

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Contact Information:

Rob Boss

rob@jesociety.org

www.jesociety.org

The Forgotten Edwards

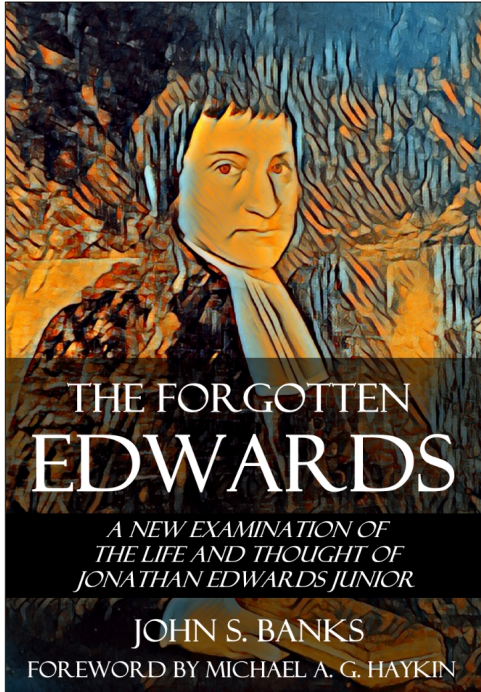
by John S. Banks

JESociety Press

978-1-7379026-1-4 / paperback / \$29.95

www.jesociety.org

New Title by John S. Banks *The Forgotten Edwards*



Jonathan Edwards Jr. (1745–1801) is well-known for his governmental theory of the atonement; however, aside from a biography produced in 1978 not much has been done to interact with his thinking on other theological matters. Further, he is often portrayed as a metaphysical preacher who drove away his congregation with cerebral abstractions. Accordingly, this received caricature also describes Edwards Jr. as distorting the Edwardsean legacy through theological innovation. This negative caricature of Edwards Jr was produced by the early liberalism of the Civil War era and has stuck to Edwards Jr. for nearly two hundred years. This treatise provides a greater interaction with primary sources, taking into account his upbringing, awakening, tragedy, pastoral challenges, as well as his actual pulpit notes.

Of particular interest to scholars will be the interaction with new source materials derived from the preaching manuscripts used in his weekly preaching ministry. Harry Stout has observed that the weekly sermon was the heart and soul of New Englanders prior to the American Revolution... Furthermore, Edwards Jr.'s systematic theology of the Holy Spirit demonstrates a received pneumatology, which is essentially the same as his father's system...

From primary documents this volume demonstrates how the younger Edwards's is important to Edwardsean study. The thinking of Hopkins, Bellamy, and Edwards Jr. are relevant as receivers of Edwards Sr.'s thinking, but also as improvers of his thoughts. Without an adequate study of his son's biography and writing, the Edwardsean theology has, at times, suffered from an apparent decline for failure to develop the thinking of the younger Edwards. This volume begins to address a lacuna in the New England Theological project.

JOHN S. BANKS is a husband to Abby, and father of five, and a pastor. He is a PhD candidate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) and holds a ThM degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, a MDiv from Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary (now with Lancaster Bible College), and MA and BA degrees from Bob Jones University. Research interests include the Atonement and New England Theology, the First and Second Great Awakenings, and American History. When he is not researching and pastoring, he enjoys small woodworking projects, home remodeling, and time with family.



Interview with John S. Banks

How did you become interested in Jonathan Edwards, Jr.?

Banks: My interest in Edwards, Jr. was initially sparked by curiosity about the Second Great Awakening in upstate New York. My upbringing in a revivalist tradition left me with many questions about what revival is and is not. Of course, the Second Great Awakening is such a vast field of study, and the awakening did not occur in a vacuum. In thinking about the pre-cursors to the Awakening, my gaze was drawn to the theological inheritors of Jonathan Edwards: Samuel Hopkins,

Joseph Bellamy, and Edwards Jr. Initially, I wanted to focus on Joseph Bellamy who was by all accounts “more winsome,” but when I discovered an untapped trove of unpublished Edwards Jr. manuscripts at Hartford Seminary, I shifted my focus. I decided to consider why he has been so neglected for such a long time. My initial survey of material pointed to a more winsome picture than what I had read in standard biographies.

Why did you choose the title *The Forgotten Edwards*?

