly millennium that will be realized in the distant future and by highlighting its apolitical features, Edwards indeed diverged from his optimistic Protestant forefathers including Thomas Brightman as well as his Puritan colleagues such as John Cotton and the Mathers. In particular, we argue that being confronted with the campaign, led by the above Puritans, of the highly optimistic millennialism in New England, Edwards in his millennialism actually was to refute, intentionally or unintentionally, the over-emphasis of the significance of the current age. For Edwards, the millennial kingdom will gradually be expanded and realized as God's redemptive history is progressively advancing. In this sense, in contrast to the over-optimism held by his Reformed colleagues mentioned in this chapter, the era of Reformation or post-Reformation, however prosperous or glorious it is, is still far from being the final sacred time that welcomes the culmination of the ages.

Having studied Edwards's temporal awareness, we will move to his spatial and anthropological consciousness of the millennial kingdom. In the following

¹¹⁷ Peters, "Jonathan Edwards's politicization of millennialism," 41, 139-201.

chapter, we will explore Edwards's Judeo-centric millennialism that departs from the England- and New England-centric millennialism held by some of his Reformed predecessors and Puritan contemporaries.

Chapter Four

Edwards's Judeo-centric Vision of the Millennial Kingdom

Introduction

Having documented Edwards's belief in a progressively-realized millennial kingdom, in the following two chapters we move from his temporal awareness to his understanding of the space and people of this kingdom. In particular, the present chapter will focus on the land and people of Israel to examine Edwards's Judeo-centric vision of the millennial kingdom.

In Edwards's time, the subject of the ethnic Israel had been neglected for centuries since supersessionism was well accepted from the mid-second century. Most of Edwards's Protestant forefathers would insist that the unique role of Israel in redemptive history and God's kingdom had been replaced by the Christian church, until his Puritan colleagues in the seventeenth century re-discovered the significance of Israel in God's eschatological scheme. Nevertheless, many, from both the English Protestant and Puritan camps, still failed to realize the central and critical role played by Israel in the historical progress towards the end time. Conversely, they tended to over-emphasize the significance of either the Old or New England in their eschatological vision of God's kingdom. Therefore, in this chapter we show that, unlike those Protestant and Puritan divines who advocated either supersessionism or England-/America-centric theology of history, by upholding a Judeo-centric millennialism, Edwards highlighted the significant role of Israel in his vision of the millennial kingdom as well as in his redemptive-historical vision.

Owing to its importance and the inadequate research in contemporary Edwardsean scholarship, we address this subject in two parts. Part One examines

Edwards's conviction of the *land* of Israel being the ideal location of the millennium and refutes the once-prevalent misinterpretation of Edwards's America-centric millennium. Part Two explores Edwards's expectation of the eschatological restoration of the *people* of Israel. This restoration includes both their return to the homeland and national conversion, which will trigger the arrival of the millennium and subsequently determine the destiny of the world. By investigating his understanding of the eschatological significance of Israel, we argue that Edwards in his Judeo-centric millennialism de-centralized both the land and people of England and New England in his vision of the millennial kingdom.

Part I

“Center of the Kingdom of Christ”: Edwards’s Canaan-centric Millennium¹

1. Introduction

In this first part, we examine Edwards’s spatial vision and present his Canaan-centric vision of the millennial kingdom. We will start with a review of the English divines’ seeking of the center of the millennium, examining the shift of this center from England to New England. Concerning Edwards’s conviction of the center of the millennial kingdom, there is a once-prevalent theory that Edwards anticipated the millennium would arrive in America. We challenge this widely accepted America-centric millennium in the next section. First, we will have a short survey of this misunderstanding among the Edwards scholars. Then we will demonstrate that Edwards was actually rather disappointed at America and predicted her a gloomy future. We then demonstrate that his spatial millennial vision actually is Canaan-centric. And we will raise some interpretations of his Canaan-centric millennium.

In this part, we argue that Edwards expected a millennial kingdom that would start from and be centered at the land of Israel. In contrast to his Protestant predecessors and Puritan colleagues who over-emphasized the significance of either England or New England and regarded it as the ideal location of the millennium, Edwards actually de-centralized the land of both England and America.

¹ An extract from section 3 of this part is published under the title “Jonathan Edwards and Chinese Millennial Movements” in *The Global Edwards*, ed. Rhys S. Bezzant (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 43-58. The quotation in the title of this Part is found in *WJE* 5:133-34.

2. Seeking the Sacred Space: from England to New England

As presented in the previous chapter, some scholars from both Protestant and Puritan camps believed that history and divine prophecy are holding hands. In this sense, the biblical prophecies were not only revealed, but also fully fulfilled in time and history. In particular, they intentionally and attentively highlighted or even overstated the significance of their current *time*, seeing it as the most important era in redemptive history. This was accompanied by the over-emphasis of the spatial dimension. By giving a unique and outstanding position of the English Reformation or Post-reformation, some Reformed scholars, including John Bale, Thomas Brightman, John Cotton, Increase and Cotton Mather, have significantly emphasized the singularity of the *space* of England or New England in redemptive history. This process is to highly-emphasize the importance of the land of England or America as well as to over-state the singularity of these nations in redemptive history.

2.1 England: from the Elect Nation to Laodicea

We will start with seeking the sacred space in England. In the process of finding and defining the uniqueness of England, as observed below, England in the mind and writings of some divines in the sixteenth century actually went down from the selected nation to the land of Laodicea. We will examine John Bale, John Foxe and Thomas Brightman in exploring this degeneration.

For John Bale, England is a singular nation where the Antichrist would be finally defeated. In his *The Image of Both Churches*, Bale argued that there was a struggle going on between two forces: the church of Christ and the church belonging to Antichrist. England, noticeably, held a rather unique position in this continuous struggle against the Roman Catholic Church and papacy that was recognized as

Antichrist.² During the Reformation in England, Bale observed, the power of Antichrist has been greatly weakened. “In England by the gospel preaching have many of these waters been dried up in the suppression of monasteries, priories, convents, and friars’ houses,” he commented, though “the bishops reign still in as much vainglorious pomp, and with as many heathenish observations as ever they did.”³ This battle would be continued. Bale anticipated that Henry VIII would wipe off all the superstitions. He wrote,

In the which daily prayer is that most worthy minister of God, King Henry the Eighth, afore all other to be remembered, which hath so sore wounded the beast that he may before his departure, or Prince Edward after him, throw all his superstitions into the bottomless lake again (from whence they have comen), to the comfort of his people.⁴

Similarly, in his historical play *King John* (or *King Johan*), Bale depicted the King John of England, who, probably taking Henry VIII or the uncorrupted early English church as a historical model, stood as a figure to persistently fight against the Pope’s usurpation of authorities.⁵ After the accession of Elizabeth I, Bale wrote in the Epilogue of this play that the Queen and her successors would overcome the Antichrist.⁶ This deep conviction in the singularity of England was echoed by John Foxe. According to Foxe, under the rule of the “good, godly, and virtuous” Queen Elizabeth, the Church of England would be significantly transformed and become “a glorious church.”⁷

Nevertheless, this optimistic anticipation of England being the stage of the spiritual contest and the decisive factor of the eschatological drama was reduced to

² Bale, *John Bale’s ‘The Image of Both Churches’*, 238-39. See also Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 29.

³ Bale, *John Bale’s ‘The Image of Both Churches’*, 276.

⁴ Bale, *John Bale’s ‘The Image of Both Churches’*, 425-26.

⁵ Barry B. Adams, ed., *John Bale’s King Johan* (San Marino: Huntington Library Publications, 1969), 147. See also Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 29-30; Philip Schwyzer, “Paranoid History: John Bale’s *King Johan*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 506.

⁶ Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 30.

⁷ Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, vol. VIII, 601; vol. I, 94.

nothing but despair and disappointment. In particular, Thomas Brightman depicted the Church of England as Laodicea, as the Puritan failure to reform the Church was witnessed. In his *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, when he came to the passage on the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22), Brightman was convinced that the “Antitype” of Laodicea is “the third reformed Church, that is, ours of England.”⁸ And he repeated this claim twice in the initial paragraph of his exposition of this passage. Evidently, Brightman was rather discouraged to see Henry VIII retaining the Popish superstitions, though the King expelled popes. As a result, when the Churches of Germany and Scotland were flourishing, pitifully, “our English Church alone constituteth [constitutes] the Antitype answering to Laodicea,” Brightman sadly commented.⁹ The Church of England, as the antitype of the church in Laodicea, will be spit out by God as described in Rev. 3:16. This definitely will be the “fearful punishment” as well as a “great, reprochfull [reproachable] judgment,” Brightman predicted and warned.¹⁰

Obviously, Brightman’s depiction above dramatically altered the position of England in redemptive history. For him, England was no more the center of eschatological struggle as Bale and others once believed, or the elect nation as Foxe asserted. In contrast, she was degraded as a place full of sin but deficient in good works and awaiting the divine wrath and punishment. This was tragic indeed.

2.2 New England: The Promised Land

Brightman’s disappointment was shared and magnified among the Puritans when the Church of England was becoming increasingly corrupted, particularly, under the

⁸ Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 102, 103.

⁹ Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 104.

¹⁰ Brightman, *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*, 110-11.

reign of James I (1566-1625) and Charles I (1600-1649). Brightman's view of the Church of England as Laodicea reverberated significantly among the Puritans who migrated to New England. As a result, while the Old World was identified as the land of Laodicea, the New Colonies were recognized as the refuge of the saints as well as the "Promised Land."¹¹

As they lamented over the corrupted England, many believed that God would prepare a hiding place as the Promised Land. John Winthrop (1588-1649), for instance, was greatly disturbed by the unfavorable situation of England when he wrote to his wife in 1629. In fact, he anticipated that the divine punishment would be shortly upon the land of England. He wrote, "my deare wife, I am verily perswaded [persuaded], God will bringe some heauye [heavy] Affliction vpon this lande, and that speedyllye [speedily]."¹² Therefore, he expected that God "will prouide [provide] a shelter and a hiding place."¹³

Winthrop's lament for England and his aspiration for a new world were echoed by many. For instance, almost at the same time when Winthrop wrote to his wife, John Cotton excitedly asserted in his *God's Promise to His Plantation* (1630) that New England is the Promised Land: "here is then an eye of God that opens a doore there, and sets him loose here."¹⁴ He continued, "when God makes roome for us, no binding here, and an open way there."¹⁵ Therefore, Cotton was convinced that in New England God's people could enjoy "not ... some ordinances of god, but of

¹¹ Engler et al, "Transformation of Millennial Thought in America, 1630-1860," 14-15. See also Philip Almond, "Thomas Brightman and the Origins of Philo-Semitism: An Elizabethan Theologian and the Restoration of the Jews to Israel," *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 9, no. 1 (2007): 6-7.

¹² John Winthrop, "John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop (May 15, 1629)," in *Papers of Winthrop Family*, vol. 2 (Massachusetts Historical Society), 92, <http://www.masshist.org/publications/winthrop/index.php/view/PWF02d052>.

¹³ Winthrop, "John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop," 92.

¹⁴ John Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, 12. See also Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 64.

¹⁵ Cotton, *Gods Promise to His Plantation*, 12. See also Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom*, 64.

all, & all in Purity.”¹⁶ The Old World, on the contrary, was not a favorable place for the godly people. In his *Canticles* (1642), while Cotton did not see the Church of England as Laodicea, by describing her as “black, yet comely,” fundamentally, he aligned himself with Brightman.¹⁷ In 1633, Cotton made a firm and confident decision and left England for New England. A few years after that, Cotton noticed some of his congregation planned to return to England. In order to stop them, he preached in 1640 his *Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation*. In this sermon series, Cotton firmly rebuked those who contemplated going back to England. By taking the analogy of the Israelites’ Exodus, he depicted England as “Egypt.” And he firmly urged them not to worship the Church of England, because she was nothing “but an image of the great beast.” He preached,

You shall have many poore creatures that came hither to this Country, and will be ready to go back againe, they looke at things as mean and poor here; believe it, such a man hath not an eare, nor an eye open, he knows not whether he goes... And may I say to such, whether will you goe? Will you be gone back againe to *Egypt* [?].... If you be once incorporated into any of their Parishes, you will finde such beastly work in the Church Government... you must worship *the beast or the Image of the beast; A Diocesan, or Nationall Church, is but an Image of the great beast...*¹⁸

To follow up Cotton’s opposition to Old England, some like Judge Samuel Sewall fervently identified New England as “a space of refuge and salvation,” as well as the ideal site of Christ’s second coming.¹⁹ In his *Phaenomena*, Sewall argued that New Jerusalem should be located in New England. “May it not with more, or equal

¹⁶ John Cotton, *Correspondence of John Cotton*, ed. Sargent Bush Jr. (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 184. See also Chi, “Forget Not the Wombe That Bare You, and the Brest That Gave You Sucke’,” 90.

¹⁷ Chi, “Forget Not the Wombe That Bare You, and the Brest That Gave You Sucke’,” 76; John Cotton, *A brief exposition of the whole book of Canticles, or, Song of Solomon; lively describing the estate of the Church in all the ages thereof, both Jewish and Christian, to this day ...* (London: Printed for Philip Nevil; 1642).

¹⁸ John Cotton, *An Exposition Upon the Thirteenth Chapter of the Revelation. By That Reverend and Eminent Servant of the Lord, Mr. John Cotton, Teacher to the Church at Boston in New-England* (London 1656), 20. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Engler et al, “Transformation of Millennial Thought in America, 1630-1860,” 18.

strength be argued,” he claimed, “*New-Jerusalem* is not the same with *Jerusalem*: but as *Jerusalem* was to the westward of *Babylon*; so *New-Jerusalem* must be the westward of *Rome*; to avoid disturbance in the Order of these Mysteries.”²⁰

Others, including Increase and Cotton Mather, advocated a more universal scheme of the millennium that included both Old and New England. As Cotton Mather preached in his *Theopolis Americana* in 1709,

We cannot image, that the brave Countries and Gardens which fill the *American Hemisphere*, were made for nothing but a *Place for Dragons*. We may not image, That when the *kingdom* of God is come, ... a *Ballancing Half of the Globe*, shall remain in the Hands of the *Devil*.²¹

Obviously, it is unacceptable for some like the Mathers to imagine that God will expel Old England from His millennial kingdom when Christ selects New England as the elect nation and the center of the millennium. Nevertheless, both Increase and Cotton Mather highlighted the superiority of New England to the Old World. In order to emphasize the prominent position of New England in the realization of God’s millennial kingdom, Increase Mather emphasized that since the day of foundation she was distinguished from other English Plantations: “they were built upon a Worldly design, but we upon a Religious design,” he commented.²² Therefore, when the churches encountered spiritual decline in the New Colonies, he still insisted that God’s promise and covenant with New England would not fail. In

²⁰ Samuel Sewall, *Phaenomena Quaedam Apocalyptica Ad Aspectum Novi Orbis Configurata, or, Some Few Lines Towards a Description of the New Heaven as It Makes to Those Who Stand Upon the New Earth* (Boston: Printed by Bartholomew Green, and John Allen, 1697), 29. For Sewall’s America-centric millennium, see Oliver Scheiding, *Samuel Sewall and the Americanization of the Millennium*, in *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630-1860*, eds. Bernd Engler et al. (Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2002), 165-86.

²¹ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana. An Essay on the Golden Street of the Holy City*, Early American Imprints, 1639-1800; No. 1469 (Boston: B. Green: sold by Samuel Gerrish at his shop, 1710), 43. Emphasis original.

²² Increase Mather, *The Day of Trouble Is near*, ed. Urian Oakes, Early American Imprints, 1639-1800; No. 192 (Cambridge, Mass.: Marmaduke Johnwo, 1674), 23.

fact, she will be the stronghold of the saints and the instrument of the divine judgment to other nations. In a sermon preached in 1673, he claimed,

Oh that our Divisions, and other Evils that are amongst us, might be repented of, and then I dare speak it boldly before all this Congregation, God will make *New-England* a burthensome stone, yea though all the Nation of the Earth should be gathered together against it, they shall be broken in pieces.²³

Following his father, Cotton Mather also stressed the superiority of New England, maintaining, in his *Theopolis Americana*, “There are many Arguments to perswade us, That our Glorious LORD, will have an *Holy City* in AMERICA; a city, the *street* whereof will be *pure gold*.”²⁴ In so doing, Cotton Mather clearly regarded New England as the elect nation and her residents as the remnant that “warranted the salvation of the entire earth.”²⁵

In sum, following up Thomas Brightman’s disappointment with England, many Puritans including John Winthrop, John Cotton, Samuel Sewall, Increase and Cotton Mather turned their eyes to New England. Like their Protestant predecessors such as John Bale and John Foxe did to the Old World, they recognized New England as the land of the elect nation and the center of the millennium. Under such circumstances, many believe that Edwards, born in the backdrop of the fervency to New England, also took an America-centric position in his anticipation of the millennium. However, it is worthy to re-evaluate Edwards’s view of New England. What was Edwards’s position among his Puritan colleagues who highly- or over-emphasize the significance of New England in the divine eschatological scheme? Did he regard the land of America as the ideal location of the millennial kingdom? The next section investigates these issues.

²³ Increase Mather, *The Day of Trouble Is near*, 30.

²⁴ Cotton Mather, *Theopolis Americana*, 43. Emphasis original.

²⁵ Engler et al, “Transformation of Millennial Thought in America, 1630-1860,” 20.

3. Edwards's Canaan-centric Millennium

In this section, we will examine whether Edwards held a view of America-oriented or Canaan-centric Millennium. First, we will challenge the widely accepted misinterpretation of Edwards's America-centric millennium by demonstrating that Edwards was rather disappointed at America and predicted her a gloomy future. Next, we will prove that his zealous eschatological hope is Canaan-centric. We will conclude this section with our evaluation of the possible reasons behind Edwards's pessimism on America and his eschatological optimism with the Land of Israel.

3.1 An America-centric Millennium?

There seems to be a prevalent misinterpretation among scholars, that Edwards, as many of his Puritan colleagues did, was expecting that New England would be the ideal location of the millennium. For instance, C. C. Goen suggested that Edwards had believed that the millennium that would “*begin in America.*”²⁶ In editing Edwards's *The Great Awakening* in 1972, Goen restated this claim and insisted that Edwards had reinforced “America's persistent self-image as a ‘redeemer nation’” and related this idea of a “redeemer nation” to “biblical prophecies of the millennium...”²⁷ By reading Edwards's sentences in his *Some Thoughts* that “the beginning of this great work of God must be near. And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in *America,*” Goen even inserted a subtitle---“*The Millennium Probably To Dawn in America*”---for this section in *The Great Awakening.*²⁸

²⁶ Goen, “Jonathan Edwards,” 29, emphasis added.

²⁷ Goen, “Editor's Introduction,” *WJE* 4:71-72.

²⁸ This section is found in *WJE* 4:353-58, the subtitle is on page 353. Italics original.

This view was followed by others. For instance, in his *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (1975), Sacvan Bercovitch claims that one has no way to gain a general understanding of nature without perceiving “Christ’s *magnalia Americana*.”²⁹ Similarly, Stephen Stein, the editor of Edwards’s *Apocalyptic Writings* (1977), declares that when Edwards published his *Some Thoughts* in 1743, he actually made a “heady proclamation” that the millennium would begin in America.³⁰ Consequently, “Edwards spent much of his time belaboring the fact that it was ‘probable’ the millennial age might begin in America, arguing the point with a strange set of reasons.”³¹

The selected quotes from several authors above indicate that Edwards was widely believed to hold an America-centric millennial view. But this assessment does not stand close scrutiny however, as Gerald McDermott has shown. As mentioned in Chapter Three, by using the phrase “this great work of God,” Edwards actually was anticipating an international revival right before the millennium, rather than the millennium itself.³² In this sense, it is unreasonable to argue Edwards was expecting to witness the millennium arriving in America. Furthermore, as McDermott pointed out, Edwards was actually “*dominated*” by “pessimism about New England’s status and destiny,” rather than regarding her as a redeemer nation (1991).³³ McDermott explained,

He [Edwards] never considered New England or Northampton to be basically righteous. Northampton was a city on a hill, but only as a negative example of behavior to be avoided. Rather than forecasting eventual and certain prosperity for the region, he seemed obsessed by the possibility of its permanent destruction. Instead of seeing Northampton or New England as a redeemer

²⁹ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 155-56. See also McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 38-39; McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 575.

³⁰ *WJE* 5:26-27.

³¹ *WJE* 5:28.

³² McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 51.

³³ Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, the City on a Hill, and the Redeemer Nation: A Reappraisal,” *American Presbyterians* 69, no. 1 (1991): 34.

nation, he speculated that God would transfer the covenant from a stubbornly wicked New England to another people more worthy of it. In other words, he threatened that God might do what his hearers so greatly feared—revoke New England’s covenant.³⁴

In 1992, McDermott briefly restated this assertion in his book *One Holy and Happy Society*.³⁵

However, many still hold on to the traditional assessment and have not taken up this important correction. As recently as 2012, Beeke and Jones persist in asserting that Edwards was not different from other Puritans who considered New England as the “promised land” and “a city on a hill” that was “called to be God’s light to the nations.”³⁶ There is no sufficient evidence to support their assessment, however. Even Harry Stout, the editor of Edwards’s *Sermon and Discourse, 1739-1742* (2003), were misled. He observes, probably rightly, “For a brief moment in the height of the revivals, he [Edwards] turned his attention homeward to America... But this proved to be a passing speculation.”³⁷ Nevertheless, he continues to claim that Edwards at that time would think America “as the possible seat of God’s new heavens and new earth at the end of history.”³⁸

Did Edwards ever anticipate, even for a short while, an America-centric millennium? If not, what would be the geographic center of his millennial kingdom? To answer these questions, we will first present Edwards’s disappointment with America, and then note his emphasis on the land of Israel.

3.2 Edwards’s Disappointment with America

Like many of his Puritan predecessors, Edwards regarded the Old World as a sinful

³⁴ McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, the City on a Hill, and the Redeemer Nation,” 34.

³⁵ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 60-63.

³⁶ Beeke and Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 779.

³⁷ Harry Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:38.

³⁸ Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:38.

place. In his “Notes on the Apocalypse,” in fact, he quoted Revelation 2:23 and referred to her as “the seat of Satan”: “What is said to Pergamos seems very well to suit the case of the Church of England; ‘and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is.’”³⁹

In the meantime, Edwards is also well known for addressing Northampton as “a city on a hill.” In fact, in July 1736 he preached a sermon entitled “A City On a Hill.”⁴⁰ In this sermon, Edwards claimed that Northampton was “the original and principal seat of” God’s work.⁴¹ He said,

We are as a city set upon a hill, in all those ways that have been mentioned. We are so by the distinguishing profession that we make. And we have been made so by the distinguishing and remarkable works that God hath wrought amongst us. And we have been made so by the great and remarkable influence that what has been seen and heard of amongst us, and the profession we make, has had on many other places. Though the whole work was the work of God, and we have nothing to attribute of it to ourselves; yet God was pleased evidently to make use of his own great and wonderful work here, as a means to stir up and awaken others all around us.⁴²

Note, however, by applying this image of “a city on a hill,” Edwards did not follow his optimistic colleagues like Increase and Cotton Mather suggesting that Northampton was capable for redeeming other towns of New England or any portion of the world. Instead, he simply stressed the fact that the infidelity of the town would not be hidden, as McDermott correctly observes.⁴³

As he elaborated in this sermon, Edwards was convinced that Northampton was far from being a perfect or righteous city. On the contrary, there *were* some “blemishes to religion” among the residents, so he urged the whole town to make much more effort to improve their religious practice, viz., “holding forth [to] the

³⁹ *WJE* 5:99.

⁴⁰ *WJE* 19:537-59.

⁴¹ *WJE* 19:551.

⁴² *WJE* 19:549.

⁴³ McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, the City on a Hill, and the Redeemer Nation,” 37.

world the good and lovely fruits of this work of God.”⁴⁴ Specifically, in order to “adorn” their profession of the gospel, and promote the glory of God’s work,⁴⁵ Edwards encouraged “all sorts” of people to lead a spiritually adorable life: all residents being united with peace and love, young people avoiding anything of disorder, town leaders managing public affairs with love and meekness, etc.⁴⁶

Compared with his impression of Northampton, Edwards’s observation of New England was much more pessimistic. Until his preaching of “A City On a Hill,” Edwards observed, New England still remained unconvinced of God’s work in Northampton. But it was not surprising for him at all. This country, according to Edwards, had experienced a rather long time of spiritual decline and suffered from the recent expansion of Arminianism among her ministers. As a result, it was reduced to a secular land that was unfamiliar with *any* of God’s work, even becoming hostile with spiritual revivals. He observed further,

But to this very day, the country is not convinced. And there seem to have been two principal reasons of it. . . . and another is that there seems to be a strong prejudice in [a] great part of the country *against any work of such a nature*. . . . It has been *a degenerate, dead time so long* in the country that vital religion, and the power of godliness, seems to be grown a shy stranger in many places. . . . But there has been *so great a decay of the power of religion so long* in the country, that the country has in a great measure forgot the language: it is strange kind of talk to them. The very notion of such powerful works of God’s Spirit, seems to be raced out of their minds. And the country seems, in [a] great part of it, to be got into another way of thinking of things of religion, *looking chiefly at morality and a sober life*. And then another great prejudice in the country has been *the late extraordinary growth of Arminianism*, or doctrines that savor of it, especially amongst those that are set to teach others.⁴⁷

Therefore, when “a mobbish rage and fury against the ministry” was raised all over New England, it was natural to see that prejudice “chiefly against Northampton” was spreading on this land, though God’s glorious work was evidently witnessed in this

⁴⁴ *WJE* 19:551.

⁴⁵ *WJE* 19:549-51.

⁴⁶ *WJE* 19:554.

⁴⁷ *WJE* 19:551-552. Emphasis added.

town.⁴⁸

Edwards's pessimistic impression of New England continued until his later years. In complete contrast to the widely-accepted view that Edwards believed the millennium would start in America, when he last mentioned New England in 1747, he saw her as a tragic nation with a gloomy future: "*how lamentable is the moral and religious state of these American colonies? Of New England in particular?*"⁴⁹

Instead of developing into a "redeemer nation," New England was actually reduced to a place undergoing a thorough spiritual bankruptcy, he argued. This overall bankruptcy was easily observed at all levels of Christian faith and ministries, and it would be among not only congregations, but also the ministers. He described it at length,

How much is that kind of religion, that was professed and much experienced and practiced, in the first, and apparently the best times of New England, grown and growing out of credit? *What fierce and violent contentions have been of late among ministers and people, about things of a religious nature? How much is the gospel ministry grown into contempt, and the work of the ministry, in many respects, laid under uncommon difficulties, and even in danger of sinking amongst us? How many of our congregations and churches rending in pieces? Church discipline weakened, and ordinances less and less regarded? What wild and extravagant notions, gross delusions of the devil, and strange practices have prevailed, and do still prevail, in many places, under a pretext of extraordinary purity, spirituality, liberty, and zeal against formality, usurpation, and conformity to the world? How strong and deeply rooted and general are the prejudices that prevail against vital religion and the power of godliness, and almost everything that appertains to it or tends to it? How apparently are the hearts of the people, everywhere, uncommonly shut up against all means and endeavors to awaken sinners and revive religion?*⁵⁰

On this land, "Vice and immorality, of all kinds, withal increasing and unusually prevailing," Edwards concluded. Only the revivals that effused from "a general outpouring" of God's spirit, he continued, could be "an effectual remedy for these evils" and thus rescue this spiritually bankrupt nation.⁵¹

⁴⁸ *WJE* 19:551.

⁴⁹ *WJE* 5:358. Emphasis added.

⁵⁰ *WJE* 5:358. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ *WJE* 5:358.

Nevertheless, one should not go too far and argue that Edwards's pessimism leads him to exclude this nation from God's redemptive scheme, as his radical Puritan friends did to the Old World. While he would not see America as a redeemer nation or the center of God's millennial kingdom, Edwards still believed that she would be included in the Kingdom, just as all the other nations. Thus he preached in his *HWR* (1739),

And however small the propagation of the gospel among the heathen here in America has been hitherto, yet I think we may well look upon the discovery of so great a part of the world as America and bringing the gospel into it, is one thing by which divine providence is preparing the way for the future glorious times of the church when Satan's kingdom shall be overthrown not only throughout the Roman empire but throughout the whole habitable globe, on every side and in all its continents. When those times come, then doubtless the gospel which is already brought over into America shall have glorious success, and all the inhabitants of this new-discovered world shall be brought over into the kingdom of Christ, as well as all the other ends of the earth.⁵²

Contrary to the colonists' optimism, particularly that of John Cotton, John Winthrop, Samuel Sewall, Increase and Cotton Mather, Edwards's pessimistic anticipation with New England is quite clear and striking. Instead of seeing New England as the ideal location of the millennium, Edwards was disturbed by her current spiritual decline and future bankruptcy. The question is, where did he locate the center of the millennial kingdom? And why did he look for the ideal millennial location somewhere else? In the following section, we will show that Edwards had a consistent belief of the land of Israel being the center of the millennium.

3.3 Edwards's Eschatological Hope for the Land of Israel

Nathan Hatch argues that due to spiritual decline in New England, Edwards could not find "signs of the coming Millennium exclusively in America," hence he had to

⁵² *WJE* 9:434-435.

shift the location of his millennial expectations to a wider world.⁵³ This ascription is not true. In what follows we shall demonstrate that it is Edwards's consistent belief that the land of Israel would be the center of the millennium.

Since his early years, Edwards realized that the land of Israel, instead of New England, was a distinct place that would be the center of the world. Why did Edwards have such favorable view of Canaan? There are at least two reasons, one is his geographical awareness, and another is his typological interpretation of the relevant biblical passages.

Early in his "Notes on the Apocalypse," despite the limited geographical knowledge in his era, Edwards noticed that the land of Canaan was "in the center" of the "three continents of the earth: the old continent, America and Terra Australis" and had easy access by waterways to all other parts of the world.⁵⁴ Based on this awareness, Edwards believed that Israel, owing to her geographical advantage, would again be the very nation that has significant spiritual impact on other parts of the world. He wrote,

As the land of Canaan is the most advantageously posited of any spot of ground on the face [of the earth], to be the place from whence the truth should shine forth, and true religion spread around into all parts of the world... That God did take care of the situation of his people Israel, upon their account, for the advantage of spreading the truth and diffusing the influences of religion, I think is evident from Deuteronomy 32:8-9, and from Acts 17:26-27 and from Habakkuk 3:6... Wherefore, we do believe that the most glorious part of the church will hereafter be there, at the center of the kingdom of Christ, communicating influences to all other parts.⁵⁵

Compared with the geographical advantage of Israel, the rest of the world (including America!) has nothing to offer. As Edwards observed, "Now the world has *never* enjoyed the advantages of this situation as yet."⁵⁶ "What advantage has it been to

⁵³ Hatch, *Sacred Cause of Liberty*, 32-33.

⁵⁴ *WJE* 5:133. Terra Australis: the early name of Australia.

⁵⁵ *WJE* 5:133-34. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ *WJE* 5:134.

America, that the Mediterranean Sea opens from them to us;” he continued, “or what advantage has Hollandia Nova or Terra Australis Incognita from the Indian Ocean’s reaching from them even to this land?”⁵⁷ In this sense, Edwards’s theological consciousness of Israel’s superiority over New England is formed first and foremost by his geographical knowledge and awareness.

His geographical knowledge is not the only reason, however. Edwards’s belief in Canaan as being the millennial location is rooted in his study of biblical texts. For him, the land of Israel is the type of heaven. In his *Notes on Scripture*, Edwards clearly related the earthly Canaan and heaven with type-antitype paradigm. In his interpretation of Exodus 12:35-36, he said, “As the earthly Canaan was taken away from the Canaanites and giants of that land, the enemies of the Israelites, and given to them, so heaven was taken from the fallen angels. . . .”⁵⁸ And in this volume he frequently referred the term “heavenly Canaan” to God’s celestial kingdom. For him, the heavenly Canaan is “a better paradise,” “the land of promise” for the people of God when they are delivered out of this world.⁵⁹ Edwards kept using this phrase into his later years. At the end of the letter he wrote to the first precinct of Northampton (November 8, 1744), Edwards hoped that he and the precinct would “walk together in Christian harmony and love . . . towards the *heavenly Canaan*, without falling out by the way.”⁶⁰ And some fragments show that during the mid-1750s Edwards was still drafting his thoughts on “the journey into the heavenly Canaan.”⁶¹

Note that, in contrast to his typical reading of Israel, in his extensive

⁵⁷ *WJE* 5:134. Emphasis added. Hollandia Nova and Terra Australis Incognita: both are the early names of Australia.

⁵⁸ *WJE* 15:336.

⁵⁹ See Edwards’s notes on Gen. 5:29, Gen. 23 and Rom. 2:29, *WJE* 15: 306, 335, 357.

