

The Reverend and the Shaykh

Jonathan Edwards, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb
and the Encounter of Eighteenth-Century
Conservatism in New England and Najd

by

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Abstract

In many ways, Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are about as far apart as two figures could possibly be. Without minimizing their very real differences, however, this comparative study finds numerous parallels that beckon even the most conservative of Christians and Muslims to take a second look at their own faith, as well as the faith of the other. Encompassing a variety of disciplines, and spanning the globe from North America to the Arabian Gulf, this study examines the major themes in the lives and works of the Reverend and the Shaykh, two traditionalist icons of the eighteenth century in Christianity and Islam. With implications in diverse fields such as politics, law, philosophy, theology, religion, history, warfare, and even gender issues, this research unearths numerous striking parallels in Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb that have heretofore gone unnoticed or largely ignored. Surprising congruences in their respective contexts, as well as in their conceptions of God, humanity, and the faith of the other, suggest that religious conservatives who revere these figures stand much to gain from a reassessment of long-held views that could lead to wholly new patterns of global engagement.

Dedication

To my two late mentors:

The Reverend Dr. David Midwood and the Shaykh Abdillah Muhammad Al Thor

This study is indicative of their formidable influences on my life.
I hope that it is also a worthy part of their considerable legacies in this world.

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I have done my best to render all Arabic sources into English as faithfully as possible, but this effort would have suffered severely if not for the help of Adib Sawaya, who tirelessly checked the translations over the course of several years. شكراً جزيلاً يا أستاذ! Thanks are also due to the Spalding Trust for helping to fund this research as a part of their vision to promote understanding between cultures through the comparative study of religions. Gracious words fail me regarding my wife and children, who supported me all along this journey, often enduring extended periods of my absence, both physical *and* mental!

Finally, and most importantly, all thanks and praise are due to the God of Abraham, who predestined me as his own before I was born, breathed life into me through his Spirit, and saved me through his Word. It is he who has enabled me to undertake this project in the first place. On several occasions I had to stop working and simply worship him because of some new revelation of himself that was brought out during the course of the research. If nothing else, this has helped me to see why we will need all of eternity to even begin to fathom the depths of his majesty. It is my great hope and prayer that this research will help Christians and Muslims alike to glorify and enjoy him more, both now and forever. He truly is the greatest! الله أكبر!

Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 BACKGROUNDS: EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NEW ENGLAND AND NAJD	14
<i>Jonathan Edwards</i>	
1.1 The Pulpit and the Academy	16
1.2 Living on a Seam of History	22
1.3 Of Church and State	26
1.4 True Son of His Fathers	31
<i>Epistemological considerations</i>	35
<i>Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</i>	
1.5 Island of the Arabs	38
1.6 From Ibn Ḥanbal to Ibn Taymiyya	47
1.7 Empires and Ideologies	51
1.8 Modern Jāhiliyya	54
<i>Epistemological considerations</i>	58
<i>Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</i>	
1.9 Comparing and Concluding	61
2.0 TRINITY AND TAWḤĪD	67
<i>Jonathan Edwards</i>	
2.1 Trinity in Context and Text	69
<i>Context</i>	70
<i>Text</i>	73
2.2 Trinity Defended	79
<i>Reason</i>	80
<i>Prisca Theologia</i>	83
<i>Typology</i>	85
2.3 Trinity Applied	89
<i>The Immanent and the Economic</i>	89
<i>A world without the Trinity</i>	92
<i>Son of God</i>	94

Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

2.4	Tawhīd in Context and Text	100
	<i>Context</i>	101
	<i>Text</i>	102
2.5	Tawhīd Conceptualized	105
	<i>Types of Tawhīd</i>	106
	<i>The eternal word</i>	110
2.6	Tawhīd Applied	113
	<i>The difference between heaven and hell</i>	113
	<i>Atonement for sin, accumulation of rewards</i>	115
	<i>Sophisticated simplicity</i>	117

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

2.7	Comparing and Concluding	121
	<i>Points of convergence</i>	121
	<i>Points of divergence</i>	124

3.0	OF GOD AND MAN	130
	<i>Why the world matters</i>	130

Jonathan Edwards

3.1	Predestined for Redemption	134
	<i>Free to choose the good, yet unable</i>	134
	<i>Of sin and redemption</i>	136
	<i>Piecing it all together</i>	141
3.2	The Divine Model for a Happy Land and Home	143
	<i>Covenant theology and the state</i>	144
	<i>The duties of Christians in a time of war</i>	150
	<i>America and the “Secular Christian” state</i>	153
	<i>Of hearth and home</i>	156
3.3	Edwards the Revivalist	161
	<i>Heaven and hell</i>	163
	<i>The marks of genuine spirituality</i>	166

Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

3.4	On the Divine Determiner and the Destinies of Men	171
	<i>Hell, sin and “salvation”</i>	173
3.5	Of Mosque, State and Home	177
	<i>Rule of law and the role of government</i>	177

“Holy War” or Jihād?	181
Men, women, and marriage	192
3.6 Reformer and Revivalist	198
 <i>Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</i>	
3.7 Comparing and Concluding	202
 4.0 SPEAKING OF OTHERS	 210
 <i>Jonathan Edwards</i>	
4.1 Edwards and Religious Others	211
Deism	213
Eschatology	217
4.2 Islam and the Millennium: One of the Last Barriers	219
4.3 Islam and Redemptive History: Heretics as Executors of Divine Judgement	223
4.4 Islam and Christianity: Deism Deconstructed	229
(mis)Understanding Islam: the issue of sources	235
 <i>Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</i>	
4.5 Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “Theology of Religions”	239
The Superiority of Islam	241
Shades of gray	243
4.6 Danger from Within	245
4.7 The People of the Book	250
(mis)Understanding Christianity: the issue of sources	254
4.8 ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam	257
 <i>Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</i>	
4.9 Comparing and Concluding	262
 CONCLUSION	 270
Looking back	270
Looking ahead	275
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 280

Figures and Tables

Figures

1 - Manuscript of Ibn Bishr's <i>'Unwān al-Majd fī Tārīkh Najd</i>	46
2 - First page of the manuscript of <i>Discourse on the Trinity</i>	88
3 - First two pages of a manuscript copy of <i>Kitāb al-Tawhīd</i>	120
4 - Marker stone at Enfield, CT for <i>Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God</i>	170
5 - Graves of Muwahhid missionaries sent to Eastern Arabia	197
6 - Growth of the First Saudi State from 1744 - 1816	201
7 - First page of "Miscellany" no. 1334 on the propagation of Islam and Christianity	238

Tables

1 - Abrahamic Family Tree of Apostasy	268
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INTRODUCTION

Among the numerous prominent figures in the history of Christianity and Islam, there is perhaps no more unlikely pair of bedfellows than the Reverend Jonathan Edwards and the Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.¹ Personifying the essence of the conservative, traditionalist branches of the world’s two largest religions, the legacies of both towering eighteenth-century figures are forever cemented in the collective consciousnesses of global Protestantism and Sunnīsm.² Renowned for the rigidity of their rhetoric, Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are often conceived of as polar opposites - a designation that has also characterized their religious progeny through the ages. Fiercely committed to the expression and expansion of their faith traditions, those who trace their spiritual lineage through

¹ Arabic transliterations are given according to the *Encyclopaedia Islamica*. Transliterated words which are commonly used in English, as well as those that are most widely used in this thesis, are not italicized. All English translations of Arabic sources are my own. This includes the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, Works and Sermons of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are given in the English Standard Version.

The term “Muwahḥid/ūn” will be used to describe Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s followers throughout the thesis instead of the more common designation “Wahhābī/s.” The reason is that the latter has often been seen as a derogatory term by the Shaykh’s followers, who maintain that they, as well as all Muslims, should be “Muwahḥidūn,” which simply means “believers in the oneness of God.” Additionally, “Muwahḥid” is here favored over the English word “Unitarian” in order to distinguish Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s followers from Unitarian Universalists.

² The terms “conservatism,” “traditionalism,” and “fundamentalism” are herein used interchangeably to describe those elements of Christianity and Islam which adhere to more literal interpretations of Scripture, and revere their particular religious histories to the extent that they seek to rekindle their essence in their own time. It is important to note that “fundamentalism” sometimes carries negative connotations because it is often mistaken for “extremism.” The two are not the same, however, as “fundamentalism” herein simply means “a return to the fundamentals of faith.”

That being said, there are a myriad of conservative voices within Christianity and Islam today. Indeed, the influence of religious conservatism in both religions is one that surpasses or flatly defies categorization. Nevertheless, these voices are perhaps best generally encapsulated by the evangelical tradition within Christianity and the *salafī* tradition within Islam - two movements that tie their existence closely to Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, respectively. Evangelicalism is marked by the absolute authority of the Bible, and places strong emphases on the atoning death of Jesus on the cross and the necessity of a personal conversion experience. Although most often found within Protestant circles, it is also found in the Catholic tradition, especially in the Global South. *Salafism* is a tradition within Sunnī Islam marked by strict adherence to the Qur’ān and Sunna (way of life) of the Prophet Muḥammad in line with his early Companions, known as *al-Salaf* (the Predecessors). Both Evangelicalism and *Salafism* exist on a continuum of conservatism within wider Christianity and Islam that does not always fit neatly into either of these two categories. Not all conservatives in the two religions are evangelicals or *salafīs*. This is why we can widen the scope of reference in this research to include traditionalist Protestantism and Sunnīsm in general. It also bears noting that not all fundamentalist Christians would claim Edwards, and not all fundamentalist Muslims would claim Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Nevertheless, one would be hard-pressed to find two men who better typify the essence of fundamentalism within Christianity and Islam than Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are among the fastest growing demographic constituencies within Christianity and Islam today.³ Often wielding a disproportionately heavy influence in politics and society at large, these two camps are typically seen as opposing forces because of their fundamentalist interpretations of Christianity and Islam. Misunderstood from all angles, especially by the media and the secular academy, by other branches of their own faiths, and by one another, might these two camps have more in common than it first appears? And if so, is there anything of benefit to the relationship between Christianity and Islam in particular, or between West and East in general, that can be gleaned from a closer examination? Are there areas of common interest between devout Protestants and Sunnīs which deserve to be explored further? Moreover, can traditionalist Christians and Muslims learn anything from one another’s pious progenitors? In order to answer these questions, this research probes numerous, often surprising points of convergence as well as critical points of departure in the

³ See Todd Johnson and Brian Grim, eds., “World Religion Database: International Religious Demographic Statistics and Sources,” Brill Online Reference Works, accessed May 18, 2015, <http://www.worldreligiondatabase.org>. See also Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “Pew: Evangelicals Stay Strong as Christianity Crumbles in America,” *Christianity Today*, May 11, 2015, accessed May 18, 2015, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/may/pew-evangelicals-stay-strong-us-religious-landscape-study.html>; and Christian Caryl, “The Salafi Moment,” *Foreign Policy*, September 12, 2012, accessed April 11, 2016, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/09/12/the-salafi-moment/>.

In terms of the worldwide evangelical population, estimates range from 300 million to 600 million (depending on how researchers classify Pentecostal and Charismatic branches). For an excellent summary, see “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population,” The Pew Research Center, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://www.pewforum.org/files/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf>. In addition to his role as a founding father of worldwide Evangelicalism, the enduring influence of Edwards is evidenced by a virtual explosion of modern scholarship on his thought which has engendered an entirely new discipline in Protestant theology known as “Edwards Studies.” See for example, *Jonathan Edwards Studies*, a scholarly journal published online by the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University. The Edwards Center at Yale is the global hub for an expanding network of Edwards research centers in such diverse locales as South Africa, Belgium, Australia, Brazil, Germany, Hungary, Japan and Poland. See also David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds., *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). For Edwards’ role in the rise of Evangelicalism, see Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Regarding the massive impact of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, one need look no further than the fact that to this day, an entire stream of Sunnī Islam bears his name as “Wahhābīs,” while others unmistakably bear his influence. Columbia University’s Gulf/2000 Project estimates the number of “Wahhābīs” in the Arabian Gulf at just over 4.5 million. Given the population of Saudi Arabia alone, however, this would appear to be a rather conservative number. Assuming that it is indeed a low estimate, we must also take into account the world’s nearly 50 million *salafīs* as well as millions of “other” Sunnīs who have been influenced by his thought, particularly on Tawhīd. Although it is very difficult to measure the latter, the point is that his influence is substantial. See “Gulf/2000 Project,” Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs, accessed April 7, 2016, <http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/>; and http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/images/mapsGulfReligionGeneral_1g.png.

lives and theologies of two men who are widely acclaimed as among the most influential figures in the history of Christian and Islamic conservatism.

Both born in 1703, the similarities between Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb merely begin here.⁴ Often regarded by their contemporaries and by modern critics alike as draconian purists, Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb held strikingly similar views on things like the sovereignty of God, the word of God, good works, the roles of men and women, the role of religion in the public square, idolatry, and maintained a fondness for “fire and brimstone” revival preaching. Although they lived across the world from one another and had no awareness of the other’s existence, both men were fighting similar battles for the recapturing of what they felt were the core elements of faith and religion in a society that was teetering on the brink of spiritual collapse. They sought a return to the roots of their faiths through remarkably similar means, and although neither one lived to see the fulfillment of their vision, the movements that they helped to spawn continue to carry on their ideas today, far beyond the borders of America and Saudi Arabia.⁵ As this thesis seeks to demonstrate, reading Edwards in light of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Islam, and reading Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in light of Edwards and Christianity suggests that the most conservative of Protestants and Sunnīs are not polar opposites, but are in fact more closely related to one another than most may realize.

The ever-expanding list of studies that have been undertaken on Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb individually is far too long to recount here. As of yet, however, there is no single volume which attempts to take their thought into account collectively, and comparatively. The

⁴ For ease of reading all dates are rendered according to the Gregorian calendar. Wherever it is necessary for clarity, the *Hijrī* calendar is referenced.

⁵ The names of countries and well known cities are not transliterated. Lesser known cities and towns are transliterated for ease of pronunciation.

present research is intended to fill that lacuna, and in so doing, possibly open up new avenues of engagement between two branches of Christianity and Islam that have heretofore avoided each other like the plague.⁶ As Paul Hedges has observed, there are “fault lines [that] exist between more ‘fundamentalist interpretations’ of each tradition... which affect dialogue and relations in various ways.”⁷ This paucity of interfaith dialogue among religious conservatives has been noted by scholars such as Kate Zebiri and Timothy Tennent, whose own works represent admirable attempts to address the situation.⁸ Noteworthy too, is the work of Clinton Bennett, whose scholarship has highlighted the opposing themes of confrontation and conciliation that mark the checkered history of Christian-Muslim relations.⁹ In a similar vein is the work of Ismail al-Faruqi, who has discussed the tension between “diatribe and dialogue” that has existed between these two great faiths.¹⁰ Hugh Goddard’s research has focused on how the history of Christian-Muslim relations has paved the way for some of the more hopeful tones that dot the current landscape for both religions.¹¹ One such example of this current trend is “A Common Word,” which began with an open letter from Muslim leaders to their Christian counterparts, and has led to numerous conferences, as well as to the

⁶ There are currently no studies that deal with these two figures bilaterally. Furthermore, I am unaware of any comparable, book-length studies that deal with two opposing figures from such seemingly polar opposite sides of the Christian-Muslim spectrum.

⁷ Paul Hedges, “The Contemporary Context of Muslim-Christian Dialogue,” in Paul Hedges, ed., *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 31.

⁸ See Kate Zebiri, *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 38; and Timothy Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 11-14.

⁹ See Clinton Bennett, *Understanding Christian-Muslim Relations: Past and Present* (London: Continuum, 2008). See also “Christian-Muslim Relations in the USA: A Postmodern Analysis after 9/11,” in Paul Hedges, ed., *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 151-165.

¹⁰ See Ataulloh Siddiqui, ed., *Ismail al-Faruqi: Islam and Other Faiths* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1998), 241ff. Ismail al-Faruqi is best known for being one of the foremost Muslim authorities on Islam and comparative religion in the twentieth century. Of additional interest to us in the present study is the fact that he was also a scholar of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

¹¹ See Hugh Goddard, *Christian and Muslims: From Double Standards to Mutual Understanding* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1995) and *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations* (Chicago: New Amsterdam, 2000).

publication of several volumes to date.¹² The aforementioned voices, as well as a plethora of other similar scholarly endeavors are to be commended for their efforts to bring thinking Christians and Muslims to the table of interfaith engagement.¹³ Of central concern to us in the present research, though, is a question posed by Reuven Firestone, who asks, “Can those chosen by God dialogue with others?”¹⁴ Firestone has here put his finger on a proverbial hot button for fundamentalists within Christianity and Islam, for the exclusivist theologies of both often seem to preclude the possibility of dialogue. By looking at figures such as Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), Firestone maintains that there is historical precedent for committed believers to benefit from interfaith engagement that does not necessitate them jettisoning their commitment to the exclusivity of their own chosen status. Indeed, what Firestone has sparked in one brief chapter, the present work seeks to illumine in a more comprehensive manner.

If it is accepted that looking to the past can enrich the present, then we are posed with yet another query in our quest to bring fundamentalist Christians and Muslims together. For here we must address the methodological issue of *how* best to approach our historical comparison. Thankfully, David Bertaina has not left us alone, adrift in a sea of methodological options. He delineates seven distinct literary and historical methods that have

¹² See for example, “A Common Word,” accessed June 1, 2017, <http://www.acommonword.com>; and Miroslav Volf, Ghazi bin Muhammad & Melissa Yarrington, eds., *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹³ To name but a few other examples, see also Bassam Dawud Ajak, *al-Ḥiwār al-Islāmī al-Masīḥī: al-Mabādāʾ, al-Tārīkh, al-Mawḍūʿāt, al-Āhdāf* (Damascus: Dar al-Qutība, 1998); Yvonne Haddad & Wadi Haddad, eds., *Christian-Muslim Encounters* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995); Paul Heck, *Common Ground: Islam, Christianity, and Religious Pluralism* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Irfan Omar, ed., *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007); Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (London: Continuum, 2010); Jutta Sperber, *Christians and Muslims: The Dialogue Activities of the World Council of Churches and their Theological Foundation* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000); and Christian Troll, *Dialogue and Difference: Clarity in Christian-Muslim Relations* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2009).

¹⁴ Reuven Firestone, “Can Those Chosen by God Dialogue with Others?” in Paul Hedges, ed., *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters*, 33-50.

been used for inquiry into this critical topic.¹⁵ Among these are dialogue as Christological debate, divine exegesis, conquest and conversion, competing historiographies, hagiography, and scriptural reinterpretation. However, the one into which the current research fits most naturally is what he calls, “Dialogue as Theological Education and Dialectic.”¹⁶ Here Bertaina puts forward the idea that a sound avenue for dialogue is through the dialectical consideration of different theological themes in Christianity and Islam. This comparative methodology is exemplified by various theological encounters between Christian and Muslim thinkers of the past, which Bertaina uses to illustrate the validity of this approach. In bringing together the historical figures of Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in a kind of theological dialectic, then, we shall here employ a methodology akin to Bertaina’s rubric that is designed to answer the question of *how* we might compare the two.¹⁷

The present work diverges from Bertaina inasmuch as the meeting between our two scholars is merely hypothetical, while those he recounts are thought to have been actual. By bringing the Reverend and the Shaykh together in this way, our study does for Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb what they could not do for themselves. It should also be noted that while Edwards fits rather neatly into the kind of dialectical reasoning that Bertaina describes, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb does not.¹⁸ However, as we shall see, a careful reading of Ibn ‘Abd al-

¹⁵ David Bertaina, *Christian and Muslim Dialogues: The Religious Uses of a Literary Form in the Early Islamic Middle East* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2011).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133ff.

¹⁷ See also John Renard, *Islam and Christianity: Theological Themes in Comparative Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). Renard notes that there have been numerous books comparing large religious themes in Islam and Christianity, but very few have examined the similarities and differences “in the more limited field of *explicitly* theological themes,” xii (emphasis his).

¹⁸ Edwards agreed with the superiority of divine revelation over human reason. Yet he made liberal use of the latter because he realized that reason was often more helpful when communicating with audiences that did not share his worldview. To that end, he endeavored to show that revelation and reason are actually complementary.

Wahhāb will reveal enough theological dialectic in his thought to justify our comparison.¹⁹ And here emerges a final difference between Bertaina’s theological encounters and our own. Rather than one figure trying to persuade the other of the correctness of their position, we shall instead look for resonances between the two that may be useful for further research. Our purpose is not to come to a resolution between Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, but to draw together various resonances between two leading figures in Christian and Islamic conservatism that warrant further enquiry. As the conclusion will demonstrate, this is a significant finding.

Accordingly, although this thesis is interdisciplinary inasmuch as it touches on a variety of fields including history and historiography, theology and religious studies, philosophy and epistemology, and even political science and sociology, we ultimately seek to make an historical comparison of the dominant theological themes that drove the thought and praxis of our two interlocutors. In this respect, as it has been hinted at above, our methodology could also be described as a comparative, historical theological analysis. This means that the vast majority of the research material belongs to the pens of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb themselves.²⁰ Due to the limitations of time and space on the present research, it has not been

¹⁹ As someone who disavowed the practice of *kalām*, the Shaykh demonstrates a real difference from Edwards. Yet for the attentive reader, there is a surprising amount of theological and philosophical reasoning in his works. This will become especially apparent when we consider Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s views on different types of Tawhīd, the divine word, and *shirk* in the chapters that follow.

²⁰ For Jonathan Edwards, see *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vols. 1-26 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2008). All citations of this printed edition of his works follow the format of “WJE” followed by the volume number and page number (e.g. WJE 1:1). See also *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, vols. 27-73 (New Haven: Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2003-), accessed September 30, 2013, <http://edwards.yale.edu/>. This online edition of his works picks up where the printed edition leaves off, and is ongoing. All citations of this edition follow the format “WJEO” followed by the volume number and page number (e.g. WJEO 27:1).

For Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, see *Mu‘allafāt al-Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (The Complete Works of the Shaykh and Imām Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb)*, 15 vols. (Riyadh: Jāmi‘ at al-Imām Ibn Sa‘ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1978). All citations of this printed edition of his works follow the format of “WMIAW” followed by the volume and page number, and finally the name of the particular work when necessary to properly distinguish between different works due to repetitive pagination (e.g. WMIAW 1:1, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*). See also *Khuṭab al-Imām Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (Sermons of the Imām Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb)*, (Riyadh: General Secretary for the Celebration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1999). All citations of this collection of his sermons follow the format “SMIAW” followed by the page number (e.g. SMIAW, 1).

feasible to comprehensively assess the nearly one hundred published volumes that contain the works of our two authors.²¹ Therefore, in order to determine the main comparative themes that comprise the body of this thesis, we have broken down our research in the following manner:

1. Carefully reading the better-known works of both men.²² This has led not only to a determination of the particular themes to address in the chapters that follow, but also to an idea of how these themes relate to one another in both authors.
2. Assessing portions of their other works which directly correspond to the main themes determined above.²³
3. Making use of the detailed indices that both sets of works contain in order to be sure that we have left as few stones as possible unturned in our quest to discover all relevant pieces of this comparative research.²⁴

All of the above methodological considerations have been read through a comparative lens, as it were, with an eye toward not only those themes that are of primary importance in the overall thought of the Reverend and the Shaykh, but also of importance for a comparative study.²⁵ The above considerations have also been supplemented by the use of various other sources that concern the thought and lives of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. These

²¹ Edwards’ corpus alone currently stands at 73 volumes and counting. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s 15 volumes are also expected to increase with further manuscript research.

²² Better-known works were selected as such based on their historical reception and impact, popularity among respective constituents today, and general frequency of citation in scholarly sources. For Edwards, this includes *Freedom of the Will, Religious Affections, Original Sin, A Faithful Narrative, The Distinguishing Marks, The Nature of True Virtue, The End for Which God Created the World, A History of the Work of Redemption, and Discourse on the Trinity*. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb this includes *Kitāb al-Tawhīd, Kashaf al-Shubuhāt, Thalātha al-Uṣūl, al-Qawā’id al-Arba’, Faḍl al-Islām, Uṣūl al-Imān, Kitāb Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān (Tafsīr al-Qur’ān), Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma’ād, al-Fiqh (Kitāb al-Jihād, Kitāb al-Nikāh) and Kitāb al-Kabā’ir*.

²³ Even though some of the following are not as widely known as their better-known works, they occupy a significant space in the current research because of their thematic correspondences to the overall comparison of both thinkers. For Edwards, this includes *Notes on the Apocalypse, A Humble Attempt, Natural Philosophy, The Mind, The Life of David Brainerd, Typological Writings, The “Miscellanies,” Letters and Personal Writings, and Sermons and Discourses*. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb this includes *Qasm al-Ḥadīth, al-Rasā’il al-Shakhṣiyya, Risāla fī al-Rudd ‘ala al-Rāfiḍa, and Mukhtaṣar Sīrat al-Rasūl*.

²⁴ The searchable index of the WJEO is particularly helpful. While the indices themselves are actually tertiary sources, the applicable references that they lead to through word, phrase, and subject searches mostly come from sermons, letters, and certain sections of Biblical, Qur’ānic, or Ḥadīth commentary by our two authors.

²⁵ This “comparative lens” is what is meant by reading both figures “in light of” the other figure and religion. While seeking to remain true to the dominant themes in their thought, we have taken these themes and read them with reference to the other, all the while looking for congruencies and incongruencies.

sources were consulted to help ascertain and legitimize the findings of our methodological considerations above regarding the main themes of the study, and also read with the same eye toward any other possible comparative aspects that should be dealt with. With the exception of the first chapter, which depends on some primary source material (such as Edwards' *Personal Narrative* and the Muwahḥid chroniclers Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr) that is helpful for understanding the backgrounds and historical contexts of our two figures, the majority of these other sources are secondary in nature, and include book length studies, academic journals, and other news articles both print and online.

The most substantial among these secondary source studies on Edwards include those by Oliver Crisp, Sang Hyun Lee, George Marsden, Gerald McDermott, Perry Miller, Iain Murray, Amy Plantinga Pauw and Kyle Strobel.²⁶ In particular, we will stand in agreement with Plantinga Pauw's Trinitarian lens on Edwards as we consider Crisp and Strobel's analysis of *perichoresis* in his thought. We will also lean heavily on Lee's analysis of Edwards' philosophy and McDermott's scholarship concerning his "public theology" as well as his theology of religions. Notable secondary sources engaged with in this thesis that concern Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb include works by Aḥmed bin Ḥajr Āl Abū Ṭāhī, Fahd al-Semmārī, 'Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn, Michael Crawford, Natana DeLong-Bas, Samira

²⁶ Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005); Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: the Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); and Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

Haj and Nabile Mouline.²⁷ Crawford, al-Semmārī and al-‘Uthaymīn will function for the Shaykh as a sort of secondary backbone in much the same way as Marsden, Miller and Murray do for the Reverend. Mouline will prove helpful in our analysis of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s political importance, and Abū Ṭāhī shall shed light on his doctrinal stances. We will also see how DeLong-Bas and Haj’s readings of the Shaykh add weight to our own, specifically concerning gender issues as well as *jihād*. While such sources are consulted throughout the thesis, especially for purposes of understanding context, our primary consideration is to investigate the words of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb themselves. We are most concerned, after all, with what they actually said on matters. For it is on the basis of the actual doctrines they taught and propagated that our comparative study depends.

As we have noted, the specific themes that are dealt with in the present research emerged as a result of a careful consideration of the works of our two figures as read through a comparative lens. Each chapter begins with a general introduction to its theme, and proceeds with a fairly systematic overview of Edwards’ and then Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s thought on the topic(s), concluding with a comparative analysis that focuses on points of possible congruence as well as key differences. Again, it bears repeating that the most unique aspect of this research is that it brings Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb into contact with their equivalent in the other religious tradition. By reading Edwards in light of the Shaykh and Islam, and by reading Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in light of the Reverend and Christianity, we

²⁷ Aḥmed bin Ḥajr Āl Abū Ṭāhī, *al-Shaykh Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: ‘Aqīdatuhu al-Salafiyya wa Da‘wātuhi al-İslāhiyya wa Thanā’ al-‘Ulamā’ ‘Alayhi (Shaykh Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: His Salafī Doctrine and Reform Movement, and Scholarly Tributes to Him)*, (Riyadh: General Secretary for the Celebration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1419 AH); Fahd al-Semmārī, ed., *A History of the Arabian Peninsula* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2010); ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: The Man and His Works* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009); Michael Crawford, *Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab* (London: Oneworld, 2014); Natana DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); and Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia*, trans. Ethan S. Rundell, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

can gain not only a new understanding of each figure, but also a new perspective on the wider relationship between fundamentalist Christianity and Islam. For this reason, the reader will notice references to Islam in the sections that deal with Edwards, as well as references to Christianity in the sections that deal with Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

The first chapter provides a necessary overview of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s biographical backgrounds and contexts. These are considered from a variety of angles so as to highlight the similarities that are probably at least partly, if not largely responsible for congruencies in their thought, as well as important distinctions that likely account for some of their incongruences.

Chapter two moves swiftly on to confront the biggest challenge to any search for harmony between the Reverend and the Shaykh - their doctrines of the Trinity and Tawḥīd. By investigating their respective views of theology proper, that is, of God himself, we shall shed light on the deepest level of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s thought. In addition to holding the sovereignty of God above all else, another likeness borne out by the chapter is their similar approach to knowledge about him in Scripture. Yet we will see that this is also the very thing that causes them to diverge from one another.

Once we have heard what our two preachers have to say about God, we will turn in chapter three to what they have to say about man, or theological anthropology - the doctrine of man and his relationship to God and his fellow man. From creation, to the problem of sin and entrance into heaven and hell, to the role of the state in matters of religion, and of the individual’s responsibilities in times of war, to the means of spreading their faith and even the roles of men and women in the home and in society, we will examine and compare our scholars’ views. Our final consideration in this extensive chapter deals with an area that both men are well remembered for - their roles as revivalists.

Lastly, in chapter four we will undertake what may be the most novel aspect of this research. Here we shall examine the views of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb on religious others such as those within (and without) their own wider traditions, as well as on Islam and Christianity, respectively. Many will be shocked to learn that Edwards had anything at all to say about the religion of Muḥammad.²⁸ In fact he said much, as Islam played a crucial role in his eschatological scheme. What might be more shocking, however, are the diversity of ways that Edwards referred to Islam, some of which approach a conciliatory nature certainly not shared by most in his era nor even by many Christians today. A similar tone will be demonstrated in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb who, like Edwards, does not fail to deliver on the expected polemical rhetoric and yet still finds a way to surprise us with words about Jesus and Christians that are almost irenic.

In comparing two men whose renown in revivalism is only exceeded by their renown in rigidity among the secular media, the academy, and liberal faith communities, we are actively entering into a world of religious conservatism that is often unintelligible to those outside of its well-defined and self-imposed borders. Some recent articles have lamented the fact that the world at large cannot seem to comprehend right wing conservatives in Christianity and Islam, and that they share the same bigoted, apocalyptic ideology, only with different labels.²⁹

Although such “outside” observers often gloss over important differences and fail to grasp

²⁸ It is standard practice in Islamic circles to utter a prayerful blessing or pious phrase immediately following the spoken or printed name of any prophet - especially so in the case of those with the stature of Muḥammad and Jesus. This is not normally practiced in Christian circles, nor is it common within academia. In an attempt to rectify this, while there is no special treatment of the names of Muḥammad and Jesus in the wider text of the thesis, I would here like to offer the following phrases at the outset. They are rendered according to the sensibilities of the respective traditions, as a means of showing respect for both:

Muḥammad: “صلى الله عليه وسلم” (“may God honor him and grant him peace”)

Jesus: “سلامه علينا” (“may his peace be upon us”)

²⁹ For an example in the media, see Rafia Zakaria, “What the Taliban and Christian Conservatives Have in Common,” *Al Jazeera America*, March 27, 2014, accessed March 31, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/3/pakistani-talibanchristianconservativesshariabancampaign.html>. For an example in the academy, see Crawford Gribben, “Evangelicals, Islamists, and the Globalization of Apocalyptic Discourse,” *Journal of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions* 1, no. 1 (2014): 5-11.

the deeper motivations and bases for the worldviews of conservative Christians and Muslims, they are absolutely right to notice the remarkable similarities, and in a sense it is upon just such a premise that the current research begins. Although Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb never actually met, one cannot help but wonder what would have happened if they had! Would they have debated, argued - perhaps forcefully - or even listened to one another long enough to understand? We cannot know the answer to this hypothetical historical meeting. However, we can do the next best thing and bring them together today through their extensive works. And it just might be that in doing so, we can highlight important distinctives in their thought that may bring greater understanding to the other, and also uncover aspects which may startle their followers today into an interfaith engagement that had only been previously hinted at by their common “enemies” in the secular media, the academy, and liberal faith communities.

1.0 BACKGROUNDS: EIGHTEENTH CENTURY NEW ENGLAND AND NAJD

Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb both preferred to conceive of themselves as purist theologians who were concerned with the fundamentals of their respective faiths. If they were pioneers, it was perhaps because their fundamentalist approach stood in such marked contrast to many of their contemporaries who may have been more heavily swayed by other prevailing influences. As such, both men prided themselves in their historic, orthodox³⁰ views of the Bible and the Qur’ān which more or less followed the example of the early Church Fathers and Protestant Reformers in the case of Edwards, and of the *Salaf* and Ḥanbalī predecessors in the case of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. If there were other current factors which influenced their theologies, both preferred to downplay them. As ideal as this conception may sound, however, it is impossible for anyone to escape basic contextual factors of human existence - for everyone is born into a particular context at a particular place and time. Given the paragons of Christianity and Islam themselves, Jesus and Muḥammad, could not escape this fact, we are thus obliged to consider the contextual factors which influenced their pious eighteenth-century followers, Reverend Jonathan Edwards and Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Contrary to certain popular historiographical practice, we do not seek a revisionist history of the contextual factors which influenced Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. We will take them at their word whenever possible. Indeed, history has been happy to concur that both men were and still are markers of traditionalist orthodoxy within Christianity and Islam. However, we must not allow ourselves to be naive in

³⁰ The word “orthodox” here does not refer to the Orthodox Church. It is used, according to the Oxford dictionary, to mean, “Following or conforming to the traditional or generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, philosophy, or practice.” With the full awareness that one man’s orthodoxy is another man’s heresy, I have here used the term to refer to *orthodoxy according to Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*.

disregarding the core contextual factors which undoubtedly influenced both men more strongly than they may have even been aware of.