Banks: The reason I decided on the title was two-fold. First, it is reminiscent of Ian Murray’s *Forgotten Spurgeon*. Second, Edwards Jr. has been truly forgotten by subsequent generations. As New England Theology became more progressive, the tendency to look down on their predecessors increased. In the hands of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Edwards Jr. became caricature of a kind of Calvinist boogie man that terrorized people with the wrath of God. Not only, it was claimed that he had “chased away” his congregation by preaching metaphysical sermons. But like most false caricatures, there is more to the story. Indeed, there were many factors which stressed congregations in Connecticut prior to the Awakening not least of which was the Revolution. So, when I discovered that Edwards Jr. was an early participant in the Second Great Awakening in his second congregation on the western outpost of Connecticut, I knew that Edwards Jr. had been forgotten and needed to be found again.

Did you make any surprising discoveries or have any “Ah ha!” moments?

Banks: I’m glad you asked! Most are acquainted with Robert L. Ferm’s biography of Edwards Jr., and the story of church decline is told by him; however, there are important pieces of the story which Ferm did not have or could not find. My greatest discovery came at the New Haven Historical Society and Museum where most of the White Haven Church records are held. In these church records, I found the notes of Deacon David Austin who had investigated several absentees from the Lord’s Supper. In an interview of three people, I learned that not all who had a grievance with their pastor stayed alienated from him. Some reconciled differences and then publicly affirmed Edwards Jr.’s doctrine of regeneration by the Spirit in accordance with his father’s teaching. This is a huge find. While negative news is easier to spread, news of reconciliation is much harder. Further, in a controversy over fellowship with the First Church in New Haven, there are conciliatory communications between Edwards Jr. and a group of men at White Haven who held different views. Edwards Jr. was very conciliatory and there is evidence of genuine regard for their pastor. These are important documents which validate Edwards Jr.’s character and overturns the caricature that he was simply preaching away his congregation.

An Excerpt from *The Forgotten Edwards*

The Edwardsean influence upon his “New Divinity” followers was extensive. The emphasis on the Spirit in Edwards Sr.’s writings was shared broadly throughout New England. The New England Theology preserved by men like Jonathan Edwards Jr. became a repository for the reformed ministers to participate in the political conflict with Britain. Gradually, a desire for the glory of God and benevolence also sowed seeds for the coming abolition movement. Even in “Old England” prominent evangelical Calvinists like Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, William Carey, and John Erskine had expressed an appreciation for the New England Theology. In a letter on March 16, 1787 to his friend, John Ryland Jr. across the sea, Edwards Jr. spoke of the influence of his father and Dr. Bellamy’s writings in his state:

I believe a majority of the ministers in Connecticut, mean to be on the plan of my father and Dr. Bellamy: and most of the young ministers and students in divinity are inclined to that plan. There have been several places during the late war, and since the war, general religious Awakenings, which have terminated in the hopeful conversion of a goodly number.

In this brief excerpt is found not only a picture of Edwards Jr. attempt to keep in step with his father’s divinity, but also a sincere desire for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on New England again. Within a few years, he would participate along with Timothy Dwight and others, in the early rains of the Second Great Awakening in the late 1790s.

Through this research, Edwards Jr. seems to be vindicated a faithful inheritor of his father's pneumatology, not only in his mentoring, but also in his occasional and weekly sermons. Both men were thoroughly sensitive to the Holy Spirit in their youth and both became prominent scholars. Both father and son were men who were devoted to the religion of the heart, even though they were both gifted with such a strong intellect. When Tryon Edwards recounts that his grandfather's "preaching became less metaphysical and argumentative, and more experimental and tender," he likely alludes to the pastoral struggles he had with Ebenezer Beardslee in New Haven. Yet, the evidence demonstrates that a transition to Colebrook did not necessarily change the style or content of his preaching. Indeed, multiple manuscripts bear record of their provenience in New Haven and their reuse in Colebrook. While certainly a person's disposition in preaching can change with a new context and a fresh audience, the primary documents show a remarkable consistency throughout his twenty-nine years of preaching. His doctrinal content and dependence upon the Holy Spirit seemed to have remained the same.