⁶⁰ *WJE* 16:151. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ *WJE* 25:759.

application of typological interpretation, Edwards *never* identified New England as the type of heaven. At least, there is no single case of America-heaven typological paradigm found among his known manuscripts. In fact, he was so cautious with the type of ancient Israel in the Old Testament that he never speculated New England as its antitype, as Harry Stout observes.⁶²

4. Summary

From the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, there was a shift in the seeking of the sacred space. While some divines such as John Bale and John Foxe regarded England as the most significant place in the final stage of the divine eschatological scheme, others such as John Cotton, Samuel Sewall, Increase and Cotton Mather envisioned that New England would be the center of the millennium. In contrast, Edwards envisioned the land of Israel as the ideal location of the millennial kingdom. Therefore, we can state categorically, his millennial vision is not America- or New England-centric as the once-prevalent misinterpretation depicted, but Canaan-centric.

This Canaan-centric millennial conviction is formed by various factors in Edwards's ministry and theology. First of all, Edwards had a distinct awareness of the spiritual deficiency of both England and New England. While he agreed with his Puritan colleagues about the spiritual hopelessness of the Old World, in the meantime, he was quite disturbed by the current spiritual decline and future bankruptcy of New England. Second, from his extensive reading, Edwards obtained a perceptive consciousness of the geographic significance of the land of Israel. Hence, he was confident from his early years that Canaan would be an ideal location for the realization of the millennial kingdom. Third and more important, the decisive

⁶² Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:38.

factor in Edwards's Canaan-centric vision has to do with his typological interpretation. According to his typical reading of the biblical texts, the land of Israel stands as the type of heaven. In this sense, the Canaan-centric millennium is to foreshadow the celestial kingdom in heaven.

Having explored his conviction of the singularity of the land of Israel, in the following part, we will investigate his eschatological anticipation for the people of Israel, particularly Edwards's expectation of Israel's restoration as one of the determining factors in the divine eschatological blueprint.

Part II

“All Israel Shall be Saved”: Edwards’s Vision of Israel’s Eschatological Restoration¹

1. Introduction

Having investigated the geographical significance of Israel in Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom, in this part we will explore his awareness of the anthropological importance of this people-group. Particularly, we will examine his view of one of the most controversial issues: the eschatological restoration of the people of Israel.

Despite its importance, curiously enough this is not a well-researched topic in contemporary Edwardsean scholarship. In his award-winning article, Reiner Smolinski (1990) only briefly mentioned Edwards’s hope for Jewish restoration.² After a long time of silence on this topic, Gerald McDermott, at a conference in 2015, rediscovered and affirmed Edwards’s conviction of Israel’s restoration. McDermott addressed Edwards as a “Christian Zionist.” According to McDermott, while he appeared as “a typical Reformed supersessionist,” Edwards held the belief that the people of Israel would return to their homeland and experience a national conversion.³ In the most recent edited monograph (2016), McDermott refined his

¹ The quotation in the title of this Part is found in *WJE* 15:252.

² Reiner Smolinski, “Israel Redivivus: The Eschatological Limits of Puritan Typology in New England,” *The New England Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1990): 368. This article was awarded the 1989 Walter Muir Whitehill Prize in Colonial History by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts.

³ Gerald R. McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Christian Zionist” (paper presented at Jonathan Edwards Congress, Melbourne, Australia, August 24-28, 2015), 19-20. Citation is on page 19. See also McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Christian Zionist,” in *The Global Edwards: Papers from the Jonathan Edwards Congress Held in Melbourne, August 2015*, ed. Rhys S. Bezzant (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 93-94.

position and categorized Edwards as a “new Christian Zionist.” Unfortunately, in this volume, McDermott’s examination of Edwards’s standpoint is rather brief, merely analyzing it from the perspective of the coherence and unity of the two covenants as Edwards understood them.⁴

Despite his ground-breaking and greatly significant research, there are important gaps in McDermott’s treatment. First, what was Edwards’s response to the controversies around Romans 11:26? Second, how did he determine the time scale of Israel’s restoration? Third, what is the significance of this eschatological event in Edwards’s overall theological framework of the millennial kingdom?

Based on these, the purpose of the second part of the chapter is to provide a careful exposition of Edwards’s vision of Israel’s eschatological restoration, particularly, from the wider perspective of his millennialism. Our thesis is that the eschatological restoration of the people of Israel plays an essential role in Edwards’s millennialism and in his theology of redemptive history. Israel’s restoration will initiate the commencement of the millennium, as well as determine the destiny of the whole world.

The structure of this part is as follows. We will start with an examination of Israel’s restoration in the Reformed tradition, evaluating the dramatic shift from the early reformers’ rejection to the Puritans’ acceptance of the eschatological restoration of Israel. We then move on to a detailed discussion of Edwards’s vision. Here we will analyze his seemingly hermeneutical inconsistency in the biblical term of “Israel,” in order to determine the identity of the restored people and the time scale of their restoration. We conclude by discussing the impact of Israel’s

⁴ Gerald McDermott, “A History of Christian Zionism: Is Christian Zionism Rooted Primarily in Premillennial Dispensationalism?” in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 62-65.

restoration on the expansion of God's kingdom and the commencement of the millennium.

2. Israel's Restoration in the Reformed Tradition

Among various biblical texts on the eschatological future of Israel, the proclamation of the Apostle Paul that "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26) probably has caused the most controversies. What did Paul mean by "all Israel"? Who will be restored and redeemed at the end time? There are at least three interpretations of this verse in hermeneutical history: some spiritualize "Israel" to refer to the Christian church embracing both the elect Jews *and* Gentiles, others insist that "all Israel" actually are the *elect Jews*, and still others claim that they are the majority of the *ethnic Jews*.⁵

During the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, these three interpretations successively became popular when the view on the future of Israel underwent a paradigm shift. This historical shift from early reformers' repudiation to Puritans' reacceptance of the eschatological restoration of Israel was shaped not only by hermeneutical but also theological considerations. One thing is clear as a consequence: concerning the eschatological restoration of the people of Israel, the Puritan interpretation and theological stance was dramatically different from that of their Reformer predecessors.

In this section, we explore this paradigm shift. Due to space limitation, we will select Martin Luther and John Calvin as our representatives from among the reformers, and Thomas Brightman and Increase Mather as Puritans, bearing in mind

⁵ Stephen Voorwinde, "Rethinking Israel: An Exposition of Romans 11:25-27," *Vox Reformata* 68 (2003): 5-12.

the great diversity among the English Puritans themselves. Thus the summary discussion is inevitably highly selective.

2.1 Repudiation of Israel's Restoration by Luther and Calvin

Supersessionism, or the theology of Replacement, is the conviction that after Christ's first coming the Christian church has *superseded* the unique role of Israel. According to Kendall Soulen, there are three versions of supersessionism. First, the *economic* supersessionism teaches that in the divine economy or administration of redemption, the essential role of Israel is to prepare for Christ's salvation. In this sense, once the incarnate Christ came, carnal Israel became "obsolete" and was replaced by the church that is spiritual Israel.⁶ Second, the *punitive* supersessionism believes that God turned to the church to make a new covenant after he "abrogates" his covenant with Israel in order to punish her rejection of the divine redemptive work through Jesus Christ.⁷ Third, the *structural* supersessionism goes further to advocate that redemptive history is constructed in a way that Israel is "indecisive" and her story even can be "completely omitted from an account of Christian faith."⁸

Supersessionism became dominant from the mid-second century. Many church fathers held this view such as Irenaeus (ca. 145-202), Origen (184-254), Augustine and Chrysostom (ca. 349-407).⁹ Martin Luther and John Calvin, as most of the subsequent sixteenth-century reformers, embraced this theology of replacement. Consequently, they rejected the possibility of Israel's eschatological

⁶ Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 29.

⁷ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 30.

⁸ Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 32.

⁹ McDermott, "A History of Supersessionism: Getting the Big Story Wrong," in *The New Christian Zionism*, 35-38.

restoration. Instead, they spiritualized God's promise in Romans 11 and applied it to the revival of the Christian church.

During his lifetime, Luther had a dramatic shift from a philo-Semite to an anti-Semite, if we can apply these nineteenth-century terms anachronistically to address his position.¹⁰ In his early career, Luther held a rather favorable view of the Jews. In his pamphlet *That Jesus Was Born a Jew* (1523), Luther claimed that "the Jews are actually nearer to Christ" than the Christians in terms of the genetic relationship.¹¹ While the Christians are "Gentiles" and the "aliens and in-laws," the Jews are "of the lineage of Christ," because they are "blood relatives, cousins, and brothers of our Lord."¹² Therefore, Luther encouraged Christians to be guided "by the law of Christian love," treating the Jews mercifully, in order to eventually convert them.¹³ "We must receive them cordially, and permit them to trade and work with us," he advocated, "that they may have occasion and opportunity to associate with us, hear our Christian teaching, and witness our Christian life."¹⁴

As it has been well known, however, Luther's initial compassion and mercy towards the Jews turned to hostility and rejection in his later life.¹⁵ In particular, in his *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Luther declared that the Jews are no more

¹⁰ These two terms were not coined until the late nineteenth century. In this sense, philo-Judaism and anti-Judaism may be the more appropriate terms. However, for the sake of keeping consistency with the modern scholarship, the terms philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism are used in the present study. For the historical account of anti-Semitism, see David W. Torrance, *Israel, God's Servant: God's Key to the Redemption of the World*, ed. George Taylor (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 2007), 89-99. For that of philo-Semitism, see Almond, "Thomas Brightman and the Origins of Philo-Semitism: An Elizabethan Theologian and the Restoration of the Jews to Israel," 3-25.

¹¹ Martin Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," trans. Walter I. Brandt, in *Luther's Works*, vol. 45, ed. Walther I. Brandt (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962), 201.

¹² Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," 201.

¹³ Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," 229.

¹⁴ Luther, "That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew," 229.

¹⁵ Many works contribute to Luther's transformation from a philo-Semite to an anti-Semite. For instance, see Jason Martin, "An Abandonment of Hope: Martin Luther and the Jews," *The Churchman* 107, no. 4 (1993): 331-37; David H. Lindquist, "Luther's Antisemitism in Historical Context: A Necessary Discussion for Christian Educators," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22, no. 1 (2013): 97-107; Thomas Kaufmann, *Luther's Jews: A Journey into Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

than the “rejected and condemned people.”¹⁶ Since the Jews were “surely rejected by God,” Luther believed that they are “no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God.”¹⁷ More seriously, he regarded the Jews as “a heavy burden, a plague, a pestilence, a sheer misfortune” for his country and should be driven out of the territory of Germany.¹⁸ Accordingly, Luther offered seven pieces of vitriolic suggestions (which are “sincere advice” in his own words), including burning the Jews’ synagogues and schools, destroying their houses, prohibiting the rabbis’ teaching and taking away their cash and valuables, etc.¹⁹

Many scholars feel uneasy at Luther’s disturbing and hostile recommendations against the Jews, particularly its potential impact on the development of anti-Semitism during World War II. Some claim that Luther was tragically used as a convenient tool during the Holocaust, though it was in a way that he never would have wanted to see or could have foreseen.²⁰ Others hold a more radical position to seek the direct relationship between Luther and the Nazi regime’s anti-Semitism. For example, David Torrance suggests that Luther’s “extreme hostility to the Jews” promoted anti-Semitism in Germany and in other European areas. In particular, one fact is that Hitler’s propaganda minister Goebbels “launched the Nazi media campaign against the Jews with the republication” of Luther’s *Of the Jews and their Lies* “in its entirety.”²¹ Despite his shift in position on Israel and the potential tragical application of his view during the twentieth century, Luther’s anti-Semitism

¹⁶ Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 47, ed. Franklin Sherman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 268.

¹⁷ Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” 139.

¹⁸ Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” 265.

¹⁹ Luther, “On the Jews and Their Lies,” 268-72.

²⁰ For instance, see James E. McNutt, “Luther and the Jews Revisited: Reflections on a Thought Let Slip,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 38, no. 1 (2011): 40-47; David H. Lindquist, “Luther’s Antisemitism in Historical Context: A Necessary Discussion for Christian Educators,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 22, no. 1 (2013): 97-107.

²¹ Torrance, *Israel, God’s Servant*, 95.

should not be overstated, if taking a careful investigation into his other writings. For instance, in his commentary on Romans, Luther still admitted that a very small amount of the Jews would be saved. For instance, when interpreting Romans 11:26, Luther wrote,

To understand the Apostle rightly, we must bear in mind that his statement extends to the whole lump of the Jewish people. Even if some among them are cast away, nevertheless, the lump must be honoured because of the elect. So we must respect any community because of the good in it, even when they are in the minority over against the wicked. *In this sense the Jewish people is a "holy lump," namely, because of the elect, but the Jews are "cut off branches" as regards the castaways.* Thus the Jews are both "fullness" and "emptiness." He calls them "lump" to show that he is speaking not of individual persons, but of the whole people, in which there may not be many that are holy.²²

Evidently, Luther did not deny the fact that some of the Jewish people would be redeemed at the end of the world. However, for him Paul's wording "all Israel" was merely confined to the *elect* Jews who would be no more than a minority of that people. In contrast to this small group of the elect, most Jews would be cast away and eternally rejected, as nothing but a "negative apocalyptic agent" and an "instrument" of the divine wrath at the day of the Final Judgment.²³

Now compared with Luther, Calvin's attitude towards the Jews was much more nuanced. At least, he did not suggest any harsh treatment for the Jewish people. However, being in the main a supersessionist, Calvin would not recognize the Jews in the gospel time as God's people. In his *Institutes* (Book IV, ii, 3), Calvin interpreted the apostle Paul's intention in Romans 9-11 and Galatians 4, asserting that "while the Jews seemed to be God's people,"²⁴ they have no way to be regarded as the church. Accordingly, Calvin provided an allegorical interpretation of Romans 11:26 in his *Commentary on Romans*. For him, the phrase "all Israel" refers to all of

²² Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1954), 146.

²³ Avihu Zakai, "The Poetics of History and the Destiny of Israel: The Role of the Jews in English Apocalyptic Thought During the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1996): 317.

²⁴ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 1044.

God's people rather than the Jews. God's eschatological promise of redeeming all Israel, consequently, is given to the Christian church, viz., the *spiritual* Israel instead of the ethnic Jews. He wrote,

And so all Israel, &c. Many understand this of the Jewish people, as though Paul had said, that religion would again be restored among them as before: but I extend the word *Israel* to all the people of God . . . This interpretation seems to me the most suitable, because Paul intended here to set forth the completion of the kingdom of Christ, which is by no means to be confined to the Jews, but is to include the whole world. The same manner of speaking we find in Gal. 6:16. The Israel of God is what he calls the Church, gathered alike from Jews and Gentiles; and he sets the people, thus collected from their dispersion, in opposition to the carnal children of Abraham, who had departed from his faith.²⁵

Based on this belief, Calvin harshly critiqued the disciples' inquiry about the restoration of God's kingdom before His Ascension (Acts 1:6). He was confident that out of their corporate "ignorance" and "rudeness," the disciples expected the kingdom to be restored unto Israel.²⁶ For Calvin, it was evident that they held the secular dream of establishing an earthly kingdom that "should flow with riches, with dainties, with external peace, and with such like good things."²⁷ Therefore, they ignored the divine plan of expanding the kingdom "unto the uttermost parts of the world," and simply restrained it "unto the carnal Israel."²⁸

Why did Calvin refuse to interpret Romans 11:26 as prophecy of Israel's national conversion? There are a number of reasons. Firstly, Calvin thought that the Jews' rejection of God's redemption would trigger God's general rejection of Jewish people. As Calvin wrote in his *Institutes* (Book IV, ii, 3), the Jews committed a three-fold sin: rejected Jesus Christ, rejected and persecuted "the teaching of the

²⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, trans. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 437. See also Voorwinde, "Rethinking Israel," 5-6.

²⁶ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 43.

²⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 43.

²⁸ Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, 43.

gospel,” and refused God’s willingness of keeping the covenant with them.²⁹ As a result, they deserve nothing but being “repudiated.”³⁰ Secondly, because the Jews had rejected Jesus as the Messiah for over 1,500 years till his time, Calvin argued that they are “worthy to *perish a thousand times* without remedy.”³¹

Nevertheless, like Luther, Calvin did not suggest that the Jews would be completely expelled from God’s kingdom. Instead, he agreed with Paul in Romans 11:2 that God has not cast away His chosen people who are the Jews. For Calvin, God would remember His covenant and keep His promise with Israel. However, God will neither abandon the whole race of the Jews, nor save all of them. Instead, God will save a remnant according to his divine and secret election. In his *Commentary on Romans*, Calvin wrote,

So the answer may be divided into two parts, ---that God has by no means cast away the whole race of Abraham, contrary to the tenor of his own covenant, --- and that yet the fruit of adoption does not exist in all the children of the flesh, for secret election precedes. Thus general rejection could not have caused that no seed should be saved; for the visible body of the people was in such a manner rejected, that no member of the spiritual body of Christ was cut off.³²

Calvin asserted that God would execute a general rejection toward the Jews, but He would redeem some of them as a remnant and include them in the church that is the spiritual Israel.

In sum, while differing in attitudes and wordings, Luther and Calvin overall held a supersessionist view and regarded the Christian church as the spiritual Israel. In this sense, both of them are punitive supersessionists. While both agreed that a small group of the elect Jews would be eventually saved and accepted into God’s

²⁹ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 1044-45.

³⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1 & 2*, vol. 1, 1044-45.

³¹ Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2, trans. John King (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 459. Emphasis added. See also David Steinmetz, “John Calvin and the Jews: A Problem in Political Theology,” *Political Theology* 10, no. 3 (2009): 404.

³² Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 409-410. See also Jack Hughes Robinson, *John Calvin and the Jews* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992), 78-80.

kingdom, for Luther and Calvin, Israel's restoration as promised in Romans 11:26, indisputably, will be realized among the Christian churches rather than exclusively among the Jews.

2.2 Renaissance of Israel's Restoration among the New England Divines

Gradually, the English divines rejected the supersessionist view, developed a "radically more positive and glorious apocalyptic vision," and a literal interpretation of Israel's eschatological restoration became a more prevalent position.³³ As a result, they believed that Israel would return to their homeland and experience a national conversion.

Thomas Brightman's work laid the foundation for the Puritan's understanding of Israel's eschatological destiny.³⁴ In his *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (1611), Brightman firmly believed that the Jews would experience a significant restoration before the second coming of Christ. According to Philip Almond, Brightman was the "founder of the British tradition of philo-Semitism," his interpretation of Revelation 16:12 "established the exegetical tradition" that the Jews would return to Jerusalem and be converted to Christianity.³⁵ In expositing this verse, Brightman wrote,

*Shal they returne agayn to Jerusalem? There is nothing more sure: the Prophets plainly confirme it, and beat often upon it Yet not to the end that the ceremonial worship should be restored: but that the mercy of God may shine unto al the world, in giving to a nation now scatered over al the face of the earth, & dwelling no where but by leave; their fathers habitations, wherin they shal serve Christ purely and sincerely, according to his owne ordinance onely.*³⁶

³³ Zakai, "The Poetics of History and the Destiny of Israel," 318-19. See also Smolinski, "Apocalypticism in Colonial North America," 54.

³⁴ Gerald R. McDermott, "A History of Christian Zionism: Is Christian Zionism Rooted Primarily in Premillennial Dispensationalism?" in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 59.

³⁵ Almond, "Thomas Brightman and the Origins of Philo-Semitism: An Elizabethan Theologian and the Restoration of the Jews to Israel," 4, 8.

³⁶ Thomas Brightman, *A Revelation of the Apocalyps, That Is, the Apocalyps of S. John Illustrated with an Analysis & Scolions: Where the Sense Is Opened by the Scripture, & the Events of Things*

There is a long list of Brightman's followers: Sir Henry Finch (ca. 1558-1625), Joseph Mede, John Cotton, John Milton (1608-1674) and John Owen (1616-1683).³⁷ For instance, Owen was convinced that there would be a most extensive spiritual revival among the Jews and they would accept Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Subsequently, they will return to their homeland. Owen wrote in his *Exposition to Hebrews*,

there shall be a time and season, during the continuance of the kingdom of the Messiah in this world, wherein the generality of the nation of the Jews, all the world over, shall be called and effectually *brought unto the knowledge of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ*; with which mercy they shall also receive deliverance from their captivity, *restoration unto their own land*, with a blessed, flourishing, and happy condition therein.³⁸

*When they shall receive, acknowledge, and believe in, that Messiah who came so long time since unto them, whom their fathers wickedly slew and hanged on a tree, and whom themselves have since no less wickedly rejected; . . . then shall they obtain mercy from the God of their forefathers, and returning again into their own land, "Jerusalem shall be inhabited again, even in Jerusalem."*³⁹

It seems that Owen was quite confident with both the Jews' spiritual restoration and their return to Jerusalem. In fact, he assumed that this was a well-accepted truth in his world: "The thing itself is acknowledged, as far as I can understand, by all the world that have any acquaintance with these things."⁴⁰ And he seemed not aware of the alternative viewpoints of some reformers mentioned above, but went further to maintain Israel's restoration had been a substantial and consistent quest among the

Foretold, Shewed by Histories. By Thomas Brightman (Amsterdam: Printed by Iudocus Hondius & Hendrick Laurens, 1611), 440. Emphasis added. For the details of Brightman's view of Israel's restoration, see Andrew Crome, *The Restoration of the Jews Early Modern Hermeneutics, Eschatology, and National Identity in the Works of Thomas Brightman* (Cham: Springer, 2014).

³⁷ Zakai, "The Poetics of History and the Destiny of Israel," 323.

³⁸ John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with Preliminary Exercitations* (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1854-55; Reprinted by The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 434. Emphasis added.

³⁹ Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with Preliminary Exercitations*, 446. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with Preliminary Exercitations*, 434.

Christians in ages: “Christians generally do assert it, look for it, pray for it; and have done so *in all ages from the days of the apostles.*”⁴¹

Later in that period, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation* (1669) by Increase Mather became “the most detailed and most representative publication” on Israel’s eschatological restoration, according to Smolinski.⁴² Mather firmly refuted those who doubted Israel’s restoration. He asserted that in the Scriptures this event is “very clear” and impossible to be “denied or questioned.”⁴³ In particular, Mather made three clear claims as follows.

First, Mather noticed “diverse interpretations” of the phrase “all Israel” in Romans 11:26: “some Few of *all Israel*,” or “all the *elect of God*,” or “all and every one of the natural posterity of *Jacob*.”⁴⁴ In confronting with these interpretations, Mather insisted on a literal interpretation. For him, “a literal interpretation of Scripture ought never to be rejected for an allegorical one.”⁴⁵ Therefore, he rejected all these three interpretations because they are either “*particular* restrained interpretation” or the allegorical one.⁴⁶

Second, the claim that “all Israel shall be saved” means the whole nation of the ethnic Israel will be redeemed. “All Israel is meant the body of the *Israelite Nation*,” Mather asserted.⁴⁷ “Yea, *all* here noteth, not only many, but most;” He

⁴¹ Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with Preliminary Exercitations*, 434. Emphasis added.

⁴² Smolinski, “Israel Redivivus,” 365.

⁴³ Increase Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation, Explained and Applied: Or, a Discourse Concerning the General Conversion of the Israelitish Nation: Wherein Is Shewed, 1. That the Twelve Tribes Shall Be Saved. 2. When This Is to Be Expected. 3. Why This Must Be. 4. What Kind of Salvation the Tribes of Israel Shall Partake of (Viz.) a Glorious, Wonderful, Spiritual, Temporal Salvation. Being the Substance of Several Sermons Preached by Increase Mather, M.A. Teacher of a Church in Boston in New England* (London: Printed for John Allen, 1669), 53.

⁴⁴ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 5-7. Emphasis original.

⁴⁵ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 8.

⁴⁶ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 5-9. Emphasis original. Citation is on page 5.

⁴⁷ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 9. Emphasis original.

explained, “it signifieth not only a *Majority*, but a very full and large *Generality*.”⁴⁸ In fact, the number of the converted Jews would be significant: “the salvation of *Israel* will be glorious in respect of the multitude of them which shall be saved,” Mather predicted, “the *Israelites* shall come flocking in marvellous multitudes, when this glorious day is come.”⁴⁹ He asserted, “the *whole nation* of the Jews” will experience the deliverance from threefold of their spiritual sins: “the blindness of their minds,” “the hardens of their hearts,” and “the unbelief of their souls.”⁵⁰ In this way, they would be “*saved* from that curse and wrath of God which lyeth upon them.”⁵¹

Third, Israel’s restoration signifies a double-sided event: the physical return to the homeland and the spiritual restoration of the people of Israel. The Jews would return to “the Land promised onto their *Father Abraham*,” Mather stressed, and the Israelites would turn to Christ and accept his salvation.⁵²

Mather’s expectation of Israel’s restoration marked a renaissance of a minority view in the early church. While supersessionism was prevalent, some church fathers still hoped for the restoration of Israel. For instance, Justin Martyr foresaw a Jerusalem-centric millennium, and Tertullian expected that the Jews would return to their homeland sometime in the future. In particular, the Egyptian bishop Nepos even believed that the returned Israel would restore Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.⁵³ While this minority view became much less accepted due to the prevalence of Augustine’s amillennial eschatology, a small number of medieval theologians

⁴⁸ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 9. Emphasis original.

⁴⁹ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 54. Emphasis original.

⁵⁰ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 11. Emphasis added.

⁵¹ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 11. Emphasis original.

⁵² Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 53. Emphasis original. See also Reiner Smolinski, “The ‘New’ Hermeneutics and the Jewish Nation in Cotton Mather’s Eschatology,” in *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of “Triparadisus,”* ed. Reiner Smolinski (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1995), 22.

⁵³ McDermott, “A History of Christian Zionism,” 54-55.

such as Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202) and John of Rupescissa (ca. 1310-1366) still insisted that the Jews would return to Jerusalem and subsequently have a mass conversion.⁵⁴ And this view is labelled as “Judeo-centrism” in the past and “new Christian Zionism” now in recent scholarship.⁵⁵ While the two terms are slightly varied in definition, a Judeo-centrist or a new Christian Zionist expects Israel’s eschatological restoration, recognizes the central role of Israel in the divine redemptive work and insists on the theological significance of the people and land of Israel in redemptive history.⁵⁶

As one may expect, there is no agreement among the Puritans concerning Israel’s restoration, as with most topics on the millennium. Some, like William Pynchon (1590-1662) and Richard Baxter (1615-1691), completely denied the possibility of Israel’s national conversion and future return to the homeland.⁵⁷ Even Increase’s son, Cotton Mather joined this camp. In his *Threefold Paradise*, he allegorized the eschatological conversion of the people of Israel and entirely departed from his father.⁵⁸ Others such as William Perkins (1558-1602) and Thomas Parker partially rejected Israel’s restoration, accepting Israel’s national conversion but repudiating their repatriation to the Land of Canaan.⁵⁹

Despite all this, in this renaissance of Israel’s eschatological restoration, Increase Mather stood as a significant transitional figure from early Puritans to late

⁵⁴ McDermott, “A History of Christian Zionism,” 56-57.

⁵⁵ Respectively, see Richard W. Cogley, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the ‘Judeo-Centric’ Strand of Puritan Millenarianism,” *Church History* 72, no. 2 (2003): 304-32; McDermott, ed. *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016).

⁵⁶ Cogley, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the ‘Judeo-Centric’ Strand of Puritan Millenarianism,” 304. See also McDermott, “Introduction: What is the New Christian Zionism?” in *The New Christian Zionism*, 12.

⁵⁷ Cogley, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the ‘Judeo-Centric’ Strand of Puritan Millenarianism,” 306.

⁵⁸ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 54.

⁵⁹ Cogley, “The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Restoration of Israel in the ‘Judeo-Centric’ Strand of Puritan Millenarianism,” 306.

New England Puritans. This can be demonstrated in the case of Edwards in the next section.

3. Edwards on Israel's Eschatological Restoration

In our previous review of the hermeneutical and theological paradigm shift on Israel, we have examined Luther's and Calvin's reluctance as well as the Puritans' acceptance of Israel's eschatological restoration. Edwards's vision of Israel's restoration, as a sum of his Puritan colleagues, can be regarded as the typical example of this shift. Therefore, in this section we will study his thinking in more detail. This is done from four aspects: his interpretation of the term "Israel" appeared in the Scriptures, his conviction of the Israel's eschatological restoration, the identity of the restored Israel, and the time scale of Israel's restoration.

3.1 Edwards's Interpretation of Israel in the Biblical Texts

What is Edwards's interpretation of the biblical term "Israel"? Did he read it as the Christian church? If so, did he think of the Jews as the rejected race who had been replaced by the spiritual Israel? In approaching these issues, we note two things.

In the first place, like Calvin, Edwards allegorized the word "Israel" that appeared in most of the scriptural texts. In his early career, he claimed that even in the Old Testament "Israel" includes both the believing Jews (he called them "Christians") and the Gentile proselytes (converters).⁶⁰ This allegoric and spiritualized interpretation was further developed in the 1730s when he wrote three miscellanies entries on Israel, two of which (*Misc.* 649 & 658) were entitled as "True

⁶⁰ *Misc.* 49, *WJE* 13:227-228.

Christian the Israel.”⁶¹ In the third entry (*Misc. 597*), Edwards clearly expressed the same notion without using such a title. “The seed of Abraham and of Israel are continued in the Christian church,” he asserted in this entry.⁶² While these Christians are the descendants of the Gentiles “according to the flesh,” they *are* “Israel, and the seed of Abraham,” as the “same people that came up out of Egypt, and dwelt in Canaan under judges and kings.”⁶³ Thus, Edwards was convinced that “Israel,” in the majority of the scriptural texts, was not an ethnic term, but a spiritual one: it referred to God’s people.

Secondly, among this spiritual Israel, only a small portion of the Jews was included, and Edwards regarded them as the elect and the remnant. For him, “only the remnant according to the election of grace that are the seed of Abraham and Israel.”⁶⁴ Consequently, Edwards thought that except this remnant, most of the Jews were “disinherited” and not regarded as the people of Israel.⁶⁵ This rejected group includes the ten tribes in the Old Testament and the “unbelieving Jews” in the gospel time. Here Edwards insisted on the consistent principle of defining “Israel”: either before or after Christ’s incarnation, it is not because of their ethnic origin, but based on God’s election and redemption, that a group of people may be addressed as “the people of Israel.” “As it was of old before Christ came,” he claimed, “the people were *not Israel* because they all came from Israel *by natural generation*, but the people as a people were derived from him; and so it is now.”⁶⁶

Based on the above observations, we agree with McDermott that by spiritualizing the term “Israel” in his interpretation of the relevant biblical texts,

⁶¹ See *Misc. 649 & 658, WJE 18:188-90, 198.*

⁶² *Misc. 597, WJE 18:131.*

⁶³ *Misc. 597, WJE 18:131.*

⁶⁴ *Misc. 649, WJE 18:189-190.*

⁶⁵ *Misc. 649, WJE 18:189-190.*

⁶⁶ *Misc. 649, WJE 18:190. Emphasis added.*

Edwards was “*sounding* like a typical Reformed supersessionist.”⁶⁷ However, we go further and argue that what Edwards attempted to highlight is the decisive significance of God’s redemptive work in defying the identity of the people of “Israel.” In another word, while believing that the term “Israel” is a spiritual one, Edwards did not suggest that the church has replaced ethnic Israel. At least, this is not what he would stress. Instead, what he highlighted is the extensive body of God’s people that includes both the Jewish and Gentile believers, though he agreed that in this body of the spiritual Israel, the portion of the Jews would not be huge.

One may well ask: since Edwards spiritualized “Israel” as Luther and Calvin did, did he also follow them and reject the future restoration of Israel? How did he envision the unbelieving Jews in his eschatological vision of the millennial kingdom? Will they be forever rejected and discarded? We will examine these in what follows.

3.2 Edwards’s Conviction of the Israel’s Restoration

In contrast to early reformers’ anticipation of Israel’s gloomy future, Edwards followed some of his Puritan colleagues and believed that the people of Israel would experience an eschatological restoration. Unlike Calvin, Edwards believed that while Israel rejected both Christ and His gospel, God would not forget His covenant with them. For Edwards, Israel was not replaced by the Christian church, nor would they have forever rejected. Conversely, he believed that Israel would experience a national conversion as well as repatriation at the end times.

To begin with, Edwards believed that the people of Israel would finally return to the land of Canaan. In his “Notes on the Apocalypse,” he claimed, “Without

⁶⁷ McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Christian Zionist,” 18. Emphasis original.

doubt, they will return to their own land.”⁶⁸ Edwards’s prediction lies in his conviction of God’s faithfulness. He believed that the faithful God would completely fulfil all His promises recorded in Scriptures. As preached in 1727, Edwards was convinced that God “never fails of his promises.”⁶⁹ For Edwards, “God foreknows all things, is able to do all things, is unchangeable, and is incapable of deceiving his people.”⁷⁰ Since God “has covenanted with his people to protect and save them,” he will keep his promise.⁷¹ This is placed on the basis of God’s faithfulness and will not be determined by the deeds or performance of his people. As for what God promised about the land, Edwards noticed that Israel never fully possessed this land. What they have possessed was even less than one quarter, in fact. Edwards wrote,

And it is the more evident, that the Jews will return to their own land again, because they *never have yet possessed* one quarter of that land, which was so often promised them, from the Red Sea to the river Euphrates (Ex. 23:31; Gen. 15:18; Deut. 11:24; Josh. 1:4). Indeed, it was partly fulfilled in Solomon’s time, when he governed all within those bounds for a short time; but so short, that it is not to be thought that this is all the fulfillment of the promise that is to be. And besides, that was not a fulfillment of the promise, because they did not possess it, though they made the nations of it tributary.⁷²

Therefore, viewing from the perspective of God’s faithfulness, Edwards maintained that God will remember His covenant with Israel and will keep His promise of bestowing upon them the land. Despite whatever the people of Israel did to disobey God’s commandment or even rebel against him, the undeniable truth is that they never had possessed even one quarter of the Promised Land. Based on this, the faithful God would not nullify his promise or forget his covenant with Israel. Instead, God would “have to” finally carry out his promise to the Jews. This has proven to be

⁶⁸ *WJE* 5:135.