Of the myriad factors which constitute the context into which one thinks about, writes, and does theology, we will here focus on four: the immediate, the political, the intellectual, and the religious. Discussion of the immediate context surrounding our two clerics will concern things such as circumstances of birth and family relationships, and geographic location. Consideration of the political context in which they lived and into which they spoke is especially important in this study not only because both men had much to say about politics, but also because political realities in their respective worlds strongly influenced religious interpretation of the times in which they lived. The intellectual climate of the eighteenth century is a vital consideration in our study because the Enlightenment, which so radically shaped Edwards' Western world did not fail to impact the Ottoman Empire in the Near East, on whose fringes Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb lived for his entire life.³¹ The final and arguably most critical contextual factor we shall consider in this chapter is the religious. Edwards' various intellectual pursuits defy simple categorization. While he was indeed a first rate philosopher, scientist, and logician among other things, he was primarily a theologian and a man of religion at the core. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's case is a bit more straightforward, as he would have objected to his denotation as anything other than a man of religion. All things considered, the religious climate in which our two clerics lived is of utmost importance.

Lest the reader wonder at the amount of historical background given in the first chapter, the reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, as a comparative study, it cannot be assumed that readers from one faith tradition will know anything about the figure from the other tradition.

³¹ See Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global Perspective: A Historiographical Critique," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012): 999-1027.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is the fact that the theology of both men was vividly shaped by their lives and experiences. Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb were ultimately practitioners of their theologies who were concerned with right living just as much as they were with right thinking. And so it is of utmost importance for us to understand our two clerics not simply as thinkers, but as particular men in a particular context. The failure to do so could lead to a misreading of both men - a mistake which others have too often made.

Jonathan Edwards

1.1 The Pulpit and the Academy

Ministers were among the elites in Puritan New England society. There was no higher office in a Puritan town than that of its minister. Even government and military officials could not surpass the prestige of the minister’s post. It was into this context that Jonathan Edwards was born to the Reverend Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards in East Windsor, Connecticut on October 5, 1703. Timothy did not hail from a family of particular noteworthiness, although he did graduate from Harvard in 1694. It seems that he met his wife, Esther Stoddard, while they were both students in Boston. In those days it was not common for girls to study away from home, but Esther Stoddard was no ordinary girl; she was the daughter of the “Pope of the Connecticut Valley,” the most revered minister of his generation, the Reverend Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard had begun his influential ministry in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1669, and over the course of his tenure he had built his pulpit on the western frontier into one of the most influential in all of New England. Thus it was befitting of a young woman of such lineage to complete her studies outside of the home and in the great city of Boston. After their marriage at Northampton in November of 1694,

Timothy and Esther settled into a ministerial post at East Windsor, where they would remain for the rest of their lives.

With ten sisters in the Edwards household, Jonathan is said to have benefitted from their loving care toward him, their only brother. Truly, this may have been one of the main factors in Jonathan's gentle disposition toward others in later years. All ten were exceptionally tall for girls, and the "sixty feet" of Edwards daughters were known throughout the region and in posterity as God-fearing young women of the finest character. Jonathan's mother was, as may rightly be assumed given her own family background, an intelligent, strong and confident woman. It would be wrong to assume that Jonathan inherited his intellectual and theological preponderance, much less even his physical stature, from his father alone, as Edwards' first biographer Sereno Dwight recounts a conversation with one of the women whom his mother mentored in her old age:

She received a superior education in Boston, was tall, dignified and commanding in her appearance, affable and gentle in her manners, and was regarded as surpassing her husband in native vigor of understanding... Mrs. Edwards was always fond of books, and discovered a very extensive acquaintance with them in her conversation; particularly with the best theological writers.³²

As we have noted above, Jonathan's father attended Harvard - then the only seminary in New England - to train for the Christian ministry. Given the curriculum in those days, it is not surprising that he was well acquainted with Hebrew literature as well as the Greek and Latin classics, in addition to his professed love for poetry and the study of nature, all qualities which Jonathan would come to possess in his own right.

There was no formal school in East Windsor when Jonathan was growing up. This meant that Timothy and Esther were primarily responsible for educating the children of the

³² Sereno Dwight, *The Works of President Edwards, with a Memoir of His Life*, Vol. 1 (New York: Converse, 1829), 16, 18.

town in the parsonage which they would call their home for upwards of six decades. Esther attended to the younger children while Timothy focused on tutoring the older children for college. There can be little doubt as to the fine job that Esther did in teaching and training the children of East Windsor, as Jonathan's own surviving notebooks from his early days reveal a well-rounded education of the finest quality, evidence of which was that he began studying Latin in earnest at the age of six. Regarding Timothy's aptitude for this task, one need only to know that when his students applied for college entrance, admissions tutors were said to remark, "there was no need of examining Mr. Edwards' scholars."³³

It is important to remember that the Edwardses lived on the western frontier of New England as British colonial citizens, and as such, the constant threat of warfare with the French and Indians always loomed large. Early in 1711, colonists were called on to march on French Canada during Queen Anne's War.³⁴ Thankfully the attempted invasion would turn out to be a relatively minor confrontation compared with years to come, but it must have proved to be quite traumatic for eight-year-old Jonathan, whose father was conscripted as a military chaplain and compelled to leave home for a time.

The next record we have which is of interest from Jonathan's early years is evidence that his intense spirituality did not commence in adulthood, but in childhood. During the period 1714-1715, his father's church was said to have undergone a revival of religion. It was at this time, at the tender age of about twelve, that Edwards and two of his companions constructed a prayer booth out in the swampy wilderness of East Windsor. At an age where other little boys were constructing forts with a view toward fighting marauding bands of

³³ Ibid., 16.

³⁴ Queen Anne's War (1702-1713) was the second of the French and Indian Wars. It was part of a larger global conflict known as the War of Spanish Succession in Europe.

Indians, Jonathan was busy building a prayer booth which served as a place for him to seek God and meditate on the Bible without distraction.³⁵

When his studies at home had finished, Edwards' parents sent him off to a new divinity college in Connecticut which had been recently incorporated as a Reformed Puritan response to the growing liberalism being displayed at Harvard.³⁶ Founded in 1701, the Collegiate School of Connecticut was to become the new choice for traditional Puritan families who were disappointed that Harvard was failing to live up to the vision of its founding fathers. Even though Timothy was a Harvard man, it made perfect sense for him to send Jonathan to the fledgling school that would come to be known as Yale.³⁷ Timothy Edwards was among the number of Puritan ministers who were displeased with the secular direction in which his alma mater was heading; the forced resignation of Increase Mather as college head in 1701 being perhaps the final straw for most.³⁸ Furthermore, it certainly could not have hurt that Jonathan spent his first two years only ten miles from home in nearby Wethersfield under the tutelage of his cousin Elisha Williams.³⁹ Despite this closeness to home and family, Jonathan's broadening horizons in college surely led to much intellectual, personal, and spiritual growth. As the most intellectually gifted among his peers, Jonathan gave the commencement oration for his baccalaureate class in the Fall of 1720, one month shy of his

³⁵ WJE 16:791.

³⁶ Harvard was founded in 1636. The "Rules and Precepts," adopted in 1646, stated, "Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning." Accessed February 13, 2014, <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~gsascf/shield-and-veritas-history/>.

³⁷ The Yale trustees' first recorded action from November 11, 1701 was to state "the glorious, public design of our now blessed fathers, in their removal from Europe into these parts of America, both to plant, and (under the Divine blessing) to propagate in this wilderness, the blessed reformed protestant religion." Cited in *Papers of the New Haven Colony Historical Society*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor, 1882), 377.

³⁸ Increase Mather was a champion of traditional Puritan orthodoxy. A prolific writer and preacher, in addition to his role at Harvard he also pastored a congregation of 1500 in Boston.

³⁹ Yale students were initially spread over four locations throughout Connecticut - Wethersfield, Saybrook, Hartford, and New Haven. In 1716 the trustees unsuccessfully mandated that all students must relocate to New Haven. It wasn't until 1718, at the beginning of Edwards' third year, that the mandate was carried out.

seventeenth birthday.⁴⁰ He went on to commence his master's degree immediately thereafter, and it was during this season that Edwards mentions the most important experience of his life - his conversion to true faith in Christ. In his *Personal Narrative* (1740), Edwards describes several apparently false experiences in his younger years wherein he thought himself to be converted. Yet it was not until some time in 1721, while studying for his master's at Yale, that Edwards became convinced of the authenticity of his faith, thanks in large part to a series of divine experiences which he did not seek out.

In 1722, Jonathan left Yale in the middle of his master's studies to take over a Presbyterian congregation in New York City.⁴¹ We have brief but harmonious accounts of Edwards' first pastorate. He speaks generally very favorably about this season of his life, which probably served to confirm his calling as a minister. However, it did not last long, as Jonathan returned to Yale late in 1723 and finished his master's, whereupon he was called to remain as tutor. Thus began a very trying time in Edwards' life, as he found the return to academia after having spent the previous year in formal ministry incredibly challenging. It seems he took the post as tutor at Yale out of a sense of obligation more so than calling, as his journal entries from this period continually bemoan the life of a full time academic, particularly now that he had some pastoral experience with which to compare it.⁴² Ironically, Edwards was the most qualified of men to undertake such a position at Yale. Yet here we catch a glimpse of Edwards' heart, wherein his academic side was always to play second fiddle to his pastoral side, primarily so in his own sense of divine calling. This is not to say that Edwards was unaware or unconcerned about his substantial academic prowess. To the

⁴⁰ As was customary for all such occasions, the address was given in Latin.

⁴¹ 1722 was not only memorable for Edwards because of his new ministry in New York, but also because this was the year where he penned most of his famous *Resolutions* for living the Christian life.

⁴² Edwards' chief complaint about his return to academia was the spiritual dullness which seemed to surround him at Yale.

contrary, his awareness of his ability and ambition to become a world famous author is clearly stated on the inside cover of his musings on *Natural Philosophy* (1829), “The world will expect more modesty because of my circumstances - in America, young, etc. Let there then be a superabundance of modesty, and though perhaps 'twill otherwise be needless, it will wonderfully make way for its reception in the world.” he wrote in 1723. “Before I venture to publish in London, to make some experiment in my own country; to play at small games first, that I may gain some experience in writing.”⁴³ Yet even this explicit acknowledgment of his intellectual prowess early in his career never supplanted his heart to preach the Bible as a minister as his first and foremost calling. Indeed, it was perhaps precisely because of his ambition to preach Reformed Christianity to the whole world that Edwards saw the pulpit as a better stage from which to declare his message than the virgin halls of a young Yale. As biographer George Marsden observes, “even being the rector of a college could be seen as a step down from an attractive parish.”⁴⁴

It is hardly surprising that when his grandfather’s church decided to look for an understudy to the aging Solomon Stoddard in Northampton’s legendary pulpit, Edwards was more than interested. And when the formal call finally came in the summer of 1726 Jonathan eagerly accepted. Although he came to Northampton as a bachelor, he was not without marriage prospect. For during his tenure at Yale, he had made the acquaintance of Sarah Pierpont, a New Haven minister’s daughter who would become his wife in July of 1727. When Stoddard died in February of 1729, the stage of one of New England’s most important congregations belonged solely to Edwards. Time did not waste itself before presenting the young pastor with the opportunity he had so long dreamed of, as Edwards was called upon to

⁴³ WJE, 6:193. This quotation was originally penned in shorthand by Edwards on the inside cover of the volume.

⁴⁴ George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 110.

give a public lecture in Boston in 1731 in the wake of a wave of Puritan defections to Anglicanism, most notably that of Yale tutor Timothy Cutler.⁴⁵ Held during the week of Harvard's commencement and packed with Harvard graduates in attendance, the lecture was intended to allow Solomon Stoddard's successor and Yale's young champion of Reformed orthodoxy to extol the virtues of Calvinism. Suffice it to say that Edwards delivered as expected. If the Boston venue was the launchpad, *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* (1731) was the rocket which initiated the meteoric ascent of Jonathan Edwards onto the world scene.⁴⁶

1.2 Living on a Seam of History

Jonathan Edwards lived on a seam of history. The incubator of time reared him at the end of one era and the start of another. The ground between the height of the colonial Puritan era and the height of the Enlightenment was at once both messy and intellectually fruitful. The decline of the former and the rise of the latter in the American colonies was a confusing world into which not many people could speak with alacrity. As a result, "by the early eighteenth century," writes Iain Murray, "New England Puritanism seemed to have lost its way: clearly it had lost its vigour."⁴⁷ Edwards was "the last Puritan," a man whose aura exuded the best of what Puritanism had to offer the early modern world.⁴⁸ His was the clearest, most contextually appropriate voice within Christian orthodoxy in early eighteenth-

⁴⁵ More will be said on this issue in section 1.4

⁴⁶ *God Glorified in Man's Dependence* was a direct refutation of the Arminian doctrine which was new to Yale but had been creeping into Harvard for decades prior. The lecture so impressed those in attendance that they arranged for its immediate transatlantic publication. Curiously, the lecture contained virtually nothing that was theologically new. Its notoriety probably had more to do with its cogent logic, delivery, and timely appearance. See WJE 17:197-217.

⁴⁷ Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 68.

⁴⁸ See for example, David Brand, *Profile of the Last Puritan: Jonathan Edwards, Self-Love, and the Dawn of the Beatific* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

century America. He was a man uniquely suited to his context inasmuch as he was able to retain the convictions of his forefathers while simultaneously engaging with a way of thinking that many have assumed to be at odds with his faith. Rationalist philosophy posited a dichotomy between religion and reason during the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And while this supposed dichotomy may have engulfed lesser religious intellects of the era, it met its match in Jonathan Edwards, who would have none of religion which did not meet and integrate the best thinking of the age. Yet contrary to others whose attempts to do so led them into a liberalism which eroded the foundations of orthodox Christianity (most notably with the rise of deism), Edwards succeeded at showing how the ideals of the Enlightenment actually broadened and strengthened Christianity's base.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholars tended to view Edwards as a lonely thinker, "islanded in the American colonies and cut off from the mainland of intellectual life in Great Britain and Continental Europe."⁴⁹ More recent scholarship, however, has proven this notion to be false, as scholars now recognize the vastness of Edwards' reading and engagement with European thought during his lifetime.⁵⁰ In addition to the theological treatises that one would expect Edwards to have been familiar with, he was also well acquainted with logic, music, metaphysics, history, geography, politics, science, poetry, and comparative religion, among other genres. It is not difficult to see the shadows of Enlightenment thought in much of what Edwards wrote - a careful observer cannot deny the influence that contemporary British and Continental philosophers had on him. Edwards' thoughts are, in many places, an attempt to engage directly with the likes of Isaac Newton and John Locke in the context of early eighteenth-century New England. This was in marked

⁴⁹ Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 40.

⁵⁰ Ibid. See also Peter J. Thuesen, "Editor's Introduction," in WJE 26:1-113.

contrast to other contemporary Puritan divines, who either engaged rather indirectly or shied away altogether. Truly, Jonathan Edwards was a man whose life and works rose above the drudgery that characterized much of Puritanism's declining era in light of Enlightenment thinking which was beginning to sweep across the world. The reason is not simply that his intellectual prowess was more than up to the task at hand. It was this, but it was also his willful *eagerness* to apply the fundamental principles of Enlightenment thought to Puritan orthodoxy.

The rise of English deism marked a major portion of Jonathan Edwards' intellectual climate and resultant endeavors. While he devoted much energy to combating Arminianism in its various forms throughout the world, it could be argued that Edwards viewed deism as the more serious threat. At the time of Edwards, it was really only the educated elites of New England who were influenced by deism, as the masses were not yet greatly touched by its "poisonous tentacles" which were just starting to stretch across the ocean from England. Prophetic as he was though, Edwards correctly predicted that this threat would eventually outstrip Arminianism in its supposed dangerous influence on society as a whole. Deism arose out of a growing European engagement with the non-Christian world which typified the Enlightenment era. Its main impetus was the difficulty posed by the idea of Christian particularity in a world which was very obviously not Christian. How could God expect people and nations who had never come under the influence of the Christian gospel to be subject to its tenets? The argument thus followed that the Christian gospel must not really be unique in the grand scheme of eternity. Instead of the particularity of the Christian message, then, God must judge humankind by some sort of equivocal or ambiguous, universally accessible standard. Admittedly, the logic of deism's rise was none other than to promote a prevailing sense of fairness in regard to divine justice as Europe encountered the non-

Christian world on a large scale for the first time. No matter how innocent its foundations or intentions were, Edwards vigorously attacked deism because he saw that it effectively emasculated the Biblical message of Christ's particularity. Ironically, it was deism that would cause him to spend his later years in pensive consideration of how this particularity could also translate into universality.⁵¹ Deism was thus at the very least an indirect cause of much of Edwards' speculation about world religions, a feature of his thought which was most atypical in his colonial context.

Of particular interest to us in Edwards' intellectual encounters in the field of comparative religion was his engagement with Islam, which has been an almost entirely neglected area of his thought. Edwards did have some intellectual exposure to Islam, and had much to say about it, particularly toward the end of his life. Characteristically though, he did not venture to publish on Islam possibly because he realized that much of what he had to say was conjecture and not necessarily drawn from personal experience. Instead, his thoughts on Islam are recorded for us in his *Miscellanies*, a varied compilation of topics upon which Edwards ruminated throughout his life with pen and notebook in hand. Although we have no record of Edwards ever coming into contact with a Muslim in the American colonies, it is possible that he may have, either in the form of a slave from Africa or a trader from the East. In any event, it is to be noted here that Islam was a part of Edwards' intellectual framework. Just how much a part of his framework it was, and the degree to which he (mis)understood it will be considered in chapter four of this thesis.

⁵¹ Committed as he was to the core of the Christian gospel as both unique and universally necessary for salvation, Edwards did not retreat into deism to deal with this tension. Instead, he sought ways to formulate a new understanding of Christianity in relation to world religions that made space for divine revelation as a part of God's wider plan of salvation for mankind. This issue is taken up in greater depth in chapter four of the present study.

1.3 Of Church and State

If one were to wander down the streets of Boston or Northampton in Massachusetts today, they would find a society where religion is seen as a private matter. If religion plays any part at all in one's political views, so the mindset goes, it must do so passively and quietly. And yet, rather paradoxically, America remains one of the world's most religiously conservative countries. When the Founding Fathers laid the framework for the new nation around three decades after Edwards' untimely death from a faulty smallpox inoculation at Princeton in 1758, one of the principles they enshrined in the Bill of Rights was that of disestablishment, or as it is more commonly known, the separation of church and state.⁵² Originally meant to protect religion from state interference, and likewise to safeguard the state from religious interference, the principle of disestablishment laid the groundwork for centuries of American religious freedom. One of the primary reasons for this was the Puritans' own experience in England, where the established state church persecuted dissenters who chose to worship in a manner that differed from Anglicanism. Indeed, religious freedom from state intervention was a large reason why many Puritans left England in the seventeenth century for the shores of America.⁵³ It is not surprising that their descendants, not long removed from the grip of England and her state church, would ensure that the government of their new nation would not interfere in religion. However, after two centuries of secularization in the West, the very principle which helped to ensure the flourishing of religion in America has become a point of tension which is being used to sever religion from

⁵² The Bill of Rights (1791) refers to the first ten amendments to the Constitution (1788), the first of which declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

⁵³ For an excellent summary of this period of Puritan history, see Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards* (Hanover: University Press New England, 1995).

the public square altogether.⁵⁴ Interestingly enough, it is the modern evangelical movement, which Edwards helped to birth, that has consistently contended for a voice of influence in the political arena.⁵⁵ In some circles today evangelicals are viewed as having a political agenda which is not only *informed by* religion, it *is* religious at the core. Given that the roots of Evangelicalism reach deep into the soil of Jonathan Edwards, the question which naturally follows concerns the nature of the connection as it relates to the political sphere. It therefore behooves us here to examine how Edwards' political context shaped his understanding of theology.

When the Founders framed the Bill of Rights as amendments to the Constitution in 1791, they broke a long-standing and rarely questioned association between the state and religion, making America the first nation in modern history to eschew a formal state religion. As we have noted above, much of this had to do with their desire to *protect* religion from state abuse or control. This desire was rooted in the emerging story of a young nation eager not to repeat the mistakes of its motherland which caused their forefathers to migrate in the first place. How, though, are we to bridge the gap between the Old World fusion of religion and politics in England and the New World separation which Madison, Jefferson, and others championed? Traditional Puritan understanding was itself not a bridge from the religious establishment of England to the disestablishment of post-revolutionary America. In fact, most early Puritans saw their "errand into the wilderness"⁵⁶ as the perfect place to recreate and even perfect the theocratic rule of Oliver Cromwell in early seventeenth-century England. It was the ever-

⁵⁴ See Gerald R. McDermott, "What Jonathan Edwards Can Teach us About Politics," *Christianity Today*, July 1, 2001, accessed March 13, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/julyweb-only/7-2-25.0.html?paging=off>.

⁵⁵ See for example, D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁶ This is the term Harvard historian Perry Miller coined in the title of his excellent work on the Puritan self understanding. See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1956).

prophetic Edwards, standing in the gap between the Puritan and Enlightenment eras, who would turn out to be the chief bridge builder.⁵⁷

Jonathan Edwards grew up in a society where politics and religion were nearly fused. Although Puritan society represented a break with the English system of an official state church, religion and politics were still very much intertwined.⁵⁸ Yet their relationship had more to do with the homogeneous nature of Puritan society than it did with official decree. In such a context, said de Tocqueville, “Christianity reigns without obstacles, by universal consent.”⁵⁹ In other words, Puritan theology was essentially state theology not because of decree, but because there were virtually no rivals to it in that time and place. In this way, Puritan society conjured Old World sentiments of proximal ties between state and religion due to the demographic realities of its context. However, as Bremer and others have noted, the Puritans came to America to build “a city on a hill.”⁶⁰ Their intention was that all members of society would share in Puritan orthodoxy not only in their beliefs but also in the practical outworking of those beliefs in their daily lives. As such, Puritan society as a whole had a distinct flavor where one’s religious views were often inseparable from their political views. Yet the reasons for this were not primarily based on familiarity with the English system. Rather, their rationale for fusing religion and society was fundamentally theological.⁶¹ Puritans saw themselves as a type of Old Testament Israel, a fulfillment of the

⁵⁷ Edwards’ own stance on this issue will be dealt with more conclusively in chapter three of this thesis. Many assume that Edwards was concerned with religion at the expense of society at large. Chapter three will demonstrate that this is a wrong assumption, and that Edwards was, in fact, intimately concerned with the incorporation of religion in the public square.

⁵⁸ For example, Puritans did not allow religious leaders to hold political office, nor vice versa. Furthermore, marriage was regulated by civil law instead of religious law. However, they did use state funds to support their churches.

⁵⁹ As quoted in McDermott, “What Jonathan Edwards Can Teach us About Politics.”

⁶⁰ See Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 55-72.

⁶¹ See for example, John Winthrop, “A Modell of Christian Charity,” *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Freeman and Bolles, 1838), 33-48. This sermon was delivered by Governor Winthrop while aboard the *Arabella* on the Atlantic passage in 1630. It was to be a prototype of later Puritan sermons stressing the obligations of the Christian to society at large.

words of Jesus to his Jewish hearers when he declared that his followers were to be “a city on a hill” meant for all the world to see as they reflected the excellencies of the God of the Bible.⁶² The Puritans attempted to extrapolate out a theology of public life from Old Testament Israel to themselves as God’s chosen people in the modern era, forming, as it were, a new Israel. Puritan theology was, at its core, covenantal.⁶³ This meant that many early Puritans saw themselves as having consented to God’s invitation into a relational contract of sorts, complete with mutual responsibilities including that of man as vicegerent.

By the time the revolt against the British crown had finished, there were essentially two camps on the issue of state and religion in the new nation. The first camp was comprised of men like Samuel Adams, the fiery revolutionary from Boston, who, inspired by Oliver Cromwell and in the vein of his Puritan forebears, wanted to make Protestant Christianity the official state religion. The second camp was comprised of men like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, Virginians with deist leanings who were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment and saw no official place for religion in state affairs, nor vice versa. Jonathan Edwards lived in between these two camps both philosophically and historically. And, as will be shown in chapter three, it was his thinking which would ultimately bridge both factions and help to account for the paradoxical nature of the American political and religious landscape for centuries to come.

There is, however, one final point to discuss before we leave our consideration of Edwards’ political context behind. Jonathan Edwards is almost universally regarded as an American, and in a very real sense of the word that is exactly what he was. Born and raised on the North American continent, having never traveled outside of the land which would later

⁶² “You are the light of the world, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:14)

⁶³ The Puritan view of covenant is discussed in further detail in chapter three.

become the United States, Edwards was an American. But he was also British. We must not lose sight of the fact that Edwards lived and died in a British colonial context which was as yet decades removed from the discontented rumblings which would eventually lead to the Declaration of Independence in 1776. That Edwards died nearly two decades beforehand does not belie the fact that he may very well have joined the multitudes of other clergymen who called for independence from the British crown. It is actually one of history's great ironies that such a voice did not live to allow us the ability to know for sure what influence he may have had, positive or negative, on the revolutionary process itself. Speculate as we may, the fact remains that Edwards was himself a committed and loyal citizen of England for all his days. It did not seem to bother him that he was separated by thousands of miles of ocean from his countrymen. His enduring relationship with the Scottish Reformed churches, who were among his staunchest allies during the revivals, and were the first to publish his works for the wider world, are testament to this fact.⁶⁴

Living on the edge of the British colonial world meant that war and other hostilities with France and her Indian allies was a constant threat. Edwards and his wife, Sarah, hosted colonial troops in their home on more than one occasion when Indian forces were raiding the area. To say the least, Edwards was well acquainted with the dangers of life on the frontier.⁶⁵ In 1744, it was Edwards who called for a day of solemn fasting to seek God's favor as King George's War broke out.⁶⁶ A year later, he stood proudly behind twenty of his parishioners who joined a British expedition to take a French fort at Louisbourg in Nova Scotia. In his assessment of the victory of British New England forces against a much better equipped

⁶⁴ Scotland officially joined Great Britain in 1707 when Edwards was a young child.

⁶⁵ As was noted in section 1.1, Edwards' own father marched off to battle when Jonathan was just a boy. He also had various friends and family members murdered and taken hostage by hostile Indian tribes over the years.

⁶⁶ King George's War (1744-1748) was the name given to the North American theater of the War of Austrian Succession (1740-1748), which saw old enemies Britain and France once again pitted against each other. It is also known as the Third French and Indian War.

French constituency, Edwards did not shy away from directly attributing the British victory to the hand of God in dealing a blow to France, who represented (in a religious sense) the Roman papacy, the arch-enemy of the Protestant cause for which England and her colonies stood. Truly, during the lifetime of Edwards, New England Puritans had forgotten much of the bitterness their fathers harbored against the crown when they first sailed to America a century before. Such anti-British sentiments would not flare up again until later in the eighteenth century. As it were, Edwards lived in a middle period marked by good relations between Britain and her colonies, and he saw himself as very much a part of the British empire and the cause of global Protestantism which she represented in the world. In this regard, Edwards perceived himself as playing his part in the expansion of this grand cause to the uncharted waters of the American continent through his preaching, and to the world beyond through his writing.

1.4 True Son of His Fathers

The Puritan movement gave birth to a veritable throng of influential divines between the late sixteenth and early eighteenth centuries on both sides of the Atlantic. The movement arose out of the belief that the Church of England was not sufficiently reformed in its theology.⁶⁷ On the heels of the Reformation, a desire to distance the Church of England from the perils of papal Rome was an obvious factor behind Puritan cohesion. However, an even more crucial driving force behind the rise of Puritanism was an increasing desire for the

⁶⁷ Reformed theology, also known as Calvinism, is a systematic interpretation of the Bible first proposed by the Reformation era theologian John Calvin in Geneva. Stressing the absolute sovereignty of God in all matters, it has been summarized by the acronym TULIP: *Total depravity* (man is born as a slave to sin, and is unable to right himself without divine assistance), *Unconditional election* (man is chosen or predestined, as it were, for salvation by God completely apart from his works or merit), *Limited atonement* (the death of Christ is only efficacious unto salvation for those that are elect), *Irresistible grace* (once the Spirit of God begins to draw a man, it is ultimately impossible to resist the divine call, no matter how pugilistically inclined a man may initially be toward it), *Perseverance of the saints* (once a man is in Christ, he is unable to ultimately fall away since his salvation fundamentally depends on God and not on himself). For a very brief and accessible introduction, see John Piper, *Five Points* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013).

Church of England to separate herself from the teachings of Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), whose doctrines ran counter to John Calvin's (1509-1564), most noticeably on several crucial points of soteriology.

Jonathan Edwards was in many ways a typical Puritan whose thought was very much informed by his forebears on both sides of the Atlantic. As such, this meant that his theology had a decidedly Reformed and covenantal bent. Edwards, like most Puritans, was greatly influenced by Calvin, although he attempted to distance himself from this fact, as his own words in his preface to *Freedom of the Will* (1754) indicate: "yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction's sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught."⁶⁸ Implicit in this statement was a disclaimer of sorts, coupled with a ready admission to a similar understanding of Scripture to that of Geneva's famous French reformer.

Notwithstanding Edwards' desire not to blur the lines between himself and Calvin, as the above quote makes clear, the fact remains that Edwards stood very much in the line of Calvin. In order to see this, we must here point out the distinction that exists between Calvin himself and that which has often been called "Calvinism" by some who may lack critical understanding of theological nuance. Calvin was, like Edwards, primarily a Biblical theologian, not a systematic one. Accordingly, his primary focus and concern in expounding the doctrines of grace was that of the person of Jesus Christ as depicted in the Bible. This meant that he was not prone to spend too much energy pondering the theological significance of a doctrine such as predestination. He tended to focus more on the doctrine's Biblical root cause, which for Calvin was the mysterious and majestic will of God. This stands in marked

⁶⁸ WJE 1:131.

contrast to some of his disciples such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Calvin's successor at Geneva, whose primary focus was systematic theology instead of Biblical theology, and whose efforts helped to shape Calvinistic doctrines into what eventually became standard Reformed theology. In this sense, Edwards was actually much more in agreement with Calvin the man than he was with "Calvinists" per se, as he was also primarily a Biblical theologian who tended to magnify God as the root cause of the doctrines of grace over against focusing on the doctrines themselves, which Calvinists had tended to do in the two centuries between Calvin and Edwards. Edwards saw this distinction whereas most others did not. This is perhaps why he sought to distance himself from Calvin even while standing firmly in his Biblical theological line. Ironically, Calvin may very well have agreed with Edwards at this point! And so it was for simplicity's sake, said Edwards, that he was inclined to allow himself to be categorized as a Calvinist. Semantics aside, Jonathan Edwards was most decidedly a Reformed Calvinist, as he spent most of his life both being influenced by, and influencing, Calvinism. In many ways he saw himself as a defender of the Reformed faith for a generation which was being influenced by other competing religious worldviews which he deemed as un-Biblical and therefore dangerous.

The most immanent of those competing worldviews was the threat of Arminianism. Jacobus Arminius developed his theological system almost entirely as a response to the tenets of Calvinism with which he disagreed, namely that God foreordained both the salvation of the elect and the damnation of the non-elect.⁶⁹ To be fair, Arminius himself was not as far

⁶⁹ One thousand years prior, Augustine had taught that God predestined the elect for salvation, and simply "passed over" others. Calvin however, taught that God did not pass over anyone, as this would make God a passive actor in his own creation. Instead, Calvin taught that God also actively chose who was to be damned. In doing so, he appealed to the mysterious counsel of God's will in warning against the kind of human fascination and speculation which came to characterize the issue after his death. Arminius and his followers then came to represent those opposed to such a view of Predestination, thus championing (to different degrees) the free will of man in salvation and damnation over against the sovereign decree of God.

removed from Calvin's thinking as is often assumed.⁷⁰ Contrary to what many in Edwards' own day thought, and to what many today continue to assume, Arminianism proper did not take issue with predestination as much as it did with reprobation.⁷¹ In any event, Edwards concluded that Arminianism's chief danger was that this seemingly subtle nuance opened the door to all kinds of theological speculation which would elevate the role of man in soteriology, thus decreasing God's role and glory in the process by default. Edwards was, like Calvin, chiefly concerned with the preservation of God's glory over all else. And for this reason, he defended Calvinism against the pernicious Arminian threat with his pen and his pulpit for his entire ministerial career. It was no accident that his first published work, *God Glorified in Man's Dependence*, dealt with precisely this issue. Subsequent publications such as *Freedom of the Will*, arguably one of the most brilliant pieces of philosophical theology ever composed, also dealt squarely with the issue of Arminianism in relation to Reformed doctrines.

If Arminianism was the most *immanent* threat to Edwards' Reformed doctrines, then Roman Catholicism was the most *abhorrent*. Jonathan Edwards was undoubtedly one of the post-Reformation era's most outspoken critics of Rome, as he never attempted to veil his harsh criticism of her doctrines. For Edwards, Rome was the epitome of the Antichrist, and he often referenced Rome as the beast spoken of in Revelation. As Stephen J. Stein observes, "According to him, the greatest barrier to the advancement of God's Kingdom was the Church of Rome, which he assailed as the most dangerous foe of Christ, worse than the Jews or the Mahometans, an unscrupulous enemy of the church comparable to 'a viper or some

⁷⁰ Arminianism as originally postulated by its founder did not differ from Calvinism nearly as much as it did in later versions. By the time of Edwards, Arminianism had almost become a catch-all phrase synonymous with anything that was not Calvinism.

⁷¹ Reprobation is the proper theological term for God's active choice in the damnation of sinners.

loathsome, poisonous, crawling monster.”⁷² This would help to explain why Edwards claimed that Christ had not only had a first coming at his birth and a second coming at the *parousia*, but that he actually had a third coming to earth during the Reformation. Edwards felt that nothing less than another visitation by Jesus into the world could account for the Reformation era triumph against the work of Satan in and through the Roman Catholic Church. In the Reformation, Edwards saw the initiation of the eventual worldwide triumph of the Reformed gospel. But until such time was to come, there were many more battles to fight.

Epistemological considerations

Even as the proverbial handwriting was being written upon the walls of the Puritan era thanks to the reemergence of Arminianism through a resurgent Anglicanism, and to the infiltration of deism through Enlightenment rational religion, Jonathan Edwards was undeterred. His genius was that he saw this, and his epistemology allowed him to theologize in such a way as to blend traditional Puritan Calvinism with new scientific and Enlightenment thinking. He saw no contradiction between Newton and Sibbes, nor between Locke and Calvin. As Sang Hyun Lee remarks, “Edwards’ thought is located within the history of Christian doctrine, going back to Augustine and Aquinas, particularly within his Reformed heritage as epitomized in Calvin. What emerges is a picture of Edwards as a theologian mindful of the past yet not afraid to innovate, to come up with daring conceptions of God.”⁷³

Nowhere did this dynamism show forth more than in his Biblical theology. As cultural winds blew in new directions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the rise of

⁷² Stephen J. Stein, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 5:10-11.

⁷³ Sang Hyun Lee, “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 21:1.