Much of the mid-nineteenth century biography of Edwards Jr. tends to be skewed toward the mood of the nation in the mid-nineteenth century. Nathan Hatch showed how the nineteenth century moved to embrace a Jacksonian philosophy of individualism. This shift produced strong fractures in the old clerical authority that Edwards Jr. would have assumed. The seeds of this anti-clericalism were very present in Edwards Jr.'s own White Haven Church in the generation that preceded him and bloomed again in his own ministry. Coupled with the pressures of a post-Revolution inflationary crisis and a westward land boom, these and other pressures affected every church in Connecticut. Edwards Jr. was not exempt from these issues. Loss and suffering, especially early in one's life, can also contribute to one's personality. Pushing through the trauma of the frontier violence, loss of nuclear family to the pox, and his young wife to drowning could impress upon others a kind of austerity. Yet, in spite of these challenges, those who knew him well understood that he battled the perfectionist tendency and that he was yet affable and gentle.

There is much more work that can be done in the comparative theology of Edwards Jr. Since his personal mission seems to have been to preserve his father's legacy, a case could be made that he did not change his father's view of penal atonement theory to a great degree. In particular, more study could be done to discover how Edwards the younger refined his father's trinitarianism and atonement theory so as to safeguard the historic Calvinistic penal substitution theory from the reaches of antinomianism and incipient Arminianism. The younger Edwards, like his father, was more than capable of holding two seemingly contradictory elements in view and reconciling them in a way that others after could not. And while this volume cannot begin to explore this method in atonement thinking, the potential for further study is now justified.

Again, while Edwards Jr. is more well-known for his governmental atonement theory, or his apologetic works against Universalism, these should not distract scholars from the younger Edwards's concern for the Spirit which *pervades* his unpublished sermons. Specifically, this research has attempted to show that Edwards Jr. was a worthy successor, contrary to the inherited caricature, in the reception of an Edwardsean pneumatology. If not the direct object of his effort in the printing press, the younger knew how necessary the Spirit was for true religion to flourish in his congregation and in his own theological production. (145–47)

Praise for *The Forgotten Edwards*

The "other" Jonathan Edwards has never received the attention his work as New Haven pastor, dedicated theologian, and interpreter of his famous father's legacy deserves. With especially fruitful use of the younger Edwards' manuscript sermons, this carefully researched book goes a long way to redress that undeserved neglect.

—**Mark Noll**, author of
In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783

Jonathan Edwards, Jr. played a crucial but still largely unappreciated role as a conduit of his father's varied legacies. In this fine study by an up-and-coming scholar, that role is paid respect and Edwards Jr.'s own honor and legacy are defended against their critics, past and present. Many thanks to John Banks for coloring in our understanding of the Edwardsean tradition in Revolutionary America.

—**Douglas A. Sweeney**, Dean, Beeson Divinity School
Samford University

This study offers an engaging account of a pastor and divine whose career included an early exposure to missions among Mohican and Mohawks, public debates about the culture of reason and Calvinism, the American Revolution, contestations over the abolition of slavery, and changes in the practice of collegiate education in New England. Based on deep original archival research and a solid grasp on current scholarship, it brings to life the complications and tensions in the career of the namesake son of Jonathan Edwards. In so doing, it gives us a humane and lucid narrative of theology and its relation to social life when America became a nation.

—**Mark Valeri**, The Reverend Priscilla Wood Neaves Distinguished Professor
John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics
Washington University in St. Louis

Jonathan Edwards Jr. has remained entirely in his father's shadow. Moreover, there are also negative prejudices regarding his person and preaching. He is seen as a spiritless preacher under whom the spiritual life in the church was decreasing. Often he is only known for his moral government theory of atonement. Is this justified? Who was Jonathan Edwards Jr who lost his father at the age of thirteen? John Banks has done us a great service by researching the life, theology and spirituality of the young Edwards. It turns out that he made an impression as a preacher in his day and that—like his father—he lived by the vital piety of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. In his strength of thought he was not inferior to his father. His public significance in regard to the American Revolution and the advocacy of the abolition of slavery was great. A new world opens up to us in this study.