⁶⁹ Edwards, “God Never Fails of His Word,” in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons*, ed. Wilson H. Kinnach (New Haven, CT: The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2016), Mt. 24:35.

⁷⁰ “God Never Fails of His Word,” Mt 24:35.

⁷¹ “God Never Fails of His Word,” Mt 24:35.

⁷² *WJE* 5:134. Emphasis added.

Edwards's "novel reasoning" of the Jews' return to their homeland, to use the phrase of McDermott.⁷³

Furthermore, Edwards was confident that Israel would experience a spiritual revival. As a result, they will be Christianized:

As they have continued hitherto, with one consent, to dishonor Christ by rejecting the gospel, so shall they meet together to honor him, by openly professing of it with one mouth, and practice it with one heart and one soul, together lamenting their obstinacy, as it is said they shall (Zech. 12:11-12), and together praising God for his grace in enlightening them.⁷⁴

While the Jews openly and continually rejected both Christ and gospel in the past "seventeen hundred years," God will renew their hearts and restore their faith in Him. Edwards asserted in his *HWR*, "when this day comes the thick veil that blinds their eyes shall be removed... and divine grace shall melt and renew their hard hearts."⁷⁵

For Edwards, Israel's restoration is not only due to God's faithfulness, but also to manifest God's self-glorification. And he described it with "for the sake of God's name." From his reading of the Bible, Edwards concluded in his *Ethical Writings* that "God's name is . . . as the end of his acts of goodness towards the good part of the moral world, and of his works of mercy and salvation towards his people."⁷⁶ For instance, God glorified himself by forgiving the people of Israel and delivering them from Babylonian captivity, as Edwards commented,

In Ezek. 36:21-23 the reason is given for God's mercy in restoring Israel. "But I had pity for my holy name.... Thus saith the Lord, I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but *for my holy name's sake* . . . and I will *sanctify my great name*, which was profaned among the heathen." . . . "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole

⁷³ McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards, Christian Zionist," 21.

⁷⁴ *WJE* 5:135.

⁷⁵ *WJE* 9:469.

⁷⁶ *WJE* 8:493.

house of Israel, *and will be jealous for my holy name.*” Daniel prays that God would forgive his people, and show them mercy *for his own sake*, Dan. 9:19.⁷⁷

In addition to Scripture, Edwards observed God’s self-glorification in His providential work in redemptive history. He noticed that God did not forsake His covenant with Israel due to her disobedience. Conversely, God had faithfully preserved the dispersed Israel for more than sixteen hundred years (till Edwards’s time). In the historical process of preserving Israel, God is actually undertaking a progressive work of restoration. In the gospel time, the Christian church will inherit all the promises and prophecies to the people of Israel. These promises are mainly “concerning their future prosperity and glory.”⁷⁸ However, this is only God’s temporary arrangement. God will fulfill his promises to the Jews more conspicuously and remarkably when they are Christianized.⁷⁹ In this sense, the seeming rejection of the Jews actually is God’s way to bring them closer to Him. Edwards claimed,

God has not cast off the seed of Abraham and Israel now in the gospel times in no wise, but hath brought them *nearer* to himself, and hath, according to frequent prophecies of gospel times, abundantly increased their blessings and the manifestations of his favor to them.⁸⁰

Therefore, Edwards regarded this historical evidence of God’s preserving Israel as a “continual miracle;” and it serves as “a remarkable seal of the fulfilment” of Israel’s eschatological restoration in the divine providence.⁸¹

Noticeably, in following the Old Testament prophets and Christ, Edwards concurred that Israel’s dispersion is evidently God’s punishment for their infidelity. However, God will eventually quench his wrath and forgive the people of Israel when they turn back to him from their infidelity. Therefore, Edwards predicted that

⁷⁷ *WJE* 8:494. Emphasis original. Edwards listed some more Bible verses, including 1 Sam. 12:22, Ps. 23:3, Ps. 25:11, Ps. 31:3, Ps. 79:9, Ps. 109:21, Jer. 14:7, 1 John 2:12, in order to illustrate that God’s merciful forgiveness is for the sake of his name, see *WJE* 8:493.

⁷⁸ *Misc.* 597, *WJE* 18:131.

⁷⁹ *Misc.* 658, *WJE* 18:198.

⁸⁰ *Misc.* 649, *WJE* 18:189.

⁸¹ *WJE* 9:470.

when the Jews' unbelief ceases, "their dispersion," as "the dreadful and signal punishment of their unbelief," would definitely cease too.⁸² On this point, Edwards appeared to be a punitive supersessionist and stressed that it was the divine punishment that Israel was scattered. Nevertheless, what he tried to emphasize is not the dark side of the Israel's sin and their deserved punishment, but the bright future of Israel's repentance, God's forgiveness and restoration that would certainly come at the end times. In this sense, it is unfair to classify Edwards as a typical supersessionist. He does not strictly fit in with any of the three categories that Soulen has put forward.

Additionally, on the basis of both scriptural and historical evidence of God's glory and his faithfulness, Edwards argued that the Israelites' repatriation was always in the divine providential blueprint. In his note on Romans 11:17 of his *Blank Bible*, Edwards applied the analogy of an individual's redemption to elaborate this harmony between the restoration of the spiritual Israel and that of the ethnic one. A person's soul was restored at first, he observed, then his body would be resurrected at the general resurrection. He applied this analogy to two layers of the sequence of God's work. First, when God's work among the spiritual Israel is done, he will turn back to restore the ethnic Israel. Second, God will restore not only the spiritual state of Israel, but also their external state by bringing them back to their homeland as a nation. Edwards explained,

As the redemption and salvation of Christ respects chiefly the soul, and yet that the restoration of men by him may be every way complete, the body also shall at last rise and be restored. So *Christ's redemption and the glorious prophecies of the blessed fruits of it to Israel respects mainly the spiritual Israel; yet through God's abundant grace, and that all things may be restored by Christ in due time, the external and literal Israel shall be restored by him.* So likewise, as something equivalent to the restoration of the body, *not only shall the spiritual state of the*

⁸² *WJE* 5:135.

*Jews be hereafter restored, but their external state as a nation in their own land.*⁸³

Therefore, based on his faith in the divine faithfulness and glorification, Edwards was confident that Israel would be restored after the restoration of the Christian church. This restoration will be a national conversion and repatriation of the people of Israel. Rather than being rejected, when they experience a spiritual revival, the Jews actually will establish a *nation state* of Israel on their homeland. In his *Blank Bible*, Edwards wrote the following on Romans 11:12ff, “not only shall the spiritual state of the Jews be hereafter restored, but their external state *as a nation* in their own land.”⁸⁴ For Edwards, Israel’s restoration will start with the destruction of Jewish infidelity and end with the establishment of a Christianized nation of Israel.

It has become quite clear from the above discussions that Edwards firmly believed in a double-layered eschatological event: Israel’s physical return to their homeland and their spiritual restoration to Christ. While this belief is similar to that of Increase Mather and other Puritans, Edwards’s conviction is rooted in his theological conviction of God’s nature and His attribute. For Edwards, God’s faithfulness and His self-glorification are the ultimate reason of Israel’s eschatological restoration. However, a series of puzzles need to be unlocked concerning Edwards’s conviction of Israel’s eschatological future. For instance, what is the scope of Israel’s restoration? Will all the Jews be included in this event? In another word, what is the identity of the restored Israel? And what is the time scale of this eschatological restoration? The following two sections examine such questions.

⁸³ *WJE* 24:1028. Emphasis added.

⁸⁴ *WJE* 24:1028. Emphasis added.

3.3 The Identity of the Restored Israel

According to Edwards, who would be included in the restored Israel? Practically, how did he determine the meaning of the phrase “all Israel” in Romans 11:26? It seems that he would not take it as the spiritual Israel (Christian church), as indicated earlier. However, will they be the elect Jews, or the ethnic Jews? This is the focus of this section.

To begin with, for Edwards, the scope of Israel’s restoration would be extremely significant. “When the greater part of the nation of the Jews were broken off by unbelief,” he insisted, “the seed of Israel were no more cast off then than in the time of the captivity of Israel and Judah into Assyria and Babylon.”⁸⁵ Instead of a small group of the Jews being converted, the people of Israel will have a national conversion that is so evident and impressive: “Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews is in the eleventh chapter of Romans,” he declared in Sermon 26 in *HWR*.⁸⁶ As the prelude of this national conversion, Jewish infidelity would be overthrown in the most extensive scope. Edwards wrote,

[W]hen this day comes the thick veil that blinds their eyes shall be removed, 2 Cor. 3:16, and divine grace shall melt and renew their hard hearts. . . *And then shall all Israel be saved. The Jews in all their dispersions shall cast away their old infidelity, and shall wonderfully have their hearts changed, and abhor themselves for their past unbelief and obstinacy. . .*⁸⁷

Consequently, the people of Israel will “*flow together* to the blessed Jesus, penitently, humbly, and joyfully owning him as their glorious King and only Saviour.”⁸⁸

Secondly, Edwards interpreted Romans 11:26 as the most extensive scope of Israel’s eschatological restoration and subsequently defined the identity of the

⁸⁵ *Misc.* 649, *WJE* 18:189.

⁸⁶ *WJE* 9:469.

⁸⁷ *WJE* 9: 469. Emphasis added.

⁸⁸ *WJE* 9:469. Emphasis added.

restored Jews. While in most of the biblical texts he interpreted the term “Israel” as the Christian church, Edwards believed that the promise in this verse would only be fulfilled among the *ethnic* Jews, rather than the elect Jews. For him, the restored Jews would definitely include the ten tribes who were rejected in the Old Testament. In fact, as preached in his *HWR*, Edwards publicly and clearly claimed that all the twelve tribes from both Judah and Israel would be restored and reunited,

When they shall be called, then shall that ancient people that were alone God’s people for so long a time be God’s people again, never to be rejected more, one fold with the Gentiles; and then also shall *the remains of the ten tribes* wherever they are, and though they have been rejected much longer than [the Jews], *be brought in with their brethren, the Jews*. The prophecies of Hosea especially seem to hold this forth, that *in the future glorious times of the church both Judah and Ephraim, or Judah and the ten tribes, shall be brought in together*, and shall be united as one people as they formerly were under David and Solomon, as Hos. 1:11, and so in the last chapter of Hosea, and other parts of his prophecy.⁸⁹

In fact, Edwards consistently interpreted Romans 11:26 as the prophecy of the ethnic Jews’ restoration. In both his public and private works, whenever he quoted Rom. 11:26, Edwards always used it to refer to the eschatological restoration of ethnic Jews. In most cases, he quoted verses 25 and 26 together and emphasized that Israel’s national conversion and the Gentiles’ conversion would be two different events: “When the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in and all Israel shall be saved.”⁹⁰ (Or: “until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in: and so all Israel shall be saved.”)⁹¹ In a few cases where Edwards did not quote these two verses together, he would make it clear that Romans 11:26 refers to the Jewish restoration only. For instance, in his *Notes on Scripture*, when discussing the tribulations in Matthew 24:21-24ff, he used “the literal Jacob” and “the spiritual Jacob” to make a clear

⁸⁹ *WJE* 9:470.

⁹⁰ See Edwards, “The Value of Salvation,” *WJE* 10:335.

⁹¹ Edwards, “God’s People to Pray for the Promised Latter-Day Outpouring of the Spirit,” in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons*, Eze. 36:36-37. See also Edwards, “The Suitableness of Union in Extraordinary Prayer for the Advancement of God’s Church,” *WJE* 25:202; Or in *Jonathan Edwards Sermons*, Zec. 8:20-22.

distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. “*The literal Jacob* shall be saved out of it,” Edwards claimed, “when the time come that the Apostle speaks of in the 11th of Romans, when ‘all Israel shall be saved’ [v. 26]. And *the spiritual Jacob* shall be saved out of it. . .”⁹² In so doing, he stressed once again that Romans 11:26 refers to ethnic Jews only.

In sum, while Luther and Calvin interpreted Romans 11:26 allegorically, Edwards followed Increase Mather and other Puritan divines to interpret it literally. He firmly insisted that all the tribes of the ethnic Jews would experience an eschatological restoration. For Edwards, the ethnic Jews would not only return and establish a nation state on their homeland, but also be spiritually restored through a national conversion of extensive scope. All in all, Edwards stated categorically that Romans 11:25-26 only can be interpreted as the prophecy of the ethnic Jews’ eschatological restoration.

3.4 The Time Scales of Israel’s Restoration

For Edwards, when would the Jewish eschatological restoration take place? How did he determine the time scale of Israel’s restoration? This particular issue is the focus of this section.

As indicated earlier, Edwards was rather confident with Israel’s restoration. Therefore, while he admitted that we are all “not to suppose but that when the nation of the Jews is converted,”⁹³ he still predicted the possible time scale for Israel’s restoration. On the one hand, he claimed that this event would happen before the commencement of the millennium. Quoting Romans 11:15 (“For if the casting away

⁹² *WJE* 15:252.

⁹³ *WJE* 5:135.

of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving [of] them be, but life from the dead?”), Edwards affirmed in his “Notes on the Apocalypse,”

I say, by this it seems that the world of the Gentiles shall be, as it were, revived from the dead after this. By which it appears, that very great events for the advancement of religion and the kingdom of Christ shall be accomplished after the calling of the Jews, which shall be extensive, that it may be called *a reviving of the world from the dead*. And this last event must doubtless be *before the millennium begins*.⁹⁴

In his *HWR*, on the basis of his interpretation of Romans 11, Edwards reaffirmed this assertion. For him, the Scripture already made it clear that Israel’s national conversion would happen before the Gentiles’ worldwide revival. He wrote,

Though we don’t know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass, yet this much we may determine by Scripture, that it will [be] before [the] glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished, because it is said that their coming in shall be life from the dead to the Gentiles, Rom. 11:12, 15 [“Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world . . . how much more their fulness? . . . For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”].⁹⁵

More exactly, this restoration would be between the fall of Antichrist and the general conversion of the heathen nations. In his “Notes on the Apocalypse,” he said,

It seems to me probable, that they shall be converted *after the fall of Antichrist* and the conversion of the civilized world and all Europe and perhaps most of Turkey, but *before the conversion of the heathen nations*, or at least before their general conversion.⁹⁶ That the calling of the Jews will not be till after the first and main destruction of Antichrist. . .⁹⁷

Similarly, in his *Blank Bible*, in concluding his discussion of Luke 21:24 (“And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”), Edwards stated that “we may infer that Antichrist will fall, and the Jews be called about the same time.”⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *WJE* 5:196. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ *WJE* 9:470.

⁹⁶ *WJE* 5:140.

⁹⁷ *WJE* 5:195. Emphasis added.

⁹⁸ *WJE* 24:917.

Edwards determined the time scale of Israel's restoration mainly from his typological reading of Israel's Babylonian captivity. In interpreting Revelation 16:13-21 in "Notes on the Apocalypse," by applying typological interpretation of some biblical texts such as Matthew 24:21ff, Luke 21:24 and Jeremiah 50:4, Edwards regarded Israel's eschatological restoration as the antitype of their restitution from Babylonian captivity. He was convinced if the literal restitution happened after the destruction of the literal Babylon, the spiritual restoration would arrive after the fall of Antichrist, viz. the spiritual Babylon. He wrote,

That the calling of the Jews will not be till after the first and main destruction of Antichrist, appears pretty manifest to me . . . the desolation of Judea by Rome or the mystical Babylon, is in this respect to agree with its desolation by the literal Babylon. The people were not restored till after Babylon, that carried them captive, was destroyed by its first destruction, that destruction that was mainly respected in the prophecies, which seems to [be] a type of the second restitution from the destruction by the mystical Babylon, or idolatrous Rome.

In the beginning of the 50th chapter of Jeremiah, both the restitutions of Israel, that from literal Babylon and that from mystical Babylon, seem to be spoken of under one . . . inasmuch as this restitution that includes both is spoken of as soon after the destruction of Babylon, therefore both are to be after the destructions of these several Babylons that caused their desolations.⁹⁹

Based on his typological interpretation of Israel's Babylonian captivity, Edwards was convinced that the people of Israel would have an eschatological restoration between the fall of the Antichrist and the worldwide revival of the Gentiles. In the next section, we will discuss the impact of Israel's restoration on the whole world in his millennial vision.

4. Essential Role of Israel's Restoration in Edwards's Millennialism

Edwards insisted that Israel's restoration would take place before the Gentiles' general conversion. In this sense, Edwards stressed the impact of Israel's eschatological restoration on the rest of world. For him, Israel's restoration would

⁹⁹ *WJE* 5:195-96.

generate more significant blessings to the whole world and finally unlock the final stage of the realization of the millennial kingdom.

4.1 Israel's Restoration and the Expansion of the Divine Kingdom

To begin with, Edwards firmly believed that Israel had been always essential in the expansion of God's kingdom. In the Old Testament and the gospel time, only a small portion of the Jews was included in the spiritual Israel, as mentioned above.

Nevertheless, God *did* use the faithful Jewish remnant to bless the Gentiles. While they were a small population, this remnant had been "exceedingly multiplied by sons and daughters from among the Gentiles."¹⁰⁰ In fact, they acted as "the mother of thousands of millions," and all the Gentile Christians subsequently became "the children of Abraham and Israel."¹⁰¹ Therefore, prior to her restoration, Israel has already played a critical role in the progressive growth of God's kingdom. She was seen by Edwards as the origin of the church of Gentile Christians. It is upon the basis of the remnant of Israel that the Christian church was established and is continually growing.

Secondly, this work of expanding God's millennial kingdom will be more evident when Israel is restored at the end times. After Israel's eschatological restoration, all the Jewish Christians will bless the rest of the world by actively engaging in the evangelistic ministry. They will become the most glorious and effective witness to the rest of the world. Edwards firmly believed that in God's eyes, Israel had always been a unique nation, either in a positive or negative way. In his "Notes on the Apocalypse," Edwards affirmed that even the dispersed Israel was

¹⁰⁰ *Misc.* 649, *WJE* 18:189-190.

¹⁰¹ *Misc.* 649, *WJE* 18:190.

preserved by God as “a distinct [nation].”¹⁰² However, she was tragically no more than a “visible monument” of God’s displeasure, because the children of Israel rejected and crucified Jesus Christ their Messiah.¹⁰³ Israel would continue to be a distinct nation after her eschatological restoration, Edwards maintained. In contrast to what she was, Israel will be a glorious witness of God’s omnipotence and providence---she will be “a visible monument of God’s wonderful grace and power in their calling and conversion.”¹⁰⁴ The converted Israel would be “with all their hearts as with one heart and voice declare his praises unto other nations,” Edwards asserted in his *HWR*.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, with her dramatic spiritual transformations, the restored Israel will generate more significant impact on the rest of world.

Finally, in addition to the remarkable growth of God’s kingdom, Israel’s eschatological restoration will significantly improve the relationship among God’s people. In fact, it will bring an unbelievable benefit to the world: a global unity, even among the most hostile camps. Edwards was not the first one to promote that Israel’s restoration would create unity. Increase Mather in his *The Mystery of the Israel’s Salvation* predicted that Christ would reunite all the people of Israel at this restoration. He stated, “Now this *Davidical Kingdom* shall Christ possess after the conversion of the Jews, and re-union of all the Tribes.”¹⁰⁶ However, Edwards went further and declared that Israel’s restoration would create the unity between the most hostile groups: the Jews and the Gentiles. In particular, there will be no “old walls of separation” between them, Edwards declared in his “Notes on the Apocalypse.”¹⁰⁷ Instead, the Christian Jews and the Gentiles will be closely connected in Christ:

¹⁰² *WJE* 5:135.

¹⁰³ *WJE* 5:135.

¹⁰⁴ *WJE* 5:135.

¹⁰⁵ *WJE* 9:469.

¹⁰⁶ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel’s Salvation*, 59-60. Citation is on page 60. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁷ *WJE* 5:135.

“they [the Jews] shall look upon all the world to be their brethren, as much as the Christians in Boston and the Christians in other parts of New England look on each other as brethren.”¹⁰⁸ Consequently, even the Land of Israel will no longer be the forbidden land, but opening to all the Gentiles: “all nations will be as free to come to Judea, or to dwell in Jerusalem, as into any other city or country, and may have the same privilege there as they themselves.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, Israel’s restoration will become the central factor of universal unity in God’s kingdom.

In summary, Israel and her eschatological restoration plays a critical role in the expansion of God’s kingdom. This is at the heart of Edwards’s theology of redemptive history. Along redemptive history, Israel has been the origin of the Christian church, she will be the most glorious and effective witness in world evangelism, and she will be the central factor in the universal unity in God’s kingdom.

4.2 Israel’s Restoration and the Commencement of the Millennium

Israel’s restoration is significant not only for the expansion of God’s kingdom, but also for the commencement of the millennium. For Edwards, as one of the essential links in the chain of God’s eschatological plan, Israel’s restoration will lead the world into the full realization of God’s kingdom.

Before the millennium begins, according to Edwards, four significant events would take place: the overthrow of Turkey, the destruction of Antichrist, the Jewish restoration and the final international revival. Writing in “Notes on the Apocalypse,” Edwards said,

First, Turkey in Europe shall be overthrown, and the true religion established in those parts of Europe possessed by the Turks . . . Nextly, Antichrist shall be

¹⁰⁸ *WJE* 5:135.

¹⁰⁹ *WJE* 5:135.

overthrown . . . *Thirdly, the Jews shall be called. And fourth, this will be succeeded by an universal propagation of religion through the vast regions of the earth . . . (which are to revive from the dead, after this calling of the Jews), and [by] the last great battle, wherein the remains of Antichrist, Mahometanism and heathenism shall be united and shall be conquered. Which victory shall be the revival of the world from the dead . . . And then the millennium shall begin.*¹¹⁰

As presented in Chapter Three of the present study, Edwards was certain that Satan's visible kingdom must be completely destroyed before the commencement of the millennium. Therefore, Jewish infidelity, as one of the evil forces of this kingdom, will be demolished with the destruction of Antichrist, as Edwards declared in Sermon 26 of *HWR*.¹¹¹ Consequently, in a general and significant manner, the Jews will be converted to Christ immediately after. And this will directly lead to the final worldwide revival. In this sense, as an inseparable stage in the realization of the millennial kingdom, Israel's restoration will determine the destiny of the world. In Edwards's eyes, as long as the people of Israel have not returned to their homeland and experienced a national conversion, the final revival will not arrive, and the millennium will not commence.

Based on this conviction, Edwards highlighted the significance of the individual Jews' conversions and enthusiastically looked for such events. Thus, he noticed in 1748 that a Jew who was "eminent for his great knowledge of the Hebrew and Chaldee languages" was baptized in London.¹¹² In 1749, with excitement he read that a German Christian travelled in Germany and many other European countries including Poland, Holland, Lithuania, Hungary, in order to evangelize the Jews. There were around 600 converts, Edwards noted.¹¹³ Finally in 1752, he was

¹¹⁰ *WJE* 5:196-197.

¹¹¹ *WJE* 9:469.

¹¹² *WJE* 5:287.

¹¹³ *WJE* 5:292-293.

overjoyed at a baptized rabbi's report that 53 Polish Jews were converted in Germany.¹¹⁴

From the above discussions, it is evident that Edwards departed from Luther, Calvin and other supersessionist theologians. His conviction and enthusiasm for Israel's restoration was typical among his Puritan colleagues, many of whom regarded this eschatological event as a "sure sign of the final culminative process" that would introduce God's millennial rule on earth.¹¹⁵ In particular, some of the Puritans foresaw that the restored Israel would bless the rest of the world in significant ways. For instance, Increase Mather stated that the converted Israel would actively evangelize the world: "they shall hold out the sweet breasts of Gospel-Ordinances in such power and glory as shall be greatly to the satisfaction of elect Gentiles."¹¹⁶ Mather believed that the restoration of "Abraham's natural seed" would trigger the commencement of the millennium.¹¹⁷ Thus he highlighted the superiority of a restored nation of Israel, as she will be "acknowledged and respected in the world *above any other nation or people.*"¹¹⁸

Despite their shared enthusiasm for the restoration of Israel, Edwards disagreed with Mather and rejected the latter's America-centric millennium, as we have discussed in more detail in Part One. Furthermore, while Edwards emphasized the essential impact of Israel's restoration on the whole world, his millennial kingdom scheme is not Israel-superior, though it is Judeo-centric. Unlike Mather, Edwards did not think that the restored Israel would be superior to other nations. In his notes on Revelation 16, Edwards wrote,

¹¹⁴ *WJE* 5:295.

¹¹⁵ Zakai, "The Poetics of History and the Destiny of Israel," 319.

¹¹⁶ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, 61.

¹¹⁷ Smolinski, "Israel Redivivus," 382.

¹¹⁸ Mather, *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation*, 58. Emphasis added.

We are *not* to suppose but that when the nation of the Jews are converted, other Christians will be as much God's Israel as they, and will have in every respect the same privileges. *Neither* can we suppose, that their church will have any manner of superiority over other parts of Christ's church, any otherwise than as that part of the church will be more glorious. Religion and learning will be there at the highest; more excellent books will be there written, etc.¹¹⁹

For Edwards, while the significance of Israel's restoration was evident, the nation of Israel would not become a superior nation with higher privileges. Similarly, the Christian churches of Israel will not to be more prominent or glorious than the churches from the rest of the world. While he was zealous for Israel's conversion and repatriation, Edwards did not regard the ethnic Jews as more privileged or glorious than the churches of other people groups.

Additionally, we may note with interest that while he was passionate with Israel's eschatological restoration, Edwards did not interact much with Jews in his time. Recent works by Shalom Goldman and Michael Hoberman show that there were some interactions between a few Congregational ministers and the Jewish residents in New England. Furthermore, there was a rise of interest in Hebraism in the time of Edwards.¹²⁰ Despite this, to the best of our knowledge, there was no evidence that Edwards either had corresponded or established personal relationship with Jews.¹²¹

5. Summary

During the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a dramatic shift took place among the Protestant and Puritan divines. In particular, the once-neglected subject of the eschatological future of Israel had its renaissance.

¹¹⁹ *WJE* 5:135. Emphasis added.

¹²⁰ See Shalom Goldman, *God's Sacred Tongue: Hebrew and the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Michael Hoberman, *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011).

¹²¹ In our personal correspondence on 28 January 2018, this observation is confirmed by Douglas Sweeney who also kindly directs us to Goldman's work.

Hermeneutically, the allegorical interpretation of Romans 11:26 and other biblical texts was gradually replaced by the literal interpretation. Theologically, supersessionism gave way to the re-acceptance of Israel's restoration. In contrast to his Reformed predecessors who held the belief of supersessionism, Edwards fully realized the importance of Israel in redemptive history and the significance of her eschatological restoration in millennialism. For him, Israel was at the heart of the expansion of God's kingdom and the commencement of the millennium. Therefore, he was convinced that the people of Israel would be in an eschatological restoration between the fall of the Antichrist and the worldwide revival of the Gentiles. Seeing the essential role of Israel in the millennial kingdom, Edwards was convinced that the restored people of Israel, acting as a glorious witness to the rest of the world, would determine its destiny. And he took particular note of converted Jews in the interim. Nevertheless, Edwards's zeal for Israel and her restoration cannot be overstated. Unlike his Puritan colleague Increase Mather, Edwards did not regard Israel as a superior nation. Instead, he argued that the body of the Jewish Christians would hold an equal position with other Christian groups in God's kingdom. And notably, he did not correspond with any Jews in his own time in New England or elsewhere.

Concluding Observations

To conclude this chapter, we make the following five observations.

First and foremost, in the period between the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a shift regarding the central location of the divine kingdom. Unlike some of his Protestant Predecessors and Puritan contemporaries who regarded respectively England or New England as the most significant place in God's eschatological scheme, Edwards's spatial vision of the millennial kingdom, in contrast to the once-prevalent misinterpretation, is Canaan-centric rather than America-centric. This view is informed by both his geographical consciousness of Israel and his typological interpretation of the relevant Scriptural passages. Based on his extensive reading of geographical work, Edwards was fully aware of the advantageous location of Canaan. Owing to his reading of Israel as the type of heaven, Edwards clearly stated that the center of the coming millennial kingdom would be Canaan, instead of America or any other location. This insistence on a Canaan-centric millennial kingdom significantly departed from many of his Reformed colleagues. Unlike those who over-stated the significance of England and America in the realization of the millennial kingdom, Edwards established his millennial vision firmly on the basis of many biblical prophecies of Israel.

Secondly, proceeding from the seventeenth century, Israel's eschatological restoration regained its theological significance. Most Puritans therefore embraced Israel's restoration and highlighted the significant impact of this issue on the general eschatological outlook. As an inheritor of his Reformed predecessors and Puritan colleagues, Edwards stood as the typical example of this shift. Thus, he insisted on a literal interpretation of Israel's eschatological restoration, expecting a double restoration before the millennium commences: both the national conversion and

repatriation of the people of Israel. Edwards was confident that Israel's restoration had always been imprinted in God's providential and redemptive scheme, and this conviction reveals his awareness of God's nature and His attribute. For him, the manifestation of God's faithfulness and glorification is of ultimate significance in the eschatological restoration of Israel.

Thirdly, owing to his stress on the essential role of Israel in both his eschatological vision of the millennial kingdom and his redemptive-historical vision, Edwards decidedly departed from supersessionist predecessors such as Luther and Calvin. In the meantime, Edwards actually deflated the importance of both the land and people of England and New England. In contrast to those who fixed their eyes on either England or New England as the "sacred space," believing their eschatological vision could be realized on this land, Edwards's Canaan-based millennium actually de-centralized the land of England and America in the arriving millennium. Furthermore, in the historical progress towards the end time, it will be the people of Israel, instead of those from England or America, who play the decisive role.

Fourthly, the de-centralization of the space and people of England and America is revealed not only in Edwards's expectation of the millennial kingdom, but also in his vision of the whole scope of redemptive history and God's kingdom. Israel is not only essential in Edwards's millennialism, but also central in his theology of the divine redemptive work. For him, the people of Israel never were completely expelled out of the body of the spiritual Israel that is the Christian church. Instead, Israel is significant in the expansion of God's kingdom. More importantly, Israel's restoration will play a decisive role in the commencement of the millennium. As the penultimate event before the millennium, it will happen at the critical historical point---between the fall of Antichrist and the worldwide revival of

the Gentiles---consequently to initiate the full realization of the millennial kingdom. In this sense, Israel's eschatological restoration will be one of most significant and indispensable links in the course of redemptive history towards the consummation of God's kingdom.

Finally, beneath Edwards's expectation of Israel's restoration is his conviction of God's glorification. For Edwards, while God punished Israel by expelling them, He kept preserving them. Moreover, God would forgive the people of Israel and finally restore them. He even would grant them a critical role to play in His millennial kingdom. Ultimately, the glory of God's faithfulness and forgiveness will be perfectly manifested in his providential and redemptive work on Israel. Consequently, on most of the biblical texts of Israel, while he spiritualized the term "Israel" as the Christian church, what Edwards actually highlighted is the extensive body of God's people that faithfully includes *both* the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Similarly, while he *appeared* as a punitive supersessionist who believed that the Jews' dispersion was the result of divine wrath and punishment, Edwards stressed the promise of God's forgiveness and Israel's eschatological restoration. In this sense, the hint of supersessionism in Edwards's theology of Israel is far from being apparent. In fact, Edwards was *not* a typical supersessionist and it is difficult to put him in any of the modern Reformed categories such as that advanced by Kendall Soulen.¹²²

Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom is not only Judeo-centric, but also cosmic in scope. While the land and people of Israel play a critical role,

¹²² In a private correspondence on 27 January 2018, Gerald McDermott concurs on this point, and kindly directs us to his on-line article in which a more nuanced view was presented, i.e. Edwards believed that "the divine abandonment would be temporary." See Gerald McDermott, "The Reformed Tradition on Israel Is Diverse," The Gospel Coalition, accessed 27 January 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/reformed-tradition-israel-diverse/>.

Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom is cosmic: it expands to the whole world, embracing China and the other heathen nations in his time, and has impact on heaven and hell. We will demonstrate this in the following chapter.

Chapter Five

“As the Waters Cover the Seas”: China and the Heathen World in the Cosmic Millennial Kingdom¹

1. Introduction

Having discussed Edwards’s Judeo-centric vision of the millennium in chapter Four, we now investigate another feature of his highly extensive millennial vision. For Edwards, this millennial kingdom goes far beyond England, New England and Israel. It will cover all the nations, including those that were considered to be the heathen world in his days. In particular, Edwards was convinced that China would become an indispensable member in the millennial kingdom.

Notably, Edwards was not the first to hold a positive view of China. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the Qing empire (1644-1912) that was known as “China” became a fashionable topic among European intellectuals.² Chinese culture and philosophy based on the teachings of “Confucius” (孔子, 551-479 BC) attracted increasing attention among the intellectuals in the European Enlightenment. This “China Vogue” significantly impacted Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom. In fact, Edwards was so fascinated with China that he believed that the millennial kingdom would not be complete without the conversion of Chinese people.

¹ An extract from sections 3 and 4 of this chapter is published in *The Miscellanies Reader*, ed. Robert Boss (Fort Worth, TX.: JESociety Press, 2018), *forthcoming*. The quotation in this chapter title is found in *WJE* 10:335.

² Walter W. Davis, “China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment,” in *Discovering China: European Interpretations in the Enlightenment*, eds. Julia Ching and Willard Gurdon (Oxtoby Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1992), 1. The early version of this article under the same title is found in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983): 523-48.

Edwards's fascination with China serves to address a significant issue in Edwardsean scholarship, i.e. whether Edwards aligned himself with the Deists who viewed China as a case to challenge the authority of Christian orthodox. When envisioning a millennium with China, as well as other heathen nations, as indispensable members, Edwards was confronting his Deist contemporaries. As is well documented, eighteenth century Anglo-European cultures were significantly affected by an influx of ideas from China.³ As a result, the Deist thinkers employed Chinese thought, particularly Confucius' thinking, as a prototype in order to undermine some of the fundamental Christian positions such as divine revelation and redemption. Under such circumstances, Edwards's appreciation of Chinese philosophical classics (particularly Ruist/Confucian and Daoist texts), his anticipation that China would be included in the millennial kingdom, if not carefully examined, might be misinterpreted as supporting the Deists' arguments for natural theology and subsequently undermining certain essential Christian doctrines.⁴

Despite its importance, this subject is less well-known among the scholars. In fact, while Edwards's thinking and his quotations on China are scattered in many places in his public and private writings, his view on this issue has rarely been discussed among the Edwardsean scholars, except in one excellent short chapter in McDermott's *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* (2000).⁵ Therefore, in the present chapter, we address Edwards's perspectives on the millennium as it encloses China and the heathen world through a comparative study of Edwards's views and those of his principal antagonists, the Deists. With this in mind, we will start with a

³ Julia Ching and Willard Gurdon, "Introduction," in *Discovering China*, xi-xxxii.

⁴ In the present chapter, the term of "Chinese philosophical classics" refers to Ruist (Confucian) and Daoist texts that were well accepted in Ming and Qing Dynasties (1368-1912). It does not refer to Buddhist texts, as the prevalence of Buddhism was during the T'ang Dynasty (618-907 AD).

⁵ See chapter 12, in Gerald McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 207-16.

brief historical review of the images of China in Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly examining the Jesuits' and Deists' position on China. Then we will present Edwards's fascination with China and examine how Edwards defended his Reformed position about the millennial kingdom, while sharing similar interests in China with the Jesuit and Deist scholars. This will lead us to examine how Edwards characterize his anticipation of the involvement of the whole heathen world in the millennial kingdom. In this process, we will highlight his difference in portraying "China" to the Christian world from that of the Deists and demonstrate how Edwards resolved the tension between China's exceptional civilization and the indispensability of divine revelation. Concluding this chapter, we will argue that while Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom is extremely extensive, even to the point of being cosmic, he was far from supporting a reductionistic vision of "China" promoted by Deist's natural theology.

2. China through the Jesuits' Recorded Experiences and the Deists' Lens

This section will present a brief historical review of the diverse perspectives about Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) known as "China" in Edwards's time. First of all, we will show the Jesuits' favorable introduction of Confucian philosophy who held that China actually had embraced Christianity from ancient times. Then we shall examine how the Deists developed from the Jesuits and moved toward opposing interpretation, regarding "China" as an instance to their undermining of the authority and even necessity of Christianity.

2.1 The Jesuits: China Embraced Christianity

China's popularity emerged from the late seventeenth century that was late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing dynasties. It was generated by Jesuit missionaries who introduced the teachings of Confucius into Europe. From the end of the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries adopted a policy of accommodation in winning the Confucian literati's respect, which seemed successful in evangelizing Chinese people.⁶ They made great efforts to accommodate Christianity to Chinese culture by learning the Chinese language, adopting Chinese customs and dresses, and building friendships with the imperial court.⁷

Among them, Matteo Ricci (or Li Madou 利玛窦, 1552-1610) was an outstanding example. He advocated that the Jesuits should painstakingly learn Confucian texts. In fact, he even assigned the *Four Books* (*Si Shu* 四书) as the "set texts" for Jesuits missionaries, so that they could be "immersed in Confucian thought."⁸ It was in this context that the Jesuits began to translate and publish Confucian classics in Latin for European readers in the seventeenth century, in order to introduce to them Confucian philosophy, particularly Neo-Confucianism that had been flourished since the Sung Dynasty (960-1279).⁹ At least two works were influential. One is entitled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* that provided to the

⁶ Stewart J. Brown, "Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment," in *Selected Papers of the Beijing Forum 2012: The Harmony of Civilisations*, ed. Zhang Zhifang (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2013), 380-97. See also McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 207-8.

⁷ Brown, "Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment," 383.

⁸ Andrew Ross, *A Vision Betrayed: The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* (Edinburgh, UK.: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 143. The *Four Books* include four most significant works of Confucian teachings: *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, *Lunyu* and *Meng Tze* (*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of Mean*, *The Analects of Confucius* and *The Mencius*).

⁹ "Neo-Confucianism" known by the Jesuits and Enlightenment thinkers, according to the contemporary Sinologists, is the "rational revival of Confucianism, particularly the teachings of Confucius and Mencius" that emerged in the early 12th century and was "synthesized by Chu Hsi [Zhu Xi 朱熹] (1130-1200)." See Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment," 1, n. 2.

European intellectuals “the first systematic and comprehensive presentation” of Confucian thought as “the main component of Chinese Civilization.”¹⁰ Father Prospero Intorcetta (1626 -1696) led the translation in collaboration with seventeen other Jesuits and their Chinese colleagues.¹¹ Philippe Couplet (1623-1693), a Flemish Jesuit edited the volume and had it printed in Paris in 1687. It was the first time a translation of the source of Confucian classics into a European language had been properly published. The Latin version of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* is a collection of three classics along with introductory essays. The canonical texts included in this work are *Daxue*, *Zhongyong* and *Lunyu* (*The Great Learning*, 大学, *The Doctrine of Mean*, 中庸, and *The Analects of Confucius*, 论语).¹² The several introductory articles and tables are to help readers gain a fundamental understanding of Confucian thought: a lengthy introduction on Chinese culture, a short biography of Confucius, and a chronology of Chinese history. The second work, entitled *Sinensis imperii Libri classici sex*, was translated by Father François Noël (1651-1729) and published in 1711 in Prague. In addition to the three classics included in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, this volume includes the first published Latin

¹⁰ Knud Lundbaek, “The Image of Neo-Confucianism in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*,” in *Discovering China*, 27. For the details of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, see *Confucius, Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, Sive Scientia Sinensis Latine Exposita. Studio Et Opera Prosperi Intorcetta, Christiani Herdrich, Francisci Rougmont, Philippi Couplet, Patrum Societatis Jesu ... Adjecta Est Tabula Chronologica Sinicae Monarchiae Ab Hujus Exordio Ad Haec Usque Tempora* (Parisiis: 1687). For the English translation of this works, see *The Morals of Confucius, a Chinese Philosopher Who Flourished above Five Hundred Years before the Coming of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: Being One of the Most Choicest Pieces of Learning Remaining of That Nation. Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (London: Randal Taylor, 1691).

¹¹ Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California press, 1942), 249. See also Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 384.

¹² For a detailed study done recently, see *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687): The First Translation of the Confucian Classics*, ed. Thierry Meynard, S. J. (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 2011).

translations of *The Meng Tze* (*The Mencius*, 孟子), along with *Xiaojing* (*The Classic of Filial Piety*, 孝经) and *Xiaoxue* (*The Minor Learning*, 小学).¹³

Strikingly, in these translations, the Jesuits intended to depict an “idealized version” of Confucian thought that enabled the Chinese to lead their lives both rationally and morally.¹⁴ In so doing, the Jesuit missionaries portrayed “Confucius” as being more than an influential philosopher, but a “great religious teacher.”¹⁵ For the Jesuits, Confucius was a man with a pure and lofty doctrine that breathed “the very spirit of the true faith.”¹⁶ Consequently, they believed that the philosophical and religious system of Confucius had stood firmly for over two thousand years as “the spiritual guide” for millions of Chinese.¹⁷ In fact, this was an over-generalized claim that was not true to the cultural changes in Chinese dynastic histories.

Nevertheless, most Jesuits tried their utmost to prove that both Confucian thought and Chinese culture was deeply rooted in God’s revelation, and thus “incipiently Christian.”¹⁸ For instance, the French Jesuit Louis-Daniel Lecomte, also known as Louis Le Comte (1655-1728), published his two-volume work *Nouveau mémoire sur l’état présent de la Chine* in Paris when returning from China in 1696.¹⁹ After carefully studying the ancient and modern Ruist and Daoist religion of China, Lecomte claims that China was “happier in its foundation than any other nation

¹³ Confucius, *Sinensis Imperii Libri Classici Sex, Nimirum, Adulorum Schola, Immutabile Medium, Liber Sententiarum, Mencius, Filialis Observantia, Parvulorum Schola, E Sinico Idiomate in Latinum Traducti a P. Francisco Noël, Etc*, trans. Father François Noël (Pragæ, 1711). See also Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 250; 331, n. 14.

¹⁴ Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 383-84.

¹⁵ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 250.

¹⁶ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 250.

¹⁷ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 250.

¹⁸ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 208.

¹⁹ It was translated into English in the following year under the title of *Memoirs and Observations Topographical, Physical, Mathematical, Mechanical, Natural, Civil, and Ecclesiastical Made in a Late Journey through the Empire of China, and Published in Several Letters: Particularly Upon the Chinese Pottery and Varnishing* (London, 1697).

under the sun,” because she “drew in the chief of the holy Maxims of their ancient religion” from the Creator who is “the Fountain Head.”²⁰ He went further and speculated that China was probably founded by the children of Noah who had witnessed the Omnipotence of God, their Creator. These founders therefore could transmit the knowledge of the true God and “instilled the fear of him into all their descendants.”²¹ Lecomte believed that this claim could be proved from ancient accounts of Chinese history. For example, Fohi (Fu Xi 伏羲), the first fabled ruler of China and the first ancestor of humankind according to Chinese legend, used to carefully breed seven sorts of creatures, in order to “sacrifice to the Supreme Spirit of Heaven and Earth.”²² And the third fabled ruler given the title “Hoamti” (Huang Di, “The Yellow Emperor,” 黄帝) was recorded to have built a temple to worship “the Sovereign Lord of Heaven” (Shangdi, 上帝).²³ In such a way, Lecomte maintained, the Chinese had “preserved the knowledge of the true God for nearly two thousand years” before Christ.²⁴ Lecomte’s work caused an on-going debate over the nature of the Ruist-versed Chinese rites which reached its climax when he asserted that Chinese citizens honored their Maker in a manner that could serve as both “an example and instruction to Christians themselves.”²⁵ He conceded in 1770, under the pressure of his opponents, that the Chinese by no means could be redeemed without knowing the Savior. But he still insisted that they had learned

²⁰ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 313.

²¹ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 313.

²² Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 313.

²³ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 314.

²⁴ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 317.

²⁵ Le Comte, *Memoirs and Observations*, 317.

“true religion” from Shem, the son of Noah, and they had been preserved from idolatry until the birth of Jesus Christ.²⁶

Lecomte’s work was echoed by the Figurists, including Joseph-Henri Prémare (1666-1736), Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730) and Jean-François Foucquet (1665-1741), who sought to find the multiple meaning of the biblical texts.²⁷ To them, there was a form of “Ancient Theology” that served as the common origin of all religions including Christianity and Confucianism. Therefore, they searched for evidence in the Confucian classics in supporting their claim of a common origin.²⁸ Like Lecomte, they thought that the Chinese were originally descendants of one of the sons of Noah, and Fu Xi had “a distinct view” of the Natural Law and eternity.²⁹ But Prémare and Foucquet went further and regarded Jesus as the heart-and-soul of the Chinese ancient philosophical classics. They even asserted that there are many terms in these books that represent the Messiah, such as “tai tsu” (in the beginning, 太初) and “hsieh” (God, 神).³⁰

The Jesuits’ favorable and idealized portrayals of China in the respects of late Ming and early Qing dynasties, particularly by means of reference to ancient Confucian thought, attracted many Enlightenment thinkers. Despite their efforts towards building connections between Chinese classics and Christianity, their over-enthusiastic promotion of Confucian thought introduced a number of problems. While they did not openly admit that Confucian philosophy could be considered as a

²⁶ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 141-44; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 208-9.

²⁷ Arnold Rowbotham, “The Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought,” in *Discovering China*, 42-43. The early version of this article is found under the same title in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 17, no. 1 (1956): 471-85.

²⁸ Rowbotham, “Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought,” 44-45. See also Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 386.

²⁹ Rowbotham, “The Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought,” 45.

³⁰ Rowbotham, “The Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought,” 47.

universal natural religion, they left the door wide open for that option that the Deists explored. As a result, they unintentionally aroused among the Deist thinkers to identify and promote their trenchant challenges to traditional orthodox Christian doctrines, as we shall see presently next.

2.2 The Deists: China Versus Christianity

In Edwards's days, radical proponents of natural religion such as John Toland (1670-1722), Anthony Collins (1676-1729) and Matthew Tindal (1657-1733) began to reject "the biblical God in favor of Nature's God."³¹ As for their approach to the Bible, these Deists argued that Christianity could not be based on the revealed mysteries, but should ultimately rely solely on human reason.³² What the Deists aimed to do was to undermine both the reliability of divine revelation and the necessity of God's redemption.

Consequently, these Deists departed further from the theory of the Jesuits by viewing the teaching of Confucius as an ideological system of truths based on humankind's nature and unaided reason.³³ It is true that most Deists still considered Confucian philosophy as a natural religion. However, unlike what Jean Bodin (1530-1596) first observed, their natural religion was not for finding cosmic evidence to testify to God's existence and His providence, but to establish a metaphysical system independent from divine revelation in the Christian Scriptures.³⁴ Essentially, what the Deists of this period proposed was to see Neo-Confucianism as a kind of *natural theology*. This term was introduced by the well-known German philosopher and

³¹ Peter J. Thuesen, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 26:70-71.

³² Anderson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 11:11.

³³ Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment," 1-6.

³⁴ A. Owen Aldridge, "Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (1997): 836.

mathematician, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), and refers to “a real system of truths available to all by the use of unaided reason.”³⁵

Prior to his attraction to China, Leibniz was searching for common truths in religions throughout the world.³⁶ Through his correspondence with the Jesuits including Joachim Bouvet in November 1700, Leibniz was fascinated by Chinese history, culture and philosophy, to the degree that the contemporary Sinologists would argue whether Leibniz was indebted to Chinese classical philosophy, particularly to Neo-Confucianism.³⁷ As one of a few supporters for the Jesuits in the Chinese rites controversy, he embraced their favorable view of the ancient Chinese. For instance, by studying the trigrams found in *I-King* (*Yi Jing*, 易经, *The Book of Changes*), Leibniz attempted to prove that “the ancient Chinese were a logical and highly intelligent people.”³⁸ In the meantime, while maintaining early modern Europe’s understanding of Christianity and the superiority of their theoretical-philosophical sciences, Leibniz believed that they were corrupted. Therefore, China’s moral philosophy was greater than that of the eighteenth-century Europeans. In fact, he believed that the Chinese were in possession of “a social ethic and notions of the one true God that were *rooted in a natural religion revealed through reason*.”³⁹ Therefore, Leibniz made great efforts to convince his intellectual friends in Europe that China was worthy to learn from, particularly in her social morality, political ethics, international honesty and maintenance of law.⁴⁰ In his preface to the

³⁵ Aldridge, “Natural Religion and Deism in America before Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine,” 836.

³⁶ Davis, “China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment,” 13-14.

³⁷ See Davis, “China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment,” 82-96. For Leibniz’s fascination with China, see D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 220-23; Rowbotham, “Jesuit Figurists and Eighteenth-Century Religious Thought,” 47.

³⁸ Donald F. Lach, “Leibniz and China,” in *Discovering China*, 116. The early version of this article is found under the same title in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 6, no. 1 (1945): 436-55.

³⁹ Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 387. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Lach, “Leibniz and China,” 100-102; Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China a Commerce of Light* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198.

Novissima Sinica (*Latest News of China*) of 1697, Leibniz declared, “we need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural religion, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology.”⁴¹ Leibniz claimed, in one of his last works entitled *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* (1716), that Confucius and other ancient Chinese philosophers had obtained “a highly sophisticated set of beliefs about God, the immortality of the human soul, and rewards and punishments in an afterlife.”⁴²

Encouraged by Leibniz’s openness to Chinese philosophical classics and inspired by his advocacy of learning social morality from the Chinese, many Deists from different backgrounds claimed Neo-Confucianism to be a natural theology. They began to see China as expression of living proof that humankind could become highly civilized without God or Christianity. Some English thinkers such as Sir William Temple (1628-1699) and Eustace Budgell (1686-1737) thought that Chinese natural theology was more advanced than Christianity and should be a model for them.⁴³ In his “Deists’ Bible” (*Christianity as Old as the Creation*), Matthew Tindal insisted that “Men of Good Sense” do not need any supernatural revelation and advocated that “natural religion transcended the polemical distortions of revealed religions.”⁴⁴ He claimed that the Confucian texts were much plainer and simpler than Jesus Christ’s “obscure teachings” from his perspective. In this way, Tindal clearly regarded the “humanistic basis of the Confucian canon...as a potential antidote for the obscurantism...in the Christian scriptures.”⁴⁵ Similarly, the French Deist

⁴¹ G. W. Leibniz, Preface to the *Novissima Sinica* (1697) in *Writings on China*, ed. G. W. Leibniz, trans. Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), 51.

⁴² Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 388.

⁴³ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 254; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 210.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:71.

⁴⁵ Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 254; McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 210.

philosophe, François-Marie Arouet (or Voltaire, 1694-1778), after his studies of Confucian texts and the Jesuits' works, concluded that Confucius' teachings were superior to biblical ones, because he preached "the purest morality" without relying on miraculous signs or ridiculous allegories.⁴⁶

Furthermore, Christian Wolff (1679-1754), the most prominent German philosopher living between Leibniz and Kant, used the Chinese as an ideal example to declare that a system of social morality could be established without any religion or divine revelation. In his lecture, *Oratio de Sinarum philosophia practica* (*Discourse on the Practical Philosophy of China*) delivered in 1721 at the University of Halle, Wolff actually promoted that this Chinese social system would promise a prosperous and perfect political, economic and administrative order for any governmental system that would follow it.⁴⁷ In this "idealized image of China," Wolff argued that for Confucius and the ancient Chinese emperors, the source of their social ethics and morality was not divine revelation, but human nature.⁴⁸ "Since the human being who makes use [only] of the powers of nature can distinguish good from evil, can be moved by the sweetness of good, can reject the bitterness of evil, and can remain mindful of an intention," he asserted, "I do not see how anyone could deny that there are natural powers sufficient for the practice of virtue and the avoidance of vice."⁴⁹ Based on this belief, Wolff argued that humankind could conduct the exercise of virtue and establish social morality by relying only on human nature, just as what the Chinese had done. Wolff's *Oratio* (1726) led to the

⁴⁶ Brown, "Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment," 388-89.

⁴⁷ For Wolff's idealization of China, see Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, "Limits to Despotism: Idealizations of Chinese Governance and Legitimizations of Absolutist Europe," *Journal of Early Modern History* 17 (2013): 347-89.

⁴⁸ Jacobsen, "Limits to Despotism," 353; Mark Larrimore, "Orientalism and Antivoluntarism in the History of Ethics: On Christian Wolff's *Oratio De Sinarum Philosophia Practica*," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 28, no. 2 (2000): 197.

⁴⁹ Christian Wolff, *Oratio*, 32:167. Quoted by Larrimore, "Orientalism and Antivoluntarism in the History of Ethics," 198.

unfortunate result of undermining the authority of Christian church among his contemporaries and caused serious controversies, when he insisted that he could not find any “essential conflict between Confucian moral doctrine and Christian teachings.”⁵⁰ Severely criticized and forced to leave Prussian territory by King Frederick William I in 1723, Wolff had a great number of followers. For instance, the French philosopher Baron d’Holbach (?-1789?) agreed with Wolff that religion and revelation were not necessary for humankind, as long as they had the ability of reasoning. John Trenchard (1662-1723), an American writer, supported d’Holbach’s view in his *Independent Whig* by reporting that “good old Confucius” had a “more Christian spirit” and in China “all men of any eminence for learning or dignity” were none but Deists.⁵¹ Leading Scottish Moralists such as Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), David Hume (1711-1776), and Adam Smith (1723-1790) had abandoned revelation and turned to psychology to seek the root of morality.⁵²

Clearly, this placed the Christian communities in that period in an awkward position. Confronted by the recent popularity of Chinese civilization and the prevalence of the Deists’ natural theology, God’s revelation, providence and redemption were being thought by the Deists to be significantly less important to the point that they were deemed even unnecessary. If the Chinese could establish a stable and long-standing system of social morality on the basis of something the Deists called natural theology, how could God include “China” in any redemptive and eschatological blueprint? The plain question is, could it be possible for humankind to create an everlasting empire of a well-established social order without being

⁵⁰ Donald F. Lach, “The Sinophilism of Christian Wolff (1679-1754),” in *Discovering China*, 120-21.

⁵¹ John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Independent Whig*, 2:56. Quoted by McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 210.

⁵² Brown, “Chinese Influence on the European Enlightenment,” 392-93.

involved in the divine kingdom? In the following sections, we will explore Edwards's view of China and examine whether he could answer these questions.

3. Edwards versus the Jesuits' and the Deists' Fervency on China

Having documented Jesuits' and Deists' favorable views of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, we now examine Edwards's perspectives in the light of their descriptions and claims. In this section, we will study his attitude towards the fervency of both those Jesuits and Deists on the "China" that they claimed and presented. The first fact we want to establish is Edwards's fascination with China and his familiarity with both the Jesuits' and the Deists' works on China. Then we will show Edwards's awareness of the dangers of the Deists' claims, particularly his justifications for opposing their rejection of Christianity and the revealed religion. We will next illustrate Edwards's opposition to the idealized claims that led to an unjust fervency related to the portrayal of China coming from these Jesuits and Deists.

3.1 Edwards's Fascination with China

From his early career, Edwards held a rather favorable view of China. In his discussion of "Christian religion" ("Miscellanies" entry 350), Edwards claimed that peoples living in America and most parts of Asia and Africa were "the heathens" who were "far more barbarous than those [that] lived at Rome, Greece, Egypt, Syria and Chaldea formerly,"⁵³ because these people were "more distant from places enlightened with revelation."⁵⁴ The people of China, however, "were a *more civilized*

⁵³ *WJE* 13:424.

⁵⁴ *Misc.* 350, *WJE* 13:424.

people.”⁵⁵ Edwards kept this favorable view of China until his later years. In one of his “Miscellanies” drafted in the 1750s, Edwards quoted *Ophiomaches, or Deism Revealed* (1749) by Philip Skelton (1707-1787) to highlight that China was a unique nation. Skelton argued that while the art of reasoning was flourishing from Syria to Egypt, Greece, and Italy and to the rest of Europe, “all the other nations of the earth” had not made any advance in knowledge, “lying without the verge of right religious instruction” and thus “remained profoundly ignorant.”⁵⁶ Yet he went on to assert that China was the only exception among all these non-Mediterranean and European countries. Edwards agreed with Skelton that China was an exceptional nation. In his explanation of Genesis 8:4, he reinforced this position by quoting from *The Sacred and Prophane History of the World Connected* (1740) by Samuel Shuckford (1694-1754).⁵⁷ For Edwards, the Chinese are so unique that their language, learning and social order are all kept intact, in spite of the world-wide impact of sin. “Their language seems not to have been altered in the confusion of Babel,” Edwards claimed, “Their learning is reported to have been full as ancient as the learning of the more western nations. Their polity is of another sort, and their government established on very different maxims and foundations.”⁵⁸ Evidently, Edwards, as his Jesuit and Deist contemporaries did, also held a favorable view of China. Did Edwards then align himself with their positions on Chinese philosophical classics? In particular, how did he resolve the tension between God’s redemption and the Chinese sages’ seemingly *self-produced* civilization? Would he agree with the Deists

⁵⁵ Misc. 350, *WJE* 13:424. Emphasis added.

⁵⁶ Misc. 1350, *WJE* 23:437-38.

⁵⁷ Samuel Shuckford, *The Sacred and Prophane History of the World Connected: From the Creation of the World to the Dissolution of the Assyrian Empire at the Death of Sardanapalus, and to the Declension of the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel, under the Reigns of Ahaz and Pekah* (London: Printed for J. and R. Tonson, 1740). See also *WJE* 26:215.

⁵⁸ *WJE* 15:535–536.

that China stood as living proof that demonstrated the dispensability or even uselessness of God's revelation and redemption?

3.2 Edwards's Familiarity with Jesuits' and Deists' Works about China

When coming to Edwards's response to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuits' and Deists' depictions of China, there is no single or published piece within his works. However, there is no doubt about the fact that Edwards was familiar with works on China written by the representatives from both camps. In fact, he relied on various resources to enrich his knowledge about China and other nations. Some of these books were kept in the Hampshire Association of Ministers' Library for common use by Edwards and other members who established that library in 1732.⁵⁹ For example, on April 7, 1747, the library received a copy of *A New Voyage Round the World* by William Dampier (1651-1715).⁶⁰ Dampier provided extensive information about the West Indies, South America, and Asian countries including *China*. Additionally, on the first page of Edwards's personal library "Catalogue," two important periodicals are listed: one is John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's *Independent Whig*, and the other is Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *Guardian*.⁶¹ Edwards would most probably have read their reports about the Chinese and "good old Confucius" in the early 1730s.⁶² Moreover, Edwards must have been aware of seventeenth and eighteenth century Jesuits' writings on China, though it is almost

⁵⁹ *WJE* 26:357-60.

⁶⁰ *WJE* 26:358. William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World. Describing particularly, the isthmus of America, several coasts and islands in the West Indies, the isles of Cape Verd, the passage by Terra del Fuego, the South Sea coasts of Chili, Peru, and Mexico; the isle of Guam, one of the Ladrones, Mindanao, and other Philippine and East-India islands near Cambodia, China, Formosa, Luconia, Celebes, &c. New Holland, Sumatra, Nicobar Isles; the Cape of Good Hope, and Santa Hellena. Their soil, rivers, harbours, plants, fruits, animals, and inhabitants. Their customs, religion, government, trade &c. Illustrated with particular maps and draughts*, 2 vols. (London, 1699.)

⁶¹ Thuesen, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 26:17.

⁶² McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 209-10.

impossible to determine how much he learned from them. In the late 1750s, just before he left for Stockbridge, Edwards made a note in his “Catalogue” from the *Travels of the Jesuits* translated into English by John Lockman (1698-1771).⁶³ There is no evidence to suggest that he owned a copy of this volume. Nevertheless, he was certainly attracted by these Jesuits’ descriptions of the Qing Dynasty that they called “China.”

Again, while it is difficult to decide how much Edwards knew about the Deists’ arguments about China, his familiarity with Deism is evident. From his extensive reading, Edwards was well informed about John Toland, Anthony Collins, Matthew Tindal and Thomas Morgan (d. 1743).⁶⁴ He was also not unfamiliar with other thinkers who were directly or indirectly related to Deism, such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648), Thomas Woolston (1668-1733) and David Hume.⁶⁵ Therefore Edwards was almost definitely aware of their writings on China. For example, in one of his “Miscellanies” entitled the “LORD’S DAY,” Edwards quoted passages from Voltaire’s *History of Europe* found in the *Monthly Review* of March 1754: “And what is most worthy of observation is, that [from] time immemorial they [the Chinese] have divided their months into weeks of seven days.”⁶⁶

Nevertheless, while familiar with their works, Edwards was not friendly with either camp. Particularly for him, the Deists were the fiercest opponents who aimed to overthrow the authority of biblical revelation and reject the expression of

⁶³ *WJE* 26:258. John Lockman, *Travels of the Jesuits, into Various Parts of the World: Compiled from Their Letters. Now First Attempted in English ... With Extracts from Other Travellers, and Miscellaneous Notes* (London, 1743).

⁶⁴ Peter J. Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:71.

⁶⁵ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 35, n. 2.

⁶⁶ *WJE* 23:225. See Voltaire’s *General History and State of Europe* or *Memnon: Histoire Orientale* (Paris, 1747). Edwards took this quotation from an extract of Voltaire’s *General History* published in the *Monthly Review* of March 1754, Article 23, p. 201. He made it clear that Voltaire was “speaking of the Chinese.”

Edwards's contemporary Anglo-European forms of Christianity, as we will see in what follows.

3.3 Deists as the Most Dangerous Antagonist

Despite his familiarity with Jesuit missionaries and their works on China, Edwards did not retract from his attack on the Roman Catholic Church. While he was willing to rely on the claims of those seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuits and of other Catholic scholars to gain knowledge about China, Edwards was not friendly at all toward them. In his *HWR*, Edwards clearly stated his abhorrence to the corruptions, tyranny and the usurpations of the Church of Rome at great length. Edwards openly asserted that the Pope's idolatrous worship is an act by Antichrist.⁶⁷ Similarly, in his interpretation of the Book of Revelation, Edwards depicted the Jesuits as a group of cheaters who "under a pretense of zeal for men's souls" were "only fishing for their estates."⁶⁸ He cited Philip Doddridge (1702-1751) in his *Blank Bible* and linked the Jesuits to the "image of the beast": "I am ready," Edwards quoted Doddridge, "with the best critics I know, to interpret this of the religious orders of the Church of Rome (*particularly that of the Jesuits*), who have many of 'em temporal estates and jurisdictions added to their spiritual, and thus have greatly supported the papacy."⁶⁹

Compared with his detestation of the Jesuits, Edwards held an even more hostile view of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Deists. In his public and private writings, he regarded these Deists as the most dangerous enemies of Christianity in his time. In his *HWR*, he claimed that they "wholly cast off the

⁶⁷ *WJE* 9:418-419.

⁶⁸ *WJE* 5:122.

⁶⁹ *WJE* 24:1227-1228. Emphasis added.

Christian religion, and are professed infidels.”⁷⁰ Since the Deists “deny the whole Christian religion,” they are much worse than heretics such as Arians, Arminians, and Socinians, who only reject some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity.⁷¹ Specifically, Edwards stressed that these Deists had denied both the divinity of Christ and God’s revelation in the Scriptures. Edwards argued,

Indeed, they own the being of God but deny that Christ was the son of God, and say he was a mere cheat, and so they say all the prophets and apostles were. And they deny the whole Scripture; they deny that any of it is the word of God. They deny any revealed religion, or any word of God at all, and say that God has given mankind no other light to walk by but his own reason.⁷²

Consequently, Edwards was very concerned about the activities and the increased popularity of Deists’ viewpoints. According to him, they “exceedingly prevailed” in England, and had even “overrun” the nation.⁷³ As Deism “prevails more and more,” he realized that it was “the opposition that Satan has made against the Reformation.”⁷⁴

Seeing these Deists as the fiercest antagonists, Edwards confronted them repeatedly and preached against them in six occasions in his *HWR* alone.⁷⁵ He depicted them as a vicious group who “oppose and ridicule Christianity” with a “great deal of virulence and contempt.”⁷⁶ He announced that the bold position of Deism “shall be crushed and driven away and vanish to nothing” at the end of the world.⁷⁷ In the Final Judgment at the end time, Deists, along with blasphemers, obstinate heretics, and other enemies of Christ, will be destroyed by “a visible and awful hand of God,” being judged with God’s “remarkable tokens of wrath and

⁷⁰ *WJE* 9:432.

⁷¹ *WJE* 9:432.

⁷² *WJE* 9:432.

⁷³ *WJE* 9:432.

⁷⁴ *WJE* 9:432.

⁷⁵ See sermons 13, 21, 25, 26, 27 and 28 of Edwards’s *HWR*.

⁷⁶ *WJE* 9:388.

⁷⁷ *WJE* 9:467.

vengeance.”⁷⁸ Such pronouncements against Deists are also found in many of his other sermons and discourses, including *Freedom of the Will* and *Original Sin*.⁷⁹ In addition, Edwards’s treatment of Deism is also found scattered throughout his private notebooks. In fact, around 25 percent of Edwards’s 1,412 “Miscellanies” entries to be linked to the threats made by Deists, according to McDermott’s calculation.⁸⁰ One striking example is No. 1069, the longest entry of the “Miscellanies” in the Yale Collection of Edwards’s manuscripts at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.⁸¹ This entry ran to 140 pages in length and was “directed in part to the Deist challenge.”⁸²

Edwards’s objection to the claims of Jesuits and Deists did not merely express itself in detestation and repugnance. Basically, he opposed evidently their fervency for China and Chinese philosophy, particularly their challenges to European Christian life and culture, as we shall show now.

3.4 China: An Exceptional But Irrelevant Nation

While holding a positive view of China, Edwards did not think that western European nations should learn from the Chinese in ethics and social order. On the contrary, for him China was such a remote and alien nation that their views are rather irrelevant to him or his congregation.

First of all, while Edwards was fascinated with the Chinese language and culture, the written Chinese remained for him something foreign and

⁷⁸ *WJE* 9:475.

⁷⁹ *WJE* 1 & 3. For a detailed analysis of Edwards’s treatment of Deism in his sermons and discourses, see McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 38, 45-50.

⁸⁰ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 39.

⁸¹ It is now published under the title of “Types of the Messiah,” in the eleventh volume of the Yale edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. See *WJE* 11:189-328.

⁸² McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 45.

incomprehensible. At times, when he wanted to emphasize that some biblical texts could be obscure and difficult for some Christians, he would describe them “as if [they] were written in the Chinese...of which we know not one word.”⁸³

Secondly, for Edwards, the Chinese people were not relevant to Christians living in the new colonies in North America. In the sermons of early 1730s and his “Miscellanies” passages of 1750s, Edwards took the Chinese people as an example in illustrating what it would be like if Christians would not follow his advice that they should have a relationship with God and take their responsibilities before Him.

Edwards wrote,

Not only is it necessary that we should know that God is, and what he is, in order to know what that religion which our duty is, but also 'tis requisite that we should know those other things mentioned, viz. what concern we have with him, etc. *Whatever we hear of the excellencies of a person in China...yet if we have no concern with him, nor he with us, no service from us to him is properly our duty. There can be no intercourse, nothing to excite the exercises and services of friendship according to the human nature...According to the human [nature], such distance and exclusion from all concern is, as to influence on the heart, much like exclusion from reality of existence.*⁸⁴

In fact, in his early career, Edwards thought that the Chinese people were so distant and irrelevant to local life in the American colonies that they could not even have an emotional impact on his own life. In his “Miscellanies” entry No. 232 Edwards wrote “if some man in China were very angry with me, I should not regard it so much as the displeasure of one that lived near me...”⁸⁵

Thirdly, during his later years, Edwards maintained that the Chinese were too distant to be often remembered in his prayers. In *Some Thoughts* published in 1743, Edwards encouraged his readers to pray more for those who had a closer

⁸³ *WJE* 22:88.

⁸⁴ *Misc.* 1304, *WJE* 23:253-254. Emphasis added. See also Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1731-1732 (WJE Online Vol. 47)*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, accessed December 22, 2015, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy40NToyNS53amVvLjEzNDI4MDM=>.

⁸⁵ *Misc.* 232, *WJE* 13:349.

relationship with them, rather than caring for those who were more distant. He argued that “our near friends are more committed to our care than others... than those that live at a great distance; and the people of our land and nation are more in some sense, committed to our care *than the people of China...*”⁸⁶ Similarly, in defending the doctrine of original sin (1757), he took the Chinese people’s remoteness as being irrelevant to be discussed while refuting John Taylor (1694-1761). Edwards claimed that Taylor wrongly and ridiculously argued that Adam’s sin had nothing to do with us, just as a sin committed by an emperor of China who would have no impact on us.⁸⁷

Since he was familiar with both the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuits’ and Deist’s views of China, and yet regarded China as an irrelevant nation, how else did Edwards respond to claims about the Qing empire and its Confucian philosophy? In particular, since he regarded the Deists as the most challenging antagonist, how did he depart from their view that China was the prototype of a highly established nation without God’s revelation and redemption? Ultimately, how could he incorporate China in his eschatological vision of the divine kingdom? It seems that Edwards was in a dilemma, having to oppose the Deists’ anti-Christian advocacy, on the one hand, and explicating his own favorable views of China, on the other. If he failed, Edwards could have easily fallen into supporting a Deist’s expression of natural theology. As will be seen, Edwards was dancing over a tight rope over the threatening principle whenever he dealt with that problem.

⁸⁶ *WJE* 4:470-471. Emphasis added.

⁸⁷ *WJE* 3:311.

4. China in Edwards's Account of God's Redemptive and Eschatological Scheme

Edwards was aware of the relation of classical and pagan myth to scriptural accounts.⁸⁸ Therefore, he had a life-long interest in how China fit into the divine redemptive and eschatological scheme. In his public and personal writings, Edwards clearly demonstrated God's continuous providential and redemptive work in China, particularly by bestowing certain notions of Christian doctrines in Chinese philosophical classics. In fact, he believed that China is always in God's blueprint of the millennial kingdom. In the meantime, Chinese civilization based on Confucian thought supported rather than discredited the necessity of divine revelation and salvation. Edwards refuted the Deist account of natural theology as an "unreasonableness" that denies revealed religion.⁸⁹ This can be demonstrated in the following four sections of discussion and analysis.

4.1 The Realm of the Ancient Chinese's Knowledge of Christian Doctrines

Edwards assumed, on the basis of report made by the Jesuits using Figurist methods in their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century works, that traditionally the ancient Chinese had the notion of some fundamental Christian doctrines. In several of his "Miscellanies" he extensively quoted Chinese understandings of many theological loci, ranging from the nature of God to the Messiah and His redemption.⁹⁰

Being strongly interested in what the Deists called natural religion, during his Stockbridge years, Edwards spent much time on two works by Chevalier Ramsay (1686-1743): *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1748-

⁸⁸ Wilson H. Kimnach, "General Introduction to the Sermon," *WJE* 10:48.

⁸⁹ *WJE* 9:282.

⁹⁰ *WJE* 13:147.

1749) and *Travels of Cyrus* (1727).⁹¹ Despite his Roman Catholic background and his fame as an ardent anti-Calvinist, Ramsay was both a knowledgeable scholar of world religions at that time and an experienced apologist for Trinitarian Christianity.⁹² Apparently, he was capable enough to find evidence contributing that “pristine ancient wisdom” conformed to the biblical account.⁹³ Edwards was impressed by Ramsay’s knowledge and his claims, turning to him for ammunition in his battles against the Deists and other heterodox forces.⁹⁴ As Peter Thuesen and Gerald McDermott have observed, Edwards quoted sixteen thousand words from Ramsay, amounting to ten per cent of all the material constituting his “Miscellanies” during his Stockbridge years.⁹⁵ Most of Edwards’s quotations from Ramsay’s posthumous magnum opus, *Philosophical Principles*, are found in his “Miscellanies” entry No. 1181. While Edwards overlooked Ramsay’s unorthodox arguments concerning predestination, original sin, the atonement and universal pardon, he seemed convinced by Ramsay’s discovery of certain Christian truths in the Chinese ancient philosophical classics.⁹⁶ As its heading suggests, Edwards’s quotation in this “Miscellanies” passage covers many theological topics, including “the Trinity, the nature of the Deity, the paradisiacal state, the Fall, the redemption of the Messiah, the fall of angels, [and] the nature of true religion.”⁹⁷ A few examples of the

⁹¹ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:48. Originally known as Sir Andrew Michael Ramsay, Chevalier Ramsay was raised in the Church of Scotland, educated in the University of Edinburgh and trained for ministry in the church. However, owing to his distaste for the doctrine of predestination, Ramsay left Scotland and was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1710. For the detailed account, see Douglas A. Sweeney, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 23:13.

⁹² Sweeney, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 23:13.

⁹³ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:48, 276.

⁹⁴ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:48.

⁹⁵ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:48. See also McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 213.

⁹⁶ Sweeney, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 23:14. See also McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 214.

⁹⁷ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:95.

materials cited and assessed by Edwards should suffice in revealing the significance of those claims.

First of all, from his study of the Daoist canonical book of the Laozi (also known as *Daodejing*, 道德经) and other passages from ancient Ruist scriptures, Ramsay suggested that some ancient Chinese writers potentially depicted God as a self-existent, eternal Creator of the ultimate truth.

God is called Chang-Ti [Shangdi, 上帝], or the sovereign emperor, and Tien [Tian, 天], the supreme heaven, the intelligent heaven, the self-existent unity, who is present everywhere, and who produced all things by his power... The same books of *King* call God Tao, which signifies reason, law, eternal code; Yen, word or speech; Tching-Che [Jing, 经], sovereign truth.⁹⁸

Moreover, from Laozi's passage of *Tonchu* (*Tai Chu*, 太初, in the beginning), Ramsay thought that these ancient Chinese even had a notion of the Trinity. At least, Laozi (老子, ?-?) seemed to be aware that "in the beginning the supreme reason subsisted in a triple unity, and that this unity created the heavens and the earth, separated them from each other, and will at last convert and perfect all things."⁹⁹ Edwards seemed to agree with Ramsay and added in front of this paragraph the following, "Our author [Ramsay] proceeds to examine the hints and shadows of this doctrine preserved among the pagans, beginning with the Chinese, in whose canonical books he says the following surprising passages are to be found."¹⁰⁰ Edwards was obviously sensitive to the unusual character of Ramsay's argument. In another "Miscellanies" passage (*Misc.* 1236), he quoted Skelton's *Deism Revealed* to restate that Laozi (or Laokun spelled by Edwards) knew about the Trinity: "And Laokun [Laojun, 老君], who lived before Confucius, was as remarkable for another

⁹⁸ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:97.

⁹⁹ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:98.

¹⁰⁰ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:98.

saying, which seems to point at the Trinity:” Edwards copied, ““Eternal Reason produced one, one produced two, two produced three, and three produced all things.””¹⁰¹

Next, in his research of the *I-King (Yi Jing)* and other classics, Ramsay claimed that Confucius, Laozi and Mencius (372-289 BC or 385-303 or 302 BC) had abundant knowledge about the Messiah. Edwards was fascinated and carefully copied it down. Certain elite ancient Chinese masters regarded the Messiah, as Edwards quoted from Ramsay, as “a minister of the supreme God” and addressed him with various names, including “Holy or the Saint by excellence,” “Wen-wang [文王], or the prince of peace; Chin-gin [Shen Ren 神人], the divine man; Chang-gin [Sheng Ren 圣人], God-man [it is probably misunderstood]; Tient-see [Tian Zi 天子], son of the sovereign lord; Kiunt-see [Jun Zi 君子], son of the king [it is a mistranslation]; Kigen [Ji Ren 至人], son of heaven [it is probably misspelled and mistranslated].”¹⁰² Edwards believed that these three ancient Chinese wrote many hints about the theology of life and work of the coming Messiah: He “created the universe” as a Creator; He would govern the whole universe and teach people with “the instructions of... the supreme God himself;” He would be incarnate and undertake severe suffering; and in His triumph He would reestablish the world “in the ways of righteousness,” banishing sin and sufferings and restoring “all things to their primitive perfection and felicity.”¹⁰³ On the basis of what he heard from Ramsay, Edwards adopted these “hints” and assumed that Ramsay’s theory was reliable at least for those who wrote the above texts on Messiah. During this same

¹⁰¹ *Misc.* 1236, *WJE* 23:171.

¹⁰² *Misc.* 1236, *WJE* 23:98-99. The Chinese pronunciation and translation are corrected and confirmed by Prof. Lauren Frederick Pfister in a private correspondence on 2 February 2018.

¹⁰³ *Misc.* 1236, *WJE* 23:99-100.

period of Edwards's life, in order to demonstrate certain Chinese teachings and claims concerning the Messiah, he quoted the English clergyman John Jackson's (1686-1763) *Chronological Antiquities* that was found in *The Monthly Review* for August 1752.¹⁰⁴ According to Jackson, Confucius had a rich knowledge of the coming Messiah. The holy one who would appear in the west, Edwards copied, is "the supreme truth and reason, or the fountain from whence truth and reason are communicated unto men..."¹⁰⁵ Confucius' Messiah is "one, supremely holy, supremely intelligent and invisible," and He "produced and sustains all things" and "is expected to come upon earth; even though an hundred ages should pass before his coming."¹⁰⁶

Lastly, Edwards was impressed by Ramsay's interpretation of the Chinese knowledge about human's fall. "In the book *Chi-king* [*Shijing*, 诗经]," Edwards quoted, "it is said, 'Heaven placed mankind upon a high mountain, but Taiwang [太王] made it fruitless by his fault. Wen-wang [文王], or the king of peace, endeavored to render to the mountain its primitive beauty, but Taiwang contradicted, and opposed his will.'"¹⁰⁷ McDermott notices that Edwards "became convinced" that the ancient Chinese had the notion of regeneration.¹⁰⁸ Quoting Ramsay's interpretation of Confucius' writings, Edwards asserted that the Chinese claimed that they would be restored in "primitive light and purity, which the soul received from heaven, upon its first creation, which it has lost by sin, and which heaven alone can render to it, by its internal irradiations and influences."¹⁰⁹ To Edwards and Ramsay, the Chinese

¹⁰⁴ Misc. 1200, *WJE* 23:123.

¹⁰⁵ Misc. 1200, *WJE* 23:123.

¹⁰⁶ Misc. 1200, *WJE* 23:123.

¹⁰⁷ Misc. 1181, *WJE* 23:101.

¹⁰⁸ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 215.

¹⁰⁹ Misc. 1181, *WJE* 23:104.

were even aware of the “three necessary means of reuniting the soul to God: by contemplation or prayer; by the sacrifice of the passions, or mortification; by humility, or self-denial...”¹¹⁰ Edwards also seemed to agree with Ramsay that the ancient Chinese had a tremendous understanding about repentance and restoration of sinners. “The canonical books of China, and the most ancient commentators upon them, who lived long before the Christian era,” Edwards quoted Ramsay, “are full of such passages, in commendation of internal prayer, purity and humility, inward recollection, and continual vigilance and true self-denial.”¹¹¹

From the above three cases, we can see that Edwards followed both Ramsay and Jackson in believing that most fundamental Christian doctrines can be traced in the ancient Chinese philosophical classics. These doctrines potentially cover some hints or similarities to many orthodox teachings such as God’s nature and his creation, the Messiah’s person and his work, as well as human’s fall and regeneration. However, despite what was explored to be their impressive knowledge of certain Christian doctrines, Edwards insisted on the need for divine revelation and redemption among all Chinese persons. Despite their highly developed civilization, Edwards could not see any hope in China without God’s revelation and redemptive work.

4.2 The Realm of the Necessity of Divine Revelation and Redemption

In contrast to Leibniz and Wolff who asserted that human beings could live properly alone with reason and according to their human nature, Edwards firmly defended the reality of human sinfulness and proved the necessity of God’s revelation and

¹¹⁰ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:103.

¹¹¹ *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23:104. Additionally, Edwards was also impressed by the Chinese understanding of paradise and the Fall of the angels and attentively wrote down all these in this “Miscellanies” passage. See *Misc.* 1181, *WJE* 23: 101-103.

salvation. This applied to the “China” discussed and promoted by Jesuits and Deists. Instead of being a people group typified by rational self-sufficiency, Edwards asserted that China would be hopeless without divine special revelation and Jesus Christ’s redemption. We shall justify these claims on the basis of Edwards’s arguments relying on the epistemological insufficiency and soteriological defectiveness of all human reasoning and their best philosophical achievements. Three perspectives are highlighted in Edwards’s arguments.

First of all, Edwards was convinced that both human reason in general and any expression of philosophy are insufficient in knowing either the material or the spiritual realms. In his sermon called “The Pure in Heart Blessed” in the early 1730s, Edwards stressed that reason ultimately had to be dependent on revelation. For him there is no such a thing as “naked” or “unaided” reason as presumed by the Deists.¹¹² If a person relied on only his defective form of reasoning, he also would be ignorant of the most obvious things in this world.

But we, having always lived in the enjoyment of gospel light and being accustomed to it, are hardly sensible how dependent we are upon it, and how much we should be in the blind and dark about things that now seem plain to us, if we never had had our reason assisted by revelation.¹¹³

Moreover, due to the limits of human reason in general, Edwards was confident that without divine revelation, humankind has no way to gain a true knowledge of God’s being and His work. Edwards wrote as follows about this in his “Miscellanies” entry 408,

A man that sets himself to reason without divine light is like a man that goes in the dark into a garden full of the most beautiful plants, and most artfully ordered, and compares things together by going from one thing to another, to feel of them and to measure the distances; but he that sees by divine light is like a man that views the garden when the sun shines upon it.¹¹⁴

¹¹² McDermott, “Jonathan Edwards, Deism, and the Mystery of Revelation,” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997-) 77, no. 4 (1999): 212.

¹¹³ *WJE* 17:74.

¹¹⁴ *Misc.* 408, *WJE* 13:470.

Consequently, it is not possible, from Edwards's understanding of humankind, that any philosophy can stand independent from divine revelation, because fallen human's minds have been impaired by sin and have no way to produce a perfect and reasonable understanding of either the spiritual or material dimensions of life.

Next, for Edwards, without divine revelation it is impossible for humankind, relying on philosophy alone, to be delivered from their sinful state of darkness and imperfection. In his early career, he wrote in "Miscellanies" entry No. 350,

*Revelation brings nations to rational studious consideration, and there is nothing else that will do it. . . Revelation redeems nations from a vicious, sensual, brutish way of living, which will effectually keep out learning. 'Tis therefore unreasonable to suppose that philosophy might supply the defect of revelation; for without revelation there would be no such thing as any good philosophy, that is, except now and then in some rare instances, and then attended with abundance of darkness and imperfection.*¹¹⁵

Edwards clearly saw the deficiency of general revelation in the life of fallen humans, no matter whether it has been revealed in the forms of philosophy, culture, nature, history, human reason, or anything else. God's revelation of redemption must be given to stimulate a person to become repentant and receive God's forgiveness, before his life could experience spiritual reformation and be granted the eternal blessings. Here Edwards claimed that biblical revelation is indispensable for the realization of God's redemption and the transformation of people's lives. This reality applied to every people group and nation Edwards studied. In his later years, Edwards repeated the necessity of divine revelation for humans to come to know God and be redeemed. In the 1750s, in his "Miscellanies" entry entitled "Necessity of Revelation," he stressed that fallen humankind was left in darkness. Consequently, God's revelation is essential for humans to gain an adequate knowledge of God, no matter what kind of admirable philosophy had been learned, or high-led culture a

¹¹⁵ *Misc.* 350, *WJE* 13:425. Emphasis added.

person had grown up within. Only with biblical revelation is it possible for a person to reconcile with God and so be aware of divine guidance.

'Tis apparent that there would be no hopes that these things would ever be satisfyingly determined among mankind, in the present darkness and disadvantages which their understandings are under, without a revelation. Without a revelation now extant, or once extant, having some remaining influence by tradition, men would undoubtedly forever be at a loss what God expects from us and what we may expect from him...¹¹⁶

During that same period, Edwards penned in his notebook that instead of reason and human nature, it is divine revelation that satisfies humanity's need of God.

Yea, notwithstanding the clear and infinitely abundant evidences of the being of a God, we need that God should tell us that he is, that there is a great, intelligent and willing Being that has made and governs the world. 'Tis of most unspeakable advantage, as to the knowledge of this, that God has told us of it. And there is much reason to think that the notions that mankind in general have had in all ages of a Deity has been very much originally owing to revelation.¹¹⁷

That it is the Creator's intention to communicate His nature and providential work to created humankind Edwards believed from early in his career. The primary purpose of divine revelation, Edwards wrote in his essay entitled "Christian Religion," is not only to enable humankind to understand the meaning and course of divine providence, but to comply with God's scheme of providence and the development of His redemptive work. He argued,

If there be a revelation that God makes to the world... that he should therein make known not only what manner of being he is, but also that he should lead mankind to an understanding of his works of creation and providence... and that men may know something of God's scheme of providence, and so much of his scope and design, as to be able to *see something of the wisdom and other perfections of God* in the course of things; and that may be of some direction to them how to *regulate themselves so as to concur with*, and not to contradict, *the holy and wise scheme of the governor of the world.*¹¹⁸

Thirdly, knowing the epistemological insufficiency and soteriological defectiveness of human reason and philosophy, Edwards insisted that Chinese

¹¹⁶ Misc. 1338, WJE 23:347.

¹¹⁷ Misc. 1338, WJE 23:348.

¹¹⁸ Misc. 752, WJE 18:401. Emphasis added.

philosophical classics were far from being self-sufficient. Conversely, he maintained that all Chinese persons, elites as well as commoners, were in need of God's revelation and salvation, despite their consciousness of some fundamental theological doctrines. He held this belief from his early years. So we see in a sermon of the late 1720s, Edwards encouraged his congregation to be thankful for salvation and other spiritual blessings granted to them. In the process of his illustration, Edwards maintained that the Chinese were still in "great darkness and blindness," just like any person of American or European origin who had not been redeemed by God.¹¹⁹ He went further and stated that these Chinese persons were of no greater value than any other sinners who would perish without divine revelation and salvation. For Edwards, contemporary China was no better than the less-civilized nations such as Tartary, Ethiopia and "Terra Australia."¹²⁰ Even with their impressive civilization, the Chinese people were still no less under the domain of Satan, until the gospel arrives.¹²¹

Edwards kept repeating this observation even in his later years. In the 1750s, he reinforced this view through his reading of Philip Skelton's *Deism Revealed*, in which the case of ancient and contemporary China was elaborated.¹²² In his "Miscellanies" entry, entitled "The Necessity of Revelation," Edwards quoted Skelton's *Deism Revealed* at length to prove the necessity of God's revelation and to

¹¹⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1728-1729* (*WJE Online*, vol. 43), ed. Jonathan Edwards Center, accessed 22nd December 2015, <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy40MT05LndqZW8uNDcwNDc5>.

¹²⁰ "Terra Australia" referred to a hypothetical continent between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, then applied to the continent of Australia in the early 1800s and was gradually replaced by the naming of "Australia."

¹²¹ Edwards, *Sermons, Series II, 1728-1729* (*WJE Online*, vol. 43).

¹²² As a devoted Irish Anglican minister and a prominent defender of divine revelation, Skelton provided not only plenty of details of the Deists' teaching, but also equipped Edwards to be more capable in challenging their claims about natural theology. More importantly, Edwards shared Skelton's position that the Bible was the only and essential source for reliable knowledge of God and His redemption. See Sweeney, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 23:17.

demolish the Deist theory of “complete” human self-sufficiency. According to Edwards, despite being more civilized than many other “heathen” nations, contemporary China (as being Qing empire) had *not* been able to show any development towards “true religion.” He wrote,

The doctrine of St. Paul concerning the blindness into which the Gentiles fell, is so confirmed by the state of religion in Africa, America, and *even China*, where, to this day, *no advances towards the true religion have been made*, that we can no longer be at a loss to judge [...] of the insufficiency of unassisted reason to dissipate the prejudices of the heathen world, and open their eyes to religious truths.¹²³

Supported by quotes from Skelton, Edwards continued to demonstrate that human beings tended to employ philosophy, reason and science for idolatry rather than for worshiping the Creator. This remained true for both the Chinese and Western peoples, as Edwards commented on the first chapter of Romans:

But St. Paul gives us quite another history of the business: he says, that ‘from the Creation, *απο κτισεως*, the invisible things of God are clearly seen’ [Rom. 1:20]; and afterwards, *through philosophy, and the boasted wisdom of man, almost wholly lost, or changed into idolatry, worse in itself than even total ignorance*.¹²⁴

So he insisted again: “Our knowledge of God did not take its rise from mere reason, but from revelation.”¹²⁵

From the above discussion, it is clear that, in contrast to the Deist natural theology, Edwards had offered strong insistence for the necessity of revelation and redemption, because human reason and philosophy is insufficient even for human knowledge of the physical world, and they are defective or even useless in knowing God and the way toward redemption. This is a universal principle that applies fittingly in Edwards’s theology to ancient China and Qing empire in his time, as well as to all the other nations, whether they are “civilized” or not.

¹²³ *Misc.* 1350, *WJE* 23:454. Emphasis added.

¹²⁴ *Misc.* 1350, *WJE* 23:454. Emphasis added.

¹²⁵ *Misc.* 1350, *WJE* 23:454. Emphasis added.

4.3 The Realm of China's Consistent Involvement in God's Kingdom

Our discussions so far suggest that Edwards accepted two seemingly opposite facts. On the one hand, ancient Chinese philosophical classics, particularly the Ruist and Daoist scriptures, were enriched with a clear awareness of the fundamental Christian doctrines. On the other hand, Edwards had argued that the ancient Chinese worldview was unsustainable without God's revelation and salvation. How did Edwards resolve the tension between these two claims? His strategy was to prove that China had been consistently involved in God's kingdom, from the perspectives of the divine redemptive work and eschatological blueprint. For one thing, God's progressive revelation can be found in the Chinese philosophical classics involved identifying "hints and subtleties" of divine work within those ancient volumes. For another, it was evident for Edwards that the millennial kingdom would not be fully realized without incorporating China and the converted Chinese in it. Edwards approached these two claims from four perspectives.

In the first place, Edwards noticed that the Chinese classics contained records of certain biblical events. In the 1730s, Edwards came across a volume entitled *Scripture Chronology* by Arthur Bedford (1668-1745).¹²⁶ Aiming to vindicate the reliability of historical records in the Bible, Bedford's work clearly enhanced Edwards's understanding of ancient China.¹²⁷ In his notes on an event in Joshua 10:12-14 in which the sun stood still for a whole day, Edwards quoted Bedford and showed that this event was also recorded in ancient Chinese history. From Bedford, Edwards said, "[I]n the reign of their seventh emperor Yao [尧], the sun did not set for ten days together... This happened in the sixty-seventh year of that

¹²⁶ Stephen J. Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:64. Arthur Bedford, *The Scripture Chronology Demonstrated by Astronomical Calculations* (London, 1730).

¹²⁷ Stein, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 5:65.

emperor's reign..."¹²⁸ There were disagreements in details in the two accounts (i.e. "a whole day" vs. "ten days") that Edwards overlooked, but he still chose to be aligned with Bedford that the Chinese historical record "exactly agrees with Scripture history."¹²⁹

In the second place, Edwards was convinced that China was incorporated in God's redemptive scheme from the very beginning of its civilization. In particular, he believed that there was an apparent correlation between Noah and Fu Xi, the founder of ancient Chinese civilization. In his early career, Edwards advocated that the reason why the Chinese were more civilized is that they probably were "from the people that Noah... immediately ruled over for many hundred years," and so "held more by tradition from Noah than other nations."¹³⁰ This supposition was made in his *Blank Bible*. By access to *Scripture Chronology* Edwards gained more confidence in his belief that Fu Xi was perhaps one of the children of Noah, or even Noah himself. In commenting on Genesis 1:27, Edwards quoted Bedford and suggested "Noah fled eastward towards China."¹³¹ In 1747, Edwards found support for his own hypothesis in Shuckford's *Sacred and Profane History of the World Connected*. In his exegetical notes on Genesis 8:4, that was drafted after his reading of that volume, Edwards quoted Shuckford to support the view that China's history "reaches up indisputably to the times of Noah."¹³² He even agreed to the hypothesis that Fu Xi and Noah were probably just one and the same person. Edwards gave a number of tentative reasons from his reading of Shuckford's works. Firstly, Fu Xi had no father and Noah's ancestors "perished in the flood."¹³³ Secondly, Fu Xi's

¹²⁸ Jos. 10:12-14, *WJE* 15:134.

¹²⁹ Jos. 10:12-14, *WJE* 15:134.

¹³⁰ *Misc.* 350, *WJE* 13:424.

¹³¹ Gen. 1.27, *WJE* 24:130.

¹³² *WJE* 15:535.

¹³³ *WJE* 15:536.

mother was said to “have conceived him encompassed with a rainbow.”¹³⁴ Thirdly, Fu Xi was reported to “have bred seven sorts of creatures” for his sacrifice to “the supreme spirit of heaven and earth,” which resembled Noah who took every clean beast into the ark by seven pairs and offered burnt offerings after the flood.¹³⁵ Lastly, according to ancient and mystical Chinese history, Fu Xi “settled in the province of Xeusi... which was near Ararat where the ark rested.”¹³⁶ Edwards did not critically examine Shuckford’s theory, but carefully recorded the facts in his *Notes on Scripture* and put them under the title, “CONCERNING THE MOUNTAIN ON WHICH THE ARK RESTED, AND FOHI [FU XI], OF CHINESE, HIS BEING THE SAME WITH NOAH.”¹³⁷ From the above facts, it seems that Edwards clearly took the resemblance between Fu Xi and Noah seriously.¹³⁸ And this resemblance is aligned with what Lecomte and the Figurists believed that is discussed in Section 2.1 of the present chapter.

Thirdly, Edwards was confident that the ancient Chinese inherited many of their Christian notions from the Jewish patriarchs. In the entry entitled “Tradition of the Chinese Concerning the Messiah and the Trinity” (*Misc.* 1236), Edwards quoted from Skelton’s *Deism Revealed* and observed that it was possibly from the ancient Jewish people, or the patriarchs specifically, that the ancient Chinese people inherited their knowledge about God and Christian doctrines. Edwards suggested that many years before the Christian era, it was possible that some Jewish people had been brought to the mainland of China as captives and educated Chinese people with biblical teachings. That could be the reason why many notions prevalent in ancient China appeared similar to those of the Jews. In particular, he argued this might be the

¹³⁴ *WJE* 15:536.

¹³⁵ *WJE* 15:535. Cf. Gen. 7:1-9; 8:20.

¹³⁶ *WJE* 15:536.

¹³⁷ *WJE* 15:535.

¹³⁸ McDermott also agrees with this observation, see *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 213.

reason why Confucius and Laozi had some vague understandings of Christianity. Living five hundred years before Christ, Confucius predicted that a “true saint,” the Messiah, would be born in the West. And Laozi, Edwards believed, knew about the Trinity before Confucius.¹³⁹ One Chinese emperor who reigned for about sixty years after Christ, Edwards was convinced, was informed by Heaven that this saint was in the West and sent ambassadors to search out for him.¹⁴⁰

Edwards’s conviction that these Christian notions found in the ancient Chinese texts were the legacy of Jewish patriarchs was reinforced by Ramsay’s work. In quoting Ramsay in two Miscellany entries, No. 1255 and No. 1351, Edwards evidently accepted the theory that the founders of ancient China actually received divine revelation containing Christian truths from the patriarchs.¹⁴¹ For Edwards, this was a significant piece of the historical and theological puzzle of how the ancient Chinese sages gained some knowledge of certain Christian doctrines. It is noteworthy that Edwards copied into his notebook many portions of Ramsay’s “Discourse upon the Theology and Mythology of the Pagans.”¹⁴² As a lengthy appendix to his *Travels of Cyrus* (1728), Ramsay compared various religions and sought for their unity and common origin.¹⁴³ In his Miscellany entry 1351, Edwards echoed Ramsay’s observation with this heading to his quotation: “the first religion of mankind [proved] agreeable to the religion of the Holy Scriptures.”¹⁴⁴ He surmised in the margin that, due to divine revelation passed down from the Jewish patriarchs,

¹³⁹ Misc. 1236, *WJE* 23:171.

¹⁴⁰ Misc. 1236, *WJE* 23:171.

¹⁴¹ See Misc. 1255, *WJE* 23:190-91; Misc. 1236, *WJE* 23:461-81. See also McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 211-12.

¹⁴² Misc. 1351, *WJE* 23:461-81.

¹⁴³ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 214. Ramsay’s work was first published in French as *Les Voyages de Cyrus, avec un Discours sur la Mythologie des Payens* (Paris, 1727). The English edition was published in London in the following year. Edwards used the 8th edition of 1752, London. See *WJE* 23:461, n. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Misc. 1351, *WJE* 23:461.

there are “many religious truths” in ancient Chinese and other heathen nations.¹⁴⁵

Edwards concluded, “We see then that the doctrines of the primitive perfection of nature, its fall and its restoration by a divine hero, are equally manifest in the mythologies of the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Indians and *Chinese*.”¹⁴⁶

Finally, Edwards believed that the scheduled nature of the development of Chinese civilization would be finally merged within the flow of God’s eschatological scheme. In commenting on Revelation 16:13-21, Edwards maintained that as the “seventh trumpet” sounds, the kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of the Lord. By that time, the millennial kingdom will reach its consummation, and will be much more extensive and glorious than the Roman Christian Empire in Constantine’s time.¹⁴⁷ The Chinese will be converted and turn their hearts to God. In fact, the final consummation of the millennial kingdom, Edwards stressed, cannot be accomplished without the conversion and involvement of the gigantic heathen countries like China. As he wrote,

The event that the church has been laboring and in travail for, is that event that is accomplished by the sounding of the seventh trumpet. Rev. 11:15, “And the seventh angel sounded: and there were great voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.”. . . But we must suppose, that this will be accomplished in a greater extent at the sounding of the seventh trumpet than ever before, because ’tis spoken of as a new thing, that shall first be accomplished then. And by this world must be meant a much bigger world than the Roman world that became Christian in Constantine’s time. *And this event can’t be looked upon to be accomplished, as long as such mighty empires as that of the Turks, and of the Chinese, and great Mogul, etc., remain in opposition to Christ’s kingdom.*¹⁴⁸

With such a favorable view on China, Edwards anticipated, with great confidence, that China, along with the Ottoman and Muslim empires, would finally become an important and indivisible member in the full realization of the millennial kingdom.