Biblical criticism, Edwards remained unmoved. Similar to his Puritan peers, Edwards staunchly held that Scripture was man's ultimate source of knowledge about the divine, and was fully confident in applying a traditional hermeneutical approach to the Bible. However, unlike his peers, he was unafraid to delve into realms such as science or philosophy to substantiate this conviction. It can be seen in his writings that Edwards was not only fully aware of many of the arguments of contemporary Biblical criticism, but he meaningfully interacted with them. One of his favorite intellectual exercises was to trace the course of historical events alongside the Biblical narrative.⁷⁴ As Robert Brown has observed, "While it is certainly true that he occupied a position at the conservative end of the critical spectrum, he was in no way ignorant of or unaffected by critical historical thought."⁷⁵

In addition to an uncompromising view of the Bible as God's final and ultimate revelation, and a respect for the early Church Fathers, Jonathan Edwards was thoroughly committed to the faith which he inherited from his more immediate Puritan forefathers. As Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield has said, Edwards "fed himself on the great Puritan divines, and formed not merely his thought but his life upon them."⁷⁶ And so in some sense, Edwards' connection to Calvin came by way of his connection to his more immediate religious ancestors. Beginning with his own grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, Edwards never shied away from mentioning those Puritan voices whom he found particularly helpful in sculpting his religious universe. He specifically mentioned the likes of Thomas Shepard (1605-1649), Richard Sibbes (1577-1635),⁷⁷ William Ames (1576-1633), William Perkins (1558-1602), Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), Theophilus Gale (1628-1678), John Owen

⁷⁴ Edwards' fascination with the Bible and history is put forth in his *History of the Work of Redemption*, WJE 9. See sections 3.1 and 4.3 of the present work for more on this.

⁷⁵ Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 128.

⁷⁶ B.B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), 529.

⁷⁷ Sibbes maintained his Puritan views while never actually leaving the Church of England.

(1616-1683), and Francis Turrentin (1623-1687), among others. His most beloved theological textbook was Petrus van Mastricht's (1630-1706) *Theoretico Practica Theologia* (1682). It is likely that Edwards favored this text both because of its theological scope and its systematic opposition to Arminianism.

As we have already noted, Edwards lived on a seam of history, and while many forces threatened to tear that seam, Edwards stood, rather remarkably, squarely in the traditionalist Puritan camp while engaging the outside world in meaningful ways that the rest of Evangelicalism would not discover for centuries. Edwards' hope was nothing less than to restore Reformed doctrine to a world on the precipice of a slippery slope of apostasy where Arminianism would lead to deism, and eventually to the loss of God and the gospel of Christ altogether.

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

1.5 Island of the Arabs

Arabs refer to the Arabian Peninsula as “*Jazīrat al-‘Arab*” (the island of the Arabs). If Arabia is an island, then Najd, the barren plateau of central Arabia, is an island within an island. While the outlying regions of the Peninsula were constantly under foreign influence and outright colonization over the centuries, Najd was largely immune to this reality, perhaps principally owing to the fact that it has always been a harsh and desolate land. From the time that the tribes of Central Arabia accepted Islam in the seventh century, Najd had survived more or less independently of foreign interference.⁷⁸ In the years immediately following the *hijra* to Medina in 622, the Prophet Muḥammad ordered a series of military expeditions and raids (*ghazū* or *ghazwāt*) into Najd which initially focused on Qurayshī caravans traveling between Mecca and Syria, and then on resident tribes who were resistant to Islam.⁷⁹ After this period, there is scant historical mention of the region until the rise of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Muwaḥḥid movement in the eighteenth century.

Najd, which means “plateau” in Arabic, gently slopes from 1500 meters in elevation in the west to 750 meters in the east. It is bounded in the west by the escarpment of Jebel Ṭuwayq, the sharp face of which separates Najd from the Ḥijāz, and runs for almost one thousand kilometers from north to south. The majestic yet treacherous al-Rub‘ al-Khālī desert constitutes the southern border of Najd, as Yemen and Oman lay further south.⁸⁰ In the north, the expansive al-Nafūd desert buffers Najd from Iraq and Syria. And in the east, it is

⁷⁸ It is telling that Ibrahim Pasha’s 1818 Ottoman expedition from Egypt to crush the Muwaḥḥidūn of the First Saudi State is the only successful conquest of Najd by an outside entity in recorded history.

⁷⁹ Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabbari both make mention of these expeditions in their biographical historical accounts, and are supported by many Aḥādīth such as Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 5:59:627.

⁸⁰ al-Rub‘ al-Khālī translates as “the Empty Quarter.” Englishmen Harry St. John Philby and Wilfred Thesiger brought it to prominence in the West during the 20th Century with works such as *The Empty Quarter* and *Arabian Sands*, respectively.

separated from the Gulf coast by the long and narrow al-Dahnā' desert, which connects al-Nafūd to al-Rub' al-Khālī. In this way, Najd is essentially hemmed in from all sides by seas of sand and mountains which have created distinct, although not entirely impassable boundaries.

One group of people who knew no such boundaries were the bedouin, who ruled the deserts of Arabia through their masterful relationship with the camel. Known as *safīnat al-sahra*' (the ship of the desert), camels provided the means for the bedouin to thrive amidst the harshness of desert life. Their nomadic lifestyle was forced upon them by the reality that water was rarely plentiful enough in a given oasis to sustain life for more than a brief time. Thus they traversed hundreds of kilometers from one oasis to the next in search of sustenance for themselves and their flocks. In the course of their travels, they engaged in an endless cycle of caravan raiding which subjected each tribe to a series of victories and defeats that would hopefully result in a net profit at the end of each year. By the time of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb in the eighteenth century, life had truly changed very little for the bedouin in more than a millennium.

The bedouin were not alone in Najd though, as they increasingly found themselves engaging with another type of Arabian existence which had developed over the centuries in the form of settlements situated in the *wādīs* (river beds) that traversed Najd. Seasonal rains, which were very sporadic and often sparse, naturally flowed downhill from the heights of Jebel Ṭuwayq through the *wādīs* and would sometimes result in substantial deposits of ground water close enough to the surface for the digging of wells which could thereby sustain small settlements and farming establishments. Life was extremely delicate in these *wādī* settlements, as drought, plague or infestation often wrought havoc. Severe instances of these

dreaded afflictions were known to either kill an entire settlement, or at least force the total abandonment of a settlement through migration to lands as far away as Iraq.⁸¹

Wādī Ḥanīfa is one of the larger *wādīs* of Najd. As such, it gave rise to several more prominent settlements. Among these settlements were two towns that would come to be forever linked with the Muwaḥḥid movement - al-‘Uyayna and al-Dir‘iyya - the former because it was the birthplace of its founder and the latter because it was his residence when he came to prominence. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb was born in 1703 in Najd at al-‘Uyayna, a small town which was enjoying a measure of prosperity at the time of his birth owing to favorable farming and trade conditions in the preceding years. Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb hailed from a branch of the well known Tamīmī clan known as the Āl Wuhaba, who were a sedentary tribe. His immediate family were the Āl Musharraf, and included a number of religious scholars (‘*ulamā*’) among their ranks.⁸²

It should be noted at the outset of our discussion that obtaining accurate biographical information about Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb is no simple task. He wrote very little about himself, and there is a paucity of other primary sources. Further complicating matters is the fact that those sources which do exist are often polemical or not contemporary. The current analysis relies heavily upon the early Muwaḥḥid chroniclers Ḥusayn Ibn Ghannām and ‘Uthmān Ibn Bishr, whose works are the best extant Arabic sources.⁸³ Ibn Ghannām’s

⁸¹ Uwaidah al-Juhany has constructed a rainfall chart and a list of disastrous events which affected Najd from the middle of the fifteenth century until the middle of the eighteenth century. He also includes extremely helpful analysis of how conditions affected life in the *wādīs* of Najd during this time. See *Najd Before the Salafī Reform Movement: Social, Political, and Religious Conditions During the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2002), 57-62.

⁸² The Āl Musharraf would later become known as the Āl al-Shaykh (“family of the Shaykh”) in honor of their most prominent member.

⁸³ I am here indebted to the research of George Rentz and ‘Abd Allāh Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn, whose biographical material on the Shaykh makes exceptional use of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr. Both authors also include an excellent survey of all known primary and secondary sources. See George Rentz, *The Birth of the Islamic Reform Movement in Saudi Arabia: Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb and the Beginnings of Unitarian Empire in Arabia* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2004); and al-‘Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb*.

account, *Tārīkh Najd (History of Najd)*, while at times blindly sympathetic to the Muwaḥḥid cause, is valuable because it provides first-hand information from the formative years of 1746 - 1797.⁸⁴ Ibn Bishr's work, *'Unwān al-Majd fī Tārīkh Najd (Symbol of Glory: on the History of Najd)*, is in places more objective, yet still shows considerable bias.⁸⁵ Unlike Ibn Ghannām, Ibn Bishr was not a contemporary of Shaykh Muḥammad, and appears to derive much of his information from his predecessor. Even so, his work is important because of the author's proximity in time and place to his subject, and is in places well researched, particularly as regards the First Saudi State from 1745 onwards. A further primary source, the anonymous *Lam' al-Shihāb fī Sīrat Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (The Shining of the Flame: The Life of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb)* is also valuable. Despite its fantastical descriptions of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's early life and travels, it is beneficial because its author was a contemporary of Shaykh Muḥammad's who provides insightful and at times objective analysis on the dawn of the Muwaḥḥid era and the First Saudi State.⁸⁶

The helpful aspects of *Lam' al-Shihāb* notwithstanding, it is difficult to rely on the text for accurate information about the life of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb because of the author's obvious bias against the Muwaḥḥid *da'wa*.⁸⁷ Assertions found here and nowhere else, such as the Shaykh studying in Isfahan, the center of the Shī'a Safavid Empire, would suggest that the author intended to characterize Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb as being outside the mainstream of eighteenth-century Sunnīsm to the extent that he was receptive to and positively influenced

⁸⁴ Ḥusayn Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd al-Musammā: Rawḍat al-Afkār wa 'l-Afhām li-Murtād Ḥal al-Imām wa-Ta'dād Ghazawāt Dhawī 'l-Islam*, 2 vols. (Cairo: 1949/1368).

⁸⁵ 'Uthmān Ibn Bishr, *'Unwān al-Majd fī Tārīkh Najd* (Beirut: n.d.).

⁸⁶ The only known manuscript of this work is in the British Museum, OPB MSS, Catalogue ADD 23346. An Arabic print edition is available from Aḥmad Muṣṭafā Abū Hakīma, ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1967). For more on its significance, see Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (New York: NYU Press, 2000) and Michael Cook, "The Provenance of the Lam al-Shihāb fī sīrat Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb," *Journal of Turkish Studies* 10 (1986): 79-86.

⁸⁷ *Da'wa* means "call" or "invitation." It normally refers to the evangelistic call to invite others into Islam, but it can also have a more general meaning of invitation to a cause or an event.

by Shī‘a thought. Based on the Shaykh’s own works, however, this is a preposterous proposition that casts much doubt on the validity of the text. Such characterizations point to a Sunnī author who was an opponent of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, and should give pause to those who would dare to read *Lam‘ al-Shihāb* uncritically.

Given the lack of historicity inherent in the anti-Muwaḥḥid *Lam‘ al-Shihāb* then, we are left to ponder what amounts to a similar lack in the opposite direction in the pro-Muwaḥḥid works of Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr. As we have noted, Ibn Bishr was not a contemporary of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, and his work often reads like a Muwaḥḥid polemic rather than a biography. He was writing, after all, during the heyday of Sa‘ūdī expansion after the death of the Shaykh, and the tone of his work reflects this fact in its partisan rhetoric. All of this takes us back to where we started, with a dependence on the work of Ibn Ghannām that is more due to a *lack* of better options than it is to his own particular scholarship, which displays a heavy Muwaḥḥid bias. In attempting to extricate the truth about Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s life from the contrarian portrayals by his enemies on the one hand, and from the hagiographic portrayals by his friends on the other, we are left to fit the extant works together as a sort of literary jigsaw puzzle, using our best historiographic instincts, as it were, to reconstruct as accurate a picture as possible. This tedious process is further helped when the picture is considered alongside the Shaykh’s own works, which can help to confirm the historicity of credible pieces of information and also to deny the validity of the more fanciful and polemical aspects of his primary source biographies.

While Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr do not provide many details about the early life of young Muḥammad, we can deduce that he was brought up in an environment where religious education was highly valued, given the number of ‘*ulamā*’ in the family. The Āl Musharraf were originally from the oasis town of Ushayqir, which had been a center of Ḥanbalī learning

in Najd throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸⁸ By the time of Shaykh Muḥammad's birth, Āl Musharraf scholars were spread all over Najd, and none was more prominent than his grandfather, Sulaymān Ibn 'Alī (d. 1668) of al-'Uyayna, whose reputation in jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was formidable. As judge (*qāḍī*) of al-'Uyayna, Sulaymān Ibn 'Alī was known to hear the most difficult disputes in all manner of cases. The author of several commentaries on topics such as the Islamic pilgrimage (*ḥajj*), he was also a teacher who was responsible for the education of the town's children, and counted his own son, 'Abd al-Wahhāb, among his students.

Not much is known about 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Sulaymān (d. 1740), the father of Muḥammad. But as would be expected, his studies under his father put him in a position of respect which resulted in him becoming the *qāḍī* of al-'Uyayna in due course. Even though he never achieved the fame that his father did, he was a decent scholar in his own right. In the same way that he had learned from his father, 'Abd al-Wahhāb was responsible for the education of his two sons, Muḥammad and Sulaymān, along with the other children of the town.

Muḥammad was introduced to the harshness of life in Najd at an early age, where the shade of date palms was a necessary respite from the intense heat of summer, and fires were used to abate the bitter cold of winter inside the small mud brick houses. A regional drought that was affecting certain towns in Najd during the year of Muḥammad's birth turned into catastrophic flooding the next year (1704).⁸⁹ Later, when he was aged six, Muḥammad would witness more indicators of the realities of tribal life in Najd. The year 1709 first saw a

⁸⁸ It is likely that Ushayqir was an influential centre for even longer than this. Unfortunately we cannot be certain of this fact because of the historiographic weakness that plagued pre-Muwahhid Najd. For more on this, see Michael Cook, "The Historians of Pre-Wahhābi Najd," *Studia Islamica* 76 (1992): 163-176.

⁸⁹ al-Juhany, *Najd Before the Salafi Reform Movement*, 58.

devastating epidemic hit nearby Sudayr where many people died.⁹⁰ Then, his own town of al-‘Uyayna, along with some bedouin allies, waged a military campaign against the neighboring town of al-Ḥuraymilā.⁹¹ This belligerent scenario was repeated again when Muḥammad was eleven, as his town this time called upon more bedouin allies to attack and loot al-Yamāma in 1714.⁹²

It was evident from an early age that young Muḥammad had a mental capacity which surpassed the other children under his father’s tutelage. Ibn Ghannām relates that he did not like to play with other children, preferring to spend his time in solitude and study. As was standard for more than a millennium in Najd, the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth served as the basis for all instruction.⁹³ Having memorized the entire Qur’ān by the age of ten, he also displayed exceptional aptitude in knowledge of the Ḥadīth, thus proving himself to be a serious and able student. Muḥammad further benefitted from the fact that the family home also served as a meeting place for visiting religious scholars to stay, and likely took advantage of this opportunity to expand his growing knowledge of Islam.

By the age of twelve, Muḥammad’s father, ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, decided that his son was knowledgeable enough in Islam to lead the congregational prayer. He also determined that he was mature enough for marriage, and thus found him a wife later that same year.⁹⁴ Here Ibn Ghannām mentions the first of several journeys that the Shaykh would undertake during his formative years, as he traveled to Mecca on pilgrimage shortly after his wedding.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 61.

⁹¹ Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-Majd*, 160.

⁹² Ibid., 183.

⁹³ The Ḥadīth refers to the Prophetic Tradition (lit. “saying”) and includes the sayings and doings of Muḥammad. The plural is Aḥādīth.

⁹⁴ It is a long-standing custom in Arabia for parents to arrange the marriage of their children, including sons, when they reach puberty. This custom, while fading in some places, still persists particularly among more rural and traditional populations.

In a letter from ‘Abd al-Wahhāb addressed to his brothers, he states that after the aforementioned occurrences, “He [Muḥammad] then asked me to allow him to make the pilgrimage to the sacred house of God; I granted his request and assisted him to achieve his aim.”⁹⁵ From Mecca the young scholar traveled to Medina, where he stayed for a couple of months before returning home to al-‘Uyayna.

The young pilgrim must have been duly impressed with what he had seen and experienced on his first trip to Islam’s holy cities. Indeed, this was the first time that he had traveled outside of Najd. It is no stretch to conclude that soon after he returned from the Ḥijāz young Muḥammad probably saw the oases of Najd in a whole new light.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibn Ghannām, *Tārīkh Najd*, 1:30.

⁹⁶ Crawford, *Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab*, 24.

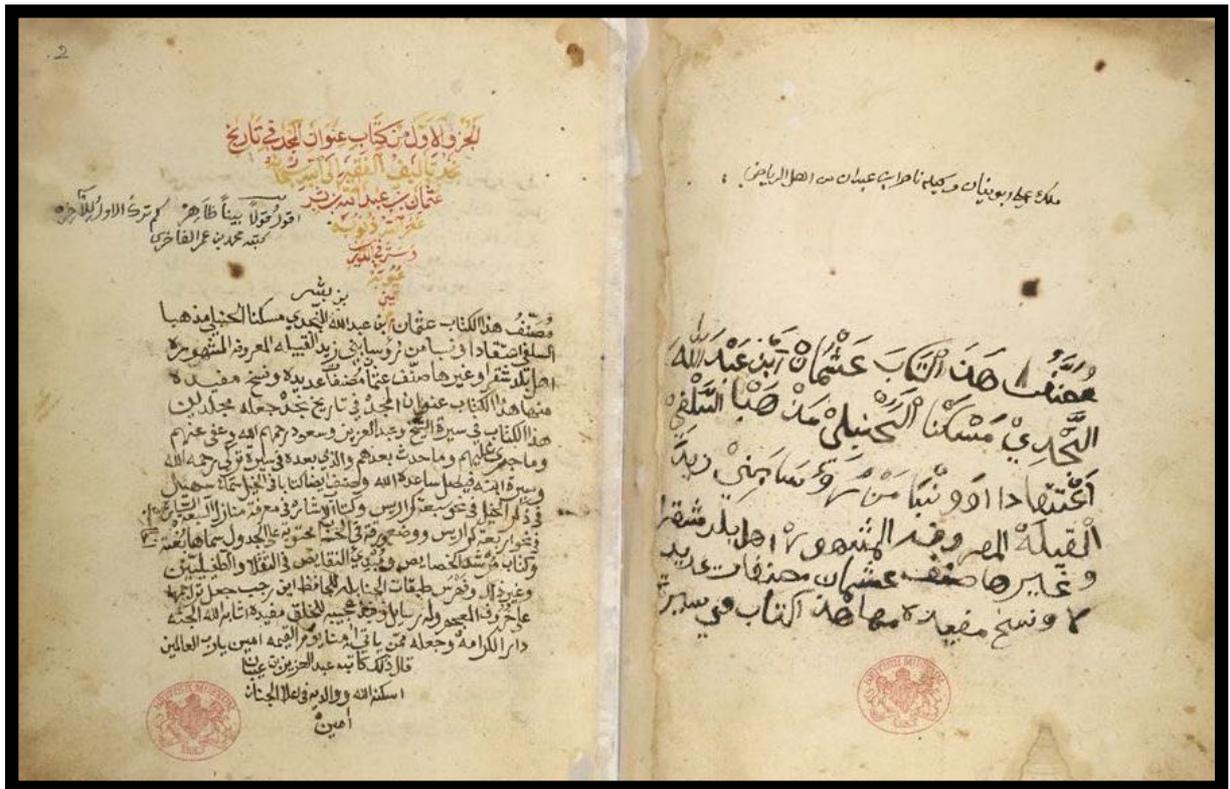


Figure 1: Ibn Bishr's 'Unwān al-Majd fī Tārīkh Najd, 1853.
 BL Or. MS 7718, ff. 1v-2. Copyright © The British Library Board.

1.6 From Ibn Ḥanbal to Ibn Taymiyya

Geographic isolation was a major contributing factor to the lack of a broad spectrum of intellectual life in the oasis settlements of Najd.⁹⁷ Further complicating matters was the fact that the rigid Ḥanbalī school had been the dominant *madhhab* for centuries. Its founder, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), parted ways with his predecessor al-Shafī'ī as well as with the other mainstream Sunnī schools of al-Malikī and al-Ḥanafī, mostly because of his emphasis on the Sunna and his dislike for traditional *ijtihād* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*.⁹⁸ Ibn Ḥanbal distrusted human reason as a basis for interpretation of the Qur'ān and Sunna because he feared that it would lead to religious innovation known as *bida'*, particularly among the less learned. As such, he argued that it was impossible for modern Muslims to achieve right understanding through consensus (*ijmā'*). For Ibn Ḥanbal, *ijmā'* was only possible for the first generation of Muslims known as the Prophet's Companions (*Ṣaḥāba*), and should be followed only in cases of unanimous agreement among the *Ṣaḥāba*. Where consensus among the *Ṣaḥāba* does not exist, *ijtihād* was allowed, but only for the well educated, so as to avoid *bida'*. With his emphasis on the Sunna and the *Ṣaḥāba* in the Ḥadīth, Ibn Ḥanbal became the forerunner of those who would later be known as “*Ahl al-Ḥadīth*” for their elevation of the Ḥadīth to the level of the Qur'ān in their interpretation of Sharī'a.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ For a broad survey of intellectual life in Najd before the rise of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, see Aḥmad bin 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Bisām, *al-Ḥayāt al-'Ilmīa fī Waṣat al-Jazīra al-'Arabiyya: fī al-Qarnayn al-Ḥādī 'Ashr wa al-Thānī 'Ashr al-Hijrayn wa Āthar Da'wat al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb Fīhā* (Riyadh: Dāra al-Malik 'Abd al-Azīz, 2005/1426). For more on intellectual life in Najd *after* the rise of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, see Haya Bint 'Abd al-'Azīz al-'Īsā, *al-Ḥayāt al-'Ilmīa fī Najd: Mundhu Qīyam Da'wat al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb wa Ḥatā Nihayāt al-Dawla al-Sa'ūdiyya al-'Āwlā* (Riyadh: Dāra al-Malik 'Abd al-Azīz, 1996-7/1417).

⁹⁸ Sunna means the “way” (of life of the Prophet). *Ijtihād* means “utmost effort” and refers to the use of diligent independent reasoning based on thorough knowledge of the Qur'ān and Sunna on the part of the *mujtahid* to arrive at understanding. *Ijtihād* stands in contrast to *taqlīd*, which means “tradition” and refers to the acceptance of Islamic legal opinion based on the merits of another *mujtahid*. *Uṣūl al-fiqh* means “principles of jurisprudence.”

⁹⁹ *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* means “people of the Ḥadīth.” For more on Ibn Ḥanbal, see Christopher Melchert's brief but lucid biography, *Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (London: Oneworld, 2006).

Having returned to Najd from his first trip abroad, it was not long before the young Shaykh seemed to have felt the need to travel again, most probably owing to his desire to immerse himself in a more learned environment such as he had experienced on his first trip to the Ḥijāz.¹⁰⁰ He therefore made a second pilgrimage to Mecca, from whence he traveled immediately back to Medina, where he met a fellow Najdī scholar named ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Ibrāhīm Ibn Sayf al-Najdī. Ibn Sayf then introduced Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī, whose teaching he sat under for the duration of his second stay in Medina.¹⁰¹ Both men, it seems, impressed upon their pupil the teachings of one *Muḥaddith* (scholar of Ḥadīth) who would come to have tremendous impact on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the fourteenth-century Damascene scholar Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).¹⁰² Although it is most probable that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had been exposed to the writings of Ibn Taymiyya previous to this, it was during his time with al-Sindī and Ibn Sayf that he seems to have been smitten by him. Al-Sindī, who came to Medina from the Sindh (present-day Pakistan), was a Ḥanafī, while Ibn Sayf al-Najdī followed the Ḥanbalī school, which was typical of most Najdī scholars at the time. However, in much the same way as Ibn Taymiyya did centuries before them, both men appear to have shunned traditional *madhhabī* allegiances, alleging that they created unnecessary divisions in the wider Islamic community (*umma*). Although they continued to maintain some sort of association with their respective *madhāhib*, both of Ibn

¹⁰⁰ The exact dates of these travels are unknown.

¹⁰¹ For more on Ibn Ḥayyā al-Sindī and his relationship with Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, see Basheer M. Nafi, “A Teacher of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and the Revival of Aḥāb al-Ḥadīth’s Methodology,” *Islamic Law and Society* 13 (2006): 208-241. See also John O. Voll, “Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: an analysis of an intellectual group in eighteenth-century Madīna,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 32-39.

¹⁰² For more on Ibn Taymiyya, including a brief biographical sketch as well as helpful perspectives on his thought, see Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed, eds., *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Medinan teachers followed the unorthodox example of Ibn Taymiyya in this regard, as well as in respect to their exultation of the Ḥadīth.

Al-Sindī and al-Najdī would appear to be part of a wider eighteenth-century revival of Ḥadīth studies which caused them to look back to Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), for inspiration.¹⁰³ Al-Sindī was particularly concerned that Islamic scholarship was swinging back and forth like a pendulum, either coming to rely too heavily on personal opinion (*rā’i*) on the one hand, or too heavily on *taqlīd* on the other. Accordingly he called for *ijtihād* via a return to the Qur’ān and Sunna as a means to counteract what he deemed as harmful trends in both directions. It is not surprising, then, that the spirit of Ibn Taymiyya permeated much of his writing and teaching. Following the example of al-Sindī, our own Shaykh would in later years make numerous mentions of both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya throughout his writings. In an effort to make sense of the emergence and impact of the Muwahhīd phenomenon, scholars have long tried to situate it within the larger context of revivalism that was occurring in the eighteenth century around the Islamic world.¹⁰⁴ Pointing to the fact that al-Sindī also taught the Indian reformer Shah Walī Allāh (1703-1762) at Medina, John Voll says, “Thus, through Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and his scholarly tradition, one can place the founder of the Wahhabi movement in a world of Islamic revivalism that stretches from Indonesia to Africa.”¹⁰⁵ However such comparisons may only be superficial, as they do not account for the many differences between the two men and their

¹⁰³ For more on this wider eighteenth-century trend in Ḥadīth revival, see John O. Voll, “‘Abdallah ibn Salim al-Basri and 18th Century Hadīth Scholarship,” *Die Welt des Islams* 42 (2002): 356-372. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya is also known as Ibn al-Qayyim, and is often referred to as such in this research.

¹⁰⁴ For more on Islamic revivalism in the eighteenth century, see Nehemia Levtzion and John O. Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1987). More will be said about this in section 3.6.

¹⁰⁵ Voll, “Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb,” 39.

respective messages.¹⁰⁶ There is no question that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s association with wider circles of learning, primarily while under al-Sindī at Medina, placed him and the movement that he founded within a larger current of reform in the eighteenth century. However, thanks to the unique features of the Shaykh’s message, and the means by which he made it heard, we must be careful not to attribute more significance to such connections than is warranted.

Further scholarly efforts to understand and situate the Muwahhīd phenomenon into a clear historical milieu have attributed its rise to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s early travels. Others have contended that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s travels had very little to do with the formulation of his doctrines, and instead it was a heavy and constant dosage of Ibn Taymiyya that fueled early Muwahhīdism.¹⁰⁷ However, instead of attempting to isolate one single factor as the primary cause of its emergence, perhaps we are better served by acknowledging some combination of both as what ultimately inspired Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in thinking and in praxis. We might thus say that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s reading of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim were a major influence on his *thinking*, while his travels were a major influence on his *praxis*.¹⁰⁸ The logic of this conclusion is further supported by the fact that after his return to Najd from Medina, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb spent about a year in study (with Ibn

¹⁰⁶ The differences between Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Shah Walī Allāh are significant. The former advocated one main doctrine for his entire ministry (Tawhīd - the unity of God), often in an acerbic tone. The latter was known to take a more conciliatory approach while expounding a large variety of doctrinal reforms.

¹⁰⁷ See for example, Michael Cook, “On the Origins of Wahhābism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2, 2 (1992): 191-202. Cook argues against the notion that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s travels were the determining factor in the formulation of his doctrine and contends that Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya were his primary muses.

¹⁰⁸ In one of his letters, the Shaykh said, “I am not calling people to Sūfism, nor to a particular *fiqh* or *madhhab*. Nor am I calling them to any of the Imāms I respect, such as Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Kathīr, and others. Instead, I am calling people to God alone, who has no partners, and I am calling them to the Sunna of the Messenger of God.” See WMIAW 7:252. We should take Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb at his word here, and accept that he was not calling people to any particular path except for that of God, which was most clearly exemplified by Muḥammad and his earliest Companions. In this thinking, he closely paralleled Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Taymiyya, and Ibn al-Qayyim, which is why we can deduce that even while he did not consider himself as a modern reproduction of any of these men, he was surely influenced by them. For more on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s distaste for sectarianism, see WMIAW 12:128-129.

Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim likely constituting a large portion of that), from whence he set out again in search of further learning in Basra. Indeed, it was his experience in Basra that would ultimately cause him to publicly put into practice the thinking that had been germinating inside of him for quite some years.

1.7 Empires and Ideologies

Up to this point in history, the Ottomans were unable (or perhaps unwilling) to subdue Najd, even as they extended their reach to virtually every area around it from the Ḥijāz in the west, to Iraq in the north, to the Gulf coast in the east, and Yemen in the south. However, their lack of a formal presence in Najd did not mean that they did not exert an influence on the development of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s thought. The same can be said for the influence of Persia, which was the other competing empire in the vicinity of Najd.

If young Muḥammad’s eyes were first opened to the outside world when he traveled to the Ḥijāz, then his time in Basra was more like gazing into the noonday sun of what the world had to offer in the eighteenth century. Although cosmopolitan enough by virtue of hosting the *hajj* since the dawn of Islam, Mecca and Medina still retained an air of homogeneity which Basra lacked. Ṣūfism was forced to remain within the bounds of acceptable orthodoxy in the Ḥijāz, but in Basra it was unrestrained. Similarly, Shī‘ism was tolerated as a guest in the Ḥijāz, but in Basra it was becoming a dominant force. Ṣūfī and Shī‘a shrines and other pilgrimage sites held sway over large swaths of Basra’s population, which at that time numbered 40,000 - 50,000. Moreover, Basra contained Christian and Jewish elements which had long ago been chased from the Arabian Peninsula in the first century of Islam. In addition to resident Jewish merchants, the Christians of Basra included

British and Dutch businessmen from the East India Companies, Indian traders, and resident Armenian merchants.¹⁰⁹

The cultural and religious diversity that the Shaykh experienced in Basra was complicated further by political developments instigated by the Persian general Nader Shah Afshar, who rose to power in 1736 by overthrowing the Safavids and declaring himself shah. Among his numerous military successes, he defeated Ottoman forces on the Gulf coast while reclaiming Bahrain for the Persians. Nader was himself raised Shī‘a, as the Safavids had made Twelver Shī‘ism the state religion of Persia in the early sixteenth century. Political aspirations seem to have led him to then embrace Sunnīsm in an apparent attempt to lessen inter-religious tensions between the Persians and the Sunnī Ottomans, who were the chief antagonists to his expansionist vision for Persia. Nader eventually encouraged Persia to adopt a more sanitized version of Shī‘ism which he called *Ja‘farīsm* in honor of the sixth Shī‘a *imām*. *Ja‘farī* doctrine called for the ban of certain Shī‘a practices which were particularly at odds with Sunnī Islam. Nader Shah lobbied for *Ja‘farīsm* to be officially accepted by the Ottomans as a fifth *madhhab*, thus bridging the divide between Sunnī and Shī‘a and ostensibly making Persia more influential in the region. Although the Ottomans formally rejected his overture in 1744, the fact that it loomed as a possibility for years beforehand caused much consternation within both traditional Sunnī and Shī‘a camps. Persians who did not share his vision migrated to Ottoman-held Iraq, which resulted in a huge Shī‘a influx into cities such as Basra. This migration exponentially increased Shī‘a influence in Iraq so that it eventually supplanted Iran as a center for Shī‘a scholarship.¹¹⁰ In such a scenario, it is not difficult to imagine that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb would have felt an existential Shī‘a threat from

¹⁰⁹ Crawford, *Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab*, 24.

¹¹⁰ Y. Naqash, *The Shi‘is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 15.

multiple angles, both from the possible contamination of Sunnīsm by *Jaʿfarīsm*, and also by the growing influence of Shīʿism due to the infiltration of Shīʿa into Iraq.

During his lengthy stay in Basra Muḥammad studied under Shaykh Muḥammad al-Majmūʿī. In addition to studying Arabic grammar, it was during this season that he really began to formulate his stance on the doctrine of the oneness of God, Tawḥīd. While we cannot claim that it was solely in response to the perceived idolatry around him in Basra, neither can we deny the fact that this must have been a primary motivating factor. If it was difficult for Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb to stomach the veneration he witnessed at the Prophet’s tomb in Medina, how much more nauseating must it have been to witness the throngs of Shīʿa pilgrims who flocked to Karbala to visit the tomb of Ḥusayn and to al-Najaf to visit the shrine of ʿAlī? Therefore it was in Basra that the Muwahḥidūn chroniclers note the beginning of Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s public preaching of Tawḥīd. His preaching was a chance for him to gain practice in the skill of rhetoric along with the Arabic grammar he had studied. And it was this preaching which earned him the honor of being expelled by the majority of Basra’s residents who were not friendly to his message.

This may have been a perfect opportunity to journey to Damascus, as he had long hoped to visit it as a center of Ḥanbalīsm, but alas it was not to be, presumably because he lacked the funds.¹¹¹ So instead of heading west, he headed south toward home, alighting briefly in al-Aḥsāʾ, which was another Ottoman-held area on the eastern fringe of Najd. Finally in or around 1739, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb’s travels outside of Najd came to an end as he arrived in the town of al-Ḥuraymilāʾ, where his father had settled as *qadī* after a disagreement

¹¹¹ Some biographers have mentioned that Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb traveled to Damascus (as well as to other places such as Baghdad and Isfahan). Cf. Roy Jackson, *Fifty Key Figures in Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 160. However, as noted in section 1.5, these fanciful accounts seem to be based on biased depictions by Muwahḥid opponents. For example, Sunnī opponents may have attempted to portray strong Shīʿa influence on his thought by stating that he studied in Isfahan. In contrast, the rather bland Muwahḥid accounts of his travels seem to be more historically reliable. Incidentally, they also align best chronologically.

with ‘Uthmān Ibn Mu‘ammar, the ruler of al-‘Uyayna. In al-Ḥuraymilā’ the young Shaykh continued the preaching that he had begun in Basra. Although it is not entirely clear as to the reason, he was asked (or implored) by his father to cease from his aggressive preaching, to which he assented, most likely out of respect. While outwardly ceasing from his preaching for a time, he harnessed his passion and took the opportunity to pen what has become his best known work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.¹¹² When his father died in 1740, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb moved back to his hometown of al-‘Uyayna, where his ministry was primed to take center stage.

1.8 Modern Jāhiliyya

Desert dwellers have a certain appreciation for horticulture that can only be explained by living in an environment where water is such a scarce resource. Considering the stages of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s development in botanical terms then, one might say that he began as a seedling in Najd, his thought germinated in Medina, he began to flower in Basra, and came to full bloom upon his return home to al-‘Uyayna.

The Āl al-Shaykh were not historically politically influential. But all this changed when Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb literally married his religious and political ideology by taking Jawhara, daughter of the renowned ruler ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Mu‘ammar and aunt of then al-‘Uyayna ruler ‘Uthmān Ibn Mu‘ammar, for a wife. At her urging, the Shaykh secured the support of ‘Uthman, who, as al-‘Uthaymīn notes, “ordered his townsmen to show respect to the Shaykh and to follow his teachings. This, combined with his growing renown and his eloquent tongue, made it easier and quicker for him to win the confidence and sympathy of inhabitants.”¹¹³ Whereas he had not been accepted elsewhere, it was in his hometown of al-

¹¹² *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* is a series of reflections on the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth in the format of a catechism, and has become a standard reference for almost all Islamic discussions on the doctrine of Tawḥīd.

¹¹³ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*, 42.

‘Uyayna that the Shaykh finally found a listening audience, albeit even then he was not without resistance from many of the nearby ‘*ulamā*’. Through the political support of his new relative through marriage, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb gained a much-desired hearing with the very people whose practices had so disgusted him upon his first return from the Ḥijāz while he was yet a teenager.

As it was hinted at previously, there was something about Najd that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw in a new light when he returned from his first pilgrimage. What perhaps once seemed normal to him when it was all he had ever known was now a horrifying sight. Idolatry and traditional practices such as worshipping at the tombs of dead saints, offering prayer at shrines or certain trees deemed to be holy, and political corruption and injustice in the name of religion all seemed to grip his soul with a consternation akin to one of God’s prophets of old. In the Shaykh’s eyes, the state of Islam had become repulsive and did not resemble the religion of Muḥammad and the Rightly Guided Caliphs of Islam’s glory days in any way. This was surely the case in places both far and near. From Istanbul to Isfahan, from the Maghreb to Medina, and from the Nile to Najd, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw one prevailing theme, *jāhiliyya*.¹¹⁴ Far from avoiding the obvious comparisons to the religious and moral climate which characterized Arabia at the time of the Prophet, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s biographers seized the opportunity to highlight this aspect of the Muwaḥḥid story. Just as the Prophet preached submission to God in all the beauty and majesty of his oneness in the midst of a polytheistic, degraded Arabian society, so now a *new* prophetic voice was needed to do the same thing approximately one thousand years later.

¹¹⁴ *Jāhiliyya* literally means “ignorance,” and is significant in Islamic terminology because it refers to the time period which preceded the coming of Islam to the Arabian Peninsula. It was an epoch marked by polytheism and various forms of intellectual and spiritual darkness and injustice.

And preach he did. In the vein of his forebear Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was a polarizing figure who was unafraid to declare other Muslims as apostates (*kuffār* or *murtaddūn*) if they did not agree with and practice his doctrines.¹¹⁵ While Ṣūfīs and even fellow Sunnīs were not spared from his pronouncements of *takfīr*, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb reserved his most vitriolic attacks for the Shī‘a, whom he saw as a deviant sect corrupted beyond repair. He also followed the example of Ibn Taymiyya in declaring the use of *jihād* as an obligatory measure to deal with those he deemed unbelievers. At the outset of his campaign, he purportedly assured ‘Uthmān, “If you rise in support of the unity of God, he will grant you his aid to rule Najd and its Arabs.”¹¹⁶ Accordingly, the two set out with some townspeople from al-‘Uyayna to destroy a shrine in nearby al-Jubayla which was the supposed burial place of Zayd Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.¹¹⁷ The pair then cut down several trees around Najd where cultic practices took place. The final announcement of the new *da‘wa* which had come to Najd was an incident which still shocks the conscience. The story is related that a certain woman came to the Shaykh to confess that she had committed adultery. After giving her a couple of days to consider her confession, which she clung to, he ordered her to be stoned to death.¹¹⁸ The Sharī‘a of the Prophet had returned, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was to be its mouthpiece.

The stoning of the adulteress at al-‘Uyayna caused no little stir among Najdī ‘*ulamā*’, to the extent that several prominent men began to call for ‘Uthmān Ibn Mu‘ammar to dispose of

¹¹⁵ The doctrine of *takfīr* (excommunication) can refer to the apostasy of a formerly true believer (*murtad*, pl. *murtaddūn*) or simply to an unbeliever (*kāfir*, pl. *kuffār*). The one who issues a *fatwa* (religious decree) of *takfīr* is known as a *takfīrī*. For more on this controversial aspect of the Shaykh’s thought, see section 3.4 of this thesis.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-Majd*, 19.

¹¹⁷ Zayd Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was a Companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and the elder brother of the second caliph, ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.

¹¹⁸ Ibn Bishr, *Unwān al-Majd*, 20.

the incendiary shaykh.¹¹⁹ Chief among these voices was that of Sulaymān Ibn Muḥammad, ruler of al-Aḥsā' and chief of the powerful Banū Khālid tribe. The sources differ over whether Ibn Muḥammad called for the death of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb or merely that he be exiled from al-'Uyayna. What is certain is that 'Uthmān feared the economic and security challenges that would befall him if he did not act in some way, so he urged the firebrand cleric to take up residence elsewhere. Thus Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb left his hometown yet again, only to find in al-Dir'iyya a place that would become the most fitting home that he would ever know in his lifetime. In Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd, the Shaykh found a man with common enemies among the Banū Khālid, and who possessed the ability to protect himself and those under his name from the threat they posed.¹²⁰ Furthermore, upon his arrival, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb found several prominent men of the town who were already committed to his doctrines, notably Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd's own son, 'Abd al-'Azīz, as well as two of his brothers.¹²¹

The meeting of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb and Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd has gone down in history in much more glamorous terms than it was likely to have actually happened. Ibn Bishr gives a fairly dramatic account, stating that the ruler and the Shaykh made a pact complete with religious, political and economic agreements. Ibn Ghannām, however, provides a drier account where the ruler is said to have only requested that the Shaykh remain in al-Dir'iyya and work for the cause of Islam in exchange for the refuge he would be provided there. This much earlier, less dramatic account is a more probable rendition of the

¹¹⁹ Najdīs were not the only ones calling for his downfall, as the Shaykh's doctrines and exploits had become known far and wide by this time. In fact there were public denunciations of *takfīr* against him from the *Sharīf* of Mecca, as well as from Basra and al-Aḥsā'. See Crawford, *Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab*, 31-32.

¹²⁰ Under Ibn Sa'ūd's leadership, al-Dir'iyya was already becoming a military force to be reckoned with by the time he met Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

¹²¹ It is also worth noting that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's wife, Jawhara, had once come to the aid of Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd by guaranteeing his safety in less fortuitous times for the chief of al-Dir'iyya. Surely Ibn Sa'ūd had not forgotten the gesture.

story of the birth of the Sa‘ūdī - Muwaḥḥid alliance. Given that the two have been so closely allied for the past three centuries it is understandable that a more fanciful account of the initial meeting between the two men should be believed. As al-‘Uthaymīn observes, “such a view seems to have been arrived at by back-projection from the way in which the administration of the state was in fact to develop.”¹²² Indeed it is more likely that the Sa‘ūdī - Muwaḥḥid alliance was the result of a more organic, practical process over the course of time. Whatever the actual origins of the religio-political alliance which has governed Saudi Arabia for the past two centuries, what is certain is that when Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb approached Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ūd, their fortunes and those of many others down to the present day would be forever changed.

Epistemological considerations

There is one final factor which is vital to our consideration of Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb’s religious context, and it concerns his epistemology. The question of how Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb conceived of the sovereign, omnipotent God described in the Qur’ān, and where this knowledge came from is foundational in understanding the context of his theology. Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb’s work often follows a similar pattern of analysis of religious texts, whereby he first considers what the Qur’ān has to say on a given topic, then moves to the Ḥadīth, and finally to the *Ṣaḥāba*.

The Qur’ān was unquestionably accepted as the first source of knowledge of the divine, as Muslims have traditionally believed that it literally descended to earth in the exact linguistic and grammatical form in which it existed in heaven. The most noteworthy

¹²² al-‘Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Waḥḥāb*, 55. For an in-depth analysis on Muḥammad Ibn Sa‘ūd’s role in the formation of the alliance and expansion of the state, see ‘Abd al-Raḥman bin ‘Alī al-‘Arīnī, *al-Imām Muḥammad Bin Sa‘ūd wa Jahūdahu fī Tā’sīs al-Dawlā al-Sa‘ūdiyya al-Āwālā* (Riyadh: General Secretary for the Celebration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 1419 AH).

historical exception to this came from the Mu‘tazilī school, which emerged during the ‘Umayyad era and championed reason and rational thought.¹²³ The Mu‘tazila believed that the Qur’ān was created, and not co-eternal with God. They held this position because they were concerned about upholding the doctrine of Tawḥīd, as anything that is co-eternal with God and yet other than God seemed to them to approach the greatest of sins in Islam, *shirk* (the association of anything other than God with God). Rather ironically, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was among the majority of Sunnīs who did not feel that the doctrine of the Qur’ān’s eternal nature approached *shirk* by compromising Tawḥīd.¹²⁴ Thus he maintained that the Qur’ān, perfect as it eternally existed with God in heaven, was not to be questioned as the primary source of divine knowledge on earth.

The next source of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s knowledge of God was the Ḥadīth, which he viewed, as we have seen, as being virtually on the same level of authority as the Qur’ān due to its narrations of the life and ways of Islam’s Prophet, Muḥammad. The Shaykh believed that Muḥammad was the last and greatest of all the prophets, and therefore all of his utterances and actions were equally as authoritative as the Qur’ān itself. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb applied the Ḥadīth to his study of the Qur’ān in a “layered” fashion, whereby he read it on top of the Qur’ānic narrative so that the consistency of the accounts could be determined not only by the chain of transmission (*isnād*), but even more so by his own analysis or *ijtihād*. For this reason, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb sometimes cited Aḥādīth which were not considered *ṣaḥīḥ* (sound) in transmission because he deemed them *ṣaḥīḥ* by means of his own *ijtihād* in

¹²³ The Mu‘tazilī school died out during the ‘Abbasid era after the tenth century. Although it was briefly the official position of the caliphate in Baghdad, it thereafter became viewed as heretical by Sunnīs. Interestingly, it continued to exist in Shī‘a thought in Persia, which may have accounted for some of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s dislike of Shī‘ism. Although this could just as easily be argued in the other direction, namely that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not subscribe to this doctrine because the Shī‘a did. For more on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and the Mu‘tazila see section 2.5 of this research.

¹²⁴ This is ironic because the doctrine of the unity of God was his foremost theological concern. More will be said of this in the chapters that follow.

comparing their content to the Qur'ān. Conversely, he had no qualms in rejecting Aḥādīth which were considered *ṣaḥīḥ* in transmission if he felt they did not correlate with his reading of the Qur'ān.

Related to his unique reading of the Ḥadīth was his reliance upon the *Ṣaḥāba* for his theological and legal analysis on a given subject. Although not necessarily divine revelation on the level of the aforementioned sources, the words of the Companions of the Prophet were, for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, worth more than the words of any other successive voice in Islam. He considered what the *Ṣaḥāba* had to say as of far greater value than any other jurists or theologians in Islamic history. This is why he was often accused of neglecting the thought and opinion of eminent Islamic scholars. As far as Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was concerned, as long as what was narrated by the Prophet's Companions did not contradict the Qur'ān or Sunna, then they were to be heeded above any other successive voices after the first Islamic generation, no matter how renowned those voices were.

We might say that Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's epistemology was built upon his combined reading of the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and *Ṣaḥāba*, with the latter two laid upon the foundation of the former. He was a staunch critic of the use of unaided human reason to gain knowledge of the divine. In adhering to a traditional hermeneutic of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb considered reason useful only inasmuch as it could be applied to understanding the relationship between the Sunna and the Qur'ān in a carefully controlled form of *ijtihād*. Beyond this concession, he had little use for epistemological alternatives. Contemporary readers might wonder how the Shaykh knew that his sources for divine knowledge were trustworthy. This was not a question that ever seemed to enter his

mind. They were trustworthy in terms of providing knowledge of the divine because they came from the divine himself!¹²⁵

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

1.9 Comparing and Concluding

We now turn to what should prove to be the most interesting, or perhaps the most contentious, part of this thesis - the comparative analysis that concludes each chapter. As the stated intent is a comparative study of the theology of Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, it is only fitting that we apply the same comparative analysis to the *contexts* which served as the backdrop to the rise of their theology. If the reader of this chapter has been careful, he or she may have observed that while there are no shortage of differences between our two protagonists, the similarities in their biographical, intellectual, political, and religious contexts are at times striking.

Both men hailed from devout families who were already situated well within the more conservative streams of their respective religions - the Puritans in the case of Edwards, and the Ḥanbalīs in the case of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Edwards’ forebears were not just Christians, they were Reformed Christians. And yet they were not just Reformed Christians, they were Puritan Reformed Christians. Although it was initially a pejorative term for those who felt that the Church of England did not go far enough in its break from Rome after the Reformation, the word *puritan* itself signifies the kind of pristine vision for a return to the undefiled gospel of Christ toward which the Puritans strove. Likewise Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s forebears were not just Muslims, they were Sunnī Muslims. And they were not just Sunnī

¹²⁵ Other Muslims have recognized that this can be considered faulty logic by virtue of its circular reasoning, and have attempted to compensate by focusing on the ways that science, history, logic, and other disciplines corroborate Islam in general and the Qur’ān in particular.

Muslims, they were Ḥanbalī Sunnī Muslims. It was the Ḥanbalī school within Islam which first gave rise to the *salafī* ideal of a return to “pure” Islam as exemplified in the Sunna of Muḥammad.

Both Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb were educated at home by fathers who were scholars in their own right, and yet it was their prominent grandfathers, both of whom were incidentally named after the Biblical King Solomon, whose reputations truly preceded them in and around New England and Najd. In fact, it is doubtful if either one of our two clerics would have achieved the level of early notoriety and eventual ministry success which they did without the strong influence of their grandfathers over their development. This was not only true in terms of the reputation they carried, but also in terms of their influence over their grandsons’ education whether directly (as in one on one conversations or tutorials) or indirectly (as in accessing their presumably large personal libraries). In the case of Edwards, it was no small thing to be the grandson and eventual pulpit understudy to the “Pope of the Connecticut Valley,” Solomon Stoddard. In the case of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, it was probably equally as significant that he was known as the grandson of Sulaymān Ibn ‘Alī, one of Najd’s most acclaimed religious scholars.

Neither young Jonathan nor Muḥammad appear to have been much taken by the normal pursuits of youth. Instead, the accounts depict two boys who were far more concerned with the pursuit of piety and prayer than with puerile pleasantries or procrastination. Truly, God was for them the highest good upon which a young man could set his mind and spend his time. Whether it was in memorizing the Bible or the Qur’ān, reading Aquinas or Aḥādīth, or praying while other boys were playing, young Jonathan and Muḥammad both displayed exceptional intellectual abilities and maturity, even by the standards of their own day.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ Ibn Ghannām, 75-76 and WJE 16:790ff.

Furthermore, Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb were both reared in an environment where hospitality was a sacred duty, and thus benefitted from regular interactions with visiting clerics who stayed in their homes for periods of time. One can almost imagine the late night theological discussions that their fathers must have held with traveling preachers and scholars while the boys sat there and soaked up every minute detail, until at last they were made to go to bed!

Certain geographic and political realities also influenced the Reverend and the Shaykh in ways that neither could have known about the other, but that tied them together nevertheless. Both New England and Najd were frontier areas whose inhabitants lived under constant threat of attack by hostile Indian or Arab tribes, respectively. There was also the constant pressure of infringement by colonial adversaries in Paris and Istanbul, as the French and Ottomans were continually perched at the doorsteps of New England and Najd, respectively. Young Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb knew these threats firsthand, and such experiences must have influenced the development of their theology, especially regarding God’s sovereignty in protecting the faithful among his people, or in punishing their disobedience by allowing them to fall victim to opposing human forces. Examples of this kind of thinking are widely present in the thought of both men in their adult years, and one cannot help but wonder how much of this was due to the geopolitical atmospheres which characterized their contexts from their youth.

It is important that we not overlook crucial differences in epistemology which arise in our comparison of our clerics’ backgrounds. For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, “education” meant the pursuit of *religious* knowledge. As far as we can tell, his education entirely consisted of studying the Arabic Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, coupled with relevant grammar and theological

treatises. There is no mention of his studying any other subject.¹²⁷ Whatever he knew about history, science, or geography was known only because of its Islamic significance. If a time, place, or subject did not hold Islamic significance, then it was actually considered *insignificant* in terms of his educational experience. According to Ḥanbalī doctrine, pursuits such as philosophy were actually seen as un-Islamic. For Edwards, “education” certainly meant primarily the pursuit of religious knowledge through the study of the Bible in its original languages of Greek and Hebrew, with relevant theological treatises. However, it also included a variety of other subjects outside of religion proper such as the natural sciences, philosophy, logic, history, geography, music, metaphysics, and the classics.¹²⁸ For the Puritans, all subjects, even those that would appear not to hold religious significance, were still important because of their view that all truth in the universe is ultimately God’s truth, and was therefore worthy of study. There is no doubt that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s travels to places like Mecca, Medina and Basra exposed him to the pinnacle of Islamic knowledge in that time and place, and meant that he had the opportunity to be influenced by other Islamic schools of thought outside of the strict Ḥanbalīsm prevalent in Najd. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the entirety of this knowledge was religious in nature, meaning that the topics included only the Qur’ān, Ḥadīth, and relevant religious texts. Edwards’ access to the likes of Harvard and Yale meant that he was exposed to the pinnacle of *all* kinds of knowledge in that time and place, as the foundation of this knowledge was seen as none other than God himself. In this way, it is clear that Edwards’ educational background far

¹²⁷ The young Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb surely spent much time studying Islamic jurisprudence. However, we cannot separate the study of *fiqh* from its religious context since it springs from the study of Sharī‘a.

¹²⁸ Edwards’ study of the classics is what put Latin at his scholarly disposal in addition to Biblical Greek and Hebrew. His writing, though primarily English, thus contains much Latin which bears this out. And like other divines of his day, he was expected to make use of Latin in formal speeches. Although Latin was no doubt useful for the study of the classical world of Ancient Rome, it also played a significant theological role in Christianity, as Jerome’s fourth-century Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible remained extremely important at the time of Edwards. Because of this, Latin was still seen as the Church’s theological language.

outstripped that of his contemporary in Arabia, especially in terms of its breadth. Not to recognize this fact would be a disservice in a comparative study such as this.

Conceivably related to this is the fact that Edwards' intellectual output was massive not only in terms of sheer quantity, but also in terms of quality (his writing is filled with penetrating, original insights on a plethora of subjects). This should in no way belittle the intellectual prowess of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, whose accomplishments stand tall in their own right. Simply put, it is difficult to find *any* thinker who approaches Edwards in creative genius, as he is arguably among a select number of the world's great thinkers of all time. It is important that we not create unrealistic comparisons between two men who were, despite their numerous similarities, not alike in every respect. Nevertheless, both men were bright thinkers who were keen to uphold the traditionalist position within their intellectual and religious traditions. As such, they both followed closely in the footsteps of those who preceded them in like manner. Rather than departing from Puritan and Ḥanbalī norms, they sought to elevate them to the next level in their own day. For Edwards this meant a relentless pursuit of the Bible, coupled with a heavy dependance on the Reformers and earlier Puritans. And for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, this meant a continued emphasis on the Qur'ān and Sunna over against other prevailing notions within Islam, particularly in jurisprudence. Interestingly though, neither man was afraid to break with his forebears when he felt that divine truth was at stake. This is evidenced in the way that Edwards' thought has never been able to be categorized as anything other than original, despite its many similarities to others such as John Calvin or Cotton Mather. This is probably best explained by the fact that Edwards was determined to read the Bible with fresh eyes, and was committed to simultaneously reading it through the lens of contemporary (Enlightenment) culture and redemptive history. In the same way that scholars have been unsuccessful at isolating Edwards into one particular camp,

neither have they been able to isolate the thought of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as being purely Ḥanbalī or Taymiyyan in nature. Although the influence of such men on his thought is undeniable and forms the majority of the flavor of his theology, as it were, the Shaykh’s thought is also full of particularities that speak to his readiness to adapt his core message to the various audiences of the day. This is evidenced by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s regular quotation of scholars from different *madhāhib*.

One might thus suggest that both the Reverend and the Shaykh were original thinkers who were happily entrenched firmly within their respective Puritan and Ḥanbalī camps. This unique combination of originality rooted in traditionalism ensured that they were well positioned as the revivalist reformers they would become in the religious and political landscapes of New England and Najd, and soon thereafter in America and Saudi Arabia, and later still around the world today.

2.0 TRINITY AND TAWHĪD

Understanding the doctrine of God in Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is of foremost importance in appreciating their theological systems as well as their motivation for life and ministry. There is a sense in which this issue unites both men because they both deemed it as ultimate. And yet there is another sense in which it divides them more sharply than anything else because they fundamentally differed on this, the most fundamental doctrine in Christianity and Islam.

Both the Reverend and the Shaykh agreed that God was one - yet they starkly differed as to *how* God was one. For Edwards his oneness was triune and for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb his oneness was absolute. This difference is due to the fact that their respective texts *and* contexts dictated the particularities in their conception of his unity. Edwards based his understanding on the Bible, and wrote both to enliven stale discussion of God’s essence among his peers and also to counter what he felt were unorthodox portrayals of God in the wider Christian world of Europe and America. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb based his understanding on the Qur’ān, and wrote both to counter the subtle polytheism that he felt many of his peers exhibited and also to testify against what he saw as the outright idol worship that characterized much of Arabia in his time. That Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb could paint such vastly different portraits from an apparently similar canvas helps one to realize that the same subject does not always lead to the same conception if the predicates are different.¹²⁹ And that is exactly what we see in this current analysis. What was worked out using two different texts was also conceived in two different contexts. The results are two different depictions of God.

¹²⁹ One of the most helpful pieces among the vast literature on the topic of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God is an article by Yale scholar Lamin Sanneh, entitled, “Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?,” *Christian Century* 121, 9 (2004): 35-37.

Nevertheless there are certain commonalities in Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s conceptions of God. These commonalities are due to the places where their texts and contexts overlapped. The Qur’ān has much in common with the Bible and thus carried over many Biblical concepts into Islam from Christianity (and Judaism). God as the universe’s one supreme being, omnipotent Creator, righteous Judge, and sovereign Ruler is not different in either scheme in these regards. In addition to the many places where texts overlapped, there were also certain contextual similarities that the Reverend and the Shaykh shared which provided further grounds for similarities in their doctrine of God. Chief among these contextual factors was a shared desire to refocus the minds and hearts of their listeners onto the one true Deity by helping them to cast aside idols - whether they be those of enlightenment, king and country in colonial America, or those of sorcery, wood and stone in Najd.

If conservative Christians and Muslims today are to have any hope of truly hearing one another, then they must humbly reckon with the most foundational conceptual aspect of their respective religions - the doctrine of God. Thankfully, the two men who are the focus of this study, so beloved in traditionalist Christian and Islamic circles, had much to say about this issue. Thus it is to their thoughts on the most critical of subjects that we now turn.

Jonathan Edwards

2.1 Trinity in Context and Text

Love. Unity. Excellency. Beauty. Harmony. Happiness. Holiness. Sweetness. Society. Consent. Simplicity. These are some of the nouns that Jonathan Edwards used to describe God - and every one of them comes out in his doctrine of the Trinity. Thinking clearly about the Trinity was not a frivolous exercise for Edwards, rather it characterised the core of his theological universe. Somehow, in years past, this fact was lost among the sea of other great theological and philosophical themes that marked his thought, and has only recently come to light in modern scholarship.¹³⁰ The extent to which Edwards' Trinitarian understanding of God shaped his overall theology and ministry is therefore a relatively new pursuit in Edwards studies, and most scholars now concur that it was central. For, without understanding Edwards on the Trinity one cannot really grasp Edwards' thought in a truly comprehensive way. We are indebted to Amy Plantinga Pauw for her definitive work on the subject, as she has demonstrated that Edwards' Trinitarianism provides an ideal interpretive window into all facets of his life and thought, including "his deepest philosophical, theological, and pastoral inclinations."¹³¹ Indeed, the dominant assertion of Plantinga Pauw's work, that the Trinity is the best window through which we can understand Edwards, is a core factor that supports our decision to pay so much attention to the subject in this thesis. That God is an infinitely happy and holy society of persons perfectly and indivisibly united within one divine being truly was, for Edwards, "the supreme harmony of all" and, "the sum of all good things." He said this because every aspect of God's own internal workings and of his external workings in

¹³⁰ See for example Oliver Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards' God: Trinity, Individuation and Divine Simplicity" in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); William Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004); Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*; and Steven Studebaker and Robert Caldwell III, *The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards: Text, Context and Application* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 83-93.

¹³¹ Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, 3.

creation depends on the truth of the Trinity. In short, God cannot be God as we know him from Scripture and the world cannot be the world as we know it from experience unless the Church Fathers were right in affirming this mysterious, supra-logical (yet not illogical) actuality.¹³² To this credo clung the fiercely monotheistic Trinitarian, Jonathan Edwards.

Context

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity was not developed in a vacuum. Like nearly all Christian theology, it was formulated as a response to the rise of teaching that was clearly not in line with what the apostles, the earliest Christians, and their immediate descendants knew to be true. Theophilus of Antioch (d. c. 183) provides the earliest extant use of the term in Greek (τριάς, “*trias*”) in his *Apologia ad Autolyicum* from the mid-second century. The Latin Father Tertullian (c. 155 - c. 240) then popularized the term (*trinitas*) in the late second and early third century. However, the mere existence of the Trinity as a widely accepted concept within earliest Christianity was not enough to safeguard it from heresy. What was implicitly accepted as Christian dogma eventually needed to be made explicit as different teachers such as Sabellius (fl. c. 215), Arius (256-336), and Photinus (d. 376) rose to prominence in the first few centuries of Christian history by advancing teachings counter to those of the apostolic writers of the New Testament and their immediate disciples such as Ignatius of Antioch

¹³² The rules of logic say that “A” cannot be both “A” and “not A” at the same time and in the same relationship; to claim so would be a contradiction. Accordingly, the Trinity is *not* “one being” and “three beings” or “one person” and “three persons” at the same time - that would be an illogical contradiction. Instead, the Trinitarian formulation of God is “one in being” and “three in persona.” Thus the doctrine of the Trinity is not a logical contradiction. By invoking divine mystery, theologians are not attempting to deflect criticism of the Trinity, but rather simply affirming that there are things about God which are above and beyond finite human understanding. This is the definition of divine mystery, and is, according to Christians, what one might logically expect of such a lofty being.

(35-108).¹³³ Thus, successive ecumenical councils were called at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) during which the doctrine of the Trinity was formally laid out by the defenders of traditional orthodoxy such as Athanasius (c. 297 - 373).¹³⁴ Even after the Trinitarian declarations of the ecumenical councils, however, non-Trinitarian conceptions of God persisted, although they were increasingly marginal both in their numerical and theological influence over Christendom.¹³⁵

Over time, the doctrine of one God who eternally exists in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, became virtually universally accepted within Christendom, as successive generations found no reason to disagree with what they saw as the plain teaching of Scripture.¹³⁶ Theologians such as Augustine (354-430) and Aquinas (1225-1274) added much helpful reflection along the way, but Trinitarian theology was challenged anew during the Reformation era with the advent of Socinianism and Unitarianism - yet it emerged victorious

¹³³ Sabellius taught that the Father, Son, and Spirit are merely different “modes” of the divine, with God simply choosing to reveal these different modes in different ways and times. Thus the heresy of “modalism” or “Sabellianism” was also labeled as “patripassianism” (Latin - “the Father suffered”) by Tertullian, who claimed that according to Sabellius’ theology, which denied the individual persons of the Trinity, the Father must have died on the cross also. Arius is known as the father of “Arianism,” which denied the eternity of the Son. Photinus is best known for having denied the incarnation. His thought also bears resemblances to both Sabellius and Arius’ non-Trinitarian views. Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of the apostle John, writer of the Gospel of John as well as Revelation and three shorter epistles that bear his name, who the Bible records as Jesus’ closest earthly companion.

¹³⁴ Athanasius was bishop of Alexandria, and spent the majority of his life defending orthodoxy against Arianism. He even came into conflict with Emperor Constantine I, who banished him to Gaul over a political disagreement. The Latin “*Athanasius contra mundum*” (Athanasius against the world) thus appropriately defined a man who defended the doctrine of the Trinity at a time when Arianism threatened to dominate the empire.

¹³⁵ “Christendom” here does not refer to the establishment of Christianity as a formal state religion, but to the more general sense of nations and peoples for whom Christianity is or was the dominant religion. The two usages often overlap, but should be differentiated. Unless otherwise indicated, this is the sense in which the term is used throughout this thesis.

¹³⁶ The story of the development and eventual triumph of Trinitarian theology is a long and sometimes complicated one. For a succinct retelling, see Franz Dünzl, *Kleine Geschichte des Trinitarischen Dogmas in der Alten Kirche* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 2006), translated by John Bowden as *A Brief History of the Doctrine of the Trinity in the Early Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

once again.¹³⁷ By Edwards' time at the dawn of the eighteenth century, a new wave of anti-Trinitarianism was sweeping across Europe, and it did not take long for him to catch wind of it in America. Essentially a result of deist and Enlightenment philosophies which charged that the Trinity was either un-Biblical, irreconcilable with deism's generic god, or incompatible with human reason, the anti-Trinitarianism of Edwards' day provided little by way of new arguments to advance its cause. The same charges that were made by Sabellius and Arius more than a thousand years previous were reappearing again, and Edwards was ready.

The London Trinity controversies of 1687-1698 pitted the Anglican church against Unitarian dissenters who argued that they should be accepted as fellow Protestants by England's state church. A little more than a decade later, Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) published *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712) which, while appearing to affirm the Trinity at a surface level, nevertheless contained Arian teachings in its support for subordinationism.¹³⁸ Clarke said that it was unreasonable to expect men to assent to Trinitarian doctrine if they did not see it plainly in the Bible for themselves, but rather accepted it on the basis of an authority which was external to Scripture. He thus regarded the Trinity as an important but non-essential doctrine. "For if any man can by any external authority be bound to believe anything to be the doctrine of Christ which at the same time his best understanding necessitates him to believe is not that doctrine; he is unavoidably under the absurdity of being obliged to obey two contrary masters and to follow two inconsistent

¹³⁷ Socinianism takes its name from the Italian Fausto Sozzini (1539-1604). In addition to being anti-Trinitarian by denying the eternality of Christ, it also denied other core doctrines of Christianity such as the atonement and original sin. Its direct descendants eventually became known as Unitarian Christians because they believed that Christ was human and in no sense divine, thus erasing the Son (and the Spirit) from the Godhead. Unitarians are so-called to reflect the non-Trinitarian absolute monotheism they profess. Incidentally the word "unitarian" is the most direct English translation of the Arabic *موحد* (*muwahhid*). See footnote no. 1 of the present work for more.

¹³⁸ Subordinationism teaches that the Son is subordinate to the Father not only in function, but in divine essence as well. The orthodox position is that the Son is only subordinate to the Father in terms of his role or function in the world, but not in his essence which is equal with the Father.

rules at once” he wrote.¹³⁹ In the following decade, more books on the subject appeared. Even the famed hymn writer Isaac Watts chimed in against the orthodox position on the Trinity with his 1722 offering, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity*.¹⁴⁰

If there is one thing that the reader should bear in mind regarding Jonathan Edwards, it is that he was always ready to defend historical, orthodox, Reformed Christianity on any and every front. Although he was largely a studious disciple of the men who formed that continuous vein through the centuries, he was unafraid to break with them if he felt they misinterpreted Scripture, particularly in light of human experience. Edwards faced the world with his Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other. Deeply saturated in the Bible, but always looking for news of happenings around the world, he strove to integrate the Bible with the real world. So it is not at all surprising that Edwards added his voice to the current of anti-Trinitarian conversation brewing across the Atlantic in the early days of his ministry. Naturally, the first place he turned to formulate his thinking on the issue was Scripture.

Text

Critics of the Trinity have long contended that the actual word is not mentioned in the Bible. The reasoning is that if the word is not there, then the concept must not be either. This of course is a logical fallacy, as the absence of a certain word has never precluded one from deducing the concept’s existential reality from the plain meaning of the text.¹⁴¹ If we must eliminate Christian doctrines which are not specifically named in Scripture, then we must

¹³⁹ Samuel Clarke, *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: James Knapton, 1712), 33.

¹⁴⁰ Isaac Watts, *The Christian Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Clark, Matthews & Ford, 1722).

¹⁴¹ As B.B. Warfield has stated, “The doctrine of the Trinity lies in Scripture in solution; when it is crystallized from its solvent it does not cease to be scriptural, but only comes into clearer view. Or, to speak without figure, the doctrine of the Trinity is given to us in Scripture, not in formulated definition, but in fragmentary allusions... we are not passing from Scripture, but entering more thoroughly into the meaning of Scripture. We may state the doctrine in technical terms, supplied by philosophical reflection; but the doctrine stated is a genuinely scriptural doctrine.” in B.B. Warfield, *Biblical Foundations*, (London: Tyndale Press, 1958), 79.

also do away with “communion,” “incarnation,” and even “monotheism,” to name a few. As we have seen, Christian doctrine is something that the early Church developed from the plain reading of Scripture, making her case from the text of the Bible itself. In this regard Edwards was no different than his Christian predecessors from the time of the apostles through the Reformation - they all used Scripture to formulate Christian doctrine. In particular, they read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament, as the Hebrew Scriptures were brought into focus, as it were, through the lens of the Gospel of Christ.

Edwards built on Augustine’s insight that Jesus was God’s perfect idea of himself.¹⁴² As God is a spirit being, we might say that when he looks in the mirror, he sees Jesus. As Edwards put it, “God’s idea of himself is absolutely perfect, and therefore an express and perfect image of him, exactly like him in every respect. There is nothing in the pattern but what is in the representation - substance, life, power, nor anything else - and that in a most absolute perfection of similitude; otherwise it is not a perfect idea.”¹⁴³ He continued,

That idea which God hath of himself is absolutely himself... so that by God’s thinking of the Deity, [the Deity] must certainly be generated. Hereby there is another person begotten... [of] the very same divine nature. And this person is the second person of the Trinity, the only begotten and dearly beloved Son of God. He is the eternal, necessary, perfect, substantial, and personal idea which God hath of himself. And that it is so, seems to me to be abundantly confirmed by the Word of [God].¹⁴⁴

Edwards worked throughout the 1730’s and 1740’s on his *Discourse on the Trinity*, arguing from Scripture that “Nothing can more agree with the account the Scripture gives of the Son of God his being in the form of God and his express and perfect image and representation [than] 2 Cor. 4:4, ‘Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of [God],

¹⁴² See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1991).

¹⁴³ WJE 21:114.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

should shine unto them.”¹⁴⁵ Following the scriptural testimony about Jesus, Edwards turned to “Phil. 2:6, ‘Who being in the form of God,’ Col. 1:15, ‘Who is the image of the invisible God,’ Heb. 1:3, ‘Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.’ In the original it is χαρακτηρ της υποστασεως αυτου, which denotes one person as like another, as the impression on the wax is to the engraving on the seal.”¹⁴⁶ Continuing further, he wrote:

That Christ is the most immediate representation of the Godhead... is in my apprehension confirmed by John 12:45, “He that seeth me seeth him that sent me”; and John 14:7-9, “If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with [you, and] yet hast thou not seen me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou, Show us the Father?”¹⁴⁷

Not content to base his argument on the New Testament alone, Edwards also summoned the Old Testament to make his case. “So the Father calls him [Jesus] his elect, in whom his soul delighteth [Is. 42:1]. The infinite happiness of the Father consists in the enjoyment of his Son. Prov. 8:30, ‘I was daily his delight,’ i.e. before the world was.”¹⁴⁸ Exodus 33:14 says that, “Christ is called the face of God,” Edwards reminded his audience, before noting that, “The word in the original [Hebrew] signifies face, looks, form or appearance... This idea is that [Christ is] the face of God which God sees, as a man sees his own face in a looking glass, his aspect, form or appearance, whereby God eternally appears to himself.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 117. Although he probably finished the manuscript some time in the 1740’s, *Discourse on the Trinity* was not found and published until 1903 (initially as *Essay on the Trinity*).

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Edwards' most compelling case for the deity of Christ in the Old Testament, however, was made by reading the Old Testament in light of the New, as mentioned above.¹⁵⁰ He observed that "Christ is called the wisdom of God" in 1 Corinthians 1:24, and therefore "how much doth Christ speak in Proverbs under the name of Wisdom... we there have Wisdom thus declaring, 'The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, or ever the earth was... When he prepared the heavens, I was there... then was I by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before [him].'"¹⁵¹ Turning back to the New Testament, Edwards also equated the wisdom of God with the *logos* of God, which is the term that the apostle John used to refer to Jesus in the beginning of his gospel account.¹⁵² *Logos* (Greek, λόγος) is rich with meaning and can be rendered as "word," "speech," "reason," and "knowledge" among others. "I suppose it won't be denied," said Edwards, "that 'tis the same thing with God's idea" for "When God declares himself, it is doubtless from and according to the idea he hath of himself."¹⁵³

Once again Edwards agreed with Augustine that the Holy Spirit was the bond between the Father and the Son, yet he went beyond him by arguing that if the second person of the Trinity is begotten by the Father having a perfect, eternal idea of himself, it follows that,

an infinitely holy and sweet energy arises between the Father and the Son; for their love and joy is mutual... this is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts to an infinite degree... the Deity becomes all act; the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence,

¹⁵⁰ Edwards was passionate about reading Scripture as a whole, and at the time of his death had designs on writing his own harmony of the Old and New Testaments.

¹⁵¹ WJE 21:119-120.

¹⁵² "In the beginning was the word (*Logos*), and the word was with God, and the word was God." (John 1:1)

¹⁵³ WJE 21:120.

and there proceeds the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the Deity in act.¹⁵⁴

Since 1 John 4 says that “God is love,” and love is more of an action than simply a feeling of one toward another, Edwards maintained that “the Holy Spirit is that love.”¹⁵⁵ Picking up this theme later in the same chapter of 1 John, Edwards recounted the words of the apostle who assured his readers that the love of God dwells in them if they love one another, and that because God has given believers his Spirit, they can know with certainty that they dwell in him too. The love that indwells believers then, is also the love that binds believers to one another and to God. Indeed, it is the same love that binds the Father to the Son of which believers also partake. This love is none other than the Holy Spirit - God’s eternal act of love which flows out from the bond between the Father and the Son to include believers on earth. Since the spirit of a man can be said to be his innermost temper or disposition, Edwards maintained, so the Holy Spirit “is likewise to be understood as God’s temper. Now the sum of God’s temper or disposition is love, for he is infinite love” and in God there is “no distinction to be made between temper or disposition and exercise.”¹⁵⁶ This is the very divine disposition that believers are made partakers of, Edwards noted from 1 Peter 1:4. Edwards then reminded his readers of Jesus’ promise to send the Holy Spirit to indwell believers after his ascension, “Christ dwells in his disciples by his Spirit, as Christ teaches us in John 14:16-18, ‘I will give you another Comforter... even the Spirit of truth... he shall be in you.’”¹⁵⁷

Turning to the Old Testament, the Reverend noted the connection between divine love and the symbolism of the Holy Spirit as a dove. He cited Song of Solomon 1:15,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 121.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 124.

“Behold... my love... thou hast doves eyes.” i.e. eyes of love... and again, 5:2, “My love, my dove.” And this I believe to be the reason that the dove alone of all birds... was appointed to be offered in sacrifice: because of its innocency, and because it is the emblem of love, love being the most acceptable sacrifice to God. It was under this similitude that the Holy Ghost descended from the Father on Christ at his baptism, signifying the infinite love of the Father to the Son.¹⁵⁸

Looking then at the creation account, Edwards brought out the fact that Genesis 1:2 places the Holy Spirit at creation when it says that “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” However, his intent here was actually to single out a key word, as he noted the Hebrew word “translated ‘moved’ in the original is מְרַחֵףָה, which... properly signifies the brooding of a dove upon her eggs.”¹⁵⁹ The book of Psalms, he said, is replete with examples of the Holy Spirit as God’s eternal act of love. In Ezekiel 47, Edwards observed that the Holy Spirit is likened to the river of life that is mentioned in Revelation as flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb, it “is God’s lovingkindness” said he.¹⁶⁰

The above Scriptures are but a small sample of the way that Edwards mined the Bible - Old and New Testaments together - for evidence of the Trinity. He summarized his findings like this:

The Father is the Deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the Deity in its direct existence. The Son is the Deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of himself, and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the Deity subsisting in act or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth, in God's infinite love to and delight in himself. And I believe the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and divine love, and that therefore each of them are properly distinct persons.¹⁶¹

And so we see how Jonathan Edwards relied upon the Scriptures, first and foremost, to build his doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible, quite literally, was the source at his right hand’s perusal.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 126.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 126-127.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 131.

However, the Bible was not the only means Jonathan Edwards availed to build his Trinitarian vision of God - he still held the newspaper in his left hand.

2.2 Trinity Defended

True to form, Edwards refused to limit the framework for his theological musings to the text of the Bible alone. There is no question that Scripture served as both his starting point and his overall frame of reference as he developed his thinking. However, he realized that in a Western society which was, even at that time, becoming increasingly distrustful of scriptural narratives as its sole source of evidence for anything, he needed to build his case on multiple grounds. Of the mysterious nature of the Trinity, he said:

I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are, and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made, and puzzling doubts and questions raised, that I can't solve. I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it.¹⁶²

Displaying an intellectual humility in this instance that was somewhat uncharacteristic for him, the young theologian knew full well that reasons for belief in the Trinity went beyond Scripture alone, and this is precisely why he concluded the above statement with these words: "I don't pretend to explain the Trinity, but in time, with reason, may [be] led to say something further of it than has been wont to be said."¹⁶³ With that, let us now delve into three other arenas which Edwards plied toward apologetic conversation on the Trinity with his interlocutors.

¹⁶² Ibid., 134.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

Reason

Jonathan Edwards' God was the most excellent being in the universe, and his notion of divine excellency perhaps helped to shape his thinking on the Trinity more than anything else. True excellency, said he, was manifested in the consent of one to another: "The more the consent is... the greater is the excellency." If this were true for mathematical formulae and other natural phenomena, how much more was it so for God? After all, "spiritual harmonies are of vastly larger extent" he carefully noted.¹⁶⁴ This is what led Edwards to confidently proclaim, "I think that it is within the reach of naked reason to perceive certainly that there are three distinct in God," at the age of twenty in "Miscellany" no. 94, his first recorded thoughts on the Trinity.¹⁶⁵ His later, more substantive reflections in *Discourse on the Trinity* began with the premise that if God is love, it follows that he must have some way to demonstrate that fundamental essence of his being. "'God is love' shows that there are more persons than one in the Deity: for it shows love to be essential and necessary to the Deity, so that his nature consists in it; and this supposes that *there is an eternal and necessary object, because all love respects another*, that is, the beloved."¹⁶⁶ The love Edwards speaks of is none other than the love between the Father and the Son. For if the Son is the very idea (i.e. *logos* - word, reason, knowledge or wisdom) that the Father has of himself, from all eternity, it follows that this is the natural relationship in which to express the love that is essential to the being of God. In short, if God were a singularity, he could not be essentially or fundamentally love at his core, because love demands another person to love. Since God by definition is eternal and existed before the universe was created, it is therefore "necessary" for this other person to exist as an eternal object of his love. If it were not so, the statement

¹⁶⁴ WJE 6:336.

¹⁶⁵ WJE 13:257.

¹⁶⁶ WJE 21:113-114, (emphasis mine). See also WJE 13:283-384, where Edwards ties the reasoning of eternal love to divine consent.

that “God is love” would be logically impossible, i.e. self contradictory, and therefore against the laws of logic. Edwards simply extrapolated this same reasoning out concerning the Holy Spirit, as he *is* the love that is generated between the Father and the Son - and love, as we have seen above, is action. In this way, the Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son, reasoned Edwards.

“Reason,” said Edwards, “is sufficient to tell us that there must be these distinctions in the Deity, viz. God, and the idea of God, and love; there are no other real distinctions in God that can be thought [of].”¹⁶⁷ As to his attributes, such as his immutability, goodness, mercy and grace, “they are mere modes of existence” of the necessary distinctions, namely God’s idea (*logos*) or his love. For God’s “omniscience [is] the same as his idea” and “God’s will... is not really distinguished from his love.” In both instances, the former is predicated by the latter. God’s omniscience flows from his perfect idea or divine knowledge, and his will is completely derived from his love. “God’s power or ability,” Edwards continued, “is not really distinct from his understanding” since those attributes are dependent upon the divine idea or *logos*, and in the same way, “mercy and grace... are but the overflowings of God’s infinite love.”¹⁶⁸ All of God’s attributes, argued the Reverend, are merely an outflow of the only fundamentally eternally necessary distinctions within the Godhead, namely the Father’s own idea of himself (the Son) and the love that actively pours forth from this divine relationship (the Spirit). These three alone “must be conceived as really distinct. But as for all those other things [his attributes] - they are not distinct real things... but only mere modes and relations. So that our natural reason is sufficient to tell us that there are these three in God, and we can think of no more.” To show that his logic was consistent with Scripture, Edwards noted that,

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

“We find no other attributes of which it is said that they are God in Scripture, or that God is they, but Λογος and Αγαπε [sic], the reason and love of God (John 1:1 and 1 John 4:8, 16).”¹⁶⁹

Aside from the existence of irreducible plurality within the Deity which he argued is necessitated by divine love, Edwards applied another argument from reason toward the existence of the Trinity. He asserted, “It appears that there must be more than a unity in the infinite and eternal essence, otherwise the goodness of God can have no perfect exercise.”¹⁷⁰ Since God is perfectly good, he delights in the expression of his goodness *to a perfect degree*. In short, he cannot *not* communicate the fullness of his goodness. It follows that since no created being is perfectly good, no one is able to receive an infusion of perfect goodness except for a perfect, uncreated person who is equal in goodness to God himself. “Wherefore,” concluded Edwards, “God must have a perfect exercise of his goodness, and therefore must have the fellowship of a person equal with himself.”¹⁷¹ In addition Edwards observed that happiness depends on the ability to know and be known by another. This is a truth which is common to all beings. Therefore, since God, the only non-contingent being in the universe, is by definition the most good and the happiest of all beings, then his goodness and happiness can not be contingent upon any created being to express itself, for this would be a logical fallacy. By this line of reasoning, God, showed Edwards, simply cannot be a singularity unless we are prepared to completely strip him of his eternality and utter independence from the created order and thereby lower him to creaturely status. In fact, those who conceive of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 132. Edwards quickly added “Indeed, it is said that God is light (1 John 1:5). But what can we understand by divine light different from the divine reason or understanding?” N.B. Edwards here spells the Greek word “agape” with an epsilon, however the correct letter is eta (η).

¹⁷⁰ WJE 13:263.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 264.

his oneness as a simple singularity rather than a unified plurality are, according to reason alone, really likening God to “no more than a stone.”¹⁷²

Prisca Theologia

As if the Bible and reason were not enough, Jonathan Edwards added a third type of proof for the orthodox definition of the Trinity in his famed usage of the *prisca theologia*.¹⁷³ Edwards drew on ancient philosophers such as Socrates and Plato to argue that the concept of one supreme deity existed outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and his writings are replete with examples thereof.¹⁷⁴ However, it was not enough for Edwards that support for the existence of the one true God was to be found in extra-Biblical sources. More specifically, he mined these sources for support of Trinitarian conceptions of this one God. One of his favorite sources for *prisca theologia* Trinitarian apologetics was *Court of the Gentiles* (1672, 1677), whose author, Theophilus Gale (1628-1678), consistently quoted ancient extra-Biblical philosophers on a plethora of Biblical doctrines.¹⁷⁵ The thinking behind this approach was that God had not left himself without a witness in the world, so to speak, and had been active in revealing himself to other societies outside of the Judeo-Christian heritage all throughout history. The fervency with which Edwards approached these texts is nearly palpable to the careful reader of his works, as one is quickly able to discern that this was no

¹⁷² WJE 13:262. This is Edwards’ harsh assessment of a god in which there is no real harmony, love, or excellency, since these attributes logically demand some sort of plurality. In “The Mind,” he added, “One alone, without any reference to any more, cannot be excellent; for in such case there can be no manner of relation no way, and therefore, no such thing as consent... in a being that is absolutely without any plurality there cannot be excellency, for there can be no such thing as consent or agreement.” See WJE 6:337.

¹⁷³ Literally “ancient theology,” the *prisca theologia* was a favorite Edwardsean tool to demonstrate that Christian truth existed in pre-Christian philosophers and other world religions. It was primarily a weapon Edwards wielded against deist claims contrary to Biblical orthodoxy. See Daniel P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); see also 4.1 of the current work.

¹⁷⁴ See for example, WJE 20:278ff.

¹⁷⁵ See Theophilus Gale, *The Court of the Gentiles: or A Discourse Touching the Original of Human Literature, Both Philologie and Philosophie From the Scriptures and Jewish Church*, 2 vols. (London: 1672, 1677).

frivolous exercise for the Puritan divine; his digestion of Gale and other similar works on the subject continues on page after page of his notebooks.

In order to establish the Godhead, Edwards relayed, “Plato discourseth particularly and distinctly, of the way and means of the world’s restoration and conservation. ‘Let there,’ says he, ‘be a law constituted and confirmed by oath calling to witness the God of all things... *the Father of that governing cause...*”¹⁷⁶ Without missing a step, he continued, “Serranus on this place tells us, that some understand this description of Plato to refer to the Trinity, as his Logos in *Epimonide* has a peculiar respect to the Messiah.” Speaking about Plato’s students who picked up on Trinitarian themes after him, Edwards quoted Gale: “It’s confessed that Plato gave some foundation for such an imaginary Trinity: for he makes mention of πατηρ, λογος or νους, and ψυχη του κοσμου: the Father, the Word or Mind, and the Universal Spirit or Soul. The Platonists in their Trias, make the Soul of the World, their Universal Spirit, to be the third υποστασις [sic].”¹⁷⁷ Edwards continued, “Plato, in his *Philebus*, acknowledges ‘that the report or tradition he had received of the unity of God, as to his essence, and plurality of persons, and decrees, was from the ancients, who dwelt nearer the gods, and were better than they.’”¹⁷⁸

The Reverend seemed never to tire of discovering evidence in support of Biblical doctrines, in this case for the Trinity, in extra-Biblical sources. But the “heathen philosophers” of Greece and Rome, which would later become the heartlands of Christianity, were not the only place he looked. Edwards was also intently drawn to the ancient Chinese in his quest to uncover the fingerprints of the Trinity outside of the Bible. Here he relied on

¹⁷⁶ WJE 20:253 (emphasis his).

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. The Greek word υποστασις is “hypostasis” meaning “substance” and has been used by theologians to describe the three persons (hypostases) of the Godhead united in one divine being (Greek: *ousia*, ουσία). The text here begins with the Greek letter iota, which corrected should be upsilon (‘Υ/ύ’).

¹⁷⁸ WJE 20:225. Edwards meticulously cites Gale throughout, herein from *Court of the Gentiles*, vol. 2, 83.

“Chevalier” Ramsay (1686-1743), whose work on the subject seemed to fascinate him to no end.¹⁷⁹ He cited Ramsay who said that “Confucius, who lived about 600 years before our Savior” relied on five original books of Chinese philosophy that each date back to around the time of the Deluge, and from which “all other books of any note in China, are commentaries upon these five.”¹⁸⁰ Now that the foundation for further reflection had been laid, Ramsay proceeded to enter into a discussion about Biblical doctrines among the ancient Chinese which Edwards relayed in these words, “In the book *Tonchu*, we read these words: ‘The source and root of all is one. This self-existent unity produces necessarily a second; the first and the second by their union produce a third; in fine, these three produce all.’”¹⁸¹ When Edwards read statements like these from ancient Chinese texts, it is not difficult to imagine the excitement that must have risen within him. It was proof positive for him that the triune God of the Bible was the only god worth worshipping.

Typology

In much the same manner as early Church Fathers such as Tertullian and other noteworthy theologians through the years, Jonathan Edwards loved to make use of nature to construct theological analogies. For in creation he found a ready-made source which enabled him to explain ethereal concepts in concrete terms through typology. According to this scheme, there were numerous theological images embedded in the physical world in the form of “types” that were meant to point observers to Biblical truth. Edwards considered different

¹⁷⁹ See Andrew Michael Ramsay, *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: 1748,1749). See also 4.1 of the present work.

¹⁸⁰ WJE 23:95.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 98. “Tonchu” is the *Tao Te Ching* (“Way of Virtue”) of the sixth century B.C. The passage which Edwards here quotes from Ramsay’s work is number 42 in the *Tao Te Ching* which reads as follows: “The Way produces one; one produces two, two produces three, three produce all beings.” Found in *The Essential Tao*, ed. Thomas Cleary (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991.), 35, as cited in McClymond & McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 202.

types of the Trinity in the created order, one of which was to be found within creatures themselves. He said that the soul of a man consists of the mind, the “understanding or idea,” and the spirit of the mind (i.e. the disposition or will). The mind, which governs all, is analogous to the Father, while the idea represents the Son and the disposition represents the Holy Spirit.

If this were too esoteric of a type for the average reader, he also made an appeal on a cosmic scale to support the fingerprints of the Trinity in nature. Concerning the sun Edwards said:

The Father is as the substance of the sun (by substance I don't mean in a philosophical sense, but the sun as to its internal constitution). The Son is as the brightness and glory of the disk of the sun, or that bright and glorious form under which it appears to our eyes. The Holy Ghost is as the action of the sun, which is within the sun, in its intestine heat, and being diffusive, enlightens, warms, enlivens and comforts the world. The Spirit, as it is God's infinite love to himself and happiness in himself, is as the internal heat of the sun; but as it is that by which God communicates himself, is as the emanation of the sun's action, or the emitted beams of the sun.¹⁸²

In addition, the sun's beams “well represent the love and grace of God,” continued the Reverend. For in them, he found yet more evidence for his typological analysis in stating that the sun's beams, which comprised the rainbow after the flood of Noah, were specifically appointed for that task to remind Noah of God's love and grace. Moreover, the rainbows spoken of by the prophet Ezekiel as being around the throne of God (Ezekiel 1:28) and those seen by John around the head of Christ (Revelation 4:3) are further Biblical corroboration that the sun is a fitting type for the Trinity inasmuch as its beams, which represent the Holy Spirit, can always be found to personify God's fundamental essence of love.

As opposed to his use of reason and the *prisca theologia*, which were meant for general audiences, some have seen in Edwards' typology an apologetic chiefly aimed at bolstering the

¹⁸² WJE 21:138.

faith of the already faithful.¹⁸³ But such a view fails to take into account his own view of typology. “I believe,” said Edwards, “the variety there is in the rays of the sun and their beautiful colors was designed by the Creator for this very purpose... that the whole visible creation, which is but the shadow of being, is so made and ordered by God as to typify and represent spiritual things.”¹⁸⁴ Clearly Edwards regarded anyone with eyes to see as being able to comprehend Biblical truths, even deep ones like the Trinity, from what has been made. In this way he went beyond what most divines felt could be known about God through the natural revelation spoken of in the first chapter of Romans. For Jonathan Edwards, the logic of the Trinity found in reason, the attestation of the Trinity found in the *prisca theologia*, and the shadows of the Trinity found in typology were enough *in themselves* to cause the soul of man to wonder and soar heavenward. Consequently, although he saw Scripture as the starting point and chief compass for all theological analysis, he made space for the whole world - including where the Bible was not available or intelligible - to yet testify to the glories of God’s divine essence and love.

¹⁸³ See for example McClymond & McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 202.

¹⁸⁴ WJE 21:139.

2.3 Trinity Applied

God is one; God is love; God is holy; God is just; God is a God of order; God is the most harmonious and beautiful being in the universe; God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe; God is the righteous Judge and Redeemer of mankind. These are just some of the core tenets of Jonathan Edwards' theology that all depended on God being triune.

The Immanent and the Economic

Given that his context was largely Christendom in its various flavors of Protestantism, Edwards' audience was comprised predominantly of monotheists. Although Protestants disagreed about finer points of theology, sometimes vehemently, they did not disagree about the fact that there is only one God. There was, however, a small subset of the population in that era, primarily in Europe, whose views of the divine were wont to lead to either atheistic or polytheistic conceptions of the divine. Neither, of course, were acceptable to the Reverend.¹⁸⁵ It was not until he moved to Stockbridge to minister among Native American tribes though, that he *personally* encountered a worldview which required some explanation of the basic concept of monotheism. Probably because of this experience, in addition to the rising skepticism in Europe, Edwards made space to defend the existence of the one true God in his notebooks. Edwards' apologetics for the existence and unity of God are philosophical and erudite in their wording. Aside from many entries in his *Miscellanies* that establish the existence of God, he used the phrase "unity of God" or "unity of the Godhead" more than a dozen times interchangeably. This suggests that Edwards saw the existence of God, the unity of God, and the plurality of persons (tri-unity) of the Godhead as concepts which were necessarily inseparable. When Edwards spoke of God then, he spoke of one God who is the

¹⁸⁵ See WJE 20:278

underlying reality of the universe and makes no concession for the worship of any other being or created thing, and he saw this God as triune.

Edwards saw God's oneness as displayed primarily in two ways. His immanent or ontological unity is *absolute* and undifferentiated in its oneness, while his economic unity is relative or differentiated.¹⁸⁶ In the former, the Father, Son and Spirit are all equal in essence or being (thus their eternal attributes of glory, power, majesty, etc. are equal); yet in the latter there is a marked difference in the way that the three persons relate to the world outside of the Godhead (thus there is a certain subordination of *tasks* or *roles*). In making a distinction between these two corresponding aspects of God's unity Edwards broke with much of Christian tradition. Perhaps for fear of being charged with tritheism and thus compromising the core tenet of monotheism which undergirds Christianity, or perhaps simply to safeguard the unity of God from heretical opponents, theologians from the post-Nicene era such as Augustine all the way to the Reformation era such as Calvin tended to shy away from any talk of subordination within the Godhead. Most instead preferred to focus on divine simplicity. While their fears may have had validity, Edwards saw no reason to shy away from the potential for controversy since it was what he saw in the Bible that led him to embrace his particular views in the first place. There is, after all, a certain degree of theological tension that exists within the Scriptures on this point, and Edwards seemed content to let his theology live with this tension. This is how Amy Plantinga Pauw reads him, observing, "Edwards gave no hint that he was troubled by the dissonances [of various Trinitarian models]," because he had a "high tolerance for theological tension."¹⁸⁷ For his unique view of the Trinity made it

¹⁸⁶ "Immanent" is from the Latin *in manere* ("remaining within"), and ontology refers to the study of being or essence. "Economic" is from the Greek *oikonomikos* ("relating to arrangement of activities"). The former refers to the internal life of God, while the latter refers to his dealings with the world outside of himself.

¹⁸⁷ Amy Plantinga Pauw, "The Trinity," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 48.

possible that “many things that have been wont to be said by orthodox divines about the Trinity are hereby illustrated.”¹⁸⁸ Edwards knew that if it was not for the Trinity, for example, the universe itself would cease to exist. For Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.”¹⁸⁹ So it is God’s eternal, uncreated word, flowing forth from his own being, which sustains the universe itself. This word is not merely a part or a mode of the Deity, it *is* the Deity himself in a real, separate person. And yet this other person is not the source of himself, for his source lies within another, namely, the Father. That the divine head and the divine word are of the same being or essence, and yet relate personally to one another and with the created order is due to the third of three divine persons depicted in the Bible - for the Holy Spirit is the Deity in loving action according to Edwards, and he shares in the same divine essence as the Father and the Son.

Based on the above reasoning, it is not difficult to see why Edwards made a distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity. He argued that the order we see in the universe is a reflection of the order that exists within the divine being himself. The Father is *antecedent* to the Son, for it is by the Father’s impulse that the Son expresses his wisdom or understanding.¹⁹⁰ The Father therefore is the supreme head and source, the Son flows forth eternally and necessarily as a perfect expression of the Father, and the Spirit proceeds from the loving union that they share. The Father, as it were, gives the orders, the Son follows them, and the Spirit makes it possible. Not three separate gods, but three separate persons (*hypostases*), each fully sharing in the same divine essence (*ousia*) together, yet distinct from one another in their form and function.

¹⁸⁸ WJE 21:134-135.

¹⁸⁹ Hebrews 1:3

¹⁹⁰ See WJE 21:119.

Hereby we see how the Father is the fountain of the Godhead, and why when he is spoken of in Scripture he is so often, without any addition or distinction, called God; which has led some to think that he only was truly and properly God. Hereby we may see why, in the economy of the persons of the Trinity, the Father should sustain the dignity of the Deity; that the Father should have it as his office to uphold and maintain the rights of the Godhead, and should be God, not only by essence, but as it were by his economical office.¹⁹¹

Elsewhere Edwards expanded on this theme: “Not that he is God by nature any more [than the Son or the Holy Spirit], but he is God in his economical character. God the Father is, in his place, God in such a manner that [he] is not only God to the creature, but he is God to the other persons of the Trinity in their offices.”¹⁹² And so we see that for Jonathan Edwards, the scriptural doctrine of the Trinity called for the affirmation of God’s unity *and* his plurality, and neither could be sacrificed at the expense of the other. For to do so would be to divest God of his eternal, unchanging essence.

A world without the Trinity

We have already seen how Edwards argued that the scriptural assertion that “God is love” is mere nonsense if not for the fact that God is a Trinity. But there are other fairly startling implications that can be deduced from Edwards’ Trinitarian dogma. According to Edwards’ logic, not only would the universe cease to exist, as we have seen above, but it *would never have existed in the first place* if not for the Trinity. For in the self-communication of the Father demonstrated in the eternal begetting of his perfect image, the Son, we see that God is eternally disposed to communicate himself. Thus when we read that man is created in the image of God in the first chapter of the Bible, we can discern that the same disposition that led the Father to beget the Son is also at work in his creation of

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 135.

¹⁹² WJE 25:150.

mankind, albeit to a much lesser extent. In this way, the existence of the universe is owing to the creative disposition of God, as he cannot not create, so to speak. It is fundamental to his nature to reflect his image (whether fully and directly in the begetting of the Son, or partially and indirectly in the creation of mankind). Thus from the Trinity we can deduce that God is a fountain of creativity, and the universe exists not because God needs it to exist, but rather because he wills it to exist as an extension of his eternal creative disposition.¹⁹³ Along similar lines, Edwards argued that God continually (re)creates the universe every nanosecond, since our moment by moment existence, while fully “real” and in no way “imagined” is completely dependent on the one in whom “existence” itself eternally resides.¹⁹⁴

Returning once more to a major theme in Edwards’ theology, that of beauty or harmony, he argued that the ultimate form of both is to be found in the Trinity. Every human individual and society is, as Edwards observed them, desirous and appreciative of beauty and harmony. This holds true whether these attributes are expressed in nature, music, art, affections, relationships or any other medium. If we delight in them when expressed in these “lower” earthly forms, how much more when they are expressed in their perfect source - God himself! Earthly forms of beauty and harmony are but shadows of the heavenly divine reality emanating down to them which is found in the Trinity, “the supreme harmony of all” as Edwards phrased it.¹⁹⁵ Since true beauty or harmony is best seen in the giving and receiving of consent, it therefore follows that their source demonstrates perfect consent. And consent can only exist with respect to another, thereby mandating a plurality of persons in the one divine being or source, who is none other than God. In this way, if God did not subsist as a

¹⁹³ WJE 8:435.

¹⁹⁴ WJE 3:402.

¹⁹⁵ WJE 13:329.

Trinity, there would be no basis at all for some of life's most pleasant experiences such as beauty and harmony.

That the creation and existence of the universe as well as the existence of love, beauty and harmony all depend on the prior existence of the Trinity is merely a sampling of the spectrum of human experiences that are affected by this doctrine. Unfortunately, to examine this theme further would fall outside the scope of the present work. However, it is impossible for us not to consider just one more aspect of human experience that is, according to New England's most enduring theological voice, deeply dependent on this mysterious revelation of God described in the Bible and seen in the world - redemption.

Son of God

Jonathan Edwards knew of a certainty that God does not have a son, at least not in the way that any human being does. Yet at the same time, he argued that if it were not for the Son of God who became incarnate in time and space in order to satisfy the perfect justice of the Father by his sacrifice of atonement, we would be left without the most important display of God's glory that flows from his attributes of mercy and grace, viz., redemption. This is why Edwards could say, "The Trinity is exceeding analogous to the gospel scheme," and "is agreeable to the tenor of the whole New Testament."¹⁹⁶

Jonathan Edwards conceived of the Trinity as a divine society, bound together by and *in* one being or essence which is divine love, i.e. God. In this way, the very order of the universe itself is dependent on this divine reality. Edwards argued that there was an observable and reasonable order in nature, in society, and in its basic unit - the family. This is why God chose to use familial language to describe the relationship between God the Father and Jesus the

¹⁹⁶ WJE 21:134.

Son. Edwards was certain that God deliberately chose to use father/son familial language as a concession of sorts to accommodate human inability to grasp the true depths of the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity.¹⁹⁷ The relationship between the two is properly *not* a human relationship, as in the result of sexual union or procreation of any kind. Rather, within the constraints of human language and experience it is the closest metaphor available to help the finite human psyche appreciate and grasp some measure of the intimacy and order within the divine being.

At this point we must return once more to Edwards' use of the economic Trinity. For through the economic Trinity it becomes clear that while there is no distinction in the eternal essence or internal nature of God (the immanent Trinity), there is a clearly discernible subordination of persons within the Deity when it comes to his dealings with the creation, namely in the covenant of redemption. God, according to Edwards, as the most beautiful and desirable being in the universe, is most concerned with the display of the fullness of his glory. Thus the sun, moon and stars, along with everything else that humans can see and experience, all testify in some way or another to his glory. But nowhere, said Edwards, was his glory more clearly visible so as to inspire eternal awe, thanks, and praise on the part of the beneficiaries than in the case of the redemption of mankind. To delete the Trinity from our theological universe is not only to delete the justice and holiness of God, but to delete the greatest display of God's glory. For if the Father, who as the supreme head within the economy of the Trinity, does not have his holiness vindicated and his just wrath at sin satisfied completely by the Son, who stands in his economic office as Redeemer, mankind is

¹⁹⁷ Edwards seems to have developed his thinking on the economic Trinity - particularly this aspect of it - from van Mastricht's *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*. As one of his favorite sources, he noted in "Miscellany" no. 482, fairly early in his ministry, a specific reference in van Mastricht concerning the usage of familial language to describe the economy of the persons of the Trinity.

left without a view toward the fullness of God's glory in redemption and is furthermore utterly lost in their sin with no hope of reconciliation either to God or one another.

Messenger, Prophet, and Servant of God

This was no small matter for a man whose primary concern in his theology *and* in his praxis was the glory and worship of the one true God. Therefore, in March of 1746, the Reverend launched the first in a trilogy of sermons about the Godhead. His sermon, *Of God the Father*, was primarily meant to help his parishioners understand just how important the economy of the Trinity is in comprehending something of the spectacular nature of God's unified nature. To behold the former is to appreciate the latter all the more. From 1 Corinthians 11:3, wherein Paul declares, "the head of Christ is God," Edwards played pastoral architect in constructing a theological structure that simultaneously affirmed God's total unity of essence *and* the subordination of persons within his divine essence. The Trinity is most clearly visible in the covenant of redemption, said Edwards. What is hinted at to varying degrees throughout the whole Old Testament, and even exists in shadows and types in nature and in other religious philosophies, is made plain in the gospel. But without a proper understanding of "who's who," if you will, within the Trinity, one cannot grasp the concept properly. For Edwards knew that it was an improper understanding of the Trinity which was the cause of so much heresy and religious confusion in the world. By unashamedly treading into deep theological waters, he hoped to clear up confusion and thereby inspire awestruck worship of God.

The three persons of the Trinity, in the great affair of our redemption, act as a society united to carry on a great affair; and as a society that has an established order in it, and a subordination of members, one being chief and head of the society and others in their order subject and dependent. There is one of 'em that is first in the affair and head of all; another acts as second in the affair and as an intermediate person between

the first and the last; the other acts as last and as subject to, and dependent on, the other two. There is this order [that] is observed by the persons of the Trinity in their acting in all affairs appertaining to the glory of the Godhead [and the] creation of the world. But it is more especially conspicuous in the affair of man's redemption. The persons of the Trinity thus acting as a society in an established order is what divines call the "economy of the persons of the Trinity," comparing it to the order of a family. The word "economy" signifies family order. This established order of the society of the persons of the Trinity is called the economy of the persons of the Trinity in allusion to that society [which] is the rather compared to a family, because the Scripture does compare the relation that two of the persons stand in, one to the other, to the family relations of father and son.¹⁹⁸

As for how this subordination comes about, Edwards was clear that it was "*not* because one person of the Trinity is by nature above the other: there is no such thing as a natural superiority."¹⁹⁹ Nor is it by obligation that the Son subjects himself to the Father, for if that were so his sacrifice would not be voluntary and thus have no real merit, asserted Edwards. Rather, the subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit to the Father "'tis the fruit of of the will and pleasure of the persons of the Trinity."²⁰⁰ In other words, there was a mutual consent among the Father, Son, and Spirit from before the world was created that this would be so. As God the Father subsists first in order among the three, it is fitting that he play the role of Father in the divine family. For, "[He] not only acts as head of the created members of the family (i.e. humans), but as head of the uncreated as well (i.e. Son and Spirit)."²⁰¹ Accordingly he is higher in authority, which is why Christ can say, "My Father is greater than I" (John 10:29). In fact, throughout its entirety, Scripture testifies that the Son and the Spirit are both "subject to the Father to appoint, order, and direct them... in their office."²⁰² When John recorded Jesus' words in John 10:18, "This commandment I have received of my

¹⁹⁸ WJE 25:146

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147 (emphasis mine).

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 148.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

Father,” Edwards says that he demonstrates that “Christ is the Father’s messenger and servant.” Indeed, Christ is the one God spoke of in Isaiah 42:1 saying, “My servant, whom I uphold” and then in verses 19-20 of the same chapter God declared that Jesus is “[My] messenger that I sent.”²⁰³ In his office as Redeemer, “The Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19). In sum, whatever authority, supremacy, kingship or lordship Jesus possesses is but an *appointed* authority, supremacy, kingship or lordship. This order is not limited to history or even to the here and now alone, Edwards noted, as he reminded his listeners that in heaven, the Father is the one who sits on the divine throne and the Lamb (Jesus) is seated at his right hand (Revelation 4:2).

Finally, Edwards’ use of the economic Trinity to explain the workings of God in the world is especially useful for our present purposes in terms of his summary remarks on this subject. For he concluded his sermon with some rather remarkable observations that can serve as an unlikely bridge of understanding by speaking of God’s relationship to Jesus as follows:

He appoints the Redeemer his work. [He] invests him with all his offices: [as] prophet: appoints him what he shall say (John 12:40), what miracles he shall work (John 5:19); [as] priest: what commands he shall obey; [he] appoints him his trials: how much he shall suffer, and what cup he shall drink. [He] determines when he has done and suffered enough; appoints his release, when he shall rise. God raises him up [and] gives him his reward. The price is paid [by] him to him, and he gives him the thing purchased: [Christ’s] kingly office. [The] redeemed are finally brought and presented to him: thus the head of Christ is God the Father; he is the head of all authority in the affair. [He is] the first disposer, the first fountain. Though the Son has an all-sufficiency in his office, yet [it is] derived. John 5:26, “[The] Father hath life in himself, and hath given to the Son to have life in himself.”²⁰⁴

For all of these reasons and more, Edwards said, “Hence God the Father is oftentimes called God in Scripture in a peculiar manner, as though he were God in some peculiar sense that the

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 151-152.

other persons of the Trinity are not.”²⁰⁵ Oliver Crisp and Kyle Strobel have both suggested that Edwards relied on divine *perichoresis* to maintain this important distinction.²⁰⁶ The idea that each member of the Trinity indwells the other is not a new idea, as Augustine employed the doctrine of *perichoresis* in order to guard the simplicity of divine oneness many centuries ago. According to the doctrine that Crisp and Strobel here advocate in their reading of Edwards on this crucial point, none of the persons in the Trinity can truly be themselves without the indwelling of the other two. The Father is not God by himself, neither is the Son God by himself, nor is the Spirit God by himself. Rather, these three who all indwell one another and share one understanding, one will and one love are who God is - the Godhead as it were. While Crisp and Strobel are certainly within the bounds of Edwards’ wider thought in emphasizing the doctrine of *perichoresis*, the position of this thesis is that Edwards *intended* to leave some space for interpretation in the mysterious relationships between the persons of the Trinity, which is why he himself did not appeal directly to this doctrine. The present research suggests that he was unafraid to creep so close to the cliff of “heresy” because he was secure in the mysterious Biblical portrayal of Trinitarian monotheism. This, it would seem, is precisely why he made the very clear assertion above, that the Father is “God in some peculiar sense that the other persons of the Trinity are not.”

The Reverend was clear that Jesus was the Son of God, but he was equally clear that Jesus was the Messenger, Prophet, and Servant of God; Edwards’ theology simply would not allow him to separate these core facets of Christ’s identity. In this way, our Puritan architect has unwittingly constructed a theological bridge between conservative Christianity and Islam. As we turn to his counterpart in Najd, we will begin to see the extent to which this is true.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 150.

²⁰⁶ See Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians*, 49-53; and Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology*, 26-70.

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

2.4 Tawḥīd in Context and Text

That there is only one God who subsists as an absolute singularity without distinction or peer is the cornerstone upon which the entire edifice of Islam is built. Indeed, the very first and last utterance for the faithful from every corner of the earth, from the cradle to the grave, is the phrase, “there is no god but *the* God!” (“*lā ilāh ilā Allāh*,” لا اله الا الله). Although it may seem a simple pronouncement, one cannot appreciate the depth of Islam’s monotheistic creed apart from some understanding of its genesis in seventh-century Arabia. For the Prophet of Islam came of age in a time and place where pagan religion was widespread. The Arabs of Muḥammad’s Arabia were not irreligious by any means. On the contrary, their many forms of worship and its pervasiveness in daily life are a testament to this fact. Whether or not they possessed a concept of one supreme deity who reigned above the numerous other deities that were collectively worshipped is not presently our concern.²⁰⁷ In reality, neither was it Muḥammad’s concern, as his growing awareness of the fallaciousness of their polytheistic worship over against a monotheistic framework was what caused him to seek an end to this time of *jāhiliyya*. Let the reader also bear in mind that Tawḥīd did *not* arise out of the ashes of a vanquished paganism, but rather as a concurrent, alternative *to* paganism. Muḥammad’s call to the worship of the one true God stood in stark juxtaposition to the variety of religious rituals and practices that permeated the Hījāz in the seventh century. Despite the fact that there were Jews and Christians in and around his environs who already shared his commitment to monotheism, the vast majority of the peoples in his midst were involved in all

²⁰⁷ Scholars have taken up this question elsewhere. Although they differ as to the extent, they do agree that most monotheistic undertones in pre-Islamic Arabian paganism were almost certainly due to the influence of Judaism and Christianity. See for example, Hamilton A.R. Gibb, “Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 4 (1962): 269-280. See also two volumes edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

varieties of pagan worship. This was especially true of his own tribe, the Quraysh, who relentlessly persecuted Muḥammad for his call to Tawḥīd until he fled to Medina in 622, marking the start of the Islamic calendar.

Context

As we have already seen, there can be little doubt that the early Muwaḥḥid chroniclers of Najd wished to draw as close of a parallel as possible between the seventh-century Prophet and his eighteenth-century namesake. Not only was the Shaykh from al-‘Uyayna similarly situated in a context of prevailing *jāhiliyya*, he also persevered in the face of persecution from many sides, including his own, before emerging victorious. Furthermore, he was likewise seen to be predestined for his prophetic mission from before his birth through supernatural means and even resembled the Prophet in his devotion to God as a young boy.²⁰⁸ Although these latter similarities are all significant in their own right, the most obvious parallel that the archivists of Najd focused on was the former one of widespread *jāhiliyya*. Ibn Ghannām and Ibn Bishr depict a society that was steeped in black magic and the cult of the saints, personified by sacred trees, tombs and amulets, where the Sunnīs of Arabia had fallen far away from the message of Tawḥīd preached by the Prophet and his Companions and were in dire need of reform. Withal, whatever good may have once resided in Ṣūfism was now muted completely by *bid‘a*. Added to all this was the troubling fact of an ever-present Shī‘a influence in the region. The Muwaḥḥid chroniclers would have us believe that the

²⁰⁸ Ibn Ishāq tells of how the Prophet’s mother, Āmina, when she was pregnant with him, saw a light shine forth from her womb that reached all the way to the castles of Buṣrā in Syria. See Ibn Ishāq, *al-Sīra al-Nabawiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2009), 97. Similarly, Louis de Corancez, who was the French consul in Aleppo and Baghdad, related that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s grandfather, Sulaymān, had a dream in which he saw a flame leave his body and spread throughout Arabia (presumably his account was either based on or at least related to *Lam‘ al-Shihāb*). See Louis de Corancez, *Histoire Des Wahabis Depuis Leur Origine Jusqu’a Al Fin De 1809*, (Paris: De L’Imprimerie De Crapelet, 1810), 6-7. I owe the linking of these two incidents to Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 54.

conditions were ripe for a new prophetic voice, especially one who shared so many characteristics with the Prophet himself. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb felt that he had little choice but to respond to what he saw as a desperate situation. And what better place to start than with the most fundamental concept in Islam?

Tawhīd may seem like the simplest concept in Islam, and in many ways it is just that. However, it is also among the most complicated concepts in the religion because its meaning and application reach far beyond a mere declaration of God’s unity. While there have been many expositors of the doctrine in the annals of Islam, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is remembered as being one of its fiercest proponents. He is not necessarily unique in terms of his philosophical or theological insights on the concept (although they are significant), but is better known for the way he *combined* the theoretical with the practical. In this he attempted to copy the earliest generation of Muslims wherein Tawhīd was first proclaimed and practiced in Islam. Before we can get to his application of Islam’s most crucial teaching, however, we must first attempt to understand it as he did. The Shaykh was known for his insistence that right understanding must be matched by right behavior. The former, as it were, should necessarily both precede *and* produce the latter. So it is to the revivalist of Najd’s basis for understanding Tawhīd that we now turn.

Text

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb formed his thought on the basis of two factors and two alone: the revelation of the Qur’ān, and the Sunna of the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba* as recorded in the Ḥadīth literature. The ultimate basis for Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s interpretation of monotheism was the book which he saw to exist on earth exactly as it did in heaven, uncreated and eternal - the Qur’ān. It may surprise some readers to learn that, much like

Edwards and the Bible, the Shaykh never wrote a full length *tafsīr* on the Qur'ān.²⁰⁹ Yet, also similar to Edwards, his exegetical prowess is not lacking when viewed through the lens of his wider writings. Preferring a thematic approach rather than an expository or chronological one, he regularly upheld the centrality of Tawḥīd in the Qur'ān in his treatises and sermons. The foundational Islamic theme found in the foundational Islamic text, as it were, was the absolute oneness of God, and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was determined to trumpet this fact as loudly and clearly as he could.

He found evidence for Tawḥīd everywhere he looked in the Qur'ān. It seemed that the Shaykh had a knack for seeing Tawḥīd in places that others did not. His uncanny ability to perceive and expound on Tawḥīd from virtually any verse of the Qur'ān is displayed in his choice to open both *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and *al-Qawā'id al-Arba'* with the following verse, “And I did not create the *jinn* and mankind except to worship me.”²¹⁰ Understanding how this verse relates to Tawḥīd might not seem obvious at first, as the context seems to suggest that *jinn* and men have been created for the purpose of worship. But if one stops there, he will fail to see the true meaning of the verse. A clue is given in the final word, “me” whereupon the careful reader is alerted that the focus might not actually be *jinn* and mankind, but God. The word “me” actually links back to verse 51, where Allāh warns against setting up another god besides him. This is why Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb knew that the focus of the verse was Tawḥīd. While it is true that God created *jinn* and mankind to worship, it must be understood that they have been created to worship *him* specifically, over against any form of polytheistic association. It is not enough to glean that creation's purpose is to worship. It must be seen that this worship should be pure in that it is carried out in accordance with God's unified

²⁰⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's partial *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, is found in volume 5 of his works.

²¹⁰ Q 51:56

nature. The Shaykh's attention to detail in the Qur'ān, both grammatical and contextual, was one of the reasons he was so adept at discovering *and* disseminating the doctrine of Tawḥīd so profoundly. Besides some of the less obvious verses such as the aforementioned, we find that the Shaykh almost never failed to capitalize on an opportunity to list a Qur'ānic reference to Tawḥīd throughout his works. From beginning to end, Islam's holy book brims with the topic. "Do not take for yourselves two deities, he is but one God" says Qur'ān 16:51. Again, in 47:19 Muḥammad is reminded, "So know that there is no deity except Allāh." Finally, near the end of Islam's holy book we read these words, "He is Allāh, the one and only" (Q 112:1). Thus the writings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb can not necessarily be said to disproportionately reference Tawḥīd, but rather to reflect the tone of the Qur'ān as a whole.

By the time of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, memorization of the Qur'ān by rote had been the typical means of formal education throughout Arabia for many centuries. Following this tradition, the Shaykh had memorized the holy book of Islam by the age of ten under the tutelage of his father and grandfather. However, as he grew older there was a clear impetus in him to help move Muslims beyond memorization of the text and into *understanding*. This is why the Ḥadīth was so important to him, because these texts contained the historical background for the revelation of the Qur'ān's many verses. Each verse had its own historical context (*siyāq al-tanzīl*) in which it was revealed, and understanding that context was key to understanding the meaning of the verse itself. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was not content to settle for rote memorization of Islam's holy book that lacked vital supplemental historical knowledge. The application of the context behind the Qur'ān's revelation and its primary principle of Tawḥīd were thus contained in the example of the Prophet's life and in the lives of his Companions. In this way we can better grasp the reason for the sheer volume of the Shaykh's references to the Sunna of Muḥammad and the *Ṣaḥāba* as recorded in Ḥadīth

narratives. For him, the context of the Scripture was as important as the Scripture itself when it came to understanding. The Qur'ān, as it were, may contain beautiful and even inimitable Arabic, and it surely contains divine light and guidance, but its full import and impact can never be realized apart from the historical context in which it was revealed and first applied by the most exemplary figures in Islam's history.

The issue at hand for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was not only that the Qur'ān taught Tawḥīd, but also that of how it was *applied*. While anyone could pick up the text and plainly discern the central message of the Qur'ān, it was the example of the Prophet and his Companions that made proper application possible. Far from being an alternate source of revelation to the Qur'ān, as some have mistakenly taken the Shaykh's dependence on the Ḥadīth to be, the Ḥadīth was a necessary component of the same divine message - the latter giving shape, continuity and perpetuity to the message of former. It mattered little to Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb if one claimed to believe in the Qur'ān and its monotheistic creed but did not consistently apply that belief in the way that Muḥammad and his Companions did. The context in which the Shaykh found himself helped to dictate the importance of the texts that drove his ministry.

2.5 Tawḥīd Conceptualized

The early centuries of Islam did not witness the development of some of the more highly technical theological language that arose only after increased contact with non-Muslim communities, particularly with Christians, whose thinking on the divine had been in process for six centuries by the time of the Islam's arrival. Accordingly, early Islamic thought tended to display more simplicity than that which arose toward the middle of the "Golden Age" of Islam, when Arab Muslim thinkers blended with Arab Christians, Persians, and Europeans

under the ‘Abbāsids, who ruled from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. The era gave rise to some of Islam’s most revered scholars of philosophy and theology such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198).²¹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, who lived at the end of the ‘Abbāsīd era, rejected much of their thought on the grounds that philosophy and theology had no place in traditional Islamic discourse, whose foundations were the clear words of the Qur’ān and the Sunna, not the speculation that often accompanied other disciplines.²¹² However, even he could not escape the spirit of the era in which he was reared, as he built on some of Ibn Sīnā’s ideas and became known as the first thinker to popularize the idea that Tawḥīd was more than a monochromatic entity. Instead, he said that Tawḥīd could be split into two general categories which he referred to as *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* (unity of lordship) and *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (unity of worship).²¹³ Nearly four centuries later, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb would expound on this idea of different types of Tawḥīd by adding yet another category which he called *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* (unity of names and attributes).

Types of Tawḥīd

By *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb meant that God was to be believed in and acknowledged for his unique role as Lord of all, including the fact that he is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. His lordship, essentially, can be inferred from his unique activity in the universe, as there is no other who can create nor sustain all that we see and experience in reality. In fact, although the Qur’ān repeatedly testifies to the lordship of God over all, *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* can actually be seen in nature, completely apart from the

²¹¹ Ibn Sīnā is also known in the West as Avicenna, while Ibn Rushd is also known as Averroes.

²¹² Ibn Taymiyya is well known for his opposition to philosophy and theology, yet his own works often display plenty of both, and of an erudite variety. For an example of Ibn Taymiyya as a philosopher and theologian, see Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

²¹³ See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ Fatāwā* (Cairo: Dar al-Rahma, n.d.), vol. 1, 91. For Ibn Sīnā’s influence on Ibn Taymiyya, see Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy*, 70-72, 138-143.

Qur'ān or specific knowledge of Islam. Therefore, affirming the first type of Tawḥīd does not necessarily make one a Muslim, said the two men who were both known by the lofty title of “Shaykh al-Islam.” For, according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, there were many who could affirm the uniqueness of God’s lordship, and yet fail to qualify as true believers. These included pagans, Jews, Christians, and even Muslims who did not grasp the second, most important aspect of God’s unity.

Although belief in *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* was seen by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as the most basic of affirmations among the three aspects of his monotheistic doctrine, it was clearly not a defining factor in whether one was a true Muslim or not. It was a mandatory starting point for belief, but this belief had to be accompanied by the proper observance of God’s unity, demonstrated in the worshipper’s obedience to *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*. This, the second aspect of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine of Tawḥīd, was the most crucial because it provided a clear delineation between Muslims and non-Muslims in their estimation. It was not enough, said the two scholars, simply to acknowledge that there is one God who is Lord of all - one must couple this belief with appropriate worship, undivided in its devotion to God alone. This is why Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb could say that those who passed the first test and yet failed the second were not true Muslims in the way of the Prophet and the *Ṣaḥāba*, who demonstrated both forms of Tawḥīd in that their belief lined up squarely with their practice in worshipping God alone. *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* then, has solely to do with how one worships. Does he worship God through an intermediary such as a saint or a holy man? Does he worship God through the use of sacred amulets or stones? Or does he worship God in the manner prescribed in Scripture and exemplified by the Prophet and his Companions? There is only one right answer, according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Concerning the difference between these first two facets of divine unity, he said this:

For if they say to you, “What is the difference between *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*?” say, “*Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* consists in the activity of the Lord, such as him being the Creator and Sustainer, the one who gives life and the one who gives death, the one who brings rain and causes the plants to grow, and arranges the affairs [of this world]... while *Tawḥīd al-ilāhiyya* consists in your activity, i.e. worship, such as the offering of prayers of supplication, the fear [of God], hope [in God], dependence [on God], stewardship, desire, giving, making vows, seeking aid, and other forms of worship.²¹⁴

With this clarification, it is much easier to distinguish between non-believers and true believers, said the Shaykh. Acknowledgement of the one God is intuitive, but worship is not. Knowing that the one God exists is a generality, but worshipping him must be specific. In this way, *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* without *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* is virtually worthless for the one who knows better. However, according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, God was in control of the fate of those who did not know the second form of *Tawḥīd* due to ignorance of the proper message of Islam. But for those who were well versed in Islam yet still chose to corrupt their worship with *shirk*, he was not nearly as optimistic. It seemed to him that the consequences of not applying *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* properly would lead them to hell, no matter how vigorously they maintained the testimony of *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*.

The third and final aspect of *Tawḥīd* in the thought of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb concerns the unity of God’s names and attributes. Even though Ibn Taymiyya is not specifically known for propounding this particular tenet of monotheism, one can trace the general idea of *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb all the way back through him to Ibn Sīnā. In this regard, all three men rejected both the Mu‘tazilī and the Ash‘arī positions on God’s attributes, preferring to conceive of themselves as occupying a middle way in the argument. While the former maintained that God’s attributes were separate from his essence, the latter argued that his attributes were one with his essence. The primary

²¹⁴ WMIAW 1:371, *Majmū‘at Rasā’il fī al-Tawḥīd*. N.B. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb used the terms *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* and *Tawḥīd al-ilāhiyya* interchangeably.

problem with the Mu‘tazilī view is that it denies the reality of divine attributes, while the primary difficulty with the Ash‘arī view is that it introduces plurality into God. *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* was important principally because it helped to solve the apparent impasse that plagued the two aforementioned schools. In Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Muwaḥḥid formulation of God’s unity, whatever divine attributes are mentioned in the Qur’ān or the Sunna are fully embraced as authentic, while silence is the proper response regarding whatever is not spoken of in these two sources. Concerning these attributes, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was careful to maintain that anthropomorphisms in the Qur’ān are *not* meant to liken God to his creation, yet seemed content to consign the issue of just how this was so to the realm of divine priority or aseity.²¹⁵ There are just some things about God that man must accept without fully understanding or questioning, and this was one of them. According to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, we need not fear in such cases as long as we are in obedience to what God has revealed.

The eternal word

One crucial point in our brief discussion of *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* is of interest in this particular study because it concerns the issue of the eternality of God’s names and attributes, specifically his word. The correlation between the *logos* of John 1:1,14 and the *kalima* of Qur’ān 4:171 is a well known trope in Arabic Christian thought on Islam; various Christian and Muslim thinkers have discussed and debated this link for over a millennium.²¹⁶ Until now, however, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb has been absent from this discussion.

²¹⁵ The doctrine of God’s aseity is common to both Christianity and Islam. Expounded by towering figures from each faith such as Aquinas and al-Ghazālī, it speaks of God’s divine otherness, self-sufficiency, and priority of being.

²¹⁶ See for example, S. Samir and J. Nielsen, eds., *Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258)*, (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

The Shaykh strongly condemned the Mu‘tazilī position that the word of God is created. Far from protecting the doctrine of Tawhīd, as they claimed, it maligned it, he said. Commenting on a Ḥadīth narrated by ‘Ubāda bin al-Ṣāmat wherein the Prophet included the fact that belief in Jesus as the word and spirit of God is fundamental to the faith, the Shaykh said that, “the attributes of God are confirmed [by this Ḥadīth], *contrary* to the claims of the Mu‘tazila.”²¹⁷ One could steadfastly affirm that the divine word is “of God” as he put it, without being a polytheist. For to deny the eternity of God’s word would be to deny the fact that it existed in heaven before it was revealed on earth, as well as to deny the testimony of the Ḥadīth. In addition to the aforementioned Ḥadīth, the Shaykh devoted an entire chapter of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* to this issue, entitled, “Seeking help from that which is other than God is *shirk*.” In it, he related a Ḥadīth from Ṣaḥīḥ Mūsliḥ wherein the Prophet was heard to say, “Whoever enters a dwelling and says, ‘I seek refuge in God’s perfect words from the evil he created,’ no harm shall befall him until he departs from that dwelling.” His explanation is worth noting in full, “This Ḥadīth is a proof: for scholars use it to prove that the words of God are not created (*ghayr makhlūqa*). They say this because seeking refuge in that which is created is *shirk*.”²¹⁸ Essentially, according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, to seek refuge in God’s word is no different than to seek refuge in God himself. Instead of being labeled as *shirk*, he said that seeking refuge in the *kalimāt* of God is a perfectly legitimate expression of worship. We can thus deduce that if the Prophet himself sanctioned the seeking of refuge specifically

²¹⁷ WMIAW 1:14, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (emphasis mine). In what was most likely a copyist’s error, the actual text of the *Mu‘allafāt* reads “al-Ash‘ariya.” There is an editorial note which says that there is one printed copy that reads, “contrary to the Mu‘ṭla.” This is presumably a short-hand reference to the Mu‘tazila, who would seem rather obviously to be the intended point of reference in this instance.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 41. The “word of God” and the “words of God” are often used interchangeably in Islam, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is no exception - he alternates between *kalima* and *kalimāt*. In this instance, due to the plural (*kalimāt*) it would seem that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb here has the Qur’ān in mind primarily. However, since he also said that believing in Jesus as the *kalima* of God (based on the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth) is mandatory for true faith, it is logical to apply his thoughts to both. Based on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s own usage then, the “word” of God and the “words” of God are used interchangeably here to refer to the same concept - God’s speech, i.e. his self-communicative revelation.

in the word of God, then this word, which is uncreated, must be “of God” in some mysterious way that the human mind cannot fully comprehend. Since this is what God has revealed though, man is obliged to accept it as truth, said Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.

The acceptance of certain doctrines such as the reality of God’s attributes, without a concrete explanation to accompany how, why, or what exactly the ontological essence of those attributes might be, is a Ḥanbalī tendency known as *bilā kayf* (“without a how”) or *imrār* (“passing on”).²¹⁹ That Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb employed this logic to the *kalima* as mentioned above is evidence that he was indeed influenced by Ḥanbalīsm despite the fact that he decried association with any one *madhhab*. The Shaykh’s reliance on *bilā kayf* or *imrār* reasoning in this case was what allowed him to contend that the attributes were real, even co-eternal with God, and yet not offer a concomitant explanation. Like earlier Muslim theologians, he seemed to allow that the attributes were existentially (although not logically) distinct from the divine essence, but he did not argue that they were self-subsistent entities. Rather, consistent with Ibn Ḥanbal as well as with other earlier thinkers in Islam, his writings are simply silent as to how the divine attributes precisely related to the divine essence.

It is doubtful that the Shaykh realized just how close his argument came to the Christian conception of the eternal word, as he was not well versed in the contours of Christian thought. How exactly his view differed from the Christian position is not specified in the chapter in question, as Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not necessarily fond of elaboration, and the genre of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, the reader must bear in mind, is more of a catechism than a theological or philosophical tome. Based on his overall thinking though, we can gather that his view on the eternity of the word and its corresponding similitude with God was a rejection of the Mu‘tazilī position which held that the word was a created entity. His thought

²¹⁹ I am indebted to Luke Yarbrough for this connection to wider Ḥanbalī thought.

in this instance actually lined up much more closely with Ash‘arīs who maintained that the divine attributes were “not God and not other than God.”²²⁰ However, it seems that the Shaykh went beyond even this pronouncement inasmuch as he always, without exception, made a clear distinction between Tawḥīd and *shirk*. If he did not consider the seeking of refuge in the word of God as *shirk*, is not the most logical deduction one can make, based on his wider thought, that the divine word is somehow one with the divine essence? Perhaps what he had in mind with *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* was a scenario where God’s names and attributes are in some sense “unified” and co-eternal with himself, *and yet* not united in the divine essence, which has its own internal unity. That is to say, God’s essence is unique to his person, and should be distinguished from his names and attributes which, while they exist in a mysterious and incomprehensible *type* of unity with God himself, are nevertheless ontologically different from God. If it is granted that the Shaykh’s view is indeed a middle ground, wherein the word was eternal yet not one with God in essence, we can see how his position would differ from the Christian position. However, since he did not explicitly state this, it is admittedly an educated guess at best.

Whether or not Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw his conviction about the word of God as per the doctrine of *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt* as a means of warding off philosophical errors that had plagued Muslim thinkers for centuries, the careful observer cannot escape the striking parallels in his thought on this issue with the Christian position. Indeed, members of the Mu‘tazilī school had often referred to their Muslim opponents derogatorily as “Christians” or “Trinitarians” because the affirmation of the reality of divine attributes is precisely what Christian thinkers correlated with the doctrine of the word of God, also known

²²⁰ See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islam and Christianity Today* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 49. See also Richard Frank, *Early Islamic Theology: The Mu‘tazilites and the al-Ash‘arī* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).

as the second person of the Godhead.²²¹ In what at times became merely a game of semantics, Christians chose to use the word “persons” to describe the reality of divine attributes within God himself, while Muslims who likewise affirmed the reality of the attributes used the word “*sifāt*” as a safeguard against being labeled Christians or Trinitarians in their descriptions of God’s unity. It bears repeating that while others have elaborated on this commonality between Christian and Muslim thinkers before, what is truly unique here is that this thread has yet to be discussed in the thinking of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb - someone who is traditionally associated with the antithesis of Christian thought. Here we see how his use of three types of Tawḥīd, particularly that of God’s names and attributes, brings him much closer to the thinking of his Christian counterparts like Edwards than one might dare to imagine.

2.6 Tawḥīd Applied

The difference between heaven and hell

For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, just uttering the simple truth that “there is no god but God,” meant that man could be granted entrance into paradise, provided it was internalized and rigorously obeyed. “Whoever says ‘there is no god but God’ with his tongue, but negates it with his actions has no benefit from the saying” he preached.²²² But those worshippers whose deeds corresponded with their creed had nothing to fear. Understanding and implementing Tawḥīd was the basis from which all true worship depended. Conversely, the failure to

²²¹ For a detailed study on the relationship between the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and the development of Islamic thought on the attributes of God, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976). Wolfson credits Christian thinkers such as the Patriarch Timothy and John of Damascus with having a tremendous influence on the development of the Islamic doctrine of God. For more on the influence of Christian theology on Islamic thought, see Sara Leila Husseini, *Early Christian-Muslim Debate on the Unity of God: Three Christian Scholars and Their Engagement with Islamic Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); James Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, 4 vols. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945, 1947, 1955, 1967); and David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

²²² SMIAW, 52.

comprehend and implement it properly was the basis for all false worship. Tawhīd was, for Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, literally the difference between heaven and hell. Looking more closely at Q 51:56, the verse he started two of his most well known works with, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had this to say:

So if you have learned that God created you to worship him, know that worship is not called worship unless it is accompanied by Tawhīd, just as prayer is not called prayer unless it is accompanied by ritual purity. For if *shirk* has entered into worship it has spoiled it, just as happens if it has entered into ritual purity. So if you have learned that *shirk*, if mixed with worship, spoils it and invalidates one’s actions and makes the one who committed it into one who will eternally reside in hell, you have known that the most important thing which is binding on you is the knowledge thereof, so that perhaps God may save you from this trap which is the association of partners with God Almighty.²²³

Worship which is accompanied by Tawhīd, as the Shaykh understood it, was the path to paradise. The reason he could say this was that, as the most basic doctrine in Islam, everything else flowed from Tawhīd. It is, in many ways, exactly like the foundation of worship in Judaism and Christianity. The first words God spoke to Moses on Sinai were these: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20: 2-5 NASB). Similarly, when Jesus was questioned about which is the greatest commandment, Tawhīd seemed to be foremost in his mind judging by his response, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your

²²³ WMIAW 1:199, *al-Qawā'id al-Arba'*

strength” (Mark 12:29–30).²²⁴ Neither of these facts were lost on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who gladly affirmed this truth as being synchronous with the most significant concept in true religion.

At the same time, the Shaykh’s *tafsīr* above also makes clear that the failure to understand and apply Tawḥīd is no simple matter - it is a surefire path to hellfire. The “trap” of idolatry in any form, said the reformer of Najd, was the root of all misguided worship. And God does not accept worship which is corrupted from the pristine revelation he has sent down. In a very real sense, if one fails at the point of Tawḥīd, he fails at the point of life itself. And to fail the test of life in this world can only mean a life of hellfire in the next world. “Whoever meets God,” reckoned Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, “having not associated anything with him shall enter paradise. And whoever meets him while committing *shirk* shall enter hellfire, *even though* he may have been an exemplary worshipper among men.”²²⁵

Atonement for sin, accumulation of rewards

Tawḥīd was clearly no peripheral issue for the Shaykh, it was to be clung to for dear life. He could argue that one’s eternal state depended on Tawḥīd because he believed that it could remove sin as well as accumulate divine rewards. Thus the vital connection between the practice of Tawḥīd in this life and the rewards or punishments of the next life are illustrated by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s entitling a chapter in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, “The Virtue of

²²⁴ That the one true God makes no concession for polytheism or idolatry is not contradictory to the doctrine of the Trinity, as the Son and the Spirit are fundamental to who God is. God is not God, according to Christians, without the full expression of himself demonstrated in the three persons of the Trinity. God is only truly God when he is known as he truly is, so to speak. Thus Christians can, together with Jesus, affirm the *Shema*, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one” and also the first commandment that “Thou shall have no other gods beside me” because when they do so they implicitly accept that the God being spoken of is the triune God of Scripture. For more on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Jesus’ words as recorded here, see section 4.7 of this thesis.

²²⁵ WMIAW 1:19, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (emphasis mine).

Tawḥīd in Atoning for Sin.”²²⁶ Therein, he retold a Ḥadīth where the Prophet said, “God has forbidden hellfire for whoever says, ‘there is no god but God,’ seeking thus the face of God.”²²⁷ He immediately followed this with another narration where God’s Messenger was heard to utter, “God most high has said, ‘Oh son of Adam, were you to come to me with a world full of sins, and meet me without associating anything else to me [in worship], I would come to you with a similar amount of forgiveness.’”²²⁸

In his summary comments at the end of the chapter, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb asked his readers to take note that Tawḥīd was not only the cause of abundant divine rewards, “in addition, it atones for sin.”²²⁹ So for the Shaykh, the fact that Tawḥīd led to paradise was not based on an abstract idea. It led to paradise precisely *because* it was a major factor in the accumulation of divine rewards on the part of the faithful worshipper, as well as making atonement for sin. The fact that Tawḥīd helped to store up the kind of heavenly credit that not only assisted in opening the door of paradise for the faithful, but also increased the experience thereof once inside, is not an idea which is exclusive to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb by any means. However, in proclaiming that proper observance of Tawḥīd also made atonement for a believer’s sins, the Shaykh broke new ground. Traditionally, Muslim thinkers have maintained that the sins of a man can and will be reckoned for by a commensurate degree of divine punishment meted out in his physical life, in the next life, or more commonly, through some combination of the two. Part of the reason for the fire of hell, as it were, is to purify man by the burning away of his sin in the hope that eventually he will be purified completely, his sin being fully expiated by his experience of the flames so that he can finally enter

²²⁶ Ibid., 12.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 13.

²²⁹ Ibid.

paradise. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not disagree with traditional Islamic thinking regarding how the Almighty deals with human sin, rather, he added a new idea into the fray by declaring that human sins are atoned for by the perfection of monotheistic worship as manifested in Tawḥīd. In typical fashion, he did not simply come up with the concept *ex nihilo*, but through a careful investigation and exegesis of the Ḥadīth literature. If the Sunna of the Prophet clearly taught that proper observance of Tawḥīd was a doorway to paradise through both the accumulation of divine rewards *and* the expiation of human sin, as the above examples demonstrate, then who was Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to stand in the way?

Sophisticated simplicity

It is clear from the sources that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw himself situated in a context which was similar to that facing the Prophet during the times of ignorance before the coming of Islam. If the primary antidote to the prevailing polytheism of those days was the call to Tawḥīd, then the same held true for his own day, reasoned the reformer from Najd. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not make monotheism his core doctrine because it was fashionable or simple. Instead, he genuinely held that Tawḥīd was the basis for Islam altogether. Indeed, without a proper understanding and application of Tawḥīd, there could be no Islam. The word Arabs typically use for “religion” is *dīn*, which properly understood, means much more. *Dīn* implies a whole way of life, as well as something which is obligatory (as it is closely related to the Arabic word for debt). This is why the religion of Islam is so much more than a mere pronouncement of faith or belief. It is literally an all encompassing way of life in which believers are obligated to adhere to its principles, namely Tawḥīd, since from this doctrine all others flow. This is why, in addition to what has been shared above, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw

so many other applications and implications for Tawḥīd in the life of the believer and the community.

Without true Tawḥīd, one could not truly love (*yuḥibb*) God.²³⁰ Without true Tawḥīd, one could not truly depend (*yatawakkal*) on God.²³¹ Apart from true Tawḥīd, one could not even truly fear (*yakhāf*) God.²³² Even though it is a concept that contains an endless supply of divine wisdom for humanity, Tawḥīd really was, in the final analysis, a simple doctrine according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. As he saw it, religious excesses, be they in the form of devotion to patrons, prophets, priests or philosophers, were the root of all kinds of disbelief. Building on divine warnings against excess in religion contained in the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth, the Shaykh observed that, “Ibn al-Qayyim said that many of the *Salaf* have stated that after the death [of righteous men of old] people remained by their gravesides, then they made statues [of commemoration], then after the passing of much time they worshipped them.”²³³ Religious excesses, in his view, most often took the form of distracted worship of God alone. Sadly, this distracted worship is usually the result of good intentions on the part of worshippers who merely hope to remember the righteous, but in so doing are led astray when remembrance becomes ritual. In addition, any kind of philosophizing or speculation that exceeds the clear revelation of God and thereby causes the faithful to stumble is likewise to be avoided. This is why, despite his own ventures into the deep waters of Tawḥīd’s types, implications, and applications, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb contended for the actual

²³⁰ Ibid., 90.

²³¹ Ibid., 93-94.

²³² Ibid., 92.

²³³ Ibid., 56. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb here references Q 4:171, which warns the People of the Book against exceeding divine limits in religious devotion (presumably in venerating saints, etc.) as well as referencing Aḥādīth from Ibn ‘Abbās against the worship of idols, and from ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattāb against the “exaggerated” praise for Jesus by Christians, and from Ibn Mas‘ūd who recalled that the Prophet said three times, “destroyed are those who are excessive in religion.”

simplicity of this most sophisticated doctrine. He did not, God forbid, wish to make an idol out of Tawḥīd!



Figure 3: First two pages of a manuscript copy of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 1802. MS Āl 'Abd al-Laṭīf/7-1. Courtesy of King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives.

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

2.7 Comparing and Concluding

Many times Christians and Muslims have in mind something very similar in their conceptualization of God, yet because of something as benign as a difference in vocabulary, they find themselves much further apart in practice than they actually are in theory. Sometimes these differences are genuinely unwitting, while other times both sides have tended to construct their theological categories as *over against* the other. What is ironic - and hopeful - is the fact that no matter the reason for some of the surface level differences between Christian and Muslim descriptions of God, there exist some foundational similarities that can be seen in even the staunchest, most theologically conservative voices from both sides. This chapter is proof of that. Nevertheless, some of the very same core beliefs about God that Christians and Muslims hold are, due to a difference in emphasis, the very things that cause the two religions to diverge sharply in other areas.

Points of convergence

Given the wider reputation of the two clerics that this study examines, one may rightfully be forgiven for being surprised at some of the striking similarities between Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s views on the unity of the divine being. When Edwards refers to Jesus as the servant of God (*‘abd Allāh*), the messenger of God (*rasūl Allāh*), and the prophet of God (*nabī Allāh*) one can almost hear Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s voice of approval. This agreement is admittedly only surface deep, however, as Edwards saw the servanthood of Jesus as one of eternal subordination to God yet *without* distinction in divine essence, whereas Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw Jesus’ servanthood as the ideal human response to God. The theological resonance is nonetheless helpful to note. Akin to this is Edwards’

admonishment of the Mohawk Indians that “True religion don’t consist in praying to the Virgin Mary and to saints and angels. It don’t consist in crossing themselves, in confessing sins to the priest, and worshipping images of Christ and of the saints, and other things that the French do.”²³⁴ Given his strong opposition to similar Ṣūfī practices, it is difficult to believe that the Shaykh would not have agreed wholeheartedly with such sentiments from his iconoclastic peer. Moreover, thanks to Edwards’ doctrine of the economy of the Trinity, we are left with little doubt about the Shaykh’s approval of his teaching that God the Father “without any addition or distinction” is “God in some peculiar sense” that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are *not*. “So God the Father, by the place he stands in among the persons of the Trinity, is the judge of all. [He is] Christ’s own judge,” Edwards emphatically preached from his Northampton pulpit in March of 1746. Indeed, “He is Christ’s God” the Reverend concluded for his parish.²³⁵ Despite the weighty differences underneath them, has so strong a fundamentalist Christian voice ever spoken more theologically conciliatory words to the ears of Muslim listeners?

Similarly, when we read about Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrine of Tawḥīd in three types, namely that of *Tawḥīd al-asmā’ wa al-sifāt*, it is impossible not to see the correlation between his thinking on the eternality of the divine word and that of Edwards and his comrades in the Church all the way back to earliest Christianity. Furthermore, by equating the seeking of refuge in the divine word with that of seeking refuge in God himself, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb treads into highly unusual theological waters for a man who was so wary of *shirk*, the chief of all sins - associating anything (or anyone) with God Almighty. He did not consider calling on the word of God instead of calling on God himself as *shirk* because he believed in the

²³⁴ WJE 25:571.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 149-150.

eternality of the divine attributes, and in this case, the mysterious oneness of God's word with God himself. He did this because of his strong reliance upon the Ḥadīth insomuch as it corresponded with the teachings of the Qur'ān. And on this matter, although it is doubtful whether he fully realized it, he sounds more like Edwards' theological peer than his adversary.

In affirming the words of the New Testament, which asks believers to prove their statement of faith in the one God by what they *do* (James 2:19), Edwards could demonstrate a further parallel with Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's thought, as the Shaykh's use of *Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* was really just his way of making sure a worshipper's actions matched his statement of faith. In the worldview of both the Reverend and the Shaykh, *words* of worship meant nothing if they were not accompanied by proper *acts* of worship. A believer's testimony to the one God was critically dependent on the way he worked it out practically.²³⁶ Edwards' discussion about the immanent and economic Trinity and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's discussion about the three types of Tawḥīd are aspects of their thought which are fairly unique in their respective traditions. In this way, their thoughts on the Trinity and on Tawḥīd distinguish themselves, however unintentionally, as examples for inter-religious dialogue about the doctrine of God in Christianity and Islam.

Yet another area of similarity in the two clerics' thinking on the doctrine of God is that of determinism, or *al-Qadr*. For Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the doctrine flowed from *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*. Inasmuch as one understands the unity of God's lordship over all, he is able to understand, accept, and glory in the fact that God is the divine disposer of all. In a very real sense, if it is given that there is one God who is Lord over all, then he is ultimately

²³⁶ "There is no disagreement [among the scholars] that true Tawḥīd consists of the heart, tongue, and actions," said the Shaykh in WMIAW 1:179 *Kashaf al-Shubuhāt*. For Edwards and the necessity of coupling true faith with actions, see WJEO 52, *Sermon 422 on 2 Cor. 9:6*.

responsible for the fate of every human being, for every action and detail of the universe; he is the cause behind all that has ever existed, all that exists now, and all that ever will exist. To ascribe this power to another is not only blasphemous according to Islam, it is also illogical from a monotheistic point of view. For Edwards, whose theology agreed completely with the above sentiments of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the doctrine was closely tied to the intra-Trinitarian councils and divine decrees before the world was created. The three persons of the Trinity agreed on the Father’s choosing not only of the elect, but also in his preordaining every minute detail of the universe. That this was so seemed abundantly clear to him from Scripture and also from naked reason. Just *how* this was so will be dealt with in the following chapter, where we will delve a bit deeper into the issue of divine sovereignty and human freedom. It suffices now, however, for us to note that predestination was a vital doctrine that both men drew from their theology of God, specifically from the unity of the divine being.

Points of Divergence

If it is accepted that the aforementioned similarities in Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s doctrines of God are truly significant, what then can account for the profound differences in their respective religious universes? It seems that the primary grounds for their convergence is also the very thing that is the basis for their divergence. There is a difference that at first glance can be said to be merely semantic, almost insignificant, thereby shrinking the theological distance between the two. Yet it is this very same issue of different ways of *naming* the mysterious relationship between God and his word that causes the two clerics to diverge firstly in theory, but even more so in practice. For Edwards, God’s eternal word is indistinguishable from his eternal essence. To state otherwise for him would have reeked of polytheism. For how could there be two which are co-eternal

and yet possess different core essences? For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, even though God and his word are both eternal, they have different essences. The former is the divine essence while the latter is a divine attribute. However, the Shaykh’s insistence that the seeking of the divine word is no different than the seeking of the divine being himself clearly elevates the word above the other divine attributes - he never sanctioned the seeking of refuge in any of the other *sifāt* elsewhere in his writings. This would seem to consign the word to some sort of theological or philosophical netherworld in his thinking. It is *more* than the other attributes, yet *less* than the divine essence.²³⁷

What then, is the core of this divine essence that both men revered so highly? For herein lies the question at the heart of the divergence in their thought and in their praxis. Edwards saw the core of the divine being as *love*, while Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw the core of the divine being as absolute *oneness*. For Edwards, the doctrine of the Trinity - the *tri-unity* of God - flows directly from the word sharing in the eternal divine essence. This fits perfectly with Scripture when it testifies that “God is love” (1 Jn. 4:8,16). Note the verse does *not* say that God is *loving*, *lovely*, or *lovable* (although these are also true). It says that God, at his very core - which can be reduced no further - is love. And since love always respects another, as Edwards went to lengths to point out, this logically supposes an irreducible plurality within the divine essence. It is mysterious, but it is not illogical, as we have seen. Thus for Edwards, the maxim that God is love and the ontological fact that he is triune are married together harmoniously by Scripture as well as reason.²³⁸ On the necessity of embracing divine wisdom in this mystery, Edwards had this to say: “The rejecting [of] the doctrine of the Trinity was

²³⁷ In the logic of *kalām*, which Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is relying upon here whether he realizes it or not, an attribute cannot have its own distinct essence, as this would mean it possesses ontological self-subsistence.

²³⁸ Lest we forget, he also saw nature and history as testifying to this harmonious divine reality through typology and the *prisca theologia*, respectively. See section 2.2 above.

only a compliment made to their own reason by the Sabellians... the Arians, and, after them, by the Mahometans, who disbelieved that doctrine on no one argument in the world, but because it was not to be accounted for by their all-sufficient understandings.”²³⁹

Since the Qur’ān was revealed in the wider Arabian Judeo-Christian milieu and followed the New Testament onto the world scene by some six centuries, it is not surprising that it would have something to say about Jewish or Christian doctrines. Thus Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had scriptural precedent for formulating a doctrine of God’s oneness in Tawhīd that expressly denied the doctrine of his oneness in the Trinity. “O people of the Book, do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not say about God except the truth, that the Messiah Jesus son of Mary was but a messenger of God and his word, delivered to Mary, and a spirit from him... and do not say ‘three’ (*thalātha*); desist, it is better for you. God is but one God, exalted above having a son...” pronounces the Qur’ān in 4:171.²⁴⁰ It is because of verses like these that the Shaykh was virtually compelled to reject the Trinity at the outset. Curiously though, he appears to have fallen victim to a common Islamic misunderstanding about the Christian doctrine by referencing *sūrat al-Mā’ida* wherein God asks Jesus, “Oh Jesus son of Mary, did you say to the people ‘take me and my mother as deities besides Allāh’?”²⁴¹ On the basis of this verse many have wrongly assumed that Mary is a part of the Trinity, which of course Christians would vehemently deny as well. Thus while it is doubtful that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had an accurate understanding of the Trinity, he nevertheless can not be expected to endorse any doctrine that appears to come close to it. This is probably why he relegated the issue of the divine word to the netherworld as we observed above. All of this is to demonstrate that in contradistinction to Edwards’ Trinitarian thought and his conception of

²³⁹ WJE 23:174.

²⁴⁰ See also Q 5:73

²⁴¹ Q 5:116

God's fundamental essence as love, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb firmly maintained that the most important aspect of God's fundamental essence is his irreducible unity.

That Edwards saw God primarily as love does not suggest that he did not also appreciate and advocate for God's unity. This was actually something very dear to the Reverend's heart, as he saw God's triune nature as something which flowed from his core essence of love. As we have seen, while Edwards had much to say about the one God, including a Trinitarian understanding of God which permeated his thought, he did not necessarily find himself in need of combating outright paganism or idolatry (with the possible exception of some of his contacts with Native Americans). Something very similar can also be said of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, whose emphasis on God's unity does not necessarily mean that he failed to grasp other aspects of God's nature such as his love. The Shaykh readily agreed that God was *al-Wudūd* (the Loving).²⁴² Attributes such as this, however, were much further down the line in his thinking and preaching, which largely focused on the various forms of idolatry that surrounded him. This, coupled with strong Qur'ānic *proscriptions* against the Trinity and *prescriptions* in favor of Tawḥīd account for much of the rigidity in his thinking on the subject.

As always, while we may rightfully exult in some of the striking similarities in their thinking, we must be careful to read both men in light of their differing contexts, lest we create connections that exist merely in the realm of idealism at the expense of historical and

²⁴² See Q 11:90, 85:14. The Arabic word *wudūd* in these verses is often translated as "loving" although a better English rendering is probably "devoted" or "favorably disposed" (see Hans Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 4th Edition, ed. J.M. Cowan (Urbana, IL: Spoken Language Services, 1979), 1240. The word does, however, come from the root *wudd* which means "love" or "affection." Therefore it is fair to associate this Qur'ānic title with love as it is usually rendered "the Loving." For a thorough study on the wider subject of love in Islam, see HRH Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad, *Love in the Holy Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2013.) For a brief but helpful survey of the concept of love in Islam, see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 209-215. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb is not likely to have approved of Nasr's thought due to his Shī'a origins and pluralistic tendencies, but his argument here is fair and balanced by any standard.

theological realism. Speaking of realism, what is perhaps more important than simply the thinking of our two clerics is the actual impact of their thought on the real world. As we shall see in the next chapter, Edwards was not averse to stoking the fires of God's wrath and judgment among his parishioners. However, he also focused heavily on heaven as "a world of love" filled by saints perfected in love toward God and one another. And that process, initiated and perfected by the grace of God, started on earth. In like manner, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was desirous that all forms of virtue and charity would flourish in his society. Yet he felt that the means to this end was a firm, sometimes harsh reliance on right worship in accordance with what God has commanded. Heaven then, was a reward earned for obedience on earth.

Entrance into heaven, said Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, was predicated upon the proper belief and adherence to the doctrine of Tawhīd above all else. Thus he was able to state that Tawhīd atones for sin. This opinion was certainly not shared by Jonathan Edwards, who had a very different idea of atonement for sin. Belief in the one true God was also foundational for him, but Edwards would not have been impressed with the idea that simple monotheistic faith, however perfectly it was professed or practiced, had the ability to atone for sin. "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe - and shudder!" says the New Testament.²⁴³ Beyond the necessity of monotheism, from which all other aspects of religion flowed, the Shaykh saw no reason to believe that God would prevent the faithful from entrance into paradise based on the fact that he is "*al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*." But Edwards' theology begs the question *on what basis* is he "the Forgiving" and "the Merciful?" In pondering James' words above, surely he gleaned that monotheism is the foundation of true faith, but it is not enough to secure the soul. A creed or textual assertion is one thing, but a

²⁴³ James 2:19

demonstrable historical event is wholly another. The forgiveness of God was, for Edwards, no mere creed or textual assertion - it was sealed in the annals of history and meant to be personally experienced. That Jesus lived and walked on this earth. That he died on a cross under the authority of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. That he bodily rose from the grave on the third day, as witnessed by hundreds, namely his apostles who would later give their lives in defense of this fact, was the kind of rock solid historical reality that gave certainty to the heart of the believer that God is indeed all forgiving and all merciful. The price of this certainty though, was assent to the doctrine of the Trinity, for without it, there could be no redemption and no forgiveness of sins. Not very coincidentally, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb saw the need for neither. Indeed, it is to these questions of just how Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's God related to the world that we shall presently turn.

3.0 OF GOD AND MAN

Now that we have some idea of how our two scholars conceived of God as he is within himself, we shall turn to consider how God relates to the world he created, and how humanity in turn relates to him and to one another. The doctrine of God as he exists without respect to another is the foundation upon which Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb constructed their respective theologies. This interior life of God, however, is not confined to the merely theoretical, as it has implications for every facet of his relationship with the created universe. For it is within the finite confines of time and space that humans perceive, and ultimately, come to relate to God. Although Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had very different ideas about how God related to the world, and how the world related to God, there are many common themes in their thoughts and in their ministries that deserve to be discussed in a study such as this. While our discourse up to this point has been rather abstract, it has hopefully served to set the stage for the present chapter, wherein we will examine the practical ways in which the theoretical expressed itself in some of the most prominent themes in both scholars’ thought and its subsequent impact on the world around them.

Why the world matters

Jonathan Edwards was certain that the world and in fact the entire created order matters immensely to God.²⁴⁴ To be sure, Edwards saw God as perfect within himself. Yet he also conceived of him as being able to be magnified through that which he created. Just as God exerts effects on the world (including that of the first cause), there is a sense in which the

²⁴⁴ For more on this theme in Edwards’ thought, see Sang Hyun Lee, *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*; and “God’s Relation to the World” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005), 59-71.

world actually has effects on God. So for Edwards, the world matters, and is extremely important to God. And yet it matters in such a way so as not to threaten the prior actuality of God. Far from being an accidental byproduct of the divine conscience on the one hand, or from being a divine necessity on the other, the world is the result of God's own tendency to self-enlargement. Based on the doctrine of the Trinity wherein the Son is the expression of the Father, this tendency to the magnification of his glory which manifests itself in creation stems from an eternal disposition and actuality within God, which Edwards saw as God's repetition outside of himself. The nature of the divine being, then, is at once both an eternal disposition *and* an eternal actuality which continually repeats. If the world did not exist, God would not cease to be God in the least. God does not "need" creation, as it were. However, because the world does exist, and is in fact willed into existence by God for his own self-enlargement, Edwards introduces a view of God where his relationship to the world is dynamic and meaningful. In short, what happens on earth matters in heaven. Humans can bring a smile to God's face or a tear to his eye, so to speak. The way in which Edwards conceived of this dynamism is entirely unique within the Christian tradition, and undergirds the importance of numerous doctrines precisely because they all *matter* to God. In the reckoning of Northampton's prodigious philosopher, how humans relate to God and one another was not simply a matter for the good of the creature, but for the Creator as well.

Not only is Edwards' conception above unique within his own tradition, it is also absent from Islamic philosophy. A somewhat less developed, although partially similar idea may be

traced to Ibn Sīnā, who posited that the creation exists as an outflow of God’s nature.²⁴⁵ In the case of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb though, one can find none of this speculation into the infinite. He heartily agreed that how humans relate to God and one another is vitally important for humans. This is a fact which is most clearly borne out in the determining of their eternal destiny and the rewards they will receive. However, in agreement with both the wider Muslim *and* Christian traditions, he maintained that whether or not humans obeyed God’s commands did not affect God. Neither can it be said that the Shaykh made an effort to describe the creation as the outflow of God’s creative nature. Such questions did not immediately concern him. None of this means, however, that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not see the world as vitally important to God. What he may have lacked in terms of philosophical engagement he more than made up for in his ardent commitment to divine revelation. The Qur’ān testifies that God created mankind for one ultimate purpose - to worship him. This is an idea which was also prominent in Edwards, as the Bible agrees on this point. However, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb refused to enter into what he deemed as speculation regarding anything beyond this clear divine declaration. It was enough for him that man was created to glorify God, and that his sojourn on earth was but a test for eternity. This fact alone made the existence of the universe and all that it contains of paramount importance to God.

²⁴⁵ In his *Ilāhiyyāt*, Ibn Sīnā talked about the “emanation” of the divine essence which leads to a series of replications that we see as the creation. While this is agreeable to part of Edwards’ thought, there is no direct equivalence in Islam for Edwards’ notion of God and his creation exerting effects on one another. However, there is a Ḥadīth related to this idea which is prominent in Ṣūfī philosophy:

كنت كنزاً مخفياً فأحببت أن أعرف فخلقت الخلق لكي أعرف

It roughly translates as, “I was a hidden treasure, and I loved to be known, so I created the creation in order that I might be known.” Edwards might simply add, “... and thereby increase the display of my glory.” N.B. He would not say “increase my glory” but “increase the *display* of my glory.” The reason is that Edwards was keen not to posit that God had need of the creation. Neither in Edwards nor in the above “hidden treasure” Ḥadīth is there an implication that God had a need that could only be fulfilled by creation. This is why Edwards’ wording, which agrees with the wording of the Ḥadīth, is crucial. “I *loved* to be known” is markedly different from “I needed to be known” or “I wanted to be known.”

Since everything we see is *God's* creation, it is by nature meaningful to the Almighty. A man can make a bicycle, as it were, which is unable to obey or disobey him because it lacks understanding and a will. And yet this bicycle can bring the man meaningful satisfaction partly because it is something which he wrought himself. The analogy breaks down when we consider that the bicycle can also bring the man joy when he uses it to ride around town, because God does not need humans to do anything for him in order to increase his joy. This is akin to how Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb saw the situation. Edwards would only have added that God may not *need* the bicycle to bring him joy, but that he somehow obtains more joy from its intended use than from when it simply sits in a garage.

Although the Reverend and the Shaykh differed on some of these finer details, they both agreed that the world matters to God because he made it, and because Scripture testifies that this is so. It is precisely because they believed that the world matters that both men spent so much time writing, preaching, and advocating on the doctrines of how God related to people, and how people should relate to God and to one another. Thus it is to this more “practical” side of their theologies, which was founded upon their understandings of Trinity and Tawḥīd, that we now turn our attention.

Jonathan Edwards

3.1 Predestined for Redemption

Jonathan Edwards viewed God's redemption of mankind through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross as the literal crux of history. In order for the doctrine of redemption to truly be seen as the apex which he held it to be however, several other core doctrines had to be asserted and defended to lay a proper foundation. This is why he labored to underscore orthodox, historical notions of the universal fallenness of mankind, both morally depraved and culpable before a sovereign God who not only predestines some men for salvation but ordains every detail of the universe, even evil and suffering, for his own wise purposes supremely demonstrated in redemption.

Free to choose the good, yet unable

How can the doctrine of God's sovereignty co-exist with the doctrine of man's free will? The question of how to reconcile the notion of a God who designs and directs every detail of the universe with that of genuine human freedom has perplexed philosophers and theologians for millennia. Edwards, who can never be said to have shied away from an intellectual challenge, took this issue head on just as he did with many other crucial questions of his age.

As Enlightenment ideals pushed back against traditional notions of causality being bounded within the divine prerogative, the notion of free will and human autonomy had begun to make its way onto the stage of Western culture in increasing ways and means, most notably in the form of the Arminian theological system which argued that man's will is ultimate. Ever the ardent Calvinist, Edwards would entertain no such paltry view of the Sovereign. Ergo, he devoted what would become his most famous intellectual achievement to this very question. Grounded firmly in a Trinitarian framework, *Freedom of the Will* was "the

most powerful piece of sheer forensic argumentation in American literature,” said Edwards’ intellectual biographer Perry Miller. The Reverend’s masterpiece on divine determinism “is considered by logicians one of the few proofs in which the conclusion follows inescapably and infallibly from the premises.”²⁴⁶ By literally obliterating all libertarian forms of indeterminism, Edwards firmly established the fact that God alone is the ultimate disposer and determiner of the universe. The genius of his argument is that God predestines *without* infringing on human freedom. Edwards was able to say this because he differentiated between *natural* ability and *moral* ability. He said that man is naturally free and able to do whatever he pleases, including choosing the good. However, because man is morally corrupt, he is thus morally unable to choose the good when he ought to. In this way, human accountability is preserved underneath the banner of divine sovereignty. Only those who have been predestined by God the Father, according to the Trinitarian plan of redemption which predated the creation of the universe, are both naturally *and* morally able to choose the good.

Edwards maintained that any system of thought which muffled or cheapened the absolute sovereignty of God over all was as slap in the face to God, whose glory is magnified through juxtaposition with things like his permitting evil in the world. Evil, as it were, did not originate in God but in the heart of man as a product of his free will. “God has no hand in” Adam’s choice to sin except “in not exerting such an influence, as might be effectual to prevent it,” argued Edwards.²⁴⁷ In his wisdom though, God had foreordained to *use* evil to glorify himself by triumphing over it. In this sense, God had accounted for the existence of evil as a means to the greater end of the full display of his majesty. Hence the issue of human

²⁴⁶ See Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 251.

²⁴⁷ WJE 3:394.

sin, which is both freely chosen and yet also inherited as a curse upon humanity, is of paramount importance to Edwards' reading of the Bible and human history.

Of sin and redemption

In addition to the underlying theme of the Trinity, there is one other dominant theme that runs throughout Edwards' works, particularly in his more mature thought. The theme of redemption was in fact related to the Trinity inasmuch as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were all in divine agreement over its exact implementation in the universe so as to maximize his glory. All three persons then, had a distinct role in the affair of redemption, which was for Edwards God's supreme act in all of history. Before we can delve into this however, we must first consider how it came to be that redemption was even necessary in the first place.

Edwards wrote *Original Sin* (1758) to set the table of argumentation for his planned *magnum opus* on redemption.²⁴⁸ As we have seen above, Edwards believed that man's freedom made him responsible before God for his actions. In his freedom, the first man Adam and his wife Eve deliberately chose to disobey the express will of God by eating fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.²⁴⁹ In doing so, they were cursed by God and condemned themselves to physical death (which did not exist in the world prior to this event), subjecting their posterity to the same curse. Adam's sin of disobedience was the occasion for the curse of God upon the human experience through things like pain in childbirth for women, unfruitful work for men, and physical death for both. However, the curse runs even deeper than that, as the Bible teaches that it reaches beyond the physical realm and into the

²⁴⁸ The reader will recall that this work was never completed because of Edwards' untimely death. *Original Sin* was even published posthumously in 1758.

²⁴⁹ Genesis 3.

eternal in that all who die under the curse of sin are eternally separated from God. As the first man, Adam was born with the *potential* to perfectly obey all that God willed, but alas he failed. Edwards agreed with Christian tradition that Adam represented all of humanity as their federal head, which means that any human being would have done as Adam did if he were given the same choice. The objection that mankind is doomed *in absentia* is therefore averted by the fact that Adam was the perfect human prototype, and if he did not obey then no one would have. Edwards put it this way:

let us suppose, that Adam and all his posterity had *coexisted*, and that his posterity had been, through a law of nature established by the Creator, *united* to him, something as the branches of a tree are united to the root, or the members of the body to the head; so as to constitute as it were *one* complex person, or *one* moral whole: so that by the law of union there should have been a *communion* and *coexistence* in acts and affections; all jointly participating, and all concurring, as *one whole*, in the disposition and action of the head: as we see in the body natural, the whole body is affected as the head is affected; and the whole body concurs when the head acts. Now, in this case, the hearts of all the branches of mankind, by the constitution of nature and the law of union, would have been affected just as the heart of Adam, their common root was affected. When the heart of the root, by a full disposition committed the first sin, the hearts of all the branches would have concurred; and when the root, in consequence of this, became guilty, so would all the branches; and when the heart of the root, as a punishment of the sin committed, was forsaken of God, in like manner would it have fared with all the branches; and when the heart of the root, in consequence of this, was confirmed in permanent depravity, the case would have been the same with all the branches... And thus all things, with relation to evil disposition, guilt, pollution and depravity, would exist, in the same order and dependence, in each branch, as in the root. Now, difference of the *time* of existence don't at all hinder things succeeding in the same order, any more than difference of *place* in a coexistence of time.²⁵⁰

Despite this and many other arguments like it, assaults on the doctrine of original sin in Edwards' time continued to focus on the fact that it seemed unjust that God would hold Adam's posterity accountable for something they did not do. Since the idea of Adam as mankind's federal head did not necessarily appease the masses, Edwards was all too happy to remind them that each individual is justly condemned before a holy God for his *own* sin. And

²⁵⁰ WJE 3:391-392 (emphases his).

he did not lack for examples of this fact such as reminding his readers that children innately know how to lie without ever being taught to do so; or the fact that mankind in all ages and places has never ceased to proliferate wickedness and evil instead of righteousness and goodness. Furthermore, Edwards observed that logically, physical death is *not* a just penalty for a truly innocent moral agent, and since death comes to all men including infants, all must therefore be morally corrupt and culpable.²⁵¹ Exercising his trademark logic, Edwards progressed with surgical precision through a plethora of other examples in the treatise, at one point declaring it is “evident that the state which it has been proved mankind are in, is a corrupt state in a moral sense, that it is inconsistent with the fulfillment of the Law of God, which is the rule of moral rectitude and goodness.”²⁵² The simple fact that no mere human has ever, at any time, perfectly fulfilled the Law of God (understood to mean either the “moral law” which is imprinted on the human conscience or the Law of Moses which was given to the Jews at Sinai) is really the most condemning evidence against his opponents. This of course was not lost on Edwards, who never missed an opportunity to remind his readers of this virtually undeniable fact.

Bookended by lengthy arguments in favor of original sin on one side and by answers to potential objections on the other, the middle section of the treatise is devoted to a thorough exegesis of Scripture on the matter at hand. Beginning with the Old Testament and progressing to the New, Edwards attempted to show that the universality of sin actually tended to promote God’s own wise purposes in the doctrine of redemption. The Reverend’s chief concern in *Original Sin* was to show that mankind was morally depraved to the extent that sin can be said to be innate and universal. Tracing this disposition to our common human

²⁵¹ WJE 3:206.

²⁵² WJE 3:129.

ancestor, he was keen to demonstrate that all humans disobey God and are morally unable to fully please him.²⁵³ The just punishment for this depravity, which is freely chosen by all through no fault of another nor through the fault of the Almighty, is a life of both physical suffering and death to be followed by the prospect of eternal death (the punishment of hell). If it is granted that Edwards achieved his goal in upholding the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine of redemption comes into much clearer focus as the preplanned, ultimate display of God's just wrath at sin and his infinite mercy and wisdom.

The event of redemption was, for Jonathan Edwards, the cosmic climax of history. His surviving notebooks give us tantalizing glimpses into where he was headed with the doctrine at the time of his death.²⁵⁴ It seems that the idea he first fleshed out in his sermon series on redemption in 1739, namely that history is the canvas upon which God paints and thus orchestrates *all* events so as to frame the work of Christ on the cross in the most glorious light, became more highly developed in his mind toward the end of his life. In the *Redemption Notebooks* from the 1750's Edwards jotted down a multitude of examples from human history spanning all times, places, and topics, both sacred *and* secular, which he interpreted as all serving to advance the doctrine of redemption in one way or another. From Chalcedon to China, Iconoclasm to Islam, in both war and peace, in the arts and in science, Edwards found evidence of God's handiwork. He regarded the work of Isaac Newton, for example, as God's way of scientifically establishing the doctrine of determinism or more precisely predestination of the elect. He noted, "The true PHILOSOPHY of Sir ISAAC NEWTON one thing to make way for the ~~Glorious~~ universal setting up of X Kingdom."²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Note that Edwards maintained in *Freedom of the Will* that man was still *naturally* able to obey God since there was no one preventing him from doing so. The fact that mankind universally does not perfectly obey God is proof that he is *morally* unable in Edwards' view.

²⁵⁴ See for example, WJEO 31, "*History of Redemption*" *Notebooks*.

²⁵⁵ WJEO 31:5 (capitals and corrective strikethrough in original mss, "X Kingdom" shorthand for "Christ's Kingdom").

We have already seen in our discussion of how Edwards applied the doctrine of the Trinity (section 2.3 above) that he viewed redemption in light of the economy of the persons of the Trinity. If the doctrine of redemption was closely tied to the doctrine of the Trinity, then the doctrine of original sin was the rope that held them together in the mind of Edwards. Speaking from his Northampton pulpit he argued that God the Father is the offended party in the affair of human sin and rebellion. Christ then, is not the one whose sense of justice is offended, instead he is the one whom the Father puts forward as Mediator and ultimately Redeemer. “Tis because God the Father, by the original establishment and eternal agreement of the persons of the Trinity, thus is vested with all the authority of the Godhead, and maintains the rights of the Godhead in the affair of our redemption, that the price is offered up to him [by the] Mediator between him and sinful men, as though he only were offended. His justice is satisfied [and] he accepts.”²⁵⁶ In short, Jesus is the agent by which God executes his just wrath at sin.

The beauty of the doctrine as Edwards envisaged it was that in the cross, God upheld his righteousness and holiness by justly punishing sin while simultaneously demonstrating the extent of his mercy, love and grace in forgiving all who accept the atoning work of Christ on their behalf. Logically, in the mind of Edwards, God would either be merciful but unjust if he simply pardoned guilty sinners with no display of his wrath in punishing sin, or he would be just but unmerciful if he held humans accountable for the full extent of their sin. The former is an assault on God’s character, while the latter is a hopeless scenario for mankind who could never stand in God’s holy presence without divine mercy. The cross solves this dichotomy because it is there that God’s justice and mercy meet, and both are displayed perfectly. If Adam was the first human prototype who was born with the potential to perfectly

²⁵⁶ WJE 25:151.

obey God and failed, Jesus was the second prototype who was born with the potential to perfectly obey, and succeeded. In this way, just as Adam's posterity is cursed for his disobedience, Jesus' posterity is blessed for his obedience.²⁵⁷ A key difference is that Adam's posterity is fleshly (i.e. membership in this community is universal because all mankind is of the same flesh and assents to sin) while Jesus' posterity is spiritual (i.e. membership in this community is limited to those who both cognitively and spiritually assent to Jesus' atoning work on their behalf).

Piecing it all together

In order to understand redemption as the divine focal point of human history as conceived in the mind of Edwards, one must understand all that lay beneath it. Edwards began with the fact that man is culpable before God for his moral depravity by virtue of the fact that he is naturally able to choose the good, yet consistently does not. This natural ability, as it were, is always trampled underfoot by a greater force at work in the heart of man which is a deficit of character in the form of a disposition to sin, or a moral inability to choose the good. So for Edwards, man is free to choose the good, but unable to do so. This universal condition, deemed original sin, is something which is both inherited as a curse from humanity's original parents yet nevertheless exists within the human disposition in general. In this way, it cannot be said that Adam's posterity is not responsible for a transgression which they did not commit themselves. It is as if Edwards says to us, "You and I would have done the same had we been

²⁵⁷ The Bible teaches that the act of sexual union between a husband and a wife within the bounds of marriage is commanded and blessed by God and thus glorifying to God both for its procreative and unifying purpose. However, the Bible also testifies that even this act is not absent of the effects of sin and is therefore not entirely "pure" in every instance. This is why David said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalm 51:5). Thus it is theologically significant that since Adam and Jesus are the only two people in history who had no human father, and are not the result of sexual activity, they were truly "pure" at birth and carried the potential to live a life unstained by sin. See also 1 Cor. 15:45ff, which discusses the issue of Adam and Jesus, respectively, in the "first Adam" and the "second Adam" as the two prototypes of humanity.

there because we share in Adam's common human disposition." The evidence for this claim is in the universality of human wickedness across times, cultures, and places. For the Reverend, it is a law unto itself, the law of moral entropy. The just penalty for such rebellion against the righteous standard of God which is not only contained in the Law but also stamped on every human heart is death, both physical and spiritual (eternal).

At the same time, Edwards knew that God was love at his core. And the most loving thing that a being such as God could do in a dire situation such as this would be to rectify this dilemma in such a way as to increase or magnify himself both for his own glory and for the good of his creatures. According to Edwards, the doctrine of redemption was the sovereign God's wise plan all along to show the full extent of his glory and majesty in inviting his creatures into the eternal communion of love that he has always experienced within himself. It was certainly not, as some have erroneously assumed, a "plan B" in the mind of God after Adam sinned. Redemption was always God's "plan A," and in his infinite wisdom and sovereignty even things like sin and evil are turned on their heads to set the table for the ultimate display of his noble character. Mysteriously though, it is only the elect, chosen by God from before he created the world, who experience the joy of redemption. In this scheme, all mankind is guilty of sin and justly condemned before a holy God. But some are granted, through eyes of faith, the ability to see and savor all that God has done for them in sending Jesus Christ to die for them on the cross where divine justice is upheld and divine mercy is fully demonstrated. Edwards opined that nothing moves the human heart quite like the act of self sacrifice for the benefit of another, especially when the innocent acts on behalf of the guilty. How much more is this true when the substitutionary "act" is divine condemnation and death? The elect, who know that they are just as deserving of eternal punishment as anyone else, and yet are invited into an eternal relationship with their Creator on the basis of the

work of Christ, are rightly moved and in a very tangible sense eternally indebted to God for this great salvation.

Perhaps it is best to let Edwards himself have the last say on the relationship between redemption and the sovereignty of the Triune God - the most crucial topic in his mind and ministry:

We may here observe the marvelous wisdom of God in the work of redemption. God hath made man's emptiness and misery, his low, lost and ruined state into which he is sunk by the fall, an occasion of the greater advancement of his own glory, as in other ways so particularly in this, that there is now a much more universal and apparent dependence of man on God. Though God be pleased to lift man out of that dismal abyss of sin and woe into which he was fallen, and exceedingly to exalt him in excellency and honor, and to an high pitch of glory and blessedness, yet the creature has nothing in any respect to glory of; all the glory evidently belongs to God, all is in a mere, and most absolute and divine dependence on the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And each person of the Trinity is equally glorified in this work. There is an absolute dependence of the creature on every one for all: all is *of* the Father, all *through* the Son, and all *in* the Holy Ghost. Thus God appears in the work of redemption, as all in all. 'Tis fit that he that "is, and there is none else" [*Deuteronomy 4:35*], should be the "Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" [*Revelation 1:11*], the all and the only, in this work... Hence we may learn a reason why faith is that by which we come to have an interest in this redemption; for there is included in the nature of faith, a sensibleness, and an acknowledgment of this absolute dependence on God in this affair... And this doctrine should teach us to exalt God alone as by trust and reliance, so by praise. "Let him that glories glory in the Lord" [*Jeremiah 9:24*].²⁵⁸

3.2 The Divine Model for a Happy Land and Home

Edwards based his picture of the ideal human society on two loftier ones - the Trinity and the millennium. In the Trinity, which he affectionately referred to as a "divine society," Northampton's illustrious minister saw the perfect model of relationship. In the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he saw things such as love, order, consent, humility, creativity, and ultimately harmony - the attributes of an ideal society. We have already discussed the fact that he saw love as the core of God's essence, actualized by the Holy Spirit (the "divinity in act"

²⁵⁸ WJE 17:212-14.

as he called it) who perfectly bonded the Father and Son together in harmony. The Father, as the supreme head of the Trinity, never willed a thing to which the Son did not consent - even his own incarnation, suffering, and death - which demonstrated unparalleled humility and a certain hierarchical order. The fact that the triune God created the world out of his own creative disposition, and did so in order to magnify his own glory *and* invite contingent beings into his divine love, bonding them to himself and to one another by the Holy Spirit, was not something Edwards was content to leave in the heavenly realms alone. He wanted to see this society replicated, as far it could be, on earth. Furthermore, Edwards' millennial vision was one of righteousness, peace, justice and the knowledge of God extending across the earth, to the remotest corners. It was, as yet, a future kingdom which he was convinced would not commence until the twenty-first century.²⁵⁹ Nevertheless he was certain that America's role in the affair was to jumpstart the process of the knowledge of God covering the earth "as the waters cover the sea" through the process of spiritual awakening in the Church which led to practical good in society. In this way, Edwards looked upward to the Trinity and ahead to the millennium in order to discern the character of the ideal human society, plying not only his intellect, but also his position as a prominent preacher to the trade of replicating that ideal society in the context of New England.

Covenant theology and the state

As far as Jonathan Edwards was concerned, there was a specific, God-ordained means by which the ideal human society was to be initiated and maintained. In typical Puritan form, he held that God extended the offer of a national covenant to New Englanders which resembled the one that Israel possessed in the Old Testament. Perry Miller's analysis (which claimed

²⁵⁹ See section 4.2 for more on this important but little-known aspect of his thought.

that covenant theology was not to be found in Edwards' thought) notwithstanding, more recent scholarship has unearthed a fountain of evidence that Northampton's favorite son was every bit the covenant theologian that his lineage would have suggested.²⁶⁰

Many theologians before and after Edwards argued that in the Law of Moses, God enacted a covenant based on works while Jesus' coming inaugurated a new covenant based on grace. The covenant theology of Edwards and his Puritan brotherhood however, saw little distinction between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and therefore did not recognize a second, or new covenant with the coming of Jesus. Instead, they saw Jesus as initiating the final fulfillment of the original covenant which God established with Moses at Sinai, and themselves as a modern day community called to extend this covenant to the entire world. In rejecting a bi-covenantal view, the Puritans did not believe God established a covenant of works through Moses and a covenant of grace through Jesus. Rather, they believed that Moses' covenant and Jesus' were one in the same, and that both brought salvation to God's people through the means of grace, or God's unmerited favor which is obtained by faith.²⁶¹

If there was any talk of duality in covenant language among the Puritans, it was surrounding the difference between the covenant of grace by which an *individual* is saved and the national covenant by which a *nation* is blessed. Puritans such as Edwards maintained that the covenant of grace is really just one continuous covenant which God started with Moses and perfected in Jesus, and now extends to people everywhere, while the national covenant is a broadening of the former to include an entire people or nation, albeit whose blessings were

²⁶⁰ Cf. Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 76-77. For the prominence of covenant theology in Edwards, which is more easily seen in his previously unpublished occasional sermons than in his published works, see Gerald McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*; and Harry S. Stout, "The Puritans and Edwards," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch & Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²⁶¹ For a more detailed explanation of covenant theology in the Christian tradition, see Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

temporal. Edwards in fact, had a name for the covenant of grace - he called it the covenant of *redemption*. Moreover, his continual references to New Englanders in general and Northamptonites in particular as a “covenant people” thus reflected his dependence on the idea of a national covenant.²⁶²

When crops failed, when strange illnesses struck men dead, or when French and Indian forces raided villages, Edwards was sure to frame these events in terms of the failure of his people to keep their end of the covenant with God. Much like Ibn ‘Abd al Wahhāb did, Edwards saw almost every external event as indicative of God blessing his people for obedience or, more commonly, disciplining them for laxity in religion. The Reverend believed that religious piety which was based upon the attributes of the Trinitarian and millennial visions mentioned above was the means by which God would successively bless Northampton, New England, America, Europe, and eventually the whole world.

The term “public theology” is now commonplace and has a wide variety of meanings that all center around the idea of the intersection of religion, politics and public life. With respect to Edwards though, it is well defined as “his understanding of civil community and the Christian’s responsibility to it.”²⁶³ As we consider Edwards’ public theology then, it is helpful here to bring to mind our previous image of him standing with arms wide, the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. As always, he sought to apply the truths of Scripture to the events of everyday life, but never vice versa. In fact it was this tendency which often distinguished Edwards from other theologians who reversed the process. Edwards was firmly committed to the Bible to the extent that he believed every historical event was interpretable in light of Scripture, and if something did not make sense presently then it was just a matter

²⁶² For more on Edwards’ thinking on the covenant of grace (or redemption) and the national (or church, federal) covenant, see WJE 12:24-30, 42, 71, 83, 199-218.

²⁶³ McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 5.

of time before the picture became clearer. He simply could not be moved to attempt the unthinkable and interpret the Bible through current events.

The question which arises now in consideration of Edwards' public theology is this: What is the responsibility of the individual Christian and of the Church to the state? The simple answer is that every individual Christian as well as the Church in general is to be as "a city on a hill" so that the light of their good deeds shines forth for all to see. In his sermon on Matthew 5:14 he both exhorted and warned his listeners with these words:

When God thus exalts a people, and makes them as a city that is set on an hill, God exercises distinguishing grace and favor unto them, by the honor he puts upon them. And he gives them advantage of appearing with peculiar and distinguished honor, in the sight of all that do behold them, if they will but show forth fruits answerable to what God has done for them. This is the way to obtain the high esteem and great respect of all wise and solemn persons, and even to be revered in the hearts of the wicked, whose consciences will necessarily bear a testimony to the honorableness of such things, as they see in them... Christ seems plainly to have respect to this in the text, "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid"; as much as to say, "If you don't behave yourselves well, you can't hide it; for you are as a city that is set on an hill, and it [will] be observed by all about you to your shame and reproach."²⁶⁴

The covenant wording is clear throughout the excerpt, but is unmistakable at the end where the exhortation to behave properly is followed by the warning of the consequences of not doing so. Parishioners should be, above all, pious people who were zealous for God and good works. Attached to this was a strong sense of social justice which could most clearly be seen in their treatment of the poor and marginalized. Like his predecessor Stoddard, he was concerned that colonial treatment of the Indians would bring divine condemnation upon them. Not surprisingly, Edwards also took a bold stance against the abuse of alcohol and all types of immorality. He warned, "all those that addict themselves to that practice of drinking strong drink" are bound for destruction. "Another way that leads directly to hell torments is a

²⁶⁴ WJE 19:546.

way of lasciviousness, a way of lascivious acting in various kinds and degrees, and of lascivious speaking, yea, and a way of indulging lascivious thinking.”²⁶⁵ Such moral failures were, in his estimation, the grounds for severe divine consequences on individuals *and* on communities who tolerated such behavior in their midst. In the end though, the baseline against which any behavior was to be measured, however pious or impious, was a personal commitment to God that superseded all other commitments and - in providence only God could supply - produced familial and societal harmony.

Christians were, according to Edwards, to seek the good of the society at large and should not shy away from laboring alongside non-Christians. He argued that even unregenerate men were bound by a common moral law, inscribed on their hearts by God, which caused them to seek their own good in the good of society.²⁶⁶ Therefore the Christian should not fear to lock arms with the non-Christian in promoting the common good, as their interests were essentially one as far as the existence of a just and prosperous society was concerned. Although he may have desired all rulers and authorities of the state to be devout Christians, Edwards was too practical to expect such a dreamy scenario. Although he strongly maintained that it was the duty of the clergy and the Church to promote Christian virtues in society, he was not under the false assumption that all members of colonial New England were converted believers.²⁶⁷ Whether they attended church or not, he knew that there were large numbers of people in society who were not members of the true “invisible” Church, which referred to those who were truly regenerated by the Spirit and thus known only to God. Edwards’ vision of the state then, was not the religious utopia that Calvin’s Geneva sought to

²⁶⁵ WJE 14:327.

²⁶⁶ See WJE 8:600ff.

²⁶⁷ This is what led Edwards to contend that only truly converted individuals should be allowed to take holy communion. He knew that his church in Northampton, for example, was full of people who were not converted, and he had no problem with them attending church. However, he felt that in obedience to Scripture they should not be served the communion meal. See 1 Cor. 11:27-29.

be. In fact, the failure of Geneva in this regard was likely something that proved to Edwards that while attempts to enlarge it were admirable and even commanded by Scripture, God's Kingdom would never exist *fully* on earth in the present dispensation. More immediate to his own background was the failed attempt by the Puritans to fully reform the Church of England. The very fact that he had been born in America was a testament to the failure of the state church system. While some of his thoughts in the midst of the early revival period in the 1730's may have sounded as if he expected Christ's millennial Kingdom to be inaugurated in Northampton, such notions were dispelled altogether by the middle of the next decade, as his *Religious Affections* (1746) painted a much more sober and realistic picture of New England's place in the overall scheme of Biblical eschatology. Edwards' mature thought reflected a desire for New England to continue to strive to be a "city on a hill," but it simply could not be expected that all members of society would share in authentic Christian faith. By accepting the fact that Christians were destined to live amidst non-Christians, even in so-called "Christian nations," Edwards was able to formulate a public theology that made room for this reality. His vision was that the Church would be the "salt and light" of any society, and through spiritual awakening which caused believers to rekindle their passion for God and caused unbelievers to become believers, God's invisible Kingdom would become more and more visible in the here and now. Along these lines, he encouraged Christians to be as involved as possible in the public square, since this tended for the good of society and the gospel. None of this contradicted with his view of the national covenant, as there were many in ancient Israel who were not individually committed to God, nevertheless they were included in the covenant by virtue of the fact that they belonged to the nation of Israel. One must recall that the covenant of grace was for the *eternal* good of an *individual* while the

national covenant was for the *temporal* good of a *people*. As it was for the Jews of old, so it was for the Puritans of Edwards' day.

The duties of Christians in a time of war

Edwards believed that people were destined to live in the exact times and places which God had preordained for them to live.²⁶⁸ This included the particular nation they dwelt in. And in this sense, he was a supporter of nationalism especially when it was driven by a desire to seek the common good over one's own interests. Since one's neighbors were those who were most like themselves, and thus most likely to share one's worldview and concept of a good life and a just society, there was a degree of pride to be found in promoting one's own nation. Speaking on this issue he said, "so our own friends are more committed to our care than others, and our near neighbors, than those that live at a great distance; and the people of our land and nation are more in some sense, committed to our care than the people of China..."²⁶⁹

Edwards' patriotism was most evident in his theology of just war, which he defined as men being called upon to defend their nation against common enemies who threatened their lives, liberty or property. *The Duties of Christians in a Time of War*, delivered on April 4, 1745, was a sermon intended specifically to lend divine confidence to those among his parishioners about to embark on an expedition against the French fort of Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia. In a more general sense however, the sermon was also meant to provide a theological framework for a Christian view of war. "A people of God," he began,

²⁶⁸ See Acts 17:26.

²⁶⁹ WJE 4:471. Edwards did not mean that the welfare of the nation of China was unimportant. Rather, he chose it to contrast for readers the natural socio-cultural affinities that different nations commonly shared.

“may be called of God to go forth to war against their enemies.”²⁷⁰ Such an undertaking was justifiable only in defense of life, liberty and property, and should not be entered into cavalierly. “Christ and John the Baptist were often concerned with men of military employment and never condemned them,” he observed. Furthermore, “those words of Christ in John 18:36, ‘If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,’ do imply that it is lawful and necessary to fight for the maintenance and support of temporal kingdoms” the preacher shrewdly deduced.²⁷¹ It was the duty of those in authority to summon men to fight. And it was the duty of Christians to answer this call, “unless it be notoriously manifest that the war is unjust.”²⁷² It mattered not to Edwards whether the call to arms came from a Christian or a secular authority. Both, as we have seen above, could be expected to be seeking the common good of society; and since Christians made up a large part of the society this meant that their good was tied together with the good of unbelieving rulers and neighbors. Edwards concluded his message with a reminder that could have just as easily been spoken by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, saying, “’Tis God, and he only, that determines the event of war and gives the victory.”²⁷³ This reminder was meant to lead to the application that God’s people must be committed to earnest supplication for his help in maintaining their cause. Prayer was foundational to success in war. Alas, any failure in battle could be traced to a failure in prayer. This gave a critical role to women, children, and male noncombatants in the overall enterprise. One did not have to be on the front lines, as it were, to make a

²⁷⁰ WJE 25:131.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

²⁷² Edwards’ qualification here may have left the door open for conscientious objection. In the context of the national covenant, however, it seems most likely that this qualification was meant to leave room for the fact that when a war was “notoriously manifestly unjust” it should be obvious to large sectors of society and not simply to isolated individuals.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 134.

difference. According to Edwards, ordinary citizens could inflict casualties in the spiritual realm from the warmth of their own hearths.

As we noted in chapter one, Edwards, just like Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, lived virtually his entire life under the threat of war. Northampton was close enough to the the frontier of New England to elicit his parsonage being garrisoned on several occasions to protect his family from French-inspired Indian raids. Later, he spent the last decade of his life at the remote Indian outpost of Stockbridge. Moreover, as a faithful Protestant British subject, he felt himself always at odds with Catholic France. Hence the ever present threat of violence from Indian tribes on a small scale and from France on a large scale demanded that Edwards not only formulate a theology of just war, but that he propagate it. This is why in addition to the occasional sermon outlined above, he spoke on the issue of war numerous other times during his ministry. *In the Name of the Lord of Hosts* was preached to the Stockbridge Indians to remind them that the British counted on their help to defeat the French. *God’s People Tried by a Battle Lost* was preached to the English congregation at Stockbridge to comfort them after the shocking defeat of Major General Braddock at the hands of the French in July of 1755.²⁷⁴ Again and again, references to war can be found throughout his works precisely because he ministered among people for whom war was a constant threat. Edwards was able to find ample support from the Bible for the demands of his duty to preach to a people in wartime circumstances. It is not surprising that he made liberal use of Old Testament stories and characters to promote his vision of just war. But his creative use of the New Testament, which is generally viewed as containing no evidence in support of war or violence, must be noted. In addition to his observations about Jesus and John the Baptist’s dealings with soldiers in their day, as well as his creative interpretation of John 18:36 above, Edwards

²⁷⁴ See WJE 25:682-684, 688-697.

referred his hearers to Paul's clear teaching on the subjection of believers to the authority of the state in Romans 13:1-4.²⁷⁵ The Reverend was glad to trumpet the radical teachings of Jesus who said, "Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," (Mt. 5:39, 43-44). At the same time, he was also cognizant of the wisdom of Ecclesiastes which says, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven... a time for war and a time for peace."²⁷⁶ Interpreting the latter in light of the former, Edwards was able to come to a place in his thinking that resolved the apparent pacifism of Jesus with the somber acknowledgement of Solomon. There was a time to lay down one's life, as it were, yet there was also a time to take up arms. The difference between the two was when the threat moved from the individual to the communal.

America and the "Secular Christian" state

The Reverend saw that religion and state were moving further apart in his generation than they had been in those of his Puritan ancestors. In that sense, he sought not a return to England, nor to the glory days of Puritanism's past where Reformed Christianity reigned unchallenged. Rather, he sought a synthesis whereby Christianity could still contribute to society at large in a meaningful way. He was not primarily concerned with private religion at the expense of society. He was an Old World Puritan who wanted Christ involved in public life, and yet he was a realist who saw that the Enlightenment had forever changed the world and thus the rules of engagement were being rewritten - Reformed Christianity no longer held

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 132.

²⁷⁶ Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

the only seat at the table, so to speak. His reading of Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers surely helped to shape his views. Edwards sought to make a way for Christianity to be tolerant of other faiths and worldviews while simultaneously engaging tirelessly in the public square, which is the evangelical view in its best light. It is this tendency, perhaps, which accounts for the vibrant history of American religiosity in the face of secular government and increasing religious pluralism.

Edwards' vision of the state was not entirely secular but not entirely religious either. He conceived of the ideal magistrate, for example, as one who would be favorably disposed to the Reformed evangelical stream of Christianity without mandating its practice. But this was only one of many functions that Edwards ascribed to an ideal state and its officials. The chief functions of government, for Edwards, were to secure property, protect the rights of citizens, ensure justice, defend the nation, make laws against immorality, help the poor, and support true religion (again, Reformed and evangelical).²⁷⁷ His view of the promotion of religion as being merely one of a number of other important issues at hand for the state was actually typical of the Puritans at large, whose beliefs about separation of church and state were influenced strongly by their own often negative experiences with the Church of England. While it was not the job of the state to mandate any particular form of religion, it should tend to promote a Christian ethos firstly by promoting the Bible's moral and ethical ideals, and only secondarily by supporting ecclesiastical ideals, although from a distance.

One can only wonder what he would have done had Edwards lived until the time of the American revolution. Would he have remained loyal to the British crown? Would he have joined the voices opposed to British "tyranny?" It seems that from his general theology of the state, even if he had at first remained loyal to England, he may have eventually

²⁷⁷ See McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society*, 128-136.

supported American independence in light of increasing infringements on colonial rights, especially in the areas of property and trade. During his lifetime, Edwards, like many of his contemporaries, was comfortable casting his spiritual lot along with the political fortunes of Great Britain because it was then the single greatest supporter of the international Protestant cause. After the Revolution this changed dramatically, as America became a behemoth of global Protestant missionary might, largely thanks to Edwards' own missionary zeal, enshrined in works like his *Life of David Brainerd* (1749). It is highly probable that even though he utterly disagreed with the aloof god of his deist contemporary Benjamin Franklin, Edwards would have supported the creation of the new nation as a secular one, albeit one with a favorable disposition to Christianity. Although he did accurately foresee the insidious influence of deism in the wider Church, Edwards probably could not have foreseen the incredible religious diversity that eventually came to characterize America thanks to immigration. In this respect, his view that government could at once be secular yet remain favorably disposed to Christianity (*his* version of it) is somewhat naive, especially in the republic that the Founding Fathers created. Either way, Jonathan Edwards' influence on American government runs much deeper than most people realize. His grandson, Aaron Burr Jr., perhaps best known for killing Alexander Hamilton in a gentleman's duel, served as the third vice president of the United States under Thomas Jefferson. But in the case of Edwards and the later American state, his ideological progeny runs much deeper than his biological. American government would come to champion many of his political ideals, and society at large would come to embrace his vision of the public good in terms of caring for the poor and marginalized. Last but in no way least, his role in the Great Awakening had immediate effects on the political arena, as this momentous event is credited with unifying the previously divided colonies under a common national religious theme. This newfound unity was one of

the driving factors behind the new national identity that drove the revolutionary era decades after his death.

Of hearth and home

Fervent fireside prayer during wartime was hardly the only momentous endeavor Edwards ascribed to the members of Christian homes. In order to understand how Edwards conceived of life in the home, we must return once again to his view of the Trinity. The divine society, full of love, order, and harmony which naturally tended to expand these and other divine attributes throughout time and space was the model he looked to for family life. “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief of the means of grace. If these fail, all other means are like to prove ineffectual. If these are duly maintained, all the means of grace will be like to prosper and be successful.”²⁷⁸ In leading his family, the husband reflected the headship of God the Father. In submitting to her husband, the wife reflected the humility of the Son. And in like manner, the children reflected a submissive and humble order in relating to their parents. Edwards’ Trinitarian framework for understanding the family was supported further by the Biblical scaffolding of the New Testament’s teaching about husbands loving their wives in the same way that Christ loved the Church by laying down his life for her.²⁷⁹ Family life was thus to be characterized by strong male headship displayed in self-sacrificial love, and humble submission from women and children which ultimately empowered them to be all that God intended for them in their roles.

²⁷⁸ WJE 25:484.

²⁷⁹ See Ephesians 5:25ff.

Edwards' overall treatment of men in his writings is surprisingly terse compared to his remarks about women and children. In fact, one discerns a certain appeal that he had for the latter which was possibly lacking for the former. In his repeated attempts to counter more traditional notions of gender imbalance in religion, Edwards' preaching drew the fancy of women and the young in ways that his contemporaries' preaching did not. Aside from the blessing of being a helpmate for her husband and a mother for her children, Jonathan Edwards gave women a prominent role in his ministry. In an extremely unusual move for his day, he almost exclusively used female worshippers as prototypical believers in his writings. From the sickly but saintly Abigail Hutchinson to the unnamed character in his description of Northampton's revival scene, Edwards saw in the fairer sex a model of piety and poise that men would do well to emulate. Hutchinson was a young woman in Northampton who was beset by a chronic illness which eventually led to her death. Edwards enshrined her in *A Faithful Narrative of a Surprising Work of God* (1737) as an example of a pious and virtuous saint, so full of the love of God in Christ that she actually looked forward to her own death because then she would dwell with God, face to face. The unnamed character in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742) was none other than his wife, Sarah Pierpont Edwards, whose ecstatic experiences under the influence of the "Heavenly Elysium" of the Holy Spirit were meant to convey the spiritual rhapsodies available to the true believer.

If championing the spiritual experiences and prowess of women made Edwards extremely unique among his Puritan brethren, his views on chastity and modesty were anything but. He regularly expounded such virtues in his sermons and writings because he saw them as foundational to the Christian ethos. Much like his peer in Najd, Northampton's preacher saw chastity and modesty as inseparably linked with truth faith. He reckoned that

one's outward appearance should match their inward state. For the true believer, this meant that their dress and actions should reflect the holiness that was present within their spirit. Restating 1 Timothy 2:10, "Women should adorn themselves in modest apparel... not with costly array; but, which becometh women professing godliness, with good works..." he remarked that "Visible holiness is an appearance or exhibition of holiness, by those things which are external, and so fall under our notice and observation. And there are two, viz. profession, and an outward behavior, agreeable to that profession."²⁸⁰

Returning once more to Edwards' readiness to share his wife's private spiritual experiences with the public, the reader must understand that he did so because it was ecstasy of the spiritual sort that he truly championed in his ministry.²⁸¹ The Reverend was a typical Puritan inasmuch as he actually celebrated the marriage bed as a place of physical, emotional, and spiritual union. Modern notions of the Puritans as prudish could not in reality be further from the truth!²⁸² Puritans such as Edwards regularly encouraged sex within marriage as a means of temporal grace, procreation, and protection from fornication. Nevertheless, bodily fulfillment was a secondary concern for Northampton's minister, who always emphasized the spiritual above the physical. He even marshaled David Hume to support his notion that, "there is a foundation laid in nature for kind affections between the sexes, that are truly diverse from all inclinations to sensitive pleasure, and don't properly arise from any such

²⁸⁰ WJE 12:188-89.

²⁸¹ The strength of Jonathan and Sarah's own marriage is perhaps best seen in their moment of greatest trial. On his deathbed, Edwards spoke of his marriage to Sarah as an "uncommon union... of such a nature as I trust is spiritual and therefore will continue forever." Sarah's response to the news of his passing, framed in a letter to their daughter Esther, was even more telling: "What shall I say! A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. O that we may kiss the rod and lay our hands upon our mouths! The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had him so long. But my God lives; and he has my heart. O what a legacy my husband and your father has left us! We are given to God; and there I am and love to be." Cited in Elisabeth Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Laurel, MS: Audubon Press, 2003), 166, 170.

²⁸² See for example, Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 39ff.

inclination.”²⁸³ Not intending to downplay the importance and seriousness of sex within marriage, Edwards nonetheless sought to lift the eyes and hearts of his congregants to the heavenly realm, where humans would one day dwell in perfect oneness with God and one another apart from the sexual oneness of this present age. The latter was but a temporal shadow pointing to the former eternal reality. Why not prepare one’s spirit now for what was to come later?

The Reverend also seemed to harbor a special place in his heart and ministry for the young. He did not hesitate to laud four year-old Phebe Bartlet as an example of spiritual fortitude from whom even her own parents could learn something. Along with Abigail Hutchinson, she is one of the main characters in Edwards’ *A Faithful Narrative* wherein he recounted her conversion experience. Like an expert storyteller, Edwards takes his readers on a journey from the little girl’s agony of recognizing her spiritually morbid state apart from Christ to the ecstasy of her exclamation upon finding him, “Mother, the kingdom of heaven is come to me!”²⁸⁴ Her resultant piety, said Edwards, was so noteworthy that she had an impact on the whole town, including her parents, siblings, friends, and even the poor. She even “manifested a great love for her minister: particularly when I returned from my long journey for my health, the last fall... when she heard of it she... told the children with an elevated voice, ‘Mr. Edwards is come home! Mr. Edwards is come home!’” and “still continues very constant in secret prayer.”²⁸⁵ Edwards was very pleased to learn that young Phebe Bartlet was ready to meet God should she encounter the fate of many a young person at a time when death was rarely constrained to the elderly. In fact, he took a special liking to the young people of his town precisely because he felt a sense of responsibility for their spiritual well

²⁸³ WJE 8:604.

²⁸⁴ WJE 4:200.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

being. In another uncharacteristic move, Edwards personally oversaw ministry to the youth in his congregation. He took care to meet with teens and young single adults in small groups, encouraging them to prepare their souls to meet God, and to live for him here on earth before they did so face to face. He had zero tolerance for the carousing and fornication that so often marked young adulthood, and would not condone coarse joking which could lead to such behavior. His passion for purity in the town's youth actually brought him into conflict with some adults in his own church when he publicly chastised several teenage boys who were using a midwifery book to poke fun at female anatomy.²⁸⁶

It is true that Jonathan Edwards gave uncommon dignity to women and the young. This is a fact which led to him having a high standing in their sight. However, any discussion of his theology of the Christian home must ultimately end with his view of the role of a husband. Flowing from his Trinitarian view of all of reality, Edwards conceived of the Christian home as a place of order where a man took his cues from God, and acted as Christ did to provide for and protect his wife and children. Thus while it was possible for men to learn much from pious women and even children as young as four, their real example was to be found in Christ. It is fitting, then, that we should give our Puritan pundit the last word on the matter:

Now it is easy to everyone to know that when marriage is according to nature and God's designation, when a woman is married to an husband she receives him as a guide, as a protector, a safeguard and defense, a shelter from harms and dangers, a reliever from distresses, a comforter in afflictions, a support in discouragements. God has so designed it, and therefore has made man of a more robust [nature], and strong in body and mind, with more wisdom strength and courage, fit to protect and defend; but he has made woman weaker, more soft and tender, more fearful, and more affectionate, as a fit object of generous protection and defense. Hence it is, that it is natural in women to look most at valor and fortitude, wisdom, generosity and greatness of soul: these virtues do - or at least ought, according to nature - move most upon the affections of the woman. Hence also it is, that man naturally looks most at a

²⁸⁶ See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 292-302.

soft and tender disposition of mind, and those virtues and affections which spring from it, such as humility, modesty, purity, chastity. And the affections which he most naturally looks at in her are a sweet and entire confidence and trust, submission and resignation; for when he receives a woman as wife, he receives her as an object of his guardianship and protection... Thus also, when the believer receives Christ by faith, he receives him as a safeguard and shelter from the wrath of God and eternal torments, and defense from all the harms and dangers which he fears.²⁸⁷

3.3 Edwards the Revivalist

If there is one thing that popular American history has remembered Jonathan Edwards for more than anything else, it is for the crucial role he played in the Great Awakening.²⁸⁸ As the largest religious awakening in American history, both in terms of its numerical and geographical scope, the Great Awakening is unparalleled. We have already noted that the awakening played a major part in unifying the colonies in the decades leading up to the American revolution. This newfound unity was based on a common religious experience that had swept the entire Eastern Seaboard during the early 1740's. Stoked by the fiery preaching of George Whitefield (1714-1770) and John Wesley (1703-1791), who both made several transatlantic voyages to speak all over America during the period, it was the preaching and scholarship of Jonathan Edwards that helped to stimulate, spread, and ultimately define the awakening. The Great Awakening in America was actually part of a larger awakening that began in the 1730's, and included Great Britain and Continental Europe. It was this transatlantic revival which most immediately gave birth to the global evangelical movement, and in addition to being a chief catalyst, Jonathan Edwards is its most enduring theologian. Marsden observes, "By the beginning of the twenty-first century, although the movement

²⁸⁷ WJE 13:220.

²⁸⁸ The First Great Awakening was the first in a series of revivals of evangelical religion in Europe and America. The awakening was particularly strong in the colonies, and was marked by a massive surge of conversions to Christianity, manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and an intense increase in religious commitment which led to rapid church growth and left a lasting impact on society.

would not be nearly as universal nor as Reformed as Edwards and his visionary friends imagined, it would, as they did anticipate, bring more people to Christian conversion experiences than in all previous history combined.”²⁸⁹

In terms of reflection and theological analysis on the topic of religious revival, Edwards really has no peer in Christian thought. That this is so should not surprise us, as he was reared in a culture of revival in New England. It was expected that ministers would seek and hopefully oversee regular intervals of the stirring of religious zeal and experience in their local congregations. This pattern of decline and renewal was what the Puritans saw in the Bible, and it was also tied to their eschatological hopes for a global revival of religion before the second coming of Christ. Jonathan’s father and grandfather both oversaw around half a dozen such instances in their lengthy ministerial careers, although they remained largely confined to their local areas. Edwards’ first recorded sentence, in a letter written to his sister Mary when he was just twelve, tells us all we need to know about the climate of religious revival in which he grew up: “Dear Sister, Through the wonderful mercy and goodness of God there hath in this place been a very remarkable stirring and pouring out of the Spirit of God, and likewise now is, but I think I have reason to think it is in some measure diminished, but I hope not much.”²⁹⁰ Is it any wonder that this young boy would one day apply the powers of his intellect to match the passion of his soul in becoming Christianity’s foremost revival theologian?

²⁸⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 315-316.

²⁹⁰ WJE 16:29.

Heaven and hell

There was scarcely a time in Edwards' ministry when he did not chastise his congregation and society for what he perceived as religious indifference at best, and outright apostasy at worst. While it was true that God seemed to be using Great Britain and her colonies to spread Reformation ideals around the world, Northampton's prophetic pulpit reminded them that this was normally the case *despite* their spirituality and not because of it. Jonathan Edwards was uncommonly sensitive to the virtue and vice motif in society as it related to divine pleasure or displeasure, respectively. When he surveyed the state of things in his own church, he did not see much improvement over the larger town of Northampton, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, or the New England Puritan enterprise altogether. The themes of religious indifference marked by lukewarm faith, religious corruption to the point of apostasy under the rubric of Arminianism or deism, and the hope of a worldwide revival to usher in Christ's return drove his mouth to speak and his pen to write more on the subject of religious revival than any Protestant before or since.

It was the vision of the afterlife, both the potential pleasures and pains, that Edwards continually made use of to promote a rekindling of spiritual affection in his listeners and readers. Scarcely a more beautiful picture has ever been sketched of heaven than the one Edwards created in his sermon *Heaven is a World of Love*, where the God of love invites saints into his eternal ether of love:

the saints will love God with an inconceivable ardor of heart, and to the utmost of their capