

## RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE IN THE WORKS OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

*Religious experience* is central to the life and thought of *Jonathan Edwards*. He is the author of many works which discuss the topic of religious experience, one of the most famous is *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746).<sup>1</sup> The intellectual basis of religious experience and revivalism, constructed in these works sparked a new philosophy and psychology of emotions. William James used Edward's writings in his classic work *Variety of Religious Experience* (1902), which was one of the first attempts to analyze the Christian religious experience since Edwards.

In this article Jonathan Edward's appraisal of religious experience is analyzed from the following different perspectives:

1. A brief examination of the roots of Edwards's theology and philosophy of religious experience.
2. The cultural and historical setting in which he lived.
3. The theological and psychological understanding of human nature.
4. Edward's theological analysis of religious experience.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Select Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 3, *Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961.

## A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF THE ROOTS OF EDWARDS'S THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Edwards in his descriptions of religious experience brilliantly combines Lockean language with Calvin's biblical idea of the inner testimony of the Spirit. Nevertheless he can't be seen as driven by a theological or philosophical system, but should be thought of as a biblical scholar who was able to greatly use philosophy and theology.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the top figures in the history of 18th century America. He was born on 5 October 1703 in Eastern Windsor (Connecticut). In the years 1716-1722 he studied in Yale College where he acquainted himself with current philosophical and theological trends. After graduation in 1726, he was invited to replace his grandfather Solomon Stoddard as a pastor in Northampton (Massachusetts). He assumed this post in February 1727, and in July that year he married Sarah Pierrepont. In 1734 his parish experienced a 'spiritual revival' that lasted until 1742. According to Joseph Tracy, what sparked these events, a series of sermons delivered by Edwards on the topic of justification by faith. He preached with conviction that on the day of judgement every mouth will be shut, as no-one can earn salvation. One of the outcomes of this revival was a publication of the book by Edwards, titled *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages* in 1736. This work earned him a wide reputation of a great revival preacher and a 'theologian of the heart'.<sup>2</sup> In December 1748 a clash occurred between Edwards and his congregation over his refusal to admit people to the church without a public confession of faith, hence also stricter demands to meet for those who wished to take part in sacraments. Edwards was apparently concerned that as a result of lax standards, unconverted people would become part of the community. In the end Edwards was forced to leave the Northampton church in 1750, which event is often consid-

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<sup>2</sup> H. Simonson, *Jonathan Edwards. Theologian of the Heart*, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1974.

ered a turning point in the history of American colonies, as it marks the eventual rejection of the 'New England Way' promoted by puritan colonizers of the New England. Edwards moved from Northampton to Stockbridge. He became a pastor of a small congregation and a missionary for 150 Indian families (Mohican and Mohawk) near the western borders of Massachusetts, where he lived until 1757. Again, he did not limit himself to pastoral and missionary ministry, but also devoted some of his time to make use of his writing skills as 'his tongue was as the pen.'<sup>3</sup> In 1757 he accepted the offer of becoming Principal of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). He died of a fever following a smallpox inoculation on 22 March 1758, after only a few months in Princeton, where he was also buried.<sup>4</sup>

### THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING IN WHICH EDWARDS LIVED

In order to understand changes that philosophy and theology underwent in the 18th century, we need to learn more about the period between the late 17th till the late 18th century, and its intellectual climate.<sup>5</sup> This epoch was a time of flourishing philosophy, whose goal was not only acquiring knowledge for its own sake, but also using it for the change in thinking and enhancement of the public life. For this reason Tatarkiewicz in his *History of Philosophy* calls it 'practical philosophy' or 'philosophy in practice.'<sup>6</sup> Initially it was termed 'a philosophy of Enlight-

<sup>3</sup> S. Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College at New-Jersey, together with Extracts from his Private Writings and Diary*, 2nd ed., Northampton: Andrew Wright 1804, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> G.M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 493.

<sup>5</sup> P. Kunzmann, *Atlas filozofii*, Warszawa: PWN, 1999, p. 102-145. Key figures in this period include J. Locke (1632-1704), G. Leibniz (1646-1716), G. Berkley (1685-1753), D. Hume (1711-1776), A. Smith (1723-1790), J. Rousseau (1712-1778), I. Kant (1724-1804).

<sup>6</sup> W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii*, Warszawa: PWN, 1978, p. 92.

enment', but due to the tremendous influence it exerted on practically every sphere of the contemporary society, the entire period of its domination was called the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> Since 1690, when the English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) published *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he wrote about empirical origins of knowledge, the way we reason became the main theme of philosophical debates.<sup>8</sup> It is Locke who is widely considered both the creator of the Empirical Theory of Knowledge and philosophical liberalism.<sup>9</sup> From that moment on it became commonplace to promulgate enormous capabilities of the human mind, which came to be something of a cult. A classic definition of this epoch was formulated by I. Kant: 'By *Enlightenment* we mean coming out from immaturity into which the man fell through his own fault. This immaturity lies in his inability to use his mind without any external guidance.'<sup>10</sup>

Human mind of the individual became a primary virtue. All kinds of authorities were questioned, as only what could be verified with your own reason was considered true and reliable. The main thrust of philosophy turned against religion, and belief in the supernatural started to be regarded as backwardness. By testing faith against reason many tried to cleanse it, this time of 'superstitions', and thus to create a 'rational religion'.<sup>11</sup> In this attempt to submit faith to reason it was ignored that religion in general (and Christianity in Europe in particular) always contained supernatural elements, which does not mean that this faith is irrational. 'The rationality of trust is based on the experienced reliability of the object of trust', and there is no one more reliable than God.<sup>12</sup> Christian faith therefore makes extensive use of wise and sensible argumentation, for the Bible itself encourages us to do it (1 Peter 3,15). It is vital, however, as J. W. Montgomery put it, not as a rational substitute of faith, but as its foundation. Not as a replacement of the work of the Holy Spirit, but rather as a means to bring the objective truth of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> B. Russell, *Dzieje filozofii zachodu*, Warszawa: Aletheia, 2000, p. 693.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 694.

<sup>10</sup> P. Kunzmann, *Atlas filozofii*, p. 103.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 103.

<sup>12</sup> J. R. Stott, *Krzyż Chrystusa*, Katowice: Credo, 2003, p. 412.

God's Word to the light, so that people regard it as an instrument of the Holy Spirit that makes Himself known to the world through the Gospel.<sup>13</sup>

In the 18th century intellectuals in Europe got rid of the old system of establishing truth; instead of seeking truth and wisdom in biblical revelation, they tried to build knowledge basing everything on human mind. The outcome of these new methods of acquiring knowledge were new ideas: Hegel stated that God is not a personal being as described in the Bible, but an impersonal force. Both Kant and Schleiermacher argued that religion has more to do with human religious experience than with God Himself. Hume claimed that it is impossible to prove the existence of God. The Enlightenment established the scientific method in which everything was subject to rational and empirical analysis, and the Bible was not excluded from this process. It is obvious that in these conditions the new scientific discipline of biblical criticism could develop very dynamically.

When it comes to Edwards not only he was an outstanding figure in the history of eighteenth-century America, but also is seen as one of the greatest American intellectuals. He is widely regarded as the greatest American theologian and one of the most original and versatile of American theologians and philosophers of the Enlightenment. His work includes a variety of philosophical and theological fields, but Edwards is most often associated with the metaphysics of theological determinism.

Every epoch has its own characteristic ideas, values, convictions and beliefs, all together often labeled 'an intellectual climate'.<sup>14</sup> It is indispensable to be familiar with this 'climate' if one wants to understand someone who lived in a particular time. Setting out on better understanding of Edwards's theology of religious experience and revival practices, we should therefore have a closer look at an awakening he took part in, namely the 'First Great Awakening'.

Religious revivals can be traced back to the remotest history of Christianity. However, classic descriptions of revivals and their characteristics began with the 18th century Methodist one. The greatest theologian of revivalism in 18th century, however, was not Wesley, whose

<sup>13</sup> P.E. Little, *Wiedz, dlaczego wierzysz*, Warszawa: VB, 1985, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> M. Heiman, *Chrześcijaństwo Europy zachodniej od oświecenia*, [in:] *Historia chrześcijaństwa*, ed. A. Hastings, Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2002, p. 529.

influence extended even to America, but Jonathan Edwards; it was his great desire to see written history of revivals and he was the first to describe religious renewals systematically.<sup>15</sup> His follower, but also a modifier of his teachings, was Charles Finney, possibly the most acclaimed among revival theologians. As W. McLoughlin wrote, 'Revivalism is the Protestant ritual (at first spontaneous, but, since 1830, routinized) in which charismatic evangelists convey the Word of God to large masses of people who, under this influence, experience what Protestants call conversion, salvation, regeneration, or spiritual rebirth.'<sup>16</sup>

Not downplaying God's sovereign work, we have to note that theological, moral and spiritual heritage is what was handed down by previous generations.

For the purposes of this article, one should limit the scope of the study on religious revivals to the United States of America, beginning in the 18th century.

William G. McLoughlin links those revivals with socio-political changes in America, and in his book *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*<sup>17</sup> categorizes them into 5 groups:

- I. *The Puritan Revival* (1610-1640)
- I. *Great Awakening* (1730-1760)
- II. *The Second Great Awakening* (1800-1830)
- III. *The Third Great Awakening* (1890-1920)
- IV. *The Forth Great Awakening* (1960 end date unspecified – the lack of the end year is obviously due to McLoughlin's classifying the event as ongoing, and therefore hard to be pinpointed as to its end).

Another classification is propounded by U. Gastaldi<sup>18</sup>, and this one stresses the theological foundations of particular revivals, and divides this period into only two Great Awakenings, albeit with various stages along the way:

<sup>15</sup> J. Edwards, *A Letter to Rev. John Erskine, Jul. 7, 1752*, in J. Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings: The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. G. S. Claghorn, Vol. 16, New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 490.

<sup>16</sup> W. G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. XIII.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> A. Siemieniewski, *Ewangelikalna duchowość nowego narodzenia a tradycja katolicka* (rozprawa habilitacyjna), Wrocław 1997, p. 44.

- I. The First Great Awakening:
  - phase 1 – from T.J. Frelinghuysen until J. Edwards
  - phase 2 – the work of G. Whitefield.
- I. The Second Great Awakening:
  - phase 1 (eastern) – commenced in colleges in Hampden-Sydney and Yale
  - phase 2 (western) – commenced in Logan County and Cane Ridge
  - phase 3 coincides with the ministry of Ch. G. Finney and his followers propagating the same ideas of an ‘organized revival’.

Yet another classification was proposed by N. Anderson and E. Towns.<sup>19</sup> Beginning with the Reformation times, they specify 6 revivals that extended far beyond the borders of the respective local communities:

- I. *Great Awakening* (1727).
- I. *Second Great Awakening* (1792).
- II. *Early Nineteenth Century Awakening* (1830).
- III. *Mid-Nineteenth Century Prayer Revival* (1858).
- IV. *Early Twentieth Century Worldwide Awakening* (c. 1904).
- V. *Midth Twentieth Century Revival* (1948).

All differences in the above chronologies notwithstanding, all three agree with respect to Two Great Awakenings, the first one in 18th century, and the second one in the 19th. In order to understand the ministry of Edwards, we need to take a closer look at these historical events that surely shaped his understanding of religious experience.

The term ‘Great Awakening’ was introduced by historians to refer to a unique religious revival that took place in many American colonies in the years 1720-1742. The beginnings of the so-called First Great Awakening are related to the arrival of Theodor Frelinghuysen in New Jersey in 1720.<sup>20</sup> With great persuasion he preached the futility of any outward

<sup>19</sup> N.T. Anderson & E.L. Towns, *Rivers of Revival*, California: Regal Books, 1997, p. 295.

<sup>20</sup> Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747) – a German minister of the Dutch Reform Church. Having arrived in New Jersey in 1720, he quickly became very popular within the Dutch community. Gilbert Tennent acknowledged that he learnt a lot about piety and revival from him. Both J. Edwards and G. Whitefield held his

religious activity and rites, and the need for a deep inner transformation. His remarkable piety combined with ardent zeal for evangelism triggered the first revival in central colonies in America. Frelinghuysen had considerable impact on Gilbert Tennent's spirituality. During the second and third decade of the 18th century, the Reform and Presbyterian Churches in Pennsylvania and New Jersey experienced a religious renewal thanks to the preaching of the Tennents' family. They had emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1718. In the 20s William Tennent (1673-1746) began teaching a small group of young men (his four sons among them), to prepare them to church ministry. In a few years this training took on such a formal character that William founded a small school, called 'Log College,' in which students were taught along the lines of the revival tradition. His eldest son, Gilbert (1703-1764) became a famous Presbyterian minister, and one of the main proponents of the Great Awakening. He once described an event that well portrays the nature of the awakening: 'While I was preaching from Psalms 119:59,60, I observed many of the assembly in tears, and heard many crying out in very great bitterness of soul'<sup>21</sup>

Similar events occurred in 1734-1735 in a Congregational Church in Northampton (Massachusetts) as a result of Jonathan Edwards's preaching. Even though they did not last long, thanks to the books Edwards wrote, some on revival events, he emerged as one of the leading theologians in America. The Great Awakening reached its peak in 1740s, due to the ministry of an itinerant preacher George Whitefield<sup>22</sup>, who is considered, along with John Wesley<sup>23</sup> to have led the religious renewal

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ministry in high esteem (R.H. Balmer, *The Social Roots of Dutch Pietism in Middle Colonies*, Virginia: Theological Publications, 1984, p. 187-199).

<sup>21</sup> J. Tracy, *The Great Awakening, A History of the Revival of Religion in the time of Edwards & Whitefield*, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprinted 1997, First published 1842, p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> G. Whitefield (1714-1779). See more in: Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield. The life and times of the great evangelist of the 18th century revival*, London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970.

<sup>23</sup> John Wesley (1703-1791), born in Epworth in England, one of 18 children of Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley. John's father Samuel was also a minister and a scholar. Along with the family tradition, John, at the age of 17, undertook studies at Christ Church College in Oxford. He was appointed as a Deacon in 1726, after his graduation. Despite his strong individualism, he always had a group of friends around him. In a short time he became a leader of the association established by his brother Charles. The whole enterprise was mocked as 'the Holy Club', and its

in 18th century England. Whitefield in his Anglican-Calvinist-Pietistic preaching greatly emphasized the necessity for being 'born again'. For this precise reason he was forbidden to preach in churches by senior officials of the Anglican Church, what made him start speaking outdoors. He had an extremely loud voice, so he could easily speak to thousands. Highly expressive, emotive and dramatic sermons moved even the most pragmatic and religiously unorthodox, e.g. Benjamin Franklin.

The result of the Great Awakening was a massive increase in the number of people in churches, as well as young believers willing to involve in ministry. It was all the outcome of stressing the need for an individual, conscious conversion (so as every Christian should know the exact date of his experiencing the 'New Birth'), the need for sharing this experience with the unbelievers or nominal Christians, and winning them for Christ. The demand for new qualified young ministers fostered growth of educational institutions such as 'Log Colleges' or the New Jersey College, Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania.

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members as 'Methodists'. This derision was meant to scorn deep piety, diligence and discipline characteristic for the members of the association. On 14 October 1735 the two Wesley brothers along a few friends from 'the club' set out for a mission in Georgia. During the journey, John first met the Bohemian Brethren (Moravian settlers). He returned to England in 1737 after the failure of the mission, and overwhelmed by the feelings of defeat and misery, started seeking the company of the Moravians. He spent hours talking to one of their ministers, Peter Boehler, who asserted that only by faith one can be internally transformed, and that faith is the only way to find peace with God. These words had enormous impact on Wesley, and on 24 May 1738 he personally experienced God's grace, having denied confidence in his own efforts. His brother Charles and friend Whitefield came through a similar experience of conversion a little earlier. Shortly afterwards, being encouraged by Whitefield, John started preaching in the open air. He delivered his first sermon on 2 April, near Bristol, for the audience of about three thousand. The ministry of the two Wesley brothers and G. Whitefield resulted in a spiritual revival that quickly spread beyond England. In order to deal with administrative issues of the fledgling movement, the first conference of Methodists was held in London in 1744.

## THE THEOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE

Edwards agreed with his contemporary, a British moralist Francis Hutcheson, that humanity has a natural ability to recognize what is moral and follow the inner moral sense. However, stressing that this kind of morality is ultimately an expression of selfish love of oneself. So this kind of socially useful behavior cannot be called a real virtue. True virtue must arise out of love for God.<sup>24</sup>

A noticeable influence of the Puritan tradition in Edward's theology can be seen in his sermons in which he summoned listeners to a personal and deep experiencing of faith. Mere holding on to doctrines and dogmas is not enough for salvation. Christianity is not just about an intellectual consent for a set of beliefs, it is about a personal and intimate relationship between God and man. Trust put in God must constantly deepen and lead to a complete submission to God's grace. The beginning of this relationship is a critical moment of conversion and accompanying remorse for sins, which is essentially accepting Christ as a personal Lord and Saviour. This in turn means that a person is included in the covenant effected by Christ, and thereby cleared of sins and justified. The concept of covenant also entails living in obedience, faith and love. Abiding in those leads to a godly and sanctified life.

An amalgam of western and eastern traditions is evident in Edward's theological anthropology. Both traditions held that man was created in God's image, which equals to absolute perfection and likeness to God.<sup>25</sup> The man obviously fell and stands in need of salvation. Edwards's doctrine of original sin was derived from protestant tradition. As the Calvinistic doctrine of original sin purports, every man born into this world

<sup>24</sup> J. Edwards, *Christian Love*, [in:] C.E. Fant, W.M. Pinson, *A Treasury of Great Preaching*, Vol. 3, Dallas: Word Publishers, 1995, p. 93.

<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that not all early Christian writers accepted this theory; Irenaeus of Lyon, for that matter, wrote in his *Demonstratio praedicationis apostolicae* that when God created man, he was still a child, and his faculties were not mature, which was the reason for his being seduced by the serpent (Ireneusz z Lyonu, *Wykład nauki apostołskiej*, Kraków: PWN, 1997, p. 35). That was a reference to his characteristic concept of human growing to maturity and perfection.

inherits the guilt and inner corruption from the first Adam. Everyone is therefore in bonds of sinful nature. Man sins because he is a sinner. Sin is a universal condition, and mankind is totally unable to recover from it. All humanity was present in Adam's loins, and so his sin is the prime cause of its depravation and guilt. Edwards concurred with the understanding of depravation as complete, in which no sphere and no aspect in life is free of corruption. When referring to this doctrines, he once stated: 'the Calvinistic doctrine of the total depravity and corruption of man's nature, whereby his heart is wholly under the power of sin, and he is utterly unable, without the interposition of sovereign grace, savingly to love God, believe in Christ, or do anything that is truly good and acceptable in God's sight.'<sup>26</sup> Edwards was of the same opinion as Luther in that from the fall of the first humans, our will is *in se curvatus*. He believed that man, because of his nature, not only does not love God, but he is not even afraid of Him. This is why his desire was that people would learn of their sickness and the only remedy for it. He preached that because people came to this world in sin, they have to be born again, born again from God. The aim of all this was to be restoration of hearts to the image of God, recovering righteousness and holiness lost in the fall. For this reason justification and forgiveness of sins is the cornerstone of Christian life. There is, however, something more that God wants for a broken sinner. Righteousness that He ascribed to a sinner as a result of Christ's death, can also be transferred to his inner person by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### EDWARDS'S THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

One of Edward's favorite phrases was 'the sense of the heart'. In accordance with the spirit of his age, he exhibited an emotional view of reality, in which 'feeling heart' was the basis for thought and action.

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<sup>26</sup> J. Edwards [1754], *Freedom of the Will*, Vol. 1, ed. Paul Ramsey (WJE Online), p. 432.

Religious feelings are a sign of recognition of the divine perfection, which is to be attributed to the recognition of the heart rather than the head. Therefore, he was a leading figure in the emerging 'New England Theology', which mainly dealt with issues such as the splendor and glory of God and the supernatural life immersed in the beauty of holiness.

Edwards' philosophy, '[by] insisting on a spontaneous flow between men's inner principles and their actions so that their spiritual state was constantly on trial and renewed, ... had explicitly rejected the rhetoric and do-good morality of a degenerate Puritanism... his conception of experiential religion [was based] on a psychology that denied either the possibility of getting outside oneself or of one's principles aloof from the ambiguities of action...'<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, the main thrust of Edward's preaching was the call to people to experience 'the new birth.' This event, as the beginning of faith, enables one to know God's presence and abide in it. Edwards agreed with the classic protestant view of justification by grace through faith.

Edwards found a confirmation of the necessity of being born again in the Bible (he spoke of the Bible as the source and the norm of his theology).<sup>28</sup> Jesus himself said 'You must be born again' (John 3,7). Commenting on Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus he noted that Christ did not speak about any outward transformation of life, as this would be obscuring an obvious thing. He has to show something new by indicating that a truly transformed life can only be the result of God's work, creating a new man. This regeneration is so crucial that it must be observable in a person's attitude, and the confirmation of this change for this person must be the inner testimony of the spirit.

Above all, a person born again from God shares in a genuine and active faith. The result of this kind of faith, by which a person is born again from God, is power over sin, no matter if it comes from outside or from within.

Another consequence of faith is peace that fills the person so deeply, regardless of the situation, that his heart is always strong and confident

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Edwards and Melancholy, "The New England Quarterly" 41 (1968), p. 211-212.

<sup>28</sup> M.A.G. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival*, New York: Evangelical Press, 2005, p. 117.

in God. What follows is therefore hope, which is a complete certainty in faith (*plerophoria pisteos*), and also Spirit's testimony that a person walks in holiness.

The most distinctive hallmark of those who believe, however, is love. God pours it into the heart through the Holy Spirit who indwells believers. Because of this love they long for Christ and rest in His arms. A natural consequence of the love for God is love for other people. It surpasses any human understanding, enabling one to love even enemies. If this true love is poured in the heart of a believer, he is bound to keep God's commands. Everyone who loves God with all his heart cannot but serve Him with all his strength.<sup>29</sup> As much as love and obedience to God are two separate things, they always go hand in hand.

What Edwards taught one the sings of being born again makes clear that he identified 'the new birth' with a utter, thoroughgoing transformation of a person's condition. This change was not only to be evident in personal piety, but also in the social aspect of interpersonal relations.

A person that experienced forgiveness and being set free from sin, must still undergo the cleansing of the sinful condition of heart. A newly-born again Christian finds in his heart the source of pride, egoism, anger and a tendency for apostasy. Being aware that it is the sick that need a physician, he seeks healing. He feels that he is not yet completely sound, and that sin, though not as greatly terrifying as before 'the new birth', has not yet been totally eradicated. The awareness of this situation makes him look for further transformation and getting close to God's light. Whenever he is close to God, he is more aware of the shortfalls in his heart. It is the process of illumination, purification and arousing a desire to be holy.<sup>30</sup> A natural result of getting close to the light is the longing to get even closer to it. This process must continue, as it is not enough to simply believe. A believer must yearn for more and more God.

In religious experience called conversion three distinct steps can be distinguished. The first is the recognition of one's sins and the resultant conviction of the need of salvation. Recognition of sins entails a change in opinion about sin in relation to God. The second step is repentance,

<sup>29</sup> J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, ed. E. Hickman, Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1992, p. 266.

<sup>30</sup> J. Edwards, *The Works*, p. 267.

which is not only recognition of sins, but also regret and remorse following it. A change in opinion about sin must result in a change in feelings about it. If it is not the case, there is no true repentance. This very change in feelings leads to a confession of sins to God, and giving them up. The third step that must take place right after repentance is putting confidence in God that because of what Christ has done on the Cross, it is possible to be justified. In simple faith one must put his trust in Christ as his Lord and Saviour. When this happens, he becomes justified in God's eyes and is born again.

As Edwards said of the Christian's desire for sanctification, 'Tis as much the nature of one that is spiritually new born, to thirst after growth in holiness, as tis the nature of a newborn babe, to thirst after the mother's breast.<sup>31</sup> The process is progressive, but never completed in this life. Sanctification is ultimately fulfilled in glorification.<sup>32</sup> Sanctification means that the whole person (its spirit, soul and body alike) is wholly filled with God's love. That being so, the Edward use of the word sanctification refers here to the perfection of God's love that fills the whole person with the fullness of God. The utmost consequence of it is living in God's love. 'A true sense of the glory of God is that which can never be obtained by speculative; and if men convince themselves by argument that God is holy, that never will give a sense of his amiable and glorious holiness. If they argue that he is very merciful, that will not give a sense of his glorious grace and mercy. It must be a more immediate, sensible discovery that must give the mind a real sense of the excellence and beauty of God.'<sup>33</sup>

A soul filled with Christ loves Him so much that it wants nothing else but to know Him better. This is why sanctification is necessary to

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<sup>31</sup> J. Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, gen. ed. P. Miller, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959, p. 366.

<sup>32</sup> 'The end of the creation is that the creation might glorify [God]. Now what is glorifying God, but a rejoicing at that glory he has displayed?' (J. Edwards, *The Miscellanies*, ed. Th. Schafer, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 13, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, p. 199). The Miscellanies are Edwards's private notebooks where he did his thinking.

<sup>33</sup> Sermon on Matthew 5:8 ('Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.') in: *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974, p. 906.

be fully immersed in the perfect love of Christ, which makes the whole person belong to Him, so that Christ may fulfil him in every respect, so that they are both united in experience of love.

One of the greatest, among many works by Edwards concerning religious experience, is *Religious Affections*. Jonathan Edwards wrote *Treatise concerning religious affections*<sup>34</sup> in order to help discern between true and false religious experience in the life of man. He was trying to help us understand that people can't neglect everything just because of unknown manifestations and on the other hand can't approve all kinds of strange situations without judging if they are from God. 'Herein appears that subtlety of Satan... Knowing the greater part of the land were not versed in such things, and had not had much experience of great religious affections to enable them to judge well of them, and distinguish between true and false; then he knew [that] by sowing tares amongst the wheat, and mingling false affections with the works of God's Spirit [he could] bring all religion into disrepute.'<sup>35</sup>

On the other side, he believed that Christianity is living experience of majesty of God and opposed all that propagated a formal and lifeless religion. In his view it was a work of the devil 'to endeavor to his utmost to propagate and establish a persuasion, that all affections and sensible emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are... to be avoided and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. This ... is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality...'<sup>36</sup>

Edwards believed that true religion is a matter of the affections. Soul, as deepest source of the self, inspires thoughts, feelings and even choices that comes out of heart.<sup>37</sup> That is why the soul's affections must be revived. This religious experience of spiritual revival opens the soul

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<sup>34</sup> Edwards wrote *Religious Affections* (1746) a few years after the Awakening had passed. The framework of the *Treatise* is simple:  
Part one explores the meaning of the affections;  
Part two looks at unreliable signs of true religious experience;  
Part three looks at reliable signs of true religious experience.

<sup>35</sup> J. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, eds. C.E. Faust, Th. H. Johnson, *Representative Selections*, New York: American Book Company, 1935, p. 222.

<sup>36</sup> Ibidem, p. 222.

<sup>37</sup> F. Copleston, *Historia filozofii*, Vol. 8, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy „Pax”, 1989, p. 262.

for God, to see the beauty, majesty and holiness of God. Better: It makes a person's mind, will and emotions transformed.

Edwards presented twelve unreliable signs of true religious experience of faith, and twelve reliable signs of true religious experience of faith.

These unreliable signs of religious experience by itself indicates nothing:

- Intense religious affections (intensity of experience or intense emotion).
- Much fervent talking with fluency and eagerness about religion.
- Experiencing a variety of many different religious affections at the same time.
- A certain sequence or order in the affections or the feelings of joy and comfort of a religious experience.
- Emotions or Spiritual experiences not produced by the self or not excited by self-effort (emotions that are aroused inexplicably are not necessarily true).
- The experience of Scriptures coming miraculously to mind and emotions accompanied by Bible verses.
- Intense bodily reactions or physical manifestations (a physical reaction to emotion).
- Frequent and passionate verbal expressions of praise for God (verbal worship/praying, talking about God, etc.).
- The exhibition/show of love and emotions with the appearance of a fullness of love.
- Zealous or time-consuming devotion or practices to religious activities (effort spent on religion).
- Self-confidence/assurance of salvation (it may be the hypocrisy of just self-confidence).
- Being able to please or inspire others through the demonstration of religious feeling (outward evidences are not enough).

These reliable signs of true religious affections were given by Edwards to help discern the difference between genuine religious experience (or works of the Spirit) and false religious experience (or works coming from other deceptive spirits):

- True religious affections toward God always have a divine and supernatural source.
- True religious affections are caused by the nature of God alone, it is attraction to God and his ways for their own sake.
- True religious affections are based on holiness focuses on the beauty of God’s righteousness (seeing the beauty of holiness).
- True religious affections are formed and arise from the mind being enlightened by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. It is a “sense of the heart” that sees the inner meaning of all the Scriptures.
- True religious affections are grounded in a reasonable and spiritual Deep-seated conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.
- True religious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation (not proud but humble).
- True religious affections produce conversions that change one’s inner-being, nature and character.
- True religious affections express the gentle temperament of Jesus Christ (a Christ-like spirit).
- True religious affections soften the heart and causes people to be tender which leads to fear of God.
- True religious affections produce a balance, beautiful symmetry and proportion in the life of the Christian and development of Christian virtues.
- True religious affections increase the hunger for God and longing for spiritual matters.
- True religious affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice (they change lives practically and they produce practical results).

## CONCLUSION

Edwards made a clear point that 'religion is not primarily an affair of the intellect, but an affair of the heart'.<sup>38</sup> He rejects an intellectualism that does not move the heart. Nevertheless he insists on the whole-person transformation by grace to Christ, therefore we must note his insistence on the use and place of the mind in religious experience, because he also remains suspicious of a spirituality which does not engage the mind. 'Edwards sought more than anything to make Christ a totally engaging Person for his people. But this is not to say that Edwards repudiated logic or that he ignored the importance of propositional understanding. Again the *Religious Affections* serves as a model. Carefully reasoned and rigorously logical, Edwards therein presents a full-blown analysis of an essential part of the Christian life, a part which must be thoroughly and propositionally known if the individual's spiritual life is to be full, complete, and true'.<sup>39</sup>

Edwards defended the place of emotion in religious experience as part of human will but, at the same time, he did not believe that subjective experience alone could serve as the source of religious authority. According to him, nobody could rely solely on their own spiritual experience. The conclusion of the article is that Edwards' insistence is on a whole-person's consecration to God, and for him religious experience is not a product of reason or emotion but it is an integrated experience of love and beauty of God.

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<sup>38</sup> O. Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards 1703-1758: A Biography*, New York: Macmillan, 1940, p. 232.

<sup>39</sup> S.T. Logan Jr., *The Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards*, „Westminster Theological Journal” 43 (Fall 1980), No. 1, p. 91.

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## STRESZCZENIE

*Doświadczenie religijne* było centralne dla życia i myśli Jonathana Edwardsa. Jest on autorem wielu dzieł poruszających zagadnienie doświadczenia religijnego, jednym z najsłynniejszych jest *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). Skonstruowane w tych pismach intelektualne podstawy doświadczenia religijnego i rewiwalizmu zainicjowały nową filozofię i psychologię uczuć. William James posłużył się pismami Edwardsa w swoim klasycznym dziele *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), które stanowiło jedną z pierwszych prób analizy chrześcijańskiego doświadczenia religijnego od czasów Edwardsa.

Ocena doświadczenia religijnego przez Jonathana Edwardsa jest analizowana z następujących perspektyw:

1. Krótkie badanie korzeni teologii i filozofii doświadczenia religijnego u Edwardsa.
2. Tło kulturowe i historyczne czasów, w których żył.
3. Teologiczne i psychologiczne rozumienie ludzkiej natury.
4. Teologiczna analiza doświadczenia religijnego.

Edwards bronił miejsca uczuć w doświadczeniu religijnym jako części ludzkiej woli, jednocześnie nie wierzył jakoby subiektywne doświadczenie samo

w sobie mogło służyć jako źródło religijnego autorytetu. Uważał, że nikt nie może polegać wyłącznie na swoim duchowym doświadczeniu. Wniosek tego artykułu jest następujący, że dla Edwardsa doświadczenie religijne nie jest produktem umysłu lub uczuć, ale jest zintegrowanym doświadczeniem miłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Jonathan Edwards, przebudzenie, doświadczenie religijne

## ABSTRACT

*Religious experience is central to the life and thought of Jonathan Edwards.* He is the author of many works which discuss the topic of religious experience, one of the most famous is *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). The intellectual basis of religious experience and revivalism, constructed in these works sparked a new philosophy and psychology of emotions. William James used Edward's writings in his classic work *Variety of Religious Experience* (1902), which was one of the first attempts to analyze the Christian religious experience since Edwards.

Jonathan Edward's appraisal of religious experience is analyzed from the following different perspectives:

1. A brief examination of the roots of Edwards's theology and philosophy of religious experience.
2. The cultural and historical setting in which he lived.
3. The theological and psychological understanding of human nature.
4. His theological analysis of religious experience.

Edwards defended the place of emotion in religious experience as part of human will but, at the same time, he did not believe that subjective experience alone could serve as the source of religious authority. According to him, nobody could rely solely on their own spiritual experience. The conclusion of the article is that for Edwards, religious experience is not only a product of reason or emotion but it is an integrated experience of love.

**Key words:** Jonathan Edwards, revival, religious experience