—**Willem van Vlastuin**, Chair of Theology and Spirituality of Reformed
Protestantism in the Faculty of Religion and Theology
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Through skillful archival work and in-depth research, John Banks dispels a common caricature of Jonathan Edwards Jr. *The Forgotten Edwards* presents the Younger Edwards as, rather than representing a significant deviation from his father's theology, in numerous respects, being a faithful disciple and developer of it. Banks chronicles several cases where Edwards Jr. augmented and extended areas where his father was silent. A case in point is the issue of slavery. Historians like to speculate counterfactually: "What if Edwards Sr. lived long enough to see the budding of the movement that eventually ended slavery?" His son's teachings on abolitionism and activism may be the key to such an inquiry. This new biographical sketch of Edwards Jr. rightly underscores his father's growing uneasiness towards the slave trade and demonstrates how his son's advocacy for abolition was actually underpinned by his father's thoughts.

—**Chris Chun**, Director of Jonathan Edwards Center
Professor of Church History
Gateway Seminary

This fresh interpretation of Jonathan Edwards Jr. is situated deep in primary sources and archival work. Banks's work points the way to a new appreciation of Edwards Jr., and provides a standard for stripping away the tired, old interpretations of the New Divinity as impersonal metaphysicians who cared more about doctrinal coherence than piety, revival, and pastoral care. While recognizing minor differences between Edwards Jr. and his famous father, Banks shows us that they shared far more in common than is generally recognized.

—**Robert W. Caldwell III**, Professor of Church History
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Will we ever see a resurgence of interest in the history of New England Theology? If we see more works like this one, we may. Banks' treatment of Jonathan Edwards Jr. is wind in the sails to those of us who continue to explore the darker corners of the development of the New England mind. A healthy deposit on what will doubtless be a profitable future in Christian scholarship, Banks' *The Forgotten Edwards* offers readers a detailed blend of historical and theological inquiry wrapped up in an artful prose.

—**S. Mark Hamilton**, Research Associate, JESociety

With an array of letters, sermon notes, diary entries, and other primary sources, John Banks offers a compelling alternative to the prevailing narrative of the “disconnect and decline” between Jonathan Edwards Sr. and Jr. Wiping away some of the historiographical haze, Banks presents a theologian and philosopher whose thinking was consistent with, not counter to, his legendary father’s. Since Joseph Haroutunian’s biting critique of the New Divinity and even long before, the exact relationship between Edwards and the Edwardseans has long been scrutinized. This book takes us a step closer to understanding that complex relationship, as Edwards Jr. can be easily caricaturized and may not have been the “spiritless” and unintelligible preacher that so many have painted him to be.

—**Obbie Tyler Todd**, Pastor of Third Baptist Church of Marion, Illinois and
Adjunct Faculty at Luther Rice College & Seminary

It has long been assumed that discontinuity existed between “America’s Theologian,” Jonathan Edwards, and his son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr. Grappling with troves of new manuscripts, John Banks offers a new perspective on their relationship that was both Edwards, Jr.’s theological and intellectual inheritance from his father. With a new, collective sum of Edwards, Jr.’s work, Banks showcases a new account of Edwards, Jr.’s thought as one of equal prowess to his father within the realms of philosophy and theology. Likewise, Banks argues for a consistency between the two Edwards men which has thought to be contrary to this point. With a host of fresh primary source material, Banks propels Edwards, Jr. into new light, and brings clarity to the complex relationship Edwards had with his father. Therefore, Banks has righted the ship from old vestiges into a clearer understanding of Edwards’ legacy and the narratives of the New England Theological tradition.

—**John T. Lowe**, PhD Candidate, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Adjunct Professor, University of Louisville

John S. Banks’s *The Forgotten Edwards* is a model study of unpublished and largely unknown manuscripts, in the case of Jonathan Edwards, Jr., over 1200 works. Readers of American religious history will be interested in Banks’s argument that the younger Edwards sought to be a spirited preacher, not, as he has often been portrayed, a logician of American Calvinism. Students of American abolitionism will benefit from Banks’s demonstration that the younger Edwards’s best known publication, his attack on the slave trade and the institution of slavery, was not only a reflection of an antislavery consensus among a core of Edwards’s heirs but also a part of a cycle of sermons preached on the Sermon on the Mount, casting this important pamphlet in a new light for historians. Scholars of early American literature will learn from Banks’s careful reconstruction of the textual history of the younger Edwards’s sermons for condemned men Joseph Mountain and Moses Paul. All these advances, which are qualitatively different from rehashing old debates, were possible because Banks worked in the archives on a corpus of rarely studied manuscripts. Bravo!

—**John Saillant**, Professor of English and History
Chair of the Department of English
Western Michigan University

