

## JONATHAN EDWARDS: RECOVERING HIS GOD-CENTRED VISION

*'No man is more relevant to the present condition of Christianity than Jonathan Edwards'* - D M Lloyd-Jones

One of the most encouraging signs of recent decades has been the interest in and appreciation of the writings of Jonathan Edwards (1703-58). In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Edwards' life and writings were scarcely known in the United Kingdom and this was reflected in the then current state of evangelicalism. The Reformed Recovery that had its beginnings in the 1950s can be traced back to men influenced by their discovery of Jonathan Edwards.

The very first dawning of a change can be traced back to the writings of A W Pink (1886-1952). His Arminian thinking was first unsettled by the discovery of the Works of Jonathan Edwards. In 1918 we are told that he was attempting to read through all four volumes of Edwards' Works (1881 edition) and in a letter of October 1936 he mentions that 'they were very searching and they were much blest to me almost 25 years ago'. It is significant that it was in the year 1918 he wrote *The Sovereignty of God*, a book that has influenced many ministers in a Calvinistic direction.

The major influence in the Recovery was Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1889-1981). We are told that in 1929 while searching for more light he saw for the first time a reference to the Works of Edwards. While waiting for a train connection in Cardiff he called at John Evans bookshop and there, he says, 'in a corner of the shop I found the two volumes of the 1834 edition of Edwards which I bought for five shillings. I devoured these volumes and literally just read and read them. It is certainly true they helped me more than anything else'. Later he said: 'I was like the man in our Lord's parable who found a pearl of great price. Their influence upon me I cannot put into words'. In 1976 he compared the Puritans to the Alps, Luther and Calvin to the Himalayas and Jonathan Edwards to Everest.

A further move towards the Recovery came through Iain Murray at the time he was a student in Durham University. He was given a copy of the two-volume British edition of Edwards (then a rarity in the second hand market) from the daughter of a retired Methodist minister in Durham City. Iain later wrote in his biography of Jonathan Edwards, published in 1986, 'the volumes remain treasured'. By that time the Banner of Truth Trust had reprinted the 'rare' two volume set of the Works of Edwards (1974) and a new generation was beginning to appreciate his writings.

In this age of pragmatic, doctrinally vague, audience-driven, culturally uncritical Christianity there is no message more needed than that of Jonathan Edwards. He presents us with a rigorous God-centredness, with the breath-taking vision of the divine glory and a passion for advancing it. He put faithfulness to the Word of God before every other consideration and defended Reformed doctrine and practice, along with strong emphasis on experimental religion. He was the 'theologian of revival' and believed that God's appointed way of extending his kingdom was by 'cyclical revival'

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