

The Life Of Brainerd and The State Of The Church

One approach to questions of ecclesiology is through the application of word studies: the use of the word *ἐκκλησία* in the book of Acts meaning 'gathering', for example, or the language of the 'temple of the Spirit' in Paul's letters to the Corinthians. An equally reductionist line is run when appeal is made to Matthew 18:20: 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them', suggesting at first glance that finding the church requires nothing more than a basic grasp of maths and the coincidental collocation of two or three believers. This text actually reassures *leaders* of the church, perhaps just two or three, of their authority to bind or to loose after they have brought a matter to the attention of the church, the group which consists of a much larger number than the leadership. Isolated Bible verses which appeal to biblical theology in scope are also prone to misuse: 'Christ is the head of the church' (Col 1:18) can be misconstrued to rule out Christ's rule of the world, an idea appearing in a previous verse (Col 1:15).

A better foundation upon which to build ecclesiology is more exacting and therefore challenging because it involves the process of coordinating other doctrines: if we are the body of Christ, debates concerning *Christology* will have profound impact on our expectations of church, as will debates concerning *eschatology*, because the purposes for which God made this world will at some level be reflected in the ways in which the church promotes God's good plans. As the concrete expression of both Christ's body and mission, the doctrine of church has both fixed and flexible elements, and is at the intersection of the mind of God, the life of God and the benefits of God bestowed on the people of God. Ecclesiology is necessarily a cumulative and synthetic doctrine.

The Life of Brainerd is a compilation by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) of the diary and journal of the eighteenth century missionary to the North American Indians, David Brainerd (1718-1747). It is a series of highly introspective, often depressing, and always provocative entries by an man orphaned in his youth, suffering both from the physical effects of tuberculosis as well as the misguided remedies of 18th century medicine¹, but who nevertheless perseveres in his task of bringing the Gospel to indigenous peoples and sees some 80 converted. His calling to the Stockbridge, Delaware and Susquehanna tribes² was brought on by his expulsion from Yale (in 1741-42 due to attendance at a revival meeting and the private indiscretion of comparing a graceless chair with a

¹ For example the idea that riding horseback over uneven ground could cure consumption!

² As listed on his tombstone

graceless tutor!) which impaired preparation for a settled parochial ministry, the model of John Eliot ('Apostle to the Indians') in the seventeenth century, youthful earnestness (he died at the age of 29), and the belief that a revival of religion amongst the indigenous peoples would accelerate the return of Christ and the coming of the millennium. Explicit references in the *Life* to doctrinal matters generally, and issues of ecclesiology more particularly, are few and fleeting.

Despite apparently poor prospects, it is my contention in this paper that *The Life of Brainerd* actually does give important insights into the doctrine of the church as it developed through the 1740s, both as a result of the revival of religion in New England and the conditions of thought generated both by the Enlightenment and by North American geography and sociology. Significantly, it presents not only *Brainerd's* private reflections on his missionary endeavours but also, through polemical editing by *Edwards*, provides a contribution to eighteenth century debates on theology, ministry and mission. *Edwards'* own Preface and Appendix, along with the heading "Account of the Life" in large print on the title page marginalizing the smaller print "Chiefly taken from his own Diary and other private writings, written for his own use" mark this as distinctly Edwardsean. I shall proceed by outlining in more depth how this volume does **not** approach the doctrine of church head-on, but how nevertheless it functions as a companion volume to *Edwards' Religious Affections* (1746) by providing a mirror-reading of issues in ecclesiology. *The Life of Brainerd* opens doors onto issues concerning the life and ministry of the church in mid 18th century New England.

A Distance from ecclesiological themes

1 The danger of liminal encounters setting an agenda

One of the first objections raised to *Brainerd* providing insight into ecclesiology comes from its setting: though there are indeed diary entries in Parts I, II, and III which reflect on *Brainerd's* life in established colonial society, these actually form just one quarter of the work. As the major part of the work relates his reflections on ministry to the Indians of Kaunaumeeek, Crossweeksung, and Susquehanna, these incidents and their context are at a distance both geographically and culturally from the life of settled clergy in New England and the Middle Colonies. Though the distance in miles may not appear to us to be significant, for a man both sick and single to traverse such dangerous territory on horseback does reinforce in his own mind the liminal encounters he faces. These Indian contacts were located in the dense and uninviting forests, mountains and foothills of the Appalachian chain, forming the border between English and French

spheres of influence, which between 1756 and 1763 would explode into colonial fighting known as the Seven Years' War (to the Europeans) or the French and Indian Wars (to the Americans). Brainerd acknowledges the difficulty of his conditions:

Wednesday, May 18 [1743]. My circumstances are such that I have no comfort of any kind but what I have in God. I live in the most lonesome wilderness; have but one single person to converse with, that can speak English ... I have no fellow Christian to whom I might unbosom myself and lay open my spiritual sorrows, and with whom I might take sweet counsel in conversation about heavenly things, and join in social prayer. I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life: most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, and my labour is hard and extremely difficult; and I have little appearance of success to comfort me. The Indian affairs are very difficult; having no land to live on, but what the Dutch people lay claim to, and threaten to drive them off from; they have no regard to the souls of the poor Indians; and by what I can learn, they hate me because I come to preach to 'em. But that which makes all my difficulties grievous to be born is that "God hides his face from me" [Job 13:24].³

Not only is this experience at the edge of the known world, it is also at the edge of acceptable ministry structures. The Protestant world had not yet fully grasped the need for new structures to cope with new conditions for mission, unlike the Roman Catholic world which through the Jesuit order and the maritime experience of Portugal in particular had more successfully pursued a missiological agenda in the sixteenth century, for example Francis Xavier's endeavours in the East Indies, Japan and China⁴. Despite the fact that the colonisation of New England had at least in part been driven by the missiological desire both to evangelise the indigenous population (witness the seal of the Massachusetts Bay colony based on the Macedonian man's appeal in Acts 16:9 'Come over and help us') and to provide a model to Old England of a Christian commonwealth using the image of the 'city upon a hill', early attempts at mission amongst the North American Indians had not been spectacularly successful. As Carpenter points out:

Like most Protestants, the Puritans had not developed the church structures to carry out mission ... Though they had the highest percentage of clergy to populace in the European world, they were handicapped by their assumption that a true minister must have a church ... It is easy to look back and assume that Protestants should have intuitively known how

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 7; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 207.

⁴ Andrew F. Walls, 'The Eighteenth-Century Protestant Missionary Awakening in Its European Context', in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment* (ed. B. Stanley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 27

to organize missions structures and go about the work; but in reality, the lessons we take for granted today had to be hard won.⁵

It is furthermore often assumed that the centre will make an impact upon the periphery, and not as often happened in the revival of religion in the eighteenth century for the periphery to have a formative impact on the centre. The Moravians from the frontier of the Empire impacted the Wesleys, minority groups like the Welsh or the Silesians facing assimilation from a majority culture provided models of revival, and the conversion of North American Indians gave hope to the sponsoring churches in Scotland that God's favour upon the Protestant cause was not yet extinguished.⁶ It would be mistaken to come to Brainerd's writing without the capacity to see the ways in which we can learn about the doctrine of the church from his experiences *in extremis*.

2 The weight of quietistic piety

Perhaps a more significant feature of *Brainerd* which works against our expectation of discovering ecclesiology in the text is the sheer weight of entries which have as their focus not external events but internal reactions to the conditions of life and ministry. This work presents a model of piety, not so much a programme of ecclesiastical reform or a platform for church growth. Indeed, the reflections are not just personal but excessively introspective and often imbalanced. The disinterested *benevolence* which became the hallmark of virtue for Christians engaged in mission in the nineteenth century can at times appear like self-absorbed *malevolence* towards the missionary himself:

Monday, July 2 [1744]. Had some relish of the divine comforts of yesterday; but could not get that warmth and exercise of faith that I desired. Had sometimes a distressing sense of my past follies and present ignorance and barrenness: And especially in the afternoon, was sunk down under a load of sin and guilt, in that I have lived so little to God after his abundant goodness to me yesterday. In the evening, though very weak, was enabled to pray with fervency and to continue instant in prayer near an hour. My soul mourned over the power of its corruption, and longed exceedingly to be "washed" and "purged as with hyssop" [Ps 51:7]. Was enabled to pray for my dear absent friends, Christ's ministers, and his church; and enjoyed much freedom and fervency, but not so much comfort, by reason of guilt and shame before God. Judged and condemned myself for the follies of the day.⁷

⁵ J.B. Carpenter. 'New England Puritans: The Grandparents of Modern Protestant Missions'. *Missiology: an international review* 30/4 (2002): 519-532.

