CONCLUSION

THE LEGACY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS IN THE THEOLOGY OF ANDREW FULLER

The legacy left by Jonathan Edwards is well remembered in New England, but historians are only now beginning to discover the significance of Edwards beyond the American context.¹ This monograph has demonstrated that in addition to being “America’s Theologian”² in the eighteenth century, Edwards had significant theological impact in England and Scotland. From a British perspective, his legacy in the theology of Andrew Fuller would ultimately make him a giant in the history of modern Christianity.

Chapter 1 has established that it was Edwards who laid the philosophical foundation for Fuller to pursue a theology of the Modern Missionary Movement in the context of the Enlightenment. Chapter 2 began with the historical setting where there was a rapid decline among Baptist denominations in England—due largely to Hyper-Calvinism among Particular Baptists and Unitarians as well as deistic tendencies among General Baptists. In this situation, Fuller’s *Gospel Worthy* fell like a bombshell on the playground of theologians. It has been argued that if Carey was the ethical catalyst for the missionary awakening, Fuller was its theological stimulus. Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrated how Fuller’s theological ammunitions for this dispute relied largely on the distinctions made by Edwards in *Freedom of the Will* between ‘natural and moral inability’ and the ‘use of means.’ While Fuller did not usually give as detailed a philosophical account of natural and moral inability as did Edwards, Fuller’s distinctions are more inclined to the implications for salvation. It is as if the results of the complex mathematical formula solved by Edwards were taken to their maximum potential by Fuller and applied to the formulation of a precise theology, which became the basis for what was to become known as the Modern Missionary Movement.

² Jenson, *America’s Theologian.*
Chapter 3 continued to press the theme of Fuller and the Modern Missions. It has shown *Humble Attempt* helped spark the missionary movement when Ryland Jr. received a parcel of books from Erskine in 1784 that included *Humble Attempt*. Ryland, fully aware of the esteem in which Fuller and Sutcliff held Edwards, swiftly send them the books and thereby changed missions history. The secondary literatures have recognized the influence of *Humble Attempt* on the Prayer Call of 1784, but few have seen the role that Edwards’s eschatological optimism played in driving the British missionary enterprise. Edwards’s thinking about the end of the world depended on his interpretation of the slaying of the witnesses in Revelation 11. Some thought this implied a coming catastrophe for the church, but Edwards argued for the exact opposite in order to promote the Concert of Prayer. Edwards feared that if the slaying of the witnesses were a future event yet to be fulfilled, it would be a great “hindrance” for the Concert. But Edwards argued for an unprecedented outpouring of the Spirit of God, and a time when the whole world would embrace the light of the gospel, with Christ’s kingdom victorious against the dark world. Fuller also saw the ransacked days of the church as a thing of the past, for he interpreted the French Revolution as a crucial sign that that shook the “papal world to its centre.” The fact that *Humble Attempt* was reprinted in 1789, when the Revolution began, seemed to confirm the optimistic Edwardsean eschatology which Fuller adopted. Although Fuller did not stress immediacy in the way Edwards did, both believed the latter days would be publicly discernible, and that the current ascendancy of Protestantism, coupled with diminishing papal authority in Europe and America, were evidence of fulfillment of apocalyptic forecasts in the Book of Revelation. Chapter 3 has concluded that both Edwards and Fuller misinterpreted the biblical prophecies. Yet there is little doubt that Edwards’s eschatology inspired Fuller to promote missionary work so vigorously.

Many historians are right to say that David Brainerd’s piety functioned as a model for missionaries of the nineteenth century. They are also justified in saying that Edwards was a fountainhead of modern missions. However, Chapters 1 to 3 have demonstrated that because of the evangelistic restraint of Hyper-Calvinism, the Modern Missionary Movement might never have gotten off the ground—if it hadn’t been

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