

2ND IN A SERIES ON 'AMERICAN REFORMERS'



During 2017, a group of pastors and lay persons, the *Cincinnati Reformation Team*, introduced readers to The Great Protestant Reformation. 500 years ago in the 15th and 16th C, God chose Martin Luther and men and women from England to the Czech Republic to the shores of the New World to “turn the world upside down.” They were referred to as Reformers.

These Reformers were ‘flesh and blood’ people like us. What

set them apart was God’s reforming and empowering of them from the inside out. Times change but the God of the Reformation does not. The Age of God’s Reformation is far from over.

To emphasize this, during 2018 readers will meet Christian men and women who profoundly formed and reformed America. Some are simple folks who covenanted together. Others were genteel women who affected morals and rights with a pen, a ballot and a hatchet. Still others were great preachers and teachers whose work formed the spirits and minds of generations upon generations to come.

“Historically it seems spiritual revivals have been accompanied by a clear, bold response to the issues of money, sex, and power... When these revivals occur in a culture, there is a renewal of both devotional experience and ethical life. We need a modern-day renewal of spiritual experience that is ethically potent.” - Richard Foster “Money, Sex & Power.”

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703 – 1758) AND THE GREAT AWAKENING IN AMERICA.

BY REV THOMAS SWEETS — PASTOR
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In a World fixated on Money, Sex and Power, Jonathan Edwards was a ‘nobody.’ But, God intervened and thru him ignited the momentous Great Awakening of the eighteenth century.

Edwards’ father was a pastor in East Windsor, CT. Jonathan was the only boy of eleven children. He was a brilliant student: a

Yale University graduate at 17 and holder of a Masters degree at 20. In 1727, after a brief pastorate in New York and three years as a tutor at Yale, Edwards moved to his grandfather’s wealthy Congregational Church in Northampton MA. *That year, he had a strong Christian conversion.* Thereafter, his life was lived under a devout and passionate belief in the sovereignty of God. In 1729, he became the sole pastor of the prestigious congregation. He married Sarah Pierpont — described as cultured, winsome, enthusiastic, and pietistic. Edward’s called it an ‘uncommon union.’ He and Sarah had 11 children and an extended Christian family.

Edwards had a rare gift of intellect. He became a serious student of philosophy at ten years of age. In his first writings he sought to stem the tide of *Arminianism** sweeping over America. His first published sermon in 1731 was “*God Glorified in the Work of Redemption by the Greatness of Man’s Dependence upon Him in the Whole of it.*” In it he demonstrated that true faith brings man low as it exalts God. He attacked those who were religiously and morally self-sufficient. Instead he declared that a person is *justified by faith in & dependence on Christ alone.*

There was nothing manipulative or charismatic about Edwards preaching style. He spoke in a monotone and did not make eye contact with the congregation. Instead, he stared

at the bell rope in the back of the church. His pastorate was fraught with challenges. Many in the church were members through a “halfway covenant.” This meant they were baptized as children, but had never confessed their faith in Christ or joined the church as an adult. It was five years before the first person was converted. In 1734 he saw the first signs of an awakening in his own congregation. By 1735, thirty-two parishes in the Connecticut River Valley were experiencing revival. The revival was particularly obvious among the youth who became concerned about their salvation, so much so that in 1737 he wrote *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundreds in Northampton.*

Edwards presented a disciplined Calvinistic Theology which became the theological foundation for a new nation. Sermons like ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,’ are classics in American literature. His preaching was so empowered that he created an “anxious bench” in the church for those who felt that they had to come forward to confess their sins. Some hearers were so overcome with guilt and the need to repent that they beat on the pulpit asking him to stop preaching. Eventually the revival of Northampton spread to all of America and Europe: the *Great Awakening of 1740-41.*

Edwards attempt to bar “halfway covenant” members from communion led to a church split. Dismissed in 1751, he took a remote congregation in Stockbridge MA and was a missionary to Indians. Stripped of money and power, he finally had *time and intellect* to write many of his greatest works including *Freedom of the Will and Original Sin.*

Late in 1757, Edward’s brilliance was finally recognized. He was called to be the President of Princeton College. The irony was that in a few months, he died after being inoculated against smallpox [March 22, 1758].

260 years later, Jonathan Edwards is known as the founder of *evangelical* Christianity. Through his preaching writing and *descendents*, ‘the nobody’ Jonathan Edwards stirred and continues to stir the hearts, souls and minds of America. **He is clearly the greatest theologian America has ever produced.**

* Examples: Wesley & Methodist Movements with emphasis on man’s free will, resistable grace, and salvation that can be lost.

NEXT MONTH - George Whitefield (1714 – 1770) English evangelist who preached to 10 million and awakened America.



REPORT BY SHARLYN STARE

The mission of ECO is to “build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.” Since the birth of our denomination in 2012, there have been annual Gatherings of pastors and laity. These events have brought together cutting-edge keynote speakers and workshop leaders from around the world. They challenge and equip the attendees committed to building “flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

ECO is committed to cultivating a healthy, diverse, resource-rich ecosystem where pastors and congregations can flourish. This year’s Gathering was outstanding. 2 ½ days were equipping & reunion and a ½

day was ‘family business’ — embracing ECO’s Confessions & Creeds. What a contrast to our former denomination’s yearly ‘jousting matches.’ Held in Houston, it brought together representatives of many of the denomination’s 367 congregations and 500+ pastors.

The 2018 Gathering theme was *RENOVATE*, based on Nehemiah 2:18. I attended 2 workshops: “Good News from Hard Places” — insights into



God’s redeeming work in the Middle East; and “Contemporary Worship Is Unbiblical” — all worship today is contemporary ... the issues are *Who* is worshipped and consistency with God’s revelation about worship in Scripture — are we willing to submit our preferences to God’s?

The highlight of the Gathering for me was hearing Condoleezza Rice

— Professor, author, pianist, golfer, avid football fan, US Sec’y of State (2005-9 the 2nd woman and 1st African American woman to hold the post), and George W. Bush’s National Security Adviser (2001-5 1st woman to hold the position). She spoke about her grandfather and father, both Presbyterian pastors, with deep affection, sharing life lessons her family taught. With candor and humility, she told about the pervasive prayer which undergirded decisions like the US’s 1990 Kuwait



military response. Clips of her address will be online in the near future at

<http://econationalgathering.org/2018-renovate/>

I find that ECO Gatherings are times of joy and refreshment... worth my time and expense. They ‘recharge’ my spiritual batteries for the whole year.

Next year’s Gatherings are the last week in January in Palm Beach Florida and in Colorado Spring Colorado.