⁶ W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 46, 310-314, 317

⁷ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 258.

Friday, September 5 [1746]. Was exceeding weak so that I could scarcely ride; it seemed sometimes as if I must fall off from my horse and lie in the open woods: However, got to Shamokin towards night: Felt something of a spirit of thankfulness that God had so far returned me: Was refreshed to see one of my Christians whom I left here in my late excursion.

Saturday, September 6 [1746]. Spent the day in a very weak state; coughing and spitting blood, and having little appetite to any food I had with me: Was able to do very little except discourse a while of divine things to my own people and to some few I met with. Had, by this time, very little life or heart to speak for God, through feebleness of body and flatness of spirits. Was scarcely ever more ashamed and confounded in myself, than now...⁸

One of the remarkable emphases of the work is how little the objective atoning death of Christ is pondered, or how much the sufferings of Christ are meditated upon: Edwards wants to distance himself and Brainerd from the imbalanced Moravian piety of *Blut und Wunden*. Nevertheless, Edwards in his *Appendix* alerts us to the subjective way that Brainerd finds reassurance:

I find no one instance of a strong impression on his imagination through his whole life: no instance of a strongly impressed idea of any external glory or brightness, of any bodily form or shape, any beautiful majestic countenance: no imaginary sight of Christ hanging on the cross with blood streaming from his wounds; or seated in heaven on a bright throne with angels and saints bowing before him; or with a countenance smiling on him; or arms open to embrace him: no sight of heaven, in his imagination, with gates of pearl and golden streets, and vast multitudes of glorious inhabitants with shining garments; no sight of the Book of Life opened with his name written in it: no hearing of the sweet music made by the songs of the heavenly hosts; no hearing God or Christ immediately speaking to him; nor any sudden suggestions of words or sentences, either words of Scripture or any other, as then immediately spoken or sent to him: no new objective revelations, no sudden strong suggestions of secret facts ... But the way he was satisfied of his own good estate, even to the entire abolishing of fear, was by feeling within himself the lively actings of a holy temper and heavenly disposition, the vigorous exercises of that divine love which casts out fear: This was the way he had full satisfaction soon after his conversion ... And we find no other way of satisfaction through his whole life afterward.⁹

It is indeed a commonplace to see the theological distinctive of the eighteenth century revivals in their commitment to regeneration, sanctification, and mission: subjective assurances of conversion became increasingly important. It is not that Brainerd has no appreciation of objective assurance in Christ (as the following quotation makes clear), it is just that being taken for granted it plays a smaller role in his diary:

⁸ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 424.

⁹ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 503-504.

In the afternoon, endeavoured to open the glorious provision God has made for the redemption of apostate creatures by giving his own dear Son to suffer for them and satisfy divine justice on their behalf.¹⁰

Despite the emotional intensity of the work, indeed perhaps because of it, this account of Brainerd's life went on to be the most reproduced edition of all Edwards' works in the 19th century, providing a manual for cross-cultural mission and a model of piety taken up by leading figures in missions, for example William Carey and Henry Martyn.¹¹ There were even translations into German by Fresenius and Steinmetz in the decade after it was published.¹² This work did indeed have an enormous impact on the church and its expectations for ministry from the time of its publication and in succeeding centuries.

3 The ambiguity of an edited collection

Although the substance of the work is by David Brainerd himself, it comes to us as a whole through the editorial hand of Edwards, his mentor. Indeed, Brainerd spent the last few days of his life at the Edwards' home in Northampton, being tended by one of Jonathan and Sarah's daughters, Jerusha. She had previously served Brainerd in his sickness while he was incapacitated in Boston, and when she died she was buried next to him in the cemetery in Northampton, such was the apparent affection she had for him. Brainerd's life was closely connected to Edwards', so it comes as no surprise to learn that Brainerd gave Jonathan the responsibility upon his death to publish his diary, though he had previously been reticent to release its contents. Edwards actually postponed other writing projects to see this material through to publication.

While we may be thankful that Brainerd's diary has been preserved, we must nevertheless be careful in how we approach it. Edwards has selected entries he deemed worthy of a wider readership by leaving out altogether some of Brainerd's most private thoughts, which he has sifted through his theological grid. He has added commentary along the way to explain events or his rationale for inclusion, changed particular words, and has book-ended the material with his own *Author's preface*, and *Some further remains of the Rev. Mr. David Brainerd, An appendix containing some reflections and observations on the preceding memoirs of Mr. Brainerd*, and *A sermon preached on the day of the funeral of the*

¹⁰ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 375.

¹¹ J. Conforti. 'Jonathan Edwards's Most Popular Work: *The Life of David Brainerd* and Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Culture'. *Church History* 54/2 (1985): 188-201.

¹² Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 275

Rev. Mr. David Brainerd. The Yale edition of *The Life of Brainerd* then includes some correspondence related to Brainerd's ministry.

Using the book as a source of insights into mid eighteenth century ecclesiology is potentially difficult. This does not mean there is no contribution to a doctrine of the church accessible to us here, only that we have to dig more carefully to find them. Edwards makes his own intentions clear:

He showed himself almost invincibly averse to the publishing of any part of his diary after his death; and when he was thought to be dying at Boston, gave the most strict peremptory orders to the contrary: but being by some of his friends there prevailed upon to withdraw so strict and absolute a prohibition, he was pleased finally to yield so far as that his papers should be left in my hands, *that I might dispose of them as I thought would be most for God's glory and the interest of religion.*¹³[italics mine]

His [Brainerd's] conversion was plainly founded in a clear, strong conviction, and undoubting persuasion, of the truth of those things appertaining to these doctrines which Arminians most object against, and which his own mind had contended most about ... And if his conversion was any real conversion, or anything besides a mere whim, and if the religion of his life was anything else but a series of freaks of a whimsical mind, then this one grand principle, on which depends the whole difference between Calvinists and Arminians, is undeniable, viz., that the grace or virtue of truly good men not only differs from the virtue of others in degree, but even in nature and kind.¹⁴

Though the ministry context of Brainerd, his descriptions of personal piety, and the editorial hand of Edwards may seem to distance this volume from a working contribution to debates of ecclesiology, they each provide a new angle through which such debates can be located. In fact, they might be just the vernacular through which eighteenth century debates concerning the church are expressed.

B Proximity to ecclesiological themes

1 Brainerd's expectations of those converted

Competing Christian spheres of influence in eighteenth century North America brought different experiences to those contacted or converted. It was not just that the Indians had to decide between the folk religion of the powwow and the Christian Gospel, they also had to decide between the rival claimants to Christian hegemony – the French Roman Catholic missionaries, traders and soldiers west of the Appalachians navigating south on the Mississippi, and the European Protestant (in some instances

¹³ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 96.

¹⁴ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 522-523.

English and Puritan) colonisers, landholders and educators along the Atlantic coastal plain. From a European perspective, winning the Indians was strategic militarily, as James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* makes so clear. Not surprisingly, these encounters generated moral dilemmas: entrepreneurs were encouraged to speak the Gospel as they travelled to find new markets or to source furs, food and labour, presenting a conflict of interests both to those offering and those receiving their ministrations. Bringing 'civilisation to the natives' might offer new economic and educational opportunities, but more often could destroy traditional cultures and languages, disperse tribes from their ancestral lands, and introduce disease, vice and anomie into village life.

However, the very attempts to bring the Gospel to the indigenous peoples of the north-east reflect significant theological as much as imperial motivation. When the Puritans made efforts to preach the problem of human sinfulness and its solution in redemption only through the name of Christ, they were treating Indians with dignity and equality. Not to preach sin and salvation in this way would have been to deny that Indians were of the same stuff as the remainder of the human race. The conversion of Indians demonstrated God's acceptance of them. Though there was amongst some Christians the belief that North American Indians had been trapped by the Devil in a continent as yet unreached by the Gospel, this did not obviate their need as men and women made in the image of God to hear Christian proclamation on the same basis and terms as the English themselves had heard it when still living in pagan darkness. Alongside preaching, Puritans also expected that the Indians be treated as equals by including them under the laws of the land and its economic system, though not at the expense of their language and survival. John Eliot's Praying Towns of the seventeenth century and Brainerd's similar model in the eighteenth attest their desire not for absolute integration, but rather separation for the sake of spiritual independence. Carpenter makes the point:

Mission for the Puritans required far more than a few missionaries; it demanded the transplantation of a whole social system. For Puritans, since missions was the extension of God's rule ... it was more than church planting and certainly far more than individual conversions. They envisioned, since they assumed all people were made in the image of God, a united civil-ecclesial community. Of course, their holistic approach to mission opens up the Puritans to criticism for using religion for political ends.¹⁵

¹⁵ J.B. Carpenter. 'Puritan Missions as Globalization'. *Fides et historia* 31/2 (1999): 103-123.

It is with this in mind that we are given access to more of Brainerd's ecclesiology than at first appears. He has high standards and great hopes for the Indians and their Christian obedience. As quoted in his *Journal*, from which Edwards excerpts material regarded as significant to include in the *Life*, Brainerd writes:

Friday, August 24 [1745] ... Spent the forenoon in discoursing to some of the Indians, in order to their receiving the ordinance of baptism. When I had opened the nature of the ordinance, the obligations attending it, the duty of devoting ourselves to God in it, and the privilege of being in covenant with him, sundry of them seemed to be filled with love to God, and delighted with the thoughts of giving up themselves to him in that solemn and public manner, melted and refreshed with the hopes of enjoying the blessed Redeemer.¹⁶

April 7 [1746]. Discoursed to my people at evening from 1 Cor. 11:23-26. And endeavoured to open to them the institution, nature, and ends of the Lord's Supper, as well as the qualifications and preparations necessary to the right participation of that ordinance. Sundry persons appeared much affected with the love of Christ manifested in his making this provision for the comfort of his people, at a season when himself was just entering upon his sharpest afflictions.¹⁷

Such Reformed preparation was both to treat the Indians with great respect, and to acknowledge the work which the Lord had been doing amongst them even if Brainerd was uncomfortable with some of the outward means of expression:

But of all the sights I ever saw among them [on Juniata Island], or indeed anywhere else, none appeared so frightful or so near akin to what is usually imagined of infernal powers; none ever excited such images of terror in my mind, as the appearance of one who was a devout and zealous reformer, or rather restorer, of what was supposed was the ancient religion of the Indians ... When he came near me I could not but shrink away from him, although it was then noonday, and I knew who it was ... At length, he says, God comforted his heart and showed him what he should do; and since that time he had known God and tried to serve him; and loved all men, be they who they would, so as he never did before. He treated me with uncommon courtesy, and seemed to be hearty in it. And I was told by the Indians that he opposed their drinking strong liquor with all his power ... He seemed to be sincere, honest and conscientious in his own way, and according to his own religious notions, which was more than I ever saw in any other pagan: And I perceived he was looked upon and derided amongst most of the Indians as a precise zealot that made a needless noise about religious matters. But I must say, there was something in his temper and disposition that looked more like true religion than anything I ever observed amongst other heathens.¹⁸

¹⁶ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 317.

¹⁷ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 381.

¹⁸ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 329-330.

For the first time in a millennium, Christians were living as neighbours with unbelievers, not having to cross oceans to minister amongst them. However, despite the innovation of Brainerd's support and sending, he maintained an understanding of church not dissimilar from his Puritan forebears. His expectations of Indian converts was not unlike what he desired for Anglo-American converts as well. As Wall summarises:

Not surprisingly, the early Protestant movement, which was principally evangelical in character, initially brought to the non-Western world the same message and the same methods that it brought to the nominally Christian world which produced evangelical radicalism. And it expected the responses (and evangelicals had plenty of experience within Christendom of hostile or indifferent response) to be along the same lines.¹⁹

2 The value of means in promoting mission

A new stage in missions was however dawning: that God would use various and innovative *means* to reach the heathen was emphasised by William Carey in his tract of 1792, but had previously been pioneered for example in the writings and exertions of the German Pietists in the Tranquebar mission in South India and in the encounter between indigenous Americans and the European colonisers earlier in the eighteenth century. Money for Brainerd's work had been raised in large part overseas through the efforts of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (organised in 1701 and chartered by Queen Anne in 1709); the Society in London for Propagating the Gospel in New England and Parts Adjacent, whose commissioners in Boston Brainerd corresponded with, was also keen to place two missionaries amongst the Indians of the Six Nations. Mention has been made also of the townships based around Brainerd's own cottage, which provided an opportunity to minister from within an Indian community, without expecting the Indians first to receive civilisation in the cities as preparation for Christian conversion:

December 31 [1746]. Spent some hours this day in visiting my people from house to house, and conversing with them about their spiritual concerns; endeavouring to press upon Christless souls the necessity of a renovation of the heart: And scarce left a house without leaving some or other of its inhabitants in tears, appearing solicitously engaged to obtain an interest in Christ. The Indians are now gathered together from all quarters to this place, and have built them little cottages, so that more than twenty families

¹⁹ Andrew F. Walls, 'Missions and Historical Memory: Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd', in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (ed. D.W. Kling, Douglas A. Sweeney; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 248-265.

live within a quarter of a mile of me. A very convenient situation in regard both of public and private instruction.²⁰

Another striking feature of Brainerd's diary is the number of friends and ministerial colleagues with whom he stays or from whom he seeks the opportunity of recuperation in his many sicknesses. He frequently returns to New York, Long Island, or Boston to consult with his sponsors, to seek aid, and to refresh his ailing body and spirit. Indeed, Pettitt in his introduction to the Yale edition of *Brainerd* enumerates these figures under the headings "Family", "Evangelists", "Adversaries", "Friends", "Associates" and "Confidants".²¹ It is a dizzying constellation. It is not just that Brainerd seeks their company, but also covets their prayers, both while he is with them and when he is away. Edwards himself had just published in 1748 his landmark work on the links between prayer, revival and mission under the title *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*. Brainerd exemplifies the connections between the means of finance, prayer, revival and the right preparation of missionaries, as Edwards points out:

As there is much in Mr. Brainerd's life to encourage Christians to seek the advancement of Christ's kingdom in general; so there is, in particular, to pray for the conversion of the Indians *on this continent*, and to *exert themselves in the use of proper means* for its accomplishment. For it appears that he, in his unutterable longings and wrestlings of the soul for the flourishing of religion, had his mind peculiarly intent on the conversion and salvation of these people, and his heart more especially engaged in prayer for them. And if we consider the degree and manner in which he from time to time sought and hoped for an extensive work of grace among them, I think we have reason to hope that the wonderful things which God wrought among them by him are but a forerunner of something yet much more glorious and extensive of that kind; and thus may justly be an encouragement to well-disposed charitable persons to "honour the Lord with their substance" [Prov. 3:9] by *contributing as they are able*, to promote the spreading of the Gospel among them; and this also may incite and encourage gentlemen who are incorporated and entrusted with the care and disposal of those liberal benefactions which have already been made by pious persons to that end; and likewise the missionaries themselves that are or may be employed; and it may be of direction unto both as to the *proper qualifications* of missionaries and the *proper measure* to be taken in order to their success.²²[italics mine]

He seemed much to wonder that there appeared no more of a disposition in ministers and people to pray for the flourishing of religion through the world. And particularly he several times expressed his wonder that there

²⁰ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 350-351.

²¹ Norman Pettitt, 'Editor's Introduction', in Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 32-71.

²² Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 533.

appeared no more forwardness to comply with the proposal lately made from Scotland for united extraordinary prayer among God's people for the coming of Christ's kingdom, and sent it as his dying advice to his own congregation that they should practice [sic] agreeable to that proposal.²³

No longer was the mission of God distinct from the mission of the church.²⁴ Edwards' final prayer in the *Appendix* makes of Brainerd's individual example a means of future revival:

The Lord grant also that the foregoing account of Mr. Brainerd's life and death may be for the great spiritual benefit of all that shall read it, and prove a happy means of promoting the revival of true religion in these parts of the world. Amen.²⁵

Revival in itself however was not an ends, but a means to the arrival of the millennial kingdom. The conversion of the Indians was the most proximate step towards the defeat of the Antichrist, and all that held back the coming of the kingdom:

Brainerd's self-sacrificing missionary zeal and Edwards' wider activism must be understood in the context of their earthly optimism. Edwards' theology was not simply philosophical reflections growing out of his contemplations of God and a heavenly eternity. Rather, since it was always refracted through Scripture, it was grounded in a breathtaking historical perspective that provided incentive for unflagging evangelical action ... In reckoning the progress towards Christ's kingdom, Edwards did not draw any sharp line between the spiritual and the political. The work of David Brainerd, the Concert of Prayer, and the war with the French and their Indian allies were all of one piece. The spread of the Gospel was the pre-eminent goal, but he never doubted that one precondition was Protestant military success against "papal" regimes.²⁶

3 An inductive approach to identifying true faith

In the evangelical revivals of the eighteenth century, the language of visibility is used frequently to attest the veracity of truth claims²⁷, just as Jesus had said that his disciples will be known 'by their fruits' (Matthew 7:20). While a forensic declaration has no necessary visible outcome, the organic nature of the new birth must surely be witnessed through human senses. Edwards had been dismissed from his pastorate in

²³ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 551.

²⁴ Carpenter. 'Puritan Missions as Globalization'. 119.

²⁵ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 541.

²⁶ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 334, 338. The mention of the Concert of Prayer refers to a united attempt in New England and Great Britain to establish regular prayer meetings for a number of years in advance to petition God for the revival of religion.

²⁷ Note for example the title of Edwards' appeal for the Concert of Prayer: 'An humble attempt to promote *explicit* agreement and *visible* union ...' [italics mine]

Northampton because of his insistence that a profession of faith be supplemented by a narrative of grace in an individual's life. Many of Edwards' writings of the 1740s take up the controversy surrounding the character and fruit of those converted in the Awakening, and defend the work of God despite the 'enthusiasm' of some of the separatists. What kind of experience and fruit would surely attest a work of God in a human life?

This inductive method, generated both by the positive appreciation of human experience in the Enlightenment, and by the confusion caused when leaders witnessed people who so quickly fell away, lay at the heart of the treatise *Religious Affections* (1746) which Edwards had published not long before Brainerd arrived at the Edwards' home preparing to die. Indeed, Edwards' *The Life of Brainerd* becomes a spiritual biography embodying the very principles which *Religious Affections* teaches. Edwards presents Brainerd as a man of great perseverance despite incapacity, prayer despite doubt, self-sacrifice despite meagre resources. In many ways, Edwards is less interested in the nature of the mission amongst the Indians than in the example which Brainerd gives of a pious life:

How greatly Mr. Brainerd's religion differed from that of some pretenders to the experience of a *clear work* of saving conversion wrought on their hearts...

The foregoing account of Mr. Brainerd's life may afford matter of conviction that there is indeed such a thing as true experimental religion, arising from immediate divine influences ...

The preceding history serves to confirm those doctrines usually called the "doctrines of grace" ...

Is there not much in the preceding memoirs of Mr. Brainerd to teach, and to excite to duty, us who are called to the work of the ministry, and all that are candidates for that great work? ...

The foregoing account of Mr. Brainerd's life may afford instruction to Christians in general; as it shows, in many respects, the right way of practicing [sic] religion in order to obtaining the ends of it and receiving the benefits of it ...

There is much in the preceding account to excite and encourage God's people to earnest prayers and endeavors [sic] for the advancement and enlargement of the kingdom of Christ in the world ...²⁸

It is only at the end of this long section that Edwards remarks upon the more pointedly missionary impact of Brainerd's life. This was actually not his chief concern:

For Edwards, who made that [Brainerd's] life known to the world, it was primarily a demonstration of the true character, authentic experience, and proper doctrine of a Christian minister ... For Wesley ... it [the expurgated

²⁸ Edwards, *The Life of Brainerd*, 500, 520, 522, 530, 531, 532.

version of *The Life*] was valuable not because it would call people to the mission field, but because it would teach them devotion and acceptance of harsh conditions in their service in England. For Wesley and Edwards alike, what we would call the cross-cultural aspect of Brainerd's work was coincidental.²⁹

Though not couched in explicitly theological terms, the concrete example of Brainerd not only strengthens the theoretical argument of *Religious Affections*, but it also reinforces a larger ecclesiological agenda of Edwards: the need of a corrective to the Christendom model of the church which was defined in terms of the existence of territorially defined clergy in service of the civic community, the orderly administration of the sacraments, precise doctrine expressed through creeds and confessions, and frequently the absence of any historical or missiological perspective on God's work in history. However, in setting forward new models for prospering God's kingdom in the New World, Edwards does not abandon his Reformed heritage: he in fact redoubles his efforts to persuade contemporaries of Biblical truth, though using methods and philosophical categories befitting a new political, geographic and intellectual setting. The ministry of David Brainerd becomes an opportunity for Edwards to showcase the active use of means to engage the world and to provide a bulwark against theological and moral compromise in the church. The ministry of David Brainerd provides an opportunity for us to approach missiology as a prism through which eighteenth century ecclesiology can be reconstructed.

²⁹ Walls, 'Missions and Historical Memory', 256.

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