¹⁴⁵ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 214.

¹⁴⁶ *Misc.* 1351, *WJE* 23:480. Emphasis added.

¹⁴⁷ *WJE* 5:183.

¹⁴⁸ *WJE* 5:182-83.

China's involvement in the divine kingdom, Edwards was convinced, had been incorporated in God's redemptive and eschatological blueprint from the very beginning of China's civilization and was progressively revealed in Chinese philosophical classics. Nevertheless, while China is an exceptional nation and will be a significant member in the divine millennial kingdom, Edwards's vision of the millennium is far more extensive than that, as we will show in what follows.

4.4 The Realm of Edwards's Cosmic Vision of the Millennial Kingdom

Edwards's conviction of China's involvement in God's kingdom and this nation's promised eschatological end is consistent with his most extended vision of the millennial kingdom. Fundamentally, this millennial vision is informed by his understanding of the cosmic scale of the divine redemptive work.

To begin with, for Edwards, the millennial kingdom will cover all the nations on the whole earth, not only the western and "Christian" countries, but also the heathen nations that were heavily engaged with idolatry and false religions. This he made clear in his sermon, "The Value of Salvation," in 1722. As the millennium commences, the knowledge of God's redemption will be, "as the waters cover the seas" (Isaiah 11:9), prevailing in these nations and over the whole earth.

Consequently, all nations, including those that were seen at his time as living in the spiritual darkness of idolatry due to non-Christian religions, will be Christianized. He prophesied,

There is a time coming that there will be very great change in the world: those nations which now are covered with the darkness of heathenism and idolatry, or other false religions, shall be enlightened with the truth, and there shall be a more extraordinary appearance of the power of godliness amongst those that profess it, when God's spirit shall be poured out on old and young, and the knowledge of God shall cover the earth "as the waters cover the seas" (Is. 11:9); . . . These, and suchlike expressions, signify that *all nations shall be Christianized and be visibly*

*holy, and that multitudes---great multitudes all over the face of the earth---shall be brought to the saving knowledge of God.*¹⁴⁹

In his *HWR* and his Miscellany entries, Edwards repeated this conviction that the terrestrial millennial kingdom will extend globally. Hence, he asserted that in the millennium “the kingdom of Christ set up on the ruins of it *everywhere, throughout the whole habitable globe.*”¹⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the gospel will be widely shared and accepted in “all countries and nations”: the knowledge of God will “prevail everywhere,” even among the nations that were most ignorant in Edwards’s time such as Ethiopia and Turkey, and “among all sorts of persons” from the “very learned men” and the “more ordinary men.”¹⁵¹ Consequently, even the most barbarous and remote countries will attentively seek God’s glory and worship him wholeheartedly. They will spare no effort “in exploring the glories of the Creator,” as well as “in loving and adoring him...in serving him, and... in making the world to ring with his praise.”¹⁵²

Edwards was confident that this millennial kingdom would need the most extensive scope across the whole of the earth. He believed this kingdom is desirable for every Christian who cares about lost souls. And he urged them to earnestly pray for its speedy arrival, though he stressed that it is God who decides the time when this millennium would arrive. He preached,

All those that are truly sensible of the worth of souls will think these very glorious times and will long for them. They are generally thought to be very near, which is a consideration that ought to stir up all Christians earnestly to pray for them, for though God has appointed the time of these things in his own counsels, yet he will be enquired of for them by his people before he accomplishes them.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Edwards, “The Value of Salvation,” *WJE* 10:335-336. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁰ *WJE* 9:472-73. Emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ *WJE* 9:480.

¹⁵² *Misc.* 26, *WJE* 13:212–213.

¹⁵³ Edwards, “The Value of Salvation,” *WJE* 10:336.

Secondly, this vision of the global millennium is consistent with and part of his conviction of the cosmic scheme of redemptive work. For Edwards, “all revolutions and changes in the habitable world” and “all the great successive changes” throughout the development of history are subservient to the divine redemptive work.¹⁵⁴ From the early 1730s, Edwards started to realize that God’s redemptive work “subordinates all the successive changes that come to pass in the state of affairs of mankind.”¹⁵⁵ Every single historical event, as he wrote around 1731 in his “Miscellany” entry, from the foundation of the earth till the end of the world, is “doubtless but [a] various” part of this great design and involved in the scheme of the divine redemptive work.¹⁵⁶

This cosmic vision of the divine redemptive work was further developed in his *HWR* preached in 1739. Notably, while the entire *HWR* is inspired by Isaiah 51:8, the reader may notice the vast scope of this Redemption Discourse. From his extensive knowledge of Scripture, Edwards set out to survey the whole divine work of redemption in history, from the fall of man to the consummation of this work. In fact, his *HWR* is designed to demonstrate the expansiveness of God’s grand scheme of redemption at the broadest level possible. Edwards’s *HWR* includes the whole of human histories, starting from Eden’s time and ending with the eclipse of time itself, since the divine redemptive work is carried on in all ages. Edwards stated the foundational doctrine of *HWR* at the opening of this discourse, “The Work of Redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world.” Edwards repeated this up to forty-five times throughout the thirty sermons that constitute *HWR*.¹⁵⁷ While the narrative base of his Redemption Discourse is

¹⁵⁴ *WJE* 9:292, 520.

¹⁵⁵ *Misc.* 547, *WJE* 18:93-94.

¹⁵⁶ *Misc.* 547, *WJE* 18:93-94.

¹⁵⁷ *WJE* 9:127. See also *WJE* 9:116, 118, 119, 120, 149, 157, 357, 417, 526, etc.

comprised of various biblical and historical events, the volume itself intends to manifest the work of redemption as being made up “by many successive works and dispensations of God, all tending to one great end and effect, all united as the several parts of a scheme, and altogether making up one great work.”¹⁵⁸ Additionally, Edwards’s *HWR* also includes the visible and invisible dimensions of the divine kingdom. While most of his narrative describes redemptive work being advanced on earth, heaven and hell are involved from time to time. While focusing on how this redemptive work developed among the redeemed or the church of God, Edwards was fully aware of angelic involvements and demonic powers. In short, all of God’s creation and the creatures are involved in the divine redemptive work,

Edwards kept developing this vision of the cosmic scheme of God’s redemptive work in his later years. In a sermon entitled “Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design” preached in December 1744,¹⁵⁹ he integrated various significant elements of his homiletical past.¹⁶⁰ In particular, the river image and the imagery of Ezekiel’s wheels, found in his *HWR*, were repeated to highlight God’s grand design of redemption in its full theological scope: from creation to providence to the end of the world. Consequently, it will incorporate and summarize all other divine works: “the work of redemption is the grand design of [history], this the chief work of God, [the] end of all other works, so that the design of God is one.”¹⁶¹ Additionally, had his projected *A History of the Work of Redemption* been completed, according to his letter to the trustees in 1757, it would “fulfill his life of study and reflection.”¹⁶² In this project, Edwards planned to display an extremely

¹⁵⁸ *WJE* 9:121.

¹⁵⁹ See Edwards, “Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design,” *WJE* 25:111-26.

¹⁶⁰ Wilson Kinnach, “Introduction to ‘Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design,’” *WJE* 25:111.

¹⁶¹ Edwards, “Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design,” *WJE* 25:119.

¹⁶² George S. Claghorn, “Introduction,” *WJE* 16:25.

extensive and complex scheme to express his cosmic redemptive-historical vision. Theologically, Edwards identified the “great work of redemption” as “the grand design of all God’s designs.”¹⁶³ In this sense, God’s redemptive work became “the *summum* and *ultimum* of all the divine operations and degrees [decrees].”¹⁶⁴ Historically, this scheme of redemptive work would involve both biblical and historical events, ranging from “the chief events coming to pass in the church of God” to “revolutions in the world of humankind” that may affect “the state of the church and the affair of redemption.”¹⁶⁵ More strikingly, this scheme would transcend both time and space, covering pre-historical, historical and post-historical dimensions, “beginning from eternity” and ending at the “consummation of all things.”¹⁶⁶ And it would demonstrate the interaction among “all three worlds, heaven, earth, and hell,”¹⁶⁷ “telling the simultaneous stories of three realms.”¹⁶⁸ Owing to the expansiveness and complexity of his redemptive-historical scheme, had he lived to accomplish this projected *A History of the Work of Redemption*, most probably Edwards would tell “a story that introduced all the major tenets and philosophical underpinnings of Christian theology.”¹⁶⁹

Thirdly, as God’s redemptive work has impact on all creatures and historical events, this is also true of the millennial kingdom, though the millennium will not reach pre-historical and post-historical dimensions. On the one hand, this millennial impact will end up in the heavenly realm, joining with the angelic creatures. For Edwards, while the lower world is the “stage of . . . wonderful work of redemption,”

¹⁶³ *WJE* 16:728.

¹⁶⁴ *WJE* 16:728.

¹⁶⁵ *WJE* 16:728.

¹⁶⁶ *WJE* 16:728. See also Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:9.

¹⁶⁷ *WJE* 16:728.

¹⁶⁸ Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:9.

¹⁶⁹ Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:10.

the divine redemptive work starts from and ends in heaven.¹⁷⁰ While heaven is older than earth, it is not eternal and was created as “a place with a physical, social, and spiritual topography.”¹⁷¹ The whole narrative of redemptive history in *HWR* begins from the creation of heaven and angels, because the created heaven provides a dwelling place for the redeemer and the redeemed, and angels “were created to be ministering spirits.”¹⁷² Similarly, the consummation of redemptive history is accomplished in heaven. When the millennium commences, Edwards declared, “praise shall not fill the earth but also *heaven*,” because the “church on earth and the church in heaven shall both gloriously rejoice and praise God as with one heart.”¹⁷³ In fact, Edwards was convinced that heaven, instead of earth, is the most proper place for the church. In his “Miscellany” entry 429, Edwards wrote, “the greatest part of the church is in heaven; there is the proper place of the church; that is their own country; that is *the proper land of Israel*.”¹⁷⁴ It is clear that Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom is far beyond New England, Israel, China and the whole earth, reaching to his understanding of the heavenly realm.

On the other hand, when the millennium commences, hell and Satan will be affected. Edwards argued that the angels’ fall in early heaven’s history was due to their rebellion against God’s scheme of redemptive work. What is the primary factor that triggered the fallen angels’ rebellion? According to Edwards, Lucifer was acting as “God’s chief servant,” “the grand minister” and “the top of the creation” before his rebellion.¹⁷⁵ In contrast to angels who are willing to be the ministering spirits in the divine redemptive work, Lucifer could not bear to serve redeemed human beings,

¹⁷⁰ *WJE* 9:118-119.

¹⁷¹ Stout, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 22:15.

¹⁷² *WJE* 9:118-119.

¹⁷³ *WJE* 9:477. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁴ *Misc.* 429, *WJE* 9:480. Emphasis added.

¹⁷⁵ *Misc.* 936, *WJE* 20:191.

because he regarded the human race as “newly created, that appeared so feeble, mean and despicable, so vastly inferior” to him and other angels.¹⁷⁶ What is worse, Lucifer refused to serve the incarnate Christ. He proudly rejected God’s plan of making him the servant of Christ who would be the God-*man*, because Christ would be “one of that [human] race that should hereafter be born.”¹⁷⁷ This triggered Lucifer’s fall; and “the other angels he drew away with him are fallen.”¹⁷⁸ After this rebellion they became enemies of the incarnate Christ and the redeemed humanity. As redemptive history comes to its end, however, Satan and his demonic followers will be confronted with the severest judgement due to their rebellion. When the millennium arrives, Edwards maintained, “the prince of hell,” Satan, would see the era of the millennial kingdom “like Christ’s coming to judgment in that it so puts an end to the former state of the world.”¹⁷⁹ Satan will be greatly afflicted and threatened by God’s wrath and Christ’s reign during this period. Worse still, he will fear more at the Final Judgment which will endure *forever*. Edwards declared, “if Satan ... trembles at the thought of it thousands of years beforehand, how much more will he tremble as proud and as stubborn as he is when he comes to stand at Christ’s bar.”¹⁸⁰

4.5 Summary

To conclude this section, Edwards was confident that it is from God’s revelation that the ancient Chinese sages obtained some notions of Christian doctrines. Specifically, his confidence was based on three theories: biblical events were also found in the Chinese classics, the resemblance between Fu Xi and Noah, and Jewish patriarchs

¹⁷⁶ *Misc.* 936, *WJE* 20:191.

¹⁷⁷ *Misc.* 936, *WJE* 20:191.

¹⁷⁸ *Misc.* 936, *WJE* 20:191.

¹⁷⁹ *WJE* 9:478.

¹⁸⁰ *WJE* 9:500.

acting as educators of the Chinese people in biblical revelation and theology. In this way, Edwards attempted to resolve the dilemma between the ancient Chinese persons' knowledge of Christian doctrines and their current spiritual darkness. For Edwards, China has always been in God's scheme as He keeps expanding His divine kingdom. The ancient and current Chinese civilization and philosophical classics were the legacies of God's progressive revelations in that part of the world. Through these, China would gradually emerge into the eschatological blueprint of God's millennial kingdom. In another word, China was, is and would be educated to know God, first through his revelation in the ancient expressions of philosophy and culture, and subsequently through his Word and by evangelistic ministries.

Furthermore, informed by his theology of redemptive history, Edwards envisioned a cosmic millennium and anticipated, with great confidence, that China, along with the entire heathen world, would finally become an important and indivisible part in the millennial kingdom. In fact, even heaven and hell will be impacted at the inauguration of the millennium. This is consistent with his cosmic redemptive-historical vision. For him, the interaction between heaven, hell, and earth extends throughout the history of fallen humankind, so that its form is frequently "likened to a journey or progress."¹⁸¹ In his grand redemptive-historical scheme, not only is New England or Israel too small to be the theatre, earth itself is not large enough. Thus Edwards's vision of the millennium involves the cosmos, including the visible and invisible worlds: earth, heaven and hell.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:18-19.

¹⁸² Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:14-23.

5. Concluding Observations

In drawing this chapter to a close, we offer the following three observations.

In the first place, by situating Edwards in his intellectual and theological contexts, we have selected what he and others considered to be “China” as an example of Edwards’s cosmic extended eschatological account of the millennial kingdom. In the eighteenth century, Anglo-European Christian countries were significantly influenced by an influx of ideas that had come out of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuit works about Ruist and Daoist classical texts and teachings inherited during the Qing empire which they simply referred to as “China.” Edwards took a great interest in this popular intellectual movement and engaged actively in the related controversies as a Reformed theologian and philosopher. By tracing what had been presented on divine revelation in “Chinese classics” that were actually the Daoist scripture entitled *Daodejing* and various Ruist ancient canonical texts, Edwards attempted to show that these ancient Chinese writers had been involved in God’s providential plan from the very beginning of their history, and would be included in the divine redemptive work leading to the end of the world. Edwards’s search through secondary resources for Christian notions from these ancient Chinese classics reflects his cosmic vision of the millennium, a vision that would cover the whole earth and would ultimately have its impact on heaven and hell. For Edwards, God’s redemptive work definitely embraced every race, nation and culture, though “God’s dealings with particular countries and kingdoms [would be] very various.”¹⁸³ Therefore, Edwards understandably included China in his theological anticipation of the millennial kingdom.

The second observation concerns Edwards’s singularity in his anticipation of

¹⁸³ Edwards, “Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design,” *WJE* 25:113-114.

China being included in the millennial kingdom. Edwards's fascination with China and the anticipation of Chinese people's involvement in the divine kingdom has not been well documented in Edwardsean scholarship until the end of the twentieth century, but it in fact marks a significant and clear thematic departure in his discussion of the eschatological vision of the millennial kingdom from many of his Reformed forefathers and Puritan colleagues, even though most of them did discuss biblical eschatology. To the best of our knowledge, Edwards appears to be the only Puritan theologian who has carefully and attentively studied what he considered to be China and her eschatological end. Most of the reformers including John Calvin, Martin Luther and John Knox, did not write anything about Chinese culture and philosophy, let alone associate this nation with God's redemptive work or His kingdom. Similarly, most of Edwards's Puritan contemporaries would not share his enthusiasm for the Chinese philosophical classics. In fact, they still firmly held a western-centric position in their theological interpretation and proclamation. While they most probably would agree with Edwards that China *is* in God's redemptive blueprint, they still "customarily dismissed non-Western religions as unambiguously uninformed."¹⁸⁴

In the meantime, Edwards's attempt to include China in the millennial kingdom was significantly different from the Deists' natural theology of taking China as a prototype to establish social morality without biblical revelation or Christianity. In this process, his methodology is both traditional and innovative. On the one hand, he moved safely within a Calvinist paradigm to defend the necessity of special revelation and redemption. Despite his reliance on authors from both the Reformed and the Roman Catholic churches, Edwards did not compromise his

¹⁸⁴ McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 215-16.

position on the ultimate and exclusive authority of Scripture. On the contrary, from his reading of the Reformed writers such as Skelton and Shuckford, Edwards evidently and faithfully followed the Protestant principle of “Scripture alone” during his confrontation with the Deists.¹⁸⁵ The reason why Edwards did so, as Sweeney’s recent research shows, is his insistence on “Scripture’s credibility and comprehensive scope” on history as well as his confidence of taking the Bible as “a map to chart the course of world events.”¹⁸⁶ For Edwards, both the course of historical development of Chinese philosophy and the eschatological end of China are all aligned with God’s redemptive plan recorded in Scripture. This was in accord with most of his Puritan contemporaries who highlighted the correlation between biblical prophecy and history. In fact, without such a view of Scripture, he would easily be trapped in the problems generated by a Deist natural theology.

On the other hand, Edwards *did* move beyond the Christian Scripture to seek the vague evidence of God’s revelation and His redemptive work among the ancient Chinese philosophers. This actually departed from what most of his Puritan colleagues would agree with. Notably, despite his clear abhorrence of the early modern order of the Jesuits, Edwards agreed with those who had written about “China” and “the Chinese” on at least three accounts. First of all, he agreed with their interpretations indicating that there were “hints and shadows” of many Christian doctrinal teachings to be found in the Chinese philosophical classics. Second, Edwards on the basis of most secondary sources considered Confucius to be an influential religious leader and spiritual guide to the elite Chinese Ruist class, one with Christian-like philosophical and moral principles in his teachings. Edwards, on

¹⁸⁵ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:72.

¹⁸⁶ Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 141.

the basis of some questionable sources and secondary writings, also noticed similar Christian-like teachings in the Daoist scripture of the Laozi and the Ruist scripture of Mencius. Thirdly, all the so called “Christian teachings” in those ancient Chinese classical works had probably come from Jewish patriarchs, according to Edwards’s reflective account of biblical and ancient Chinese historical sources. Similar to what the Jesuits believed, Edwards maintained that Chinese civilization was closely connected with some events found in biblical texts. In particular, Edwards agreed with the Jesuit scholar Lecomte and assumed that the Chinese people were probably Noah’s descendants and so in this way inherited Christian philosophy. This claim reveals his acceptance of a certain account of ancient “Chinese” theology, which was not uncommon at the time. However, Edwards did not go as far as to suggest that Chinese philosophy, whether in Ruist or Daoist terms, has developed into true religion. According to Edwards, China, in its ancient and contemporary forms as seen in its canonical scriptures and through the Jesuit reports, did not show any development towards Christianity, which he considered to be the true and revealed religion.

The third observation is about the effectiveness of Edwards’s apologetic effort in his presentation of Chinese involvement in the divine kingdom. It is a controversial issue whether Edwards was an apologist. Some scholars, including Perry Miller, H. Richard Niebuhr and Joseph Haroutunian, suggest that due to his firm belief of God’s supreme transcendence, Edwards refused the evidentialist approach as an effective way to argue with the Deists or any of his Enlightenment counterparts. In fact, Miller and others claim that Edwards neither saw the necessity of defending his Reformed positions against the Enlightenment thinkers’ critics, nor showed any interest in moral or rational debates. As a result, they declared that

Edwards was “entirely uninterested in apologetics or natural theology.”¹⁸⁷ More recent scholars, like Gerald McDermott, Avihu Zakai, Douglas Sweeney and Jeffrey Waddington, tend to provide a corrective view by regarding Edwards as a “modern super-naturalist”¹⁸⁸ or a “great evidentialist.”¹⁸⁹ According to this view, Edwards did lay much emphasis on “rational analysis of the evidence of divinity” to defend his positions. For example, in his reading, writing and preaching, Edwards often quoted the most recent scientific development and responded to the current philosophical controversy---the subject of “China” being one of many instances. Having done so, as a “pastor-apologist,” he did not “disassociate apologetics from the rest of his ministry,”¹⁹⁰ though one may go too far to assert that “one of Edwards’s main aims” in his *HWR* “was to undermine the role of human autonomy and freedom in influencing the course of history.”¹⁹¹ Conversely, his major concern was the spiritual welfare of his congregation.

This applies fittingly in Edwards’s response to the controversial perspectives about “China” in the eighteenth century. We must note that Edwards did not formulate any public writings against the Deists on this issue. This is probably because he was preoccupied with his pastoral ministry and had to respond to all the challenges arising from the revivals. From the materials he collected and the notes he made, we may assume that he might have been able to produce some public writings on this issue. After all, what Edwards accumulated in his private and public writings provides various insights into his disagreements with contemporary Deists who

¹⁸⁷ Sweeney, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 23:22.

¹⁸⁸ Sweeney, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 23:22-23.

¹⁸⁹ R. C. Sproul, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Pre-suppositional Apologetics*, ed. John H. Gerstner and Arthur Lindsley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1984), 185.

¹⁹⁰ Jeffrey C. Waddington, “Jonathan Edwards: Pastor-Apologist,” in *Jonathan Edwards for the Church: The Ministry and the Means of Grace*, ed. William M. Schweitzer (Welwyn Garden City, UK; Grand Rapids, MI.: EP Books, 2015), 98.

¹⁹¹ Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 225.

employed “Chinese thought” to justify their opposition to some fundamental Christian theological positions, such as the need for special revelation and redemption. As was seen in reference to his public sermons, discourses and private notebooks, Edwards wrote extensively to refute Deists attacks on the necessity of biblical revelation and divine redemption. In arguing for the unreliability of human reason, man-made philosophy and the sinfulness of human nature, Edwards clearly demonstrated that for any Chinese person---whether ancient elite Ruists, mystical Daoists, or contemporary commoners in the Qing empire---there was no other way for them to experience salvation apart from divine revelation in the knowledge of the triune God’s nature and His redemption that comes exclusively through Jesus Christ the Messiah. These claims Edwards upheld in spite of his clear conviction that the account of Chinese philosophy and Chinese civilization he had read about were probably inherited from Noah and the Jewish patriarchs.

We note however, that Edwards was not always consistent or effective in his debate with the Deists. At the best of his knowledge in his era, Edwards’s view on Chinese philosophical classics and God’s revelation seems problematic and not as convincing in a number of ways, particularly, to the readers in modern and post-modern contexts. For instance, the Israelite influence on ancient Chinese culture is difficult to justify and is unable to be developed. Consequently, it is questionable if Edwards’s attempt to incorporate Chinese religion into his redemptive-historical scheme is a success. This is an under-developed area in his theology. Most probably, he needed to develop his conceptions of “general revelation” or “common grace” before this issue had become so engrained into his Reformed worldview. More seriously, in his search for Christian notions in the Chinese classics, Edwards was misled by the resources he used. For example, his claim of the Messiah’s names in *Yi*

Jing that was based on Ramsay, is completely wrong and Ramsay probably developed his own theory on the Jesuits' misguided writings of *Yi Jing* or *Yi Zhuan* (易传 the commentary of *Yi Jing*) if more exactly. At a fundamental level, Edwards, as well as the Jesuit and Deist contemporaries, held a simplified and over-generalized understanding of Chinese philosophy. For one thing, Edwards seems to have no awareness of dynastic changes in Chinese history and thus was convinced that Confucian thought was consistently ruling the ideological system in "China." In fact, during T'ang Dynasty (618-907 AD), Buddhism had been prevalent for hundreds of years. For another, Edwards did not realize that he was actually following the Jesuits' idealization of Confucian philosophy in which many essential aspects were generalized, simplified and omitted, according to the twentieth-century Sinologists.¹⁹² In fact, there is no such a thing as a Christian "personal God" in Chinese philosophy in general and in Confucianism (or Neo-Confucianism) and Daoism in particular. While the Chinese have used such terms as *Tien* (heaven), *Shang Ti* (lord above) and *Dao* ("word," "truth" or "the way of life") in describing a supreme ruler of heaven and earth, these terms more often denote an unknown and impersonal divine.¹⁹³ Therefore it is questionable if it is appropriate to acknowledge any ancient Chinese awareness of certain fundamental Christian doctrines such as the nature of God, the divine redemption and Messiah. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that all these deficiencies in Edwards's argument reflect the typical seventeenth- and eighteenth-century understanding of "China" and the Chinese culture and philosophy, as presented in this chapter.

¹⁹² Lundbaek, "The Image of Neo-Confucianism in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*," 35. For instance, Lundbaek rightly points out that "the *li-ch'i* duality (organizing principle and activated matter or matter-energy)" is "the central issue in Neo-Confucian cosmology." However, it was surprisingly omitted by the Jesuits in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*.

¹⁹³ Joseph Alan Adler, *Chinese Religions* (London: Routledge, 2002), 30-57.

Chapter Six

Concluding Discussion

We have established the integrity of Edwards's Judeo-centric and cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom in the previous chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of Edwards's vision of the millennial kingdom in the Reformed tradition; Chapter Two discusses his Christological focus in his millennialism, particularly, from the perspective of his literary strategies and typological interpretation applied in *HWR*; Chapter Three examines Edwards's conviction of the progressive realization of the millennial kingdom, in order to refute the misinterpretation of Edwards's anticipation of the imminent millennium; Chapter Four explores Edwards's expectation of the Judeo-centric millennium, presenting his vision of the Canaan-oriented millennial kingdom in which the Israelites' eschatological restoration plays an essential role; Chapter Five explores Edwards's cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom that extends from New England and Israel to China and the heathen world.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to provide a brief summary of our discussions so far and indicate the wider historical and theological implications of Edwards's millennialism. Section One summarizes Edwards's millennial view and assesses its theological significance and contemporary relevance. Section Two examines the legacy of Edwards's millennialism, dealing with two instances from entirely different historical epochs and geographical locations: his legacy in eighteenth-century New England and the twenty-first-century China. Limited by space, the discussion of these subjects in the present chapter will be brief, being merely illustrative of the further exploration as well as potential application and implication of Edwards's millennialism.

1. Summary and Prospect

To sum up the present study, we will start with a brief recapitulation of Edwards's millennialism. We then move on to assess the theological features of Edwards's millennialism. This section ends with an evaluation of its potential significance in the contemporary millenarian contexts. As a work of historical rather than systematic theology, we will keep both the theological assessment and contemporary relevance concise.

1.1 Edwards's Vision of the Millennial Kingdom

As the previous five chapters indicate, Edwards may serve as a typical example of a dramatic paradigm shift in millennialism for the period between Reformation and post-Reformation (16th-18th centuries). What Edwards expected in his millennialism, as the summary and climax of this shift, is an earthly millennial kingdom arriving in the future. This terrestrial millennial kingdom, starting with a general and international revival and ruled by Christ in his spiritual presence, will stand for about one thousand years before reaching its culmination with Christ's physical return at the end of the millennium. While it will be an inchoate millennium endangered by sin and death, what Edwards expected is a prosperous millennial kingdom with great peace, love, spiritual and material prosperity.

Evidently, in many aspects this millennial view departed from his Reformed predecessors such as Luther and Calvin. While Edwards was largely aligned with what his Puritan colleagues asserted, in various specific aspects, the divergences between his millennialism and theirs are quite clear. In particular, Edwards held a Judeo-centric view of the millennium, though he attempted to avoid the danger of

Israel-superiority. For him, the land of Israel would be the ideal location of the millennial kingdom; the people of Israel, after their restoration, will play a critical and decisive role in the commencement of the millennium. In the meantime, Edwards's millennial vision is cosmic. The arriving millennial kingdom, he asserted, would embrace both the European countries and the heathen world including even China. And this kingdom will affect heaven and hell. While being less-well-known in Edwardsean scholarship, this Judeo-centric and cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom shows another significant aspect of Edwards's millennialism. Furthermore, this millennial vision is the indispensable part of his overall theological system, as we will briefly discuss in what follows.

1.2 Theological Consciousness of God's Sovereignty and Glory in the Millennialism

At least three theological loci are highlighted in Edwards's millennialism: the greatness of God's divine sovereignty, the magnificence of His glory and the capaciousness of His kingdom.

Above all, Edwards laid much emphasis on God's divine sovereignty over the created order. Following his Reformed forefathers, Edwards believed that God continuously rules over history and definitely determines both its progress and the end.¹ "God's absolute sovereignty, and justice, with respect to salvation and damnation," he confessed in his "Personal Narrative," "is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of anything that I see with my eyes."²

¹ For the Reformed conviction of the divine sovereignty, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy; Volume 3: The Divine Essence and Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 538.

² *WJE* 16:792.

Hence, in his description of the complex historical process towards the millennium, in order to highlight the divine rule over history, Edwards employed various imageries including Ezekiel's vision of the wheels, clock and chariot wheels. All of these imageries were to express "the sense of complex precision and ultimate divine control" in the historical development of the divine redemptive work.³ True, Edwards was not the first to note the relationship between Ezekiel's wheels and redemptive history. Before him, the Jewish theologian Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) already applied this image in his works.⁴ Edwards was very interested in Maimonides' works which were available in a variety of Latin translations in his time.⁵ However, Edwards probably was the first one to employ Ezekiel's vision to map a redemptive-historical scheme in his works such as *HWR*. This distinctiveness perhaps stems from Edwards's interactions with the Deist historians, as we have shown in Chapter Five. After all, it was the popular belief among the Deists in the eighteenth-century that history neither has *telos* nor meaning. Under such circumstances, by highlighting God's sovereignty revealed in the complex historical process towards the millennium at the consummation of history, Edwards clearly asserted his belief of the inseparable correlation between history and the millennium. For him, the first prepared for the second, the second being the *telos* of the first.⁶

In so doing, Edwards actually refuted the Deist historical view by applying Ezekiel's vision to uphold the complexity of the historical process and emphasize the divine dominion of historical movement. Contrary to the claims of Voltaire and

³ Wilson H. Kinnach, "Introduction to 'Approaching the end of God's Grand Design'," *WJE* 25:112.

⁴ Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013; paperback edition in 2014), 7, n. 11.

⁵ These Latin translations include an edition of *Guide for the Perplexed: Rabbi Mosis Majemonidis liberi Doctor perplexorum ...* (Basel, 1629) and the Oxford Latin translation of selections from Maimonides' commentary on the Mishnah *Kitab al-Siraj* (Oxford, 1655). See *WJE* 26:172. See also *WJE* 11:26 for Wallace Anderson's comment on Edwards's familiarity of Maimonides' works.

⁶ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 47.

Edward Gibbon (1737-1794), for Edwards “the outcome of history was entirely assured and known prophetically in advance,”⁷ because history is simply “a play written and directed by God.”⁸ Edwards introduced the notable idea that redemptive history is cyclical but not repetitive. For him, the movement of God’s work of redemption is from God’s emanation to his remanation: starting from the Intra-Trinitarian self-communication and returning to the Triune God’s self-glorification.⁹ He wrote,

Providence is like a mighty wheel whose ring or circumference is so high that it is dreadful with the glory of the God of Israel above upon it, as ’tis represented in Ezekiel’s vision. We have seen the revolution of this wheel, and how that as it was from God so its return has been to God again. All the events of divine providence are like the links of a chain, the first link is from God and the last is to him.¹⁰

According to Edwards, “history was the language of God’s redemptive love.”¹¹ Therefore, Edwards’s millennialism reveals his awareness of redemptive history being “saturated by God’s action---revealed in the movements of redemption from creation to consummation.”¹² Therefore, in Edwards’s vision of the millennial kingdom, God determines the destiny, plays as the center and defines both the *telos* and meaning of history. This is directly against what Materialism (or Materialist metaphysics) proposed: “the universe is a complete, autonomous, and self-sustaining system of unthinking bodies that are subject only to inherent, necessary, and

⁷ McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 243.

⁸ Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 243.

⁹ Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology*, 7-9; See also Wilson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 9:66.

¹⁰ *WJE* 9:517-518; see also 118, 128, 281-82, 492, 519, 525.

¹¹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 488.

¹² Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology*, 7. Strobel argues that Edwards departed from his Puritan colleagues such as John Owen. For instance, Strobel thinks that the overall framework of *HWR* is similar to Owen’s *Biblical Theology* in terms of chapter division and application of historical mode as an exposition of the author’s doctrinal convictions. Nevertheless, while Owen’s theology is relational, Edwards weaved his Trinitarian thought into his redemptive-historical vision. Specially, Owen believed that theology is fundamentally relational and is depended on the relationship between the revealer (God) and the recipients (humans). Edwards took his Trinitarian thought as the “engine of his theology” and viewed history as the “theological plotline for creation as the theatre of glory,” which results in “eternity ... is brought within time ... and time is endowed with significance by being taken up into eternity.” See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology*, 6-7.

mathematically exact laws of mechanical causation.”¹³ One striking example in demonstrating Edwards’s divergence with the Deists’ Materialism is his use of the imagery of the clock. The clock was “a favorite eighteenth-century device, legendarily with the deists” that often used to state the belief of mechanical philosophy that arose in the latter half of the seventeenth century: the world was “widely regarded as being subject to divinely instituted natural laws, which God rarely violated.”¹⁴ However, Edwards’s clock imagery, along with his use of Ezekiel’s vision and chariot wheels, reveals his philosophical core that “every mathematical theorem or scientific discovery revealed God’s providential design.”¹⁵

Secondly, Edwards stressed the magnificence of God’s glory in his millennialism, in particular emphasizing the radiation of all nature and history with the glory of God. For him, the whole historical progress of the realization of the millennial kingdom is to manifest the glory of divine sovereignty, wisdom and sufficiency. Therefore, as we have shown in Chapter Three, Edwards predicted a durable rather than an instant realization of the millennium. In this he aligned with his Reformed friends in affirming the correlation between God’s sovereign rule and His infinite knowledge and wisdom.¹⁶ In this progression, God’s majesty and his glory will be more sufficiently manifested to the creatures for their observation and comprehension. Meanwhile, God’s consistent triumphs over all attempts from his enemies to obscure his rule would become a clear evidence and manifestation of his divine glory.

¹³ Anderson, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 6:54.

¹⁴ Edwards, “Approaching the End of God’s Grand Design,” *WJE* 25:112.

¹⁵ Thuesen, “Editor’s Introduction,” *WJE* 26:94.

¹⁶ For the detailed discussion of this correlation, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 538.

In this victorious progress over sinful creatures, not only God's power, but his faithfulness is revealed. For instance, Edwards asserted that Israel's restoration, both repatriation and national conversion, always has been imprinted in the divine providential blueprint. This restoration of Israel will become true before the full realization of the millennial kingdom. Edwards laid his confidence on God's faithfulness in making this bold declaration, which reverberates Calvin's faith of God's faithfulness: "He [God] declares ... that he will abide by his promises, because he wishes to vindicate his glory and preserve it entire, that it may not in any respect be diminished."¹⁷

It is noteworthy that Edwards's emphasis on God's glory in this progressive progress towards the millennium marks a significant departure from the Augustinian tradition, even though one may still designate him as the "American Augustine."¹⁸ While Augustine claimed that the city of God and the earthly city would continue their parallel courses throughout history, and the constant and persistent conflict between them would be present in world history and could only be resolved at Christ's return, Edwards held "a more progressive view of history" and laid much emphasis on the long but gradual advancement of the divine redemptive work before the advent of the millennium.¹⁹ In so doing, Edwards actually insisted that God manifest the glory of His kingship in His full control over the whole cosmos. As a result, all creatures, including history and nature, are subject to God and radiate his glory. As Edwards stated in his "Personal Narrative,"

The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or *appearance of divine glory, in almost everything*. God's excellency,

¹⁷ Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 42:8 (*CTS Isaiah*, III), 296. See also Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 542.

¹⁸ For instance, see Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 1, 5, 238.

¹⁹ See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 197; Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 238; Joanne McWilliam, "Augustine of Hippo (354-430)," ed. Trevor A. Hart, *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2000), 45.

his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to *appear in everything*; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind.²⁰

This radiation of God's glory is consistently found in the created realm, and in the lengthy but progressive process towards the end of history. During this process, God faithfully and victoriously dominates every detail, until he guides the course of history and the redeemed creatures into the millennium. This is the ultimate historical epoch of the divine redemptive work on earth as well as the fullest manifestation of God's glory in the temporal realm.

Finally, Edwards's millennialism reveals his conviction of the capacious nature of the kingdom of God which includes all peoples, nations and languages. As his reading of the Book of Daniel (Dan. 7) shows, Edwards expected to witness a divine kingdom in which God's dominion and glory will be over all people, nations and languages who "should serve him."²¹ In this way, God's dominion is "an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."²²

Thus, Edwards held a cosmic vision of the millennium. This is a vision of the divine kingdom that covers the whole earth and will have impact on heaven and hell. Edwards believed that God's redemptive work definitely embraces every race, nation and culture, and this belief naturally included China and the heathen world in his millennial vision. While this marks a significant departure from many of his Reformed forefathers and Puritan colleagues, as we have shown in Chapter Five, it is consistent with his consciousness of God's sovereignty and His glory manifested in history, nature and all the creatures. For Edwards, the entire created world and the whole universe are under God's providential government and participate in the

²⁰ *WJE* 16:793-94. Emphasis added.

²¹ *WJE* 9:353-354.

²² *WJE* 9:353-354.

divine redemptive work. Therefore, he saw the history of redemption with a tri-level structure that embodies not only earth, but also heaven and hell. Every significant event concerning God's work of redemption that happens on earth will have great impact on heaven and hell, and vice versa.²³ In this tri-level history, Edwards actually employed historiographical time from both sacred and secular sources and subjected them to the divine time.²⁴ In this sense, "eternity actually is brought within time... and time is endowed with significance by being taken up into eternity."²⁵

Nevertheless, Edwards's millennialism is not flawless. From the contemporary perspective, his anticipation of a peaceful and prosperous earthly millennial kingdom *before* Christ's physical return sounds like a fancy illusion to the post-modern audience. Postmillennialism was important to Edwards and the Puritans because it showed that God was bringing the Kingdom to earth in manifest ways. However, postmillennialism has been through secularization in the late 19th century. Particularly, it has fallen from view since the great wars of the twentieth century because all of these wars and genocides have made us all pessimistic about history and its end. Consequently, postmillennialism seems literally un-believable and finally vanished.²⁶ One may well ask whether Edwards's millennialism, particularly, his anticipation of the future millennium, is merely a pre-critical curiosity which is hopelessly outdated. We will examine this in the next section.

²³ For instance, from Edwards's perspective, revivals need to be examined on three levels of interacting histories: the history of heaven, the history of earth, and the history of hell. See Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:7. This tri-level history was constructed by borrowing Dante's vision in *The Divine Comedy* (c.1309-1320). It is so unique among Edwards's reformed predecessors and Puritan contemporaries that it may be considered as "Edwards's great contribution to theology" and could be the "entire new method" Edwards mentioned in his letter to the trustees. See Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 9-10.

²⁴ Stout, "Preface to the Period," *WJE* 22:5.

²⁵ Wilson, "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 9:56.

²⁶ For the historical survey of disappearance of postmillennialism, see James H. Moorhead, "The Erosion of Postmillennialism in American Religious Thought, 1865-1925," *Church History* 53, no. 1 (1984): 61-77; for the secularization of postmillennialism, see Jean B. Quandt, "Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Postmillennialism," *American Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1973): 390-409.

1.3 The Contemporary Relevance of Edwards's Millennialism

What is the contemporary theological significance of Edwards's millennialism? Is it possible to incorporate some of his claims, if not his overall millennial structure, into an eschatology that can sustain our hope for the future? We now explore the contemporary relevance of Edwards's millennialism in light of Jürgen Moltmann's standpoint of millenarian eschatology. First, we will argue that unlike Moltmann's misinterpretation, Edwards's millennialism is necessary in a contemporary context. Second, we will argue that millennial eschatology, from the perspectives of both Moltmann and Edwards, will provide a hope for the future of Israel and the rest of the world.

1.3.1 Is Edwards's Millennialism Necessary?

In his *Coming of God*, Moltmann makes a clear distinction between historical and eschatological millennialism.²⁷ For him, while historical millennialism “interprets the present as Christ's Thousand Years' empire and the last age of humanity,” eschatological millennialism “hopes for the kingdom of Christ as the future which will be an alternative to the present, and links this future with the end of ‘this world’ and the new creation of all things.”²⁸ In this sense, Moltmann asserts that eschatological millenarianism is “a necessary picture of hope in resistance, in suffering, and in the exiles of this world,” because it stands as “an expectation of the future in the eschatological context of the end, and the new creation of the world.”²⁹ In contrast, historical millenarianism is not necessary because it is merely “a religious theory used to legitimate a political or ecclesiastical power, and is exposed

²⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 192-202.

²⁸ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 146.

²⁹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 192.

to acts of messianic violence and the disappointments of history.”³⁰ Edwards’s millennialism, as Moltmann saw it, is undoubtedly historical millennialism and thus *unnecessary*.

In drawing this conclusion, Moltmann follows the traditional interpretation that Edwards, along with his Puritan colleagues in New England, advocated an American optimism and acted as the eighteenth-century representative of the political millennial notion of “the redeemer nation.”³¹ For Moltmann, it is the “USA’s strange millenarian mythology” that she plays as “the nation whose destiny, according to God’s salvific plan, is the redemption of the world.”³² This mythology started since the early seventeenth century. “The confidence of being God’s chosen people and thus ‘new Israel’ came to America from England with the early Puritans,” Moltmann observes.³³ “When ‘the great revolution’ in England ended in 1660,” he continues, “the emigrants had the impression that now Protestant destiny was in America’s hands, and they resisted English attempts at a restoration.”³⁴ “Through the conversion of the New World,” Moltmann asserts, “Jonathan Edwards, the great revivalist preacher, wanted to pave the way for ‘that glorious future’ of the church, in which the kingdom of Satan would be overcome on the whole inhabited globe.”³⁵ In this sense, Edwards, as the only one named by Moltmann among the Puritan divines, actually played an essential role in the formation of the notion that “white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant America (WASP) saw itself as ‘the millennial nation’” through

³⁰ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 192.

³¹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 168-71.

³² Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 168-69.

³³ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

³⁴ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

³⁵ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

whom God will redeem the world.³⁶ And this notion is no less than “the dream of Anglo-Saxon superiority,” Moltmann concludes.³⁷

Is Edwards’s millennialism really unnecessary as Moltmann asserts? The answer is “No” on three counts. Overall, Edwards’s millennialism on the contrary meets every major criterion Moltmann raises for the *necessary* millennial eschatology.³⁸

Moltmann follows C. C. Goen’s and Ernest Lee Tuveson in categorizing Edwards’s millennialism (as well as that of other Puritans) as being an America-centric political utopianism. Since 1970s this interpretation has been challenged by James Davidson, Nathan Hatch, John Wilson, Gerald McDermott and others. As this study has demonstrated and early sections of the present chapter showed, Edwards’s millennialism is neither America-centric nor politically utopian. On the contrary, Edwards’s millennialism actually deflates the notion of an America-centric utopianism. In this sense, Edwards was not the origin or even advocate of the notion of the redeemer nation, though he is frequently regarded as such. As we have emphatically repeated in the previous chapters, in his millennialism, Edwards de-centralized both England and New England from the illusion of being the redeemer nation for the rest of the world.

In the first place, Edwards de-centralized the present time of his historical epoch. In declaring that “post-millenarian eschatologies . . . are based on a false definition of the location of the present in the context of salvation history,”³⁹ Moltmann probably over-generalized the postmillennial view in the last few centuries and in particular failed to notice the complexities and diversities among

³⁶ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

³⁷ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

³⁸ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 192-202.

³⁹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 194.

postmillennial Puritans, as we have shown in Chapter One. As a matter of fact, what is found in Edwards's postmillennialism is in direct contrast to what Moltmann stated about the postmillennialists' illusion of their present time. According to Edwards, as we have mentioned in Chapter Three, the arrival of an earthly millennium will be in the distant future. Under the circumstance of the centralization or even sacralization of the time of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Edwards indeed diverged from his optimistic Protestant predecessors and Puritan contemporaries in both millennial chronology and the assessment of the significance of the present time. Being faced with the highly optimistic millennialism in New England, Edwards departed from the view of the imminent millennium held by his Puritan colleagues, thus refuted the over-emphasis of the significance of the Reformation or Puritan ages. For Edwards, the millennial kingdom will be gradually realized in the distant future (around the year 2000). In this sense, the historical and theological significance of his present time should not be over-emphasized in the divine redemptive plan. In fact, being disappointed with the spiritual deficiency among New England churches, Edwards thought it was both unbiblical and arrogant to regard his own time as being the ultimate sacred time culminating the present ages and ushering in the glorious millennium.

Second, in his millennialism, Edwards de-emphasized the significance of the space of New England. As Chapter Four shows, *some* of Edwards's Reformed forefathers and Puritan friends *did* envision the millennial kingdom being realized in England or New England. And Moltmann may be right in seeing this as "the dream of Anglo-Saxon superiority."⁴⁰ However, our study shows that Edwards expected the land of Israel to be the ideal millennial location. While this expectation is based on

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

his geographical consciousness, Edwards's typological interpretation of Scripture is decisive in his Canaan-centric conviction. For him, the land of Israel stood as the type of heaven. In this sense, the Canaan-centric millennial kingdom is a foreshadow of the celestial kingdom in heaven. Therefore, such a Canaan-oriented millennium evidently deflates the geographical and theological significance of England and America. In contrast to those who regarded America as the center of millennium, Edwards clearly played down the superiority of New England and insisted on Canaan, not anywhere else, as the millennial center.

Third, Moltmann stated that some "white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Americans" held a "strange millenarian mythology" and regarded Americans as the citizen of the redeemer nation.⁴¹ This may be a correct general assessment, but it does not apply to Edwards. As Chapters Four and Five demonstrate, in his millennialism, Edwards actually de-centralized New England from its over-inflated contribution in redemptive history. In contrast to America being the redeemer nation, Edwards was convinced that the restored and redeemed people of Israel, i.e. the ethnic Jews, would play an essential role in the final historical epoch of redemptive work. Israel's repatriation and national conversion are always in the divine redemptive plan, according to Edwards. Edwards fully realized the vital significance of Israel's eschatological restoration in the expansion of God's kingdom and the commencement of the millennium. In particular, the restored Israel will play a critical role in world evangelism as well as the universal unity in God's kingdom. For Edwards, it would be Israelites, not the residents of New England, who would determine the world's destiny.

⁴¹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 170.

Furthermore, unlike most of his Reformed and Puritan colleagues, Edwards looked beyond England and New England into the much less-known heathen world. Believing that God's redemptive work definitely embraces every race, nation and culture, Edwards kept tracing the subtleties of divine revelation in ancient China. In particular, he traced the Christian notions found in Chinese classics back to the Jewish patriarchs. He went so far as to claim that they were the educators of the Chinese people in their biblical and theological awareness. The conviction that the Chinese's Christian notions are the legacy of the Jews marks a further de-centralization of America as a central force in redemptive work.

Edwards's millennialism was not all that unique among his Puritan colleagues. However, when some of his Puritan contemporaries attempted to centralize, or even sacralize their present time and nation, Edwards de-centralized England and New England from the dimensions of time, space and people. In this sense, he was not advocating a political utopianism or the notion of the redeemer nation. Instead, Edwards attempted to avoid the danger of America-centric or American-superiority sentiment that would easily lead to national exceptionalism. Looked at from this perspective, Edwards's millennialism is still relevant in a contemporary context as we shall now argue.

1.3.2 Edwards and Moltmann on Eschatological Hope

In the previous section, we refuted Moltmann's misunderstanding of Edwards's millennialism and presented Edwards's de-centralization of England and New England in terms of time, space and people. Now we will examine whether Edwards's millennialism has any theological advantage in our contemporary context. In particular, we argue that both Edwards and Moltmann agree that the theological

advantage of millennial eschatology is to ensure a future of hope for Israel and the whole world. From this perspective, Edwards's millennial vision actually is aligned with Moltmann's emphasis on the essential features of millennialism.

On the first front, both Edwards and Moltmann stress that Christian hope of the future is embedded in Christ. Moltmann claims that the core theme of Christology is the Christian hope "based on Christ's coming, his surrender to death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead."⁴² Edwards believed that the Christian hope is based on the purchase of redemption that is made by Christ's humiliation and secured by His ascension. For both Edwards and Moltmann, Christian hope for the future rests on Christ's life and death, His resurrection and His future return.

Undoubtedly, both Edwards and Moltmann highlight the theological connection between Christology and eschatology in their thinking on Christian hope. Moltmann stresses the significance of a Christological foundation in Christian eschatology. For him, the millennial hope must be built on Christ's incarnation, suffering, resurrection and His return. Otherwise, the millennium will be "utopian or apocalyptic or a stage in salvation history."⁴³ In particular, Christ's resurrection is the decisive factor in the eschatological hope, since in "the resurrection narratives experience and judgment manifestly take place within a decidedly *eschatological horizon* of expectations, hopes and questions about the promised future."⁴⁴ In this sense, "Christian eschatology arose from the Easter experience" and the Christian hope for the eschatological future "comes of observing a specific, unique event---that

⁴² Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 194.

⁴³ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 194.

⁴⁴ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 191. See also Richard Bauckham, "Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* Revisited," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42, no. 2 (1989): 199-214.

of the resurrection and appearing of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ Edwards’s Christocentric focus in his millennialism, as Chapter Two shows, is more than evident. For him, Christ plays the central and essential role in the establishment and realization of the millennial kingdom. Edwards placed much emphasis on Christ’s life, death and His resurrection that is the “most remarkable article of time” in the whole progress of history.⁴⁶ In particular, in the divinely directed play of redemptive history, Edwards believed that “Christ is the center of history and in him is to be found its principle of meaning.”⁴⁷ For him, all things in God’s providential work are like a “one great wheel performing one revolution.”⁴⁸ Everything starts from Christ and ends with Christ’s future return. Christ is always the center of the historical movement of the world. He wrote in his *Notes on Scripture*,

So it is in the course of things in God’s providence over the intelligent and moral world; all is the motion of wheels. . .

The course of things, from the beginning of the world to the coming of [Christ], may be represented as one great wheel performing one revolution. All things in the beginning of this revolution were from Christ, the Creator of man; and the whole motion henceforward till Christ came was to bring things about to Christ again, and to prepare the way for his coming, and to introduce him as the Redeemer of man.⁴⁹

As Marsden summarizes,

Nothing in human history had significance on its own. Christ’s saving love was the center of all history and defined its meaning. Human events took on significance only as they related to God’s redemptive action in bringing increasing numbers of human beings into the light of that love or as they illustrated human blindness in joining Satan’s warfare against all that was good.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 191, 194.

⁴⁶ *WJE* 9:294.

⁴⁷ Douglas Elwood, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 45. See also Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 488-89.

⁴⁸ *WJE* 15:375.

⁴⁹ *WJE* 15:374-75.

⁵⁰ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 488-89.

The consummation of this Christocentric redemptive history is the realization of God's kingdom on earth. Edwards asserted that Christ's resurrection and ascension had inaugurated the glorious latter days.

Similarly, Moltmann believes that Christian eschatology involves "speaking of '*Christ and his future*,'" which is the "parousia of Christ" or the "return of Christ."⁵¹ Accordingly, history is seen "as the reality instituted by promise."⁵² This promise is "the universal future of the lordship of the crucified [and the resurrected] Christ,"⁵³ because Christ's resurrection has enabled the world to move towards its "future transformation."⁵⁴ This transformation will be accomplished by God's eschatological action which transcends "all the possibilities of history" and will terminate "all evil, suffering and death."⁵⁵ In this sense, the Christian eschatological hope awaits the "final fulfillment" of all the divine promises.⁵⁶ As Moltmann observes,

The Christian expectation is directed to no other than the Christ who has come, but it expects something new from him, something that has not yet happened so far: it awaits the fulfilment of the promised righteousness of God in all things, the fulfilment of the resurrection of the dead that is promised in his resurrection, the fulfilment of the lordship of the crucified one over all things that is promised in his exaltation.⁵⁷

Therefore, for both Edwards and Moltmann, "the millennium" should not be a regulative idea or something dispensable in Christian eschatological hope.

Conversely, what we should expect is an actual millennium on earth. This millennium, for Moltmann, is the consummation of the future transformation; for Edwards, it is the universal restoration of the divine kingdom. With this millennium,

⁵¹ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 227.

⁵² Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 224.

⁵³ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 192-93. Emphasis added.

⁵⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 10.

⁵⁵ Bauckham, *The Theology of Moltmann*, 10.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 228.

⁵⁷ Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 229.

Christian eschatology will make the world different. The world, however it has been damaged by sin, suffering and death, is “seen as transformable in the direction of the promised future.”⁵⁸ Whatever is destroyed in the world will be restored on this globe in the millennium. Without this millennial hope of transformation and restoration, the world will hopelessly await its complete destruction at the end time.

On the second front, for both Edwards and Moltmann, the millennial hope also provides an eschatological future for Israel. Edwards’s millennialism opens a door of hope for Israel, which is what Moltmann stresses as the essential theological indicator. Moltmann lays much emphasis on Israel in eschatology. “It is only the millenarian hope in Christian eschatology which unfolds an earthly and historical future for the church and Israel.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the church should draw Israel into her eschatological hope on the basis of three presuppositions:

- (a) Israel has an enduring ‘salvific calling’, parallel to the church of the Gentiles, for God remains true to his election and his promise (Rom. 11.1f)
- (b) The promises given to Israel are as yet only fulfilled in principle in the coming of the Messiah Jesu, and in him without conditions, and hence universally endorsed (II Cor. 1.20); . . .
- (c) Christianity is God’s ‘other community of hope’, parallel to Israel, and over against Israel. . . In the very fact of turning wholly to the Gentile nations with the gospel, it confirms and strengthens Israel’s hope: all Israel will be saved when the fullness of the Gentiles arrives at salvation (Rom. 11.25f.)⁶⁰

As Chapter Four shows, Israel is not only essential in Edwards’s millennialism, but also central in his theology, though he did not take Israel as a superior nation. For him, in the divine redemptive work, the ethnic Israelites plays a parallel role with the spiritual Israel---the Christian church. And Edwards was convinced that the people of Israel, according to God’s faithfulness, would have a double restoration before the millennium: both national conversion and repatriation. Israel’s restoration plays a

⁵⁸ Bauckham, *The Theology of Moltmann*, 10.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 197.

⁶⁰ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 197-98.

decisive role by inaugurating God's millennial kingdom and by uniting the Jewish and Gentile churches. Edwards's Judeo-centric vision of the millennial kingdom is thus reverberated in Moltmann's anticipation of the "Israelo-centric kingdom of Christ" in which "the chosen and 'sealed' Christians are joined together with the chosen and 'sealed' Jews, together with them becoming the messianic people of the messianic kingdom."⁶¹

In particular, from his understanding of God's faithfulness, Edwards asserted that the Promised Land is not something that is additional, but an indispensable part of God's covenant. Therefore, unlike the ceremonial law, the Promised Land will not be replaced or superseded. Conversely, God remembers his covenant with Israel and will eventually fully fulfil his promise of the land. For Edwards, Israel's dispersion, as their exile to Babylon, would not be a perpetual judgment. As presented in Chapter Four, Edwards was convinced that God kept preserving the people of Israel in the ages of their dispersion, and He would forgive them and restore them at the end time. This is also predicated on God's faithfulness. Again, God will not forget his covenant with Israel or his promise to them merely because of Israel's disobedience. Conversely, he will renew their hearts, restore them and forgive them. In fact, viewed from his redemptive-historical vision, this land-people relationship is fundamental in Edwards's understanding of God's covenant with Israel. Seen from his eschatological vision of the millennial kingdom, this land-people relationship will exist until the end of the world. After all, the people of Israel, Edwards advocated, would be restored and have their national conversion *on the Promised Land*.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 199. Moltmann quotes the term "Israelo-centric kingdom of Christ" from J. T. Beck's *Die Vollendung des Reiches Gottes. Separatabdruck aus der Christlichen Glaubenslehre (The completion of the kingdom of God. Separate imprint from the Christian doctrine)* (Gütersloh, 1887), 58.

Nevertheless, we stress once again that Edwards's view of Israel, compared with his Protestant predecessors and Puritan contemporaries, is somewhere in the middle. There are always certain extremes towards Israel and her future in the course of church history. One extreme is to treat Israel in a rather hostile way. Some, like the supersessionists presented in Chapter Four, attempt to marginalize or even eliminate Israel in God's redemptive plan. Consequently, they reject the possibility of Israel having a future in God's eschatological scheme. Others, who may exhibit anti-Semitic traits, go further to deny the right of existence of the people of Israel. Another extreme, such as Zionism, is to secure the future of Israel by regarding her as a superior nation and subsequently treating her Arabic neighbors in a hostile way.⁶² Evidently, Edwards departed from his Reformed supersessionist forefathers who held to a replacement theology. In the meantime, while he envisioned a Judeo-centric millennium, Edwards's scheme was *not* Israel-superior as his Puritan colleagues such as Increase Mather promoted. More importantly, as his millennialism is not political, his treatment of the future of Israel is apolitical. Viewing from an eschatological perspective, Edwards was convinced that the people of Israel would certainly return to the Promised Land and be restored on this land. Nevertheless, for him, the believing Israel was of greater significance than national Israel.⁶³ Had he learned of the establishment of the nation state of Israel, Edwards

⁶² For the detailed introduction of anti-Semitism, see Torrance, *Israel, God's Servant*, 64-99; for the most recent introduction of Zionism, see *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, eds. Donald E. Wagner and Walter T. Davis (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2014).

⁶³ This is accepted by contemporary scholars who advocate a new Christian Zionism. For instance, see Darrell Bock, "How Should the New Christian Zionism Proceed?", in *The New Christian Zionism: Fresh Perspectives on Israel and the Land*, ed. Gerald R. McDermott (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 308-9. Nevertheless, in the present study, we do not take this anachronistic term to address Edwards. Additionally, in *The New Christian Zionism*, the term "new Christian Zionist" is used to address a rather wide scope of people from biblical to historical figures. Consequently, it over-generalized and simplified the great variety of their views of Israel. See Gerald McDermott, "A History of Christian Zionism: Is Christian Zionism Rooted Primarily in Premillennial Dispensationism?", in *The New Christian Zionism*, 45-78.

would still regard it as only the *partial* fulfilment of God's promise and covenant. After all, what would trigger the arrival of the millennium, according to Edwards, was the national conversion of the people of Israel that only could be accomplished by the work of God's Spirit. In this sense, the eschatological future of Israel that Edwards envisioned is determined by the spiritual revival and restoration of the people of Israel, rather than being achieved by a political or military conquest. In this sense, when Edwards highlighted the significance of Israel in God's redemptive history and her restoration in His millennial kingdom, his well-balanced treatment of Israel and her future departed from his Reformed colleagues who upheld supersessionism and anti-Semitism on the one hand, and avoided the danger of Zionism on the other.

All in all, Edwards would see both Jewish-Christian relationship and the Jewish-Gentile relations in the light of eschatological reunion. For him, the eschatological restoration of Israel would not be a threat, but a blessing to the rest of world. What would come with Israel's restoration, according to Edwards, is a millennial kingdom of peace, prosperity and perfect unity. In this sense, the universal unity between the Jews and the Gentiles has already been imprinted in God's eschatological scheme. From this perspective, the reconciliation of Israel and other nations, should be seen as a "fulfilment already given but also to be hoped for."⁶⁴

To sum up, "there is no adequate Christian eschatology without millenarianism."⁶⁵ This applies fittingly to both Edwards's and Moltmann's millennialism. While Moltmann views Edwards's millennial vision as unnecessary historical millennialism, it still has evident contemporary relevance. Edwards's de-

⁶⁴ Remaud, *Israel, Servant of God*, 131.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *Coming of God*, 197.

centralization of his present time, space and people, his Christocentric focus of Christian eschatological hope for the whole world, and his conviction of hope for Israel in the millennial kingdom all may provide an alternative reading of modern and post-modern millenarian thought.

2. Edwards's Legacy in His Millennialism

Having presented the necessity of Edwards's millennialism in the contemporary contexts, we next offer some instances of his millennial legacy. This section starts with Edwards's legacy in the eighteenth century, from which epoch Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins stand as prominent examples. Then we examine whether his millennialism is able to provide a remedy for Chinese millennial movements.

2.1 Edwards's Millennial Legacy in the Eighteenth Century

In this part, we focus on two central figures in the development of millennialism and the overall theological thought in late eighteenth-century America, Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803). Both were Edwards's most influential students and most famous "prophets" who faithfully interpreted and promoted Edwards's theology known as New England Theology or the New Divinity.⁶⁶ Some like Ernest Tuveson interpret the millennialism of Bellamy and Hopkins, as that of Edwards, as being imminent, America-centric and political. While Bellamy anticipated a millennium with "a strong *this-worldly* character," Hopkins' millennialism was utopian and "fashioned a part of the American

⁶⁶ Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 69. Other important figures in the early emergence of New Divinity thought include Sara Osborn, Nathan Strong and Nathaniel Emmons. See Sweeney and Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology*, 69-132.

Dream.”⁶⁷ Consequently, as what happened to Edwards, they are regarded as the representatives of the American nationalistic notion of the redeemer nation.

However, as shown below, both of them closely followed their mentor to insist on a Judeo-centric and apolitical millennium arriving in the distant future.

2.1.1 Joseph Bellamy and *The Millennium* (1758)

Born on February 20, 1719, Joseph Bellamy studied at Yale College (1731-1735) and arrived in Northampton in 1736 and studied under Edwards for one year. After he received his preaching license in 1737, Bellamy became a Congregational minister in 1739 and continued his life-long pastoral ministry in the same church in Bethlehem, Connecticut, until his death in 1790.⁶⁸ As Edwards’s first student, Bellamy established a close friendship with his mentor. In one of his letters, Edwards addressed himself as Bellamy’s “affectionate and grateful friend and brother,” and even discussed with him sheep raising in Edwards’s household.⁶⁹

Bellamy shared with Edwards at least four common interests. First, he had an evident passion for the homiletical ministry and was a highly talented and influential preacher during the First Great Awakening (1740-1742). Second, like Edwards, he later became rather cautious with those extreme revivalists.⁷⁰ Third, during the revivals, he also was gradually aware of the necessity to discern the truly converted ones from those with a short-lived fervor. The outcome of this awareness is his most important book *True Religion Delineated* (1750). By modifying

⁶⁷ Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*, 58-60. See also Bernd Engler, “Strategies of Re-ciphering God’s Moral Character in Joseph Bellamy’s ‘The Millennium’,” in *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630-1860*, 230.

⁶⁸ Michael J. Plato, “Bellamy, Joseph (1719–1790),” in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, ed. Harry S. Stout (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 67-68. See also Sweeney and Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology*, 69.

⁶⁹ *WJE* 16:362–363.

⁷⁰ Plato, “Bellamy, Joseph (1719-1790),” 67-68.

Edwards's thinking on atonement, this volume became the "foundational theological text" of New England Theology. Its significance may be indicated by Edwards's preface.⁷¹ Last and more to our point, Bellamy shared a common ground with Edwards in his millennialism. We examine this by focusing on his homiletical work *The Millennium* preached in 1758 based on his exposition of Revelation 20:1-3.⁷²

To begin with, Bellamy inherited Edwards's optimistic millennialism which is an earthly one. He anticipated that the millennium would arrive with universal peace, eternal hope, divine glory and international spiritual revival. "Babylon shall fall, Satan be bound, and Christ will reign, and truth and righteousness universally prevail..."⁷³ It will be a period full of "universal peace and prosperity."⁷⁴ More importantly, humankind will be "more sensible of the Greatness of the Deliverance" and more grateful for God's "self-moving Goodness and sovereign Grace."⁷⁵ This optimistic vision of a glorious and promising millennium rightly served as "abundant cause for consolation" for his audience living in the terrible days of darkness during the French-Indian War (1754-1763).⁷⁶

While Bellamy and Edwards highly resembled each other in millennialism, some minor disagreements may be noted. For instance, while Edwards was convinced that the duration of the millennium would be no longer than one thousand years, Bellamy expected a much longer period, as long as 360,000 years, to be exact.

⁷¹ Sweeney and Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology*, 73; Plato, "Bellamy, Joseph (1719-1790)," 68.

⁷² Joseph Bellamy, *Sermons Upon the Following Subjects, Viz. The Divinity of Jesus Christ. The Millenium [Sic]. The Wisdom of God, in the Permission of Sin* (Boston: Printed and sold by Edes and Gill; and by S. Kneeland, in Queen-Street, 1758). See also the second edition of this work: *The Millennium; or, the Thousand Years of Prosperity, Promised to the Church of God, in the Old Testament and in the New, Shortly to Commence, and to Be Carried on to Perfection, under the Auspices of Him, Who, in the Vision, Was Presented to St. John*, ed. David Austin (Elizabeth Town [N.J.]: Printed by Shepard Kollock, 1794).

⁷³ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 61.

⁷⁴ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 63.

⁷⁵ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 67.

⁷⁶ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 47.

From his reading of Daniel, Bellamy believed that a longer millennium would be more biblical, as he said in his sermon,

Some indeed understand the Thousand Years in the Revelation agreeable to other prophetic Numbers in that Book, a Day for a Year. . . . if the 1000 Years is reckoned a Day for a Year, as the Scripture-Year contains 360 Days, so the 1000 Years will amount to 360,000 Years.⁷⁷

By taking a figural interpretation of “one thousand years” in Revelation 20:2-4, Bellamy departed from Edwards’s literal reading of the duration.

Then, Bellamy went further and provided a millennial demographics. He insisted that the significant part of humankind would be redeemed during the millennium. In fact, Bellamy even produced a table to illustrate his calculation of the ratio between the saved and lost in different historical periods. According to his calculations, in the millennium there would be over two million people saved (2,097,150 people, to be exact). The ratio of the saved to the lost in redemptive history will be extremely high: “there would be above seventeen Thousand saved, to One that would be lost.”⁷⁸ While admitting that the ratio between the saved and the lost was “nowhere revealed” in the Scriptures and his calculation merely indicted what would be possible, his optimism in the millennium is more than evident.⁷⁹

One cannot go further to overstate Bellamy’s optimism, however. Being aligned with Edwards’s rejection of an imminent millennium, Bellamy expected the millennium to be inaugurated in a distant future. He agreed with Edwards and explained the durable progress before the millennium from God’s glory, sovereignty and His wisdom. He said in his preaching,

We are apt to wonder why these glorious Days should be so long delayed, if God indeed intends such Mercy to Men.---But God infinitely wise, knows what is best;---knows how to conduct the Affairs of the Universe, knows when is the

⁷⁷ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 64.

⁷⁸ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 65. For Bellamy’s table, see 65-66, n. 3. See also Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought*, 191-93.

⁷⁹ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 66.

fittest Time to introduce this glorious State of Things; . . . so that this glorious Day may be ushered in to the best Advantage, in a Manner most suited to honour God and his Son, to humble a haughty world, and to disappoint Satan most grievously, . . . God knows when this will be; And this is the very time he has fixed upon for this glorious work.⁸⁰

Rather than seeing his time as the final historical stage ushering in the millennial kingdom, Bellamy insisted that the people of New England still need to wait for a long while before the dawn of the millennium.

Furthermore, it is notable that Bellamy dis-associated his millennial expectation with any contemporary political or religious events.⁸¹ Unlike the civil millennialists, he neither regarded the French-Indian War as apocalyptic battle, nor predicted the “inevitable victory” of New England.⁸² Instead, in *The Millennium*, Bellamy placed his audience’s hope in the eschatological significance of Christ’s future return with a glorious, eternal kingdom. While his audience were amidst the terror of French-Indian war, Bellamy stressed, they were still the “brave Followers of the Lamb.”⁸³ Since their Lord, “*the King of Kings and Lord of Lords*,” “reigns on high with all Power in Heaven and Earth in his hands.”⁸⁴ Hence, instead of being tangled with “earthly Pursuits” or “unmanly Discouragements,” they should work attentively when “the glorious Day is coming on.”⁸⁵ In order to further encourage and comfort his audience who were probably anxiously awaiting the arrival of the

⁸⁰ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 67-68.

⁸¹ As Hatch observes, in his other works, “Bellamy displays the same exclusively religious and political concern.” These include *A Blow at the Root of the Refined Antinomianism of the Present Age* (Boston, 1763); *An Essay on the Nature and Glory of the Gospel of Jesus Christ . . .* (Boston, 1763); *The Half-Way Covenant* (New Haven Conn., 1769), etc. See *Sacred Course of Liberty*, 35, n. 29.

⁸² Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 115. For the details of civil millennialism, see Nathan O. Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1974): 407-30.

⁸³ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 68.

⁸⁴ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 68-69.

⁸⁵ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 68-69.

millennial kingdom, Bellamy concluded *The Millennium* with an analogy of temple building,

Let this Age do their Share, as David, altho' the Temple was not to be built in his Day, yet exerted himself to lay up Materials for that magnificent Edifice, on which his Heart was intently set; as knowing, that in his Son's Day it would be set up in all its Glory. So let us rise up, and with the greatest Alacrity contribute our utmost towards this Building, this living Temple, this Temple all made of lively Stones of Stones alive, in which God is to dwell, and which will infinitely exceed in Glory of Temple of Solomon. . .⁸⁶

In seeing his age as that of King David, Bellamy in fact regarded his present time as an era of preparation for the arrival of the divine kingdom. In this sense, Bellamy also unintentionally deflated the over-emphasis of America as well as the historical epoch in which he was living. Consequently, he departed from those “more fervently nationalistic patriots” who were anticipating an imminent and America-centric millennium.⁸⁷

2.1.2 Samuel Hopkins and *A Treatise on the Millennium* (1793)

Samuel Hopkins was born on September 17, 1721. After graduating from Yale College, he arrived at Northampton to study divinity under Edwards (1741-1742). He and Bellamy became Edwards's most prominent pupils. In December 1743, Hopkins was ordained as a Congregational minister at the Church of Sheffield in Housatonic, Massachusetts. However, in 1769 he was dismissed due to his opposition to the Half-Way Covenant and open communion, exactly as happened to Edwards in 1750.⁸⁸ In 1770, Hopkins transferred his homiletic ministry to the church in Newport, Rhode

⁸⁶ Bellamy, *The Millennium*, 70.

⁸⁷ Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England*, 156. See also 138, n. 42.

⁸⁸ For the dispute over the Half-Way Covenant and open communion in Edwards's church, see Kenneth P. Minkema, “Preface to the Period,” *WJE* 14:38-42.

Island and ministered there until his death in 1803. One year before his death, he received his Doctor of Divinity from Yale.⁸⁹

By no means a talented preacher among his New Divinity colleagues, Hopkins was well known for systematizing Edwards's theology and he formulated the New England Theology with Joseph Bellamy, Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745-1801) and Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840). Hopkins characterized this theology as "Consistent Calvinism" with certain adjustments, even innovations, in Edwards's orthodox Calvinism. Others called his theology "New Divinity." The movement of the New Divinity started in 1765 with the publication of Hopkins's *Inquiry Concerning the Promises of the Gospel*. His association with this movement is indicated by terms such as "Hopkinsianism" and "Hopkintonianism," although it was occasionally described as "Edwardsean."⁹⁰

While Hopkins promoted Edwards's theology as his student, colleague, close friend and first biographer, he modified Edwards's theology on major issues such as the doctrines of original sin, imputation and atonement.⁹¹ Despite his modifications, he shared much of Edwards's millennialism, as we will show from four aspects. Our examination is based on his *Treatise on the Millennium* being an appendix to his three-volume magnum opus *System of Doctrines* (1793).⁹²

⁸⁹ Michael J. Plato, "Hopkins, Samuel (1721-1803)," in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, 304-305; Sweeney and Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology*, 69.

⁹⁰ Plato, "Hopkins, Samuel (1721-1803)," 305; Sweeney and Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology*, 86. Hopkins was also famous for his defense of the Reformed theology against the Deist's threat, and as the first abolitionist among the congregational ministers, he had a life-long commitment in abolishing the slavery. See Peter Jauhiainen, "'Reasoning out of the Scriptures': Samuel Hopkins, the Theological Enterprise, and the Deist Threat," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 79 (2): 119-133; David Swift, "Samuel Hopkins: Calvinist Social Concern in Eighteenth Century New England," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, vol. 47 (1): 31-54; M. Fackler, "Hopkins, Samuel," ed. J. D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort, *Who's Who in Christian History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1992), 328.

⁹¹ Peter Jauhiainen, "Samuel Hopkins and Hopkinsianism," in *After Jonathan Edwards: The Courses of the New England Theology*, eds. Douglas A. Sweeney and Oliver D. Crisp, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 108-18; Cairns, "Hopkinsianism," in *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 213-14.

⁹² Samuel Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium: Showing from Scripture Prophecy, That It Is yet to Come; When It Will Come; in What It Will Consist; and the Events Which Are First to Take Place*,

Firstly, Hopkins' optimistic depiction of the millennium is highly similar to what is stated in Edwards's *An Humble Attempt* and *HWR*. At the beginning of his *Treatise on the Millennium*, Hopkins highlighted these two volumes when he briefly mentioned similar works by other authors such as Moses Lowman and Joseph Bellamy.⁹³ With great respect, he started his introduction to Edwards's two works, "the late President Edwards, attended much to this subject [the millennium], and wrote upon it *more than any other divine* in this century."⁹⁴ Hopkins believed in *An Humble Attempt* Edwards "produces the evidence from the scripture" that the millennium is "yet to come;" and in *HWR* this subject is "brought into view, and particularly considered."⁹⁵

Like Edwards, Hopkins maintained that the millennium would start with an international revival: the whole world will be filled by "the knowledge of the Lord" that is "true religion, or real Christianity, which consists most essentially in benevolence and goodness."⁹⁶ He asserted that this revival would be rekindled and empowered by the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit of God will then be poured out in his glorious fullness," he claimed, "and fill the world with holiness, and salvation, as flood upon the dry ground."⁹⁷ As a result, the nature of humanity will be transformed. The men "who were in ages before, like savage beasts, injurious, cruel, revengeful and destructive to each other," Hopkins predicted, "shall lay aside all this, and become harmless, humble and benevolent."⁹⁸ In addition to the spiritual revival, those dwelling in the millennium will significantly benefit from material prosperity.

Introductory to It (Boston: Printed at Boston, by Isaiah Thomas and Ebenezer T. Andrews, proprietors of the work, Faust's Statue, no. 45, Newbury Street., 1793).

⁹³ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 6-7.

⁹⁴ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 6. Emphasis added.

⁹⁵ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 7.

⁹⁶ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 17.

⁹⁷ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 81.

⁹⁸ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 60.

They will enjoy the “plenty, and fullness of the things of this life, and worldly prosperity,” Hopkins believed, for them “all will be in easy, comfortable circumstances” when they are blessed with “outward conveniences, and temporal enjoyment.”⁹⁹

While Hopkins expected an inchoate millennium, as Edwards did, he did so with great optimism. For Hopkins, human beings would not be immortal in the millennium. Instead, “they will die. . . and pass into the invisible world.”¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, death will not be “attended with the same calamitous and terrible circumstances” as it is in the premillennial historical epochs.¹⁰¹ Instead, “death in a great measure will lose his sting.”¹⁰² On the one hand, death will not be caused by “long and painful sickness” or “any great distress of body or mind.”¹⁰³ Consequently, humankind will not die with great fear, but welcome death “with the greatest comfort and joy.”¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, death will come to everyone at the best time and in the most appropriate manner. Therefore, the relatives and the friends of the one who died will “rather rejoice than mourn,” because they are clearly aware that their beloved, according to “the will of God,” has gone into “the invisible world” of “the greater happiness.”¹⁰⁵

Secondly, like Bellamy, Hopkins made no association between his millennial expectation and American Revolution, though he was amidst the War of Independence (1775-1783). In his *Treatise on the Millennium*, he did not indicate that America would play a significant role, let alone become the redeemer nation in

⁹⁹ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 70.

¹⁰⁰ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

¹⁰¹ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

¹⁰² Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

¹⁰³ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

¹⁰⁴ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 75.

the millennial kingdom. Instead, he was aligned with Edwards and predicted that the Israelites would have an eschatological restoration. He believed the biblical prophecies concerning “the restoration of the Jews to a state of holiness and happiness” would be fulfilled “in the last days.”¹⁰⁶ His typical reading of Ezekiel 34:23 and 37:22-25 firmly points to the eschatological return and revival of the Jews, as he wrote,

By David, Jesus Christ the Son of David is meant, as the former was an eminent type of the latter. Therefore this must refer to their restoration and happy state under Christ, which is certainly not yet come; but will take place, when there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. . .¹⁰⁷

Like Edwards, Hopkins also was convinced that the great majority of Jews would be restored. Quoting Romans 11, he claimed, “the Jews. . . the most of them. . . as yet to come into the kingdom of Christ, even all of them, which he [Apostle Paul] terms their *fullness*.”¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, Hopkins also held a cosmic vision of the millennium when he highlighted the Israelites’ eschatological restoration. For him, Paul’s claim “all Israel shall be saved” will be realized only when every nation turns to Christ. This will become true in the millennium

when the church of Christ shall be universal, and include all nations . . . when those prophecies shall be fulfilled to the Jews, the fullness of the Gentiles will also come in, and *all men in every nation* will be subject to Christ, and his kingdom shall be glorious, and fill the world. And in this sense “All Israel shall be saved.”¹⁰⁹

Following Edwards, he expected the impeccable union in this universal church of Christ. Particularly, the Jews and the Gentiles will be perfectly united: “[The] Jews and Gentiles shall be united in one church under the Redeemer,” he predicted.¹¹⁰ And

¹⁰⁶ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 28.

¹⁰⁸ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 27. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁹ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 28. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁰ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 28.

this united church will be brought up to the heavenly realm and the eternal dominion: “which, after the millennium, shall be transplanted from earth to heaven; where the spiritual David will reign over it forever.”¹¹¹

Finally, while he depicted the millennium as the most significant and attractive period, Hopkins agreed with Edwards and Bellamy that there would be a progressive process before the millennium commences at around year 2000. He insisted, the millennium will be “introduced gradually” and it will “begin about two hundred years from the end of this present century.”¹¹² When it finally arrives, the millennium will be an epoch of universal peace, love and bliss. As Edwards did, Hopkins quoted the same Bible verse (Isaiah 11:9) to describe the millennial kingdom: “Love, peace and the most happy concord and union are promoted,” he asserted, “when this shall take place universally among men, and fill the earth, *as the water covers the sea*, there will be nothing to destroy or hurt, but universally safety, peace and love.”¹¹³ Hence, the kingdom of Christ “shall increase and spread, and fill the world; and continue in this happy state on earth *a thousand years*.”¹¹⁴

It is clear, what Hopkins expected is not an America-centric and imminent millennium, but a progressively realized kingdom that includes all nations. Unlike what Tuveson claims, this kingdom is far more than “a utopian world of justice, benevolence, and prosperity” that “fashioned a part of the American Dream,”¹¹⁵ but highly resembles Edward’s millennial kingdom: a Judeo-centric divine kingdom arriving with cosmic effect in the distant future. In this kingdom, Israel, instead of America, will play an essential role. In this sense, the reason for his disassociation

¹¹¹ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 28.

¹¹² Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 84, 98.

¹¹³ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 29. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁴ Hopkins, *A Treatise on the Millennium*, 17. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁵ Tuveson’s *The Redeemer Nation*, 41, 60.

with American Revolutionary War is not like what Smolinski declares, “the political Messiah had not come to the young republic,”¹¹⁶ because Hopkins probably did not expect that the Messiah would come to *this land* to inaugurate the millennium.

Conversely, as Edwards did, he encouraged his audience to implant their eschatological hope in the millennial kingdom that would arrive in another land, viz., the land of Israel.

Edwards’s millennial legacy is evident in both Bellamy and Hopkins. Like their mentor, while both held an optimistic vision of the millennium, they did not expect an America-centric or imminent political utopia. Conversely, they attempted to disassociate the contemporary events, either political or religious, with the millennium arriving in the distant future. By rejecting the America-centric and imminent millennium, Bellamy and Hopkins, as Edwards did, actually deflated the over-emphasis of the time, space and people of America in the coming millennial kingdom. To be specific, their present time will *not* be the most significant historical epoch ushering in the millennium; the land of America will *not* be the center of the arriving millennial kingdom; and American people will *not* play the most critical role in this kingdom. This de-centralization of America in the millennial kingdom most probably was unintentional, but it may well provide a corrective reading for their fervent contemporaries who advocate the American dream of national exceptionalism.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Smolinski, “Apocalypticism in Colonial North America,” 63.

¹¹⁷ For instance, David Austin (1760-1831), as one example among many of their contemporaries, advocated an America-centric and imminent Millennium in his *Downfall of Mystical Babylon* (1794).

2.2 Edwards Speaks to Chinese Millennial Movements¹¹⁸

Having documented the legacy of Edwards's millennialism in the eighteenth century, in this section we move to Chinese millennial movements. We will show that as some of Edwards's Reformed predecessors and Puritan colleagues did in centralizing England or New England in their millennialism, in Chinese millennial movements, frequently the efforts of centralization of the time, space, and people of China follow the same story line. Hence, this subject is treated from the specific background of the author as a Chinese pastoral scholar, being fully aware of the need for countering the dangerous tendency in Chinese Christians' millennial expectations.

The millennium, if defined along non-Anglo-European religious traditions, is a "paradisiacal age" that will arrive in the near future. Chinese civilization is rich with numerous apocalyptic, messianic and millennial traditions. The long Chinese history, beginning in Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 AD), gave birth to multiple millennial movements.¹¹⁹

Interestingly enough, while many Chinese Christians *do* think Christianity is not ultimately compatible with Daoism, Buddhism or Chinese folk religion, they still incorporate various Chinese cultural elements, by design or otherwise, into their Christian belief.¹²⁰ The intention may be to render Christianity more acceptable to Chinese people. Nevertheless, it is in danger of undermining and even distorting

¹¹⁸ An early version of this section is included in the article published under the title of "Jonathan Edwards and Chinese Millennial Movements," in *The Global Edwards*, ed. Rhys S. Bezzant (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 43-58. It has been expanded and revised to be inserted in this chapter.

¹¹⁹ Scott Lowe, "Chinese Millennial Movements," in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism. [Electronic Resource]*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 309, 322.

¹²⁰ Lin Yutang (林语堂, 1895-1976) may be an exceptional example that finds many similarities between Christianity and Daoism. As a result, he affirms that Chinese should be aware of both Chinese philosophy and Chinese folk legends. See Jianming He, "Dialogue between Christianity and Taoism," in *Christianity and Chinese Culture*, eds. Paulos Huang and Miikka Ruokanen (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010), 132-36.

Christian doctrines. Chinese millenarian traditions frequently and successfully absorb, incorporate and modify foreign millenarian beliefs. Instead of being replaced by Christian millennial teachings, the Chinese traditions seem to have reshaped the imported ideologies and incorporated them into their own, thus creating “new forms of indigenous millennialism.”¹²¹ Since the introduction of Christianity into China in the Seventh Century, Chinese millenarian traditions are repeatedly found in Christian clothing but nourished by the teachings of Daoism, Buddhism and Chinese folk religions. According to these teachings, the afterlife and anything beyond this world is considered to be too mysterious to be understood.¹²² Therefore, the essential task of these millennial movements is to establish a *Sino-centric, human- (Chinese-) inaugurated* heavenly kingdom *on earth*.

The Taiping Rebellion (1836-1864) is a prominent example of such a Sino-centric, Chinese-inaugurated earthly kingdom. Its key leader Hong Xiuquan (洪秀全, 1814-1864) was inspired by evangelical Protestant eschatology but formulated it into his personal vision of a Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace.¹²³ Having established a political base in Nanjing (Nanking), Hong and his followers (“God-worshippers”) began acting as if they were emperors and princes, believing that they had fulfilled God’s mission to establish the millennial kingdom. Therefore, unlike most peasant rebellions in Chinese history, they had no intention of taking the capital city Beijing, and no aim to overthrow the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912).¹²⁴

¹²¹ Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 309, 322.

¹²² Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 197.

¹²³ Robert P. Weller, *Resistance, Chaos, and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts, and Tiananmen* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 50-68. See also Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 310.

¹²⁴ Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 310.

Various elements from Daoism and Chinese folk religion can be traced in the ideological framework of Hong and his followers. First, the notion of an era of “Taiping” (Great Peace) is originally found in the Daoist classic the *Zhuangzi* (庄子 *Chuang tzu*).¹²⁵ Hong’s dream of creating a heavenly realm of great peace was a mixed product of Christian millenarian and Daoist utopian hopes. Secondly, Hong claimed that he was raptured into heaven and his internal organs were completely replaced. Most notably, he asserted that in this rapture he was elected by God to be Jesus’ younger brother. In Chinese history, it is not uncommon for a person to claim extraordinary experiences in order to gain a legitimacy for a throne.¹²⁶ Thus, it is not surprising to see Hong, a school teacher and a failure at the imperial examinations, doing so. For the same reason, other key leaders of the Taiping Rebellion, aligned themselves with local spirit-possession traditions and stated that they were possessed and empowered by all kinds of spirits that are either recorded in the biblical Scriptures or simply known among Chinese legends.¹²⁷ These examples clearly indicate that Hong and his followers, so-called the God-worshippers, had forged a new Christianity and turned the Taiping Rebellion into a highly Sinicized millennial movement that included various ingredients drawn from the Bible, Daoism and Chinese folk religion. And they were firmly convinced that they had successfully established the divine kingdom on the land of China.

Dongfang Shandian (“Eastern Lighting”) can be viewed as an alternative version of the Taiping Rebellion in contemporary China. It developed into a popular

¹²⁵ Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 309.

¹²⁶ For instance, Liu Bang (刘邦, 247-195 B. C.), the first emperor of Han Dynasty declared in the early stage of his rebellion that he was conceived after his mother had sexual intercourse with a dragon, in order to be recognized as *longzi*, the Son of Dragon and *tianzi*, the Son of Heaven. For the details, see *Shiji*, vol. 8, no. 8, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://ctext.org/shiji/gao-zu-ben-ji>.

¹²⁷ Weller, *Resistance, Chaos, and Control in China*, 69-80. See also Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 315.

movement in the last two decades and is currently regarded as a “a highly Sinicized, aggressively evangelistic millennial group that has been recruiting forcefully and deceptively in northeastern China since 1989.”¹²⁸ The leader of Eastern Lighting, a Chinese lady in Henan province (central China), has made similar claims to Hong, professing that she is the incarnate God and the returned Christ. She proclaimed that her “divine mission” is to destroy the PRC, which she teaches is the Red Dragon from the Book of Revelation (Rev. 12:3-18), and to take her followers up to heaven.¹²⁹ Similar to the Taiping Rebellion, holding the evident Sino-centric and Chinese-oriented millennial faith, followers of Eastern Lighting are convinced that they would enter the eternal kingdom from this piece of Chinese land.

In light of these historical developments in Chinese eschatology, it is needful to present alternative and robust Christian views of the millennium that might be more resistant to such destructive hybrids. This is why we present Edwards’s Judeo-centric and cosmic millennialism as a viable millennial view for a Chinese context.¹³⁰ The Sino-centric millennial expectation is not limited to the heterodox movements such as the Taiping Rebellion and Eastern Lighting. In fact, Chinese people traditionally and habitually tend to take “China”--- “Zhong Guo” or literally “the Central Kingdom” (中国, the Chinese name of “China”)---as the center of the world. In Chinese millenarian traditions, China is frequently regarded as the ideal location of a millennial kingdom. If not, at least it is an essential factor in the realization of this kingdom. This “Sino-centric syndrome” may even be found in some Chinese missionary movements. The Back to Jerusalem Movement (BTJ) is a

¹²⁸ Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 322.

¹²⁹ Lowe, “Chinese Millennial Movements,” 322.

¹³⁰ This is particularly true when Reformed theology is becoming increasingly prevalent among the contemporary Chinese churches. For more details of the popularity of Reformed theology in China, see Tian Yu Cao et al, ed., *Culture and Social Transformations in Reform Era China* (Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2010).

typical example.¹³¹ In discussing Edwards's potential contribution to the BTJ, we will argue that Edwards's de-centralization of his time, space and people directly challenges the Sino-centric, Chinese-oriented millennial claims of this missionary movement.

Self-recognized as the "*largest* missions movement in history," BTJ defines its position on its official website as "the goal of the Chinese church to evangelize the unreached peoples from eastern provinces of China, *westwards towards Jerusalem*."¹³² The reason behind this self-understanding is "the call from God for the Chinese church to preach the gospel and establish fellowships of believers in all the countries, cities, towns, and ethnic groups *between* China and Jerusalem."¹³³ To reverberate this divine calling, they assert,

Our goal is nothing less than the completion of the Great Commission so that the Lord Jesus Christ will return for his bride, to bring all of human history to the moment in Scripture where voices are heard in heaven, proclaiming, "*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever*" (Rev. 11:15).¹³⁴

The BTJ believes that it is Chinese Christians' destiny to take the final step of the global missionary movement in order to bring the gospel back to Jerusalem.¹³⁵

Therefore, they "train and send Chinese missionaries into the unreached regions of

¹³¹ Here we focus on the Current BTJ movement since the 1980s. For the historical review of the BTJ, see Mingri Jin, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations: A Biblical Foundation*, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, an imprint of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, 2016), 5-22; Kim-kwong Chan, "Mission Movement of the Christian Community in Mainland China: The Back to Jerusalem Movement" (paper presented at Seoul Consultation, Study Commission IX, Seoul, South Korea, March 22-24, 2009), 69-73.

¹³² "What is Back to Jerusalem," Back to Jerusalem, accessed March 23, 2018, <https://backtojerusalem.com/about/>. Emphasis added.

¹³³ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), xi-xii. Emphasis original. This book and the BTJ website act as the main advocates of this movement.

¹³⁴ Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*, 97. Emphasis original.

¹³⁵ Paul Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*, 57, 68, 78, etc. See also Paul Hattaway, *The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun* (London: Monarch Books, 2011), 284; Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think About and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2007), 222-23.

the globe,” particularly to the “Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu nations” located in the area within the 10/40 window.¹³⁶ Notably, in 2003 the BTJ website suggested to send around 200,000 Chinese missionaries to these nations in ten years, but has reduced this number to 100,000 since 2006.¹³⁷

In assessing the BTJ, Timothy Tennent stands out. In his exploration of the relationship between eschatology and global missions, Tennent seeks the resemblance between the BTJ and Edwards’s millennialism.¹³⁸ He is probably the only one, to the best of our knowledge, to find such a correlation between the BTJ and Jonathan Edwards. According to Tennent, the BTJ and Edwards share four similarities in their millennialism.¹³⁹ First, both Edwards and the BTJ optimistically anticipate the global advance of the gospel and the expansion of Christianity prior to the millennium. Second, both of them regard the eschatological conversion of Muslims and Jews as the final event before the advent of the millennium. Despite this, Edwards would be surprised to find that the Chinese, Tennent claims, “rather than the Americans” are leading this missionary movement.¹⁴⁰ Third, both Edwards and the BTJ expect massive persecutions in the latter days. Finally, both of them highlight the effectiveness of prayer in “stimulating missions and preparing for the millennium.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ “What is Back to Jerusalem,” Back to Jerusalem, accessed March 23, 2018. The 10/40 Window extends from 10 degrees south to 40 degrees north of the equator, covering North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. It is estimated that among nearly 4 billion people living in 69 nations of the 10/40 Window, around 1.6 billion have never heard the gospel. See “About the 10/40 Window,” Window International Network (WIN), accessed April 25, 2018, <http://win1040.com/about-the-1040-window.php>.

¹³⁷ Chan, “Mission Movement of the Christian Community in Mainland China,” 79, n. 15. See also Hattaway, *Back to Jerusalem*, 97, back cover.

¹³⁸ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*. See the ninth chapter, “Eschatology: Jonathan Edwards and Chinese Back to Jerusalem Movement,” in this work, 221-248.

¹³⁹ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 240-46.

¹⁴⁰ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 243.

¹⁴¹ Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 245.

While Tennent's exploration is innovative and insightful, his interpretation of Edwards's millennialism is problematic; hence his application of Edwards to support the BTJ, consequently, is questionable. In the first place, Tennent's assessment is based on his incomplete or selective knowledge of Edwards's millennialism. From his reading of McDermott's "compelling" argument, Tennent is aware of Edwards's objection to the imminent millennium.¹⁴² However, he neglects the fact that Edwards's millennium is not America-centric which is clearly illustrated by McDermott in the same chapter of his *One Holy and Happy Society*, and only a few pages apart.¹⁴³ As we demonstrated in Chapter Four and briefly summarized above, Edwards's millennialism actually deflates the over-emphasis on the British Empire and her New Colonies. Edwards's millennial blueprint de-centralizes the over-emphasis by some Reformed and Puritan divines: the space of both England and New England, the people from the New England churches and the time of either Reformation and Puritanism.

Furthermore, Tennent mistakenly believes that Edwards expected the Americans would take the leadership in the global revival ushering in the millennium. On the contrary, Edwards was keenly aware of the unique position of Israel in the eschatological conversion of non-Christian countries (or "the heathen world" in Edwards's words). For Edwards, it is the people of Israel, rather than the Americans or Chinese, who play the most significant role in expanding the kingdom of God. In particular, Edwards was convinced that the restored Israel, rather than the Christianized Chinese, would have the most significant spiritual impact on the rest of the world and determine its destiny. Consequently, Israel's eschatological

¹⁴² Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity*, 227, n. 34.

¹⁴³ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 60-63,

restoration, instead of the Chinese BTJ, will trigger the international revival and the inauguration of the millennial kingdom. In this sense, unlike what Tennent claims, Edwards's millennialism is not to promote, but *refute*, the advocacy of the BTJ that the Chinese will play the final and most decisive role in evangelizing the world and bringing it into the millennium.

Finally, Edwards's cosmic vision of the millennial kingdom emphasizes the essential roles of Israel's restoration to the whole world. His millennial kingdom is not Israel-superior but is Judeo-centric. For Edwards, the coming millennial kingdom will expand over the whole earth, as the whole universe is the stage of God's redemptive work. In this sense, there is not any nation or people-group can claim a special status or acting as a superior force in the realization of *God's* millennial kingdom. Edwards's millennialism is opposite to the self-awareness of the BTJ, although there is a resemblance between the two, as Tennent observes. While a thrilling indigenous Christian missionary movement orchestrated predominantly by Chinese church networks may well open a new page in the history of mission, BTJ is plagued with the Sino-centric syndrome deeply embodied in Chinese millennial movements, although the BTJ may not go so far as the heretic millennial movements did. Moreover, the BTJ's Sino-centric belief does not have any biblical reference. No matter how much the Chinese may impact this world, there is no convincing evidence in Scripture that China is specifically chosen by God to complete the Great Commission before Christ's return. In fact, what is behind the Sino-centric assumptions is the "ethnocentric visions of missionary 'chosenness'."¹⁴⁴ And these ethnocentric visions are rooted in nothing but "a salvation-historical self-understanding of China as God's appointed means for ushering in the millennium,"

¹⁴⁴ Chan, "Mission Movement of the Christian Community in Mainland China," 76.

as James Park rightly observes.¹⁴⁵ What lies beneath this self-understanding is the centralization, if not the sacralization, of China and the Chinese people in the progress of redemptive history. This Sino-centric self-understanding, if not treated with care, may easily lead to ethnocentrism and territorialism.¹⁴⁶

What the BTJ needs to learn from Edwards is the de-centralization of China and Chinese people in their eschatological anticipation and redemptive-historical vision. Specifically, while China's location may be suited to missions to the non-Christian countries in the Middle East, and Chinese *do* play a vital role in contemporary Christian missions, they are not the only force in the expansion of the millennial kingdom. While the twenty-first century may be named as "the century of China," the historical era should not be over-emphasized. If the BTJ is willing to take Edwards's Judeo-centric and cosmic vision of the millennium and gets rid of its Sino-centric syndrome, it may yet be able to avoid the mistake repeatedly made by various millenarian groups in Chinese history, i.e. realizing the "China Dream" in the name of the Christian missionary movement. We agree with Mingri Jin in his most recent work: at least the BTJ should recognize this movement, theologically and strategically, as "Back to Jerusalem *with All nations*," in order to remedy the evident tendency of Sino-centrism.¹⁴⁷ We add to this phrase, "for the eschatological restoration of Israel in the divine-appointed time."

In sum, as a theologian who sought to deflate the excess of imminent and America-centric millennial expectations in the eighteenth century, Edwards's

¹⁴⁵ James Sung-Hwan Park, "Chosen to Fulfil the Great Commission? Biblical and Theological Reflections on the Back to Jerusalem Vision of Chinese Churches," *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 2 (2015): 164.

¹⁴⁶ Park, "Chosen to Fulfil the Great Commission? Biblical and Theological Reflections on the Back to Jerusalem Vision of Chinese Churches," 171.

¹⁴⁷ Jin, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations*, 163. Emphasis added. In addition to Sino-centrism, Jin maintains that BTJ has other problems in leadership, finance, theology, integrity and mission strategies. See pages 20-22.

interpretation of the millennium provides a corrective reading to a Chinese anticipation of a Sino-centric and Chinese-inaugurated millennial kingdom, the latter of which is deeply rooted in Buddhism, Daoism and Chinese folk religion. It can also be of great help in avoiding the danger of centralizing or even sacralizing the space, people and the present time of China as can be found in contemporary Chinese millennial movements such as the Back to Jerusalem Movement.

Edwards's interpretation of apocalyptic texts was far from perfect as he often took historical events into consideration in predicting the advent of the millennium. However, unlike leaders of Chinese millennial movements, Edwards did not allow his cultural context to blind his reading of the biblical revelation. Instead, he continued to realign his eschatological view with the Scriptures and proclaimed a more biblical view of the millennium. Chinese Christians, when attempting to include Chinese cultural traditions in their Christian faith, either to secure their national and ethnic identities or to make Christianity more palatable to their Chinese fellow countrymen, should be aware of the danger of subverting Christian doctrines and thus turning Christianity into another religion altogether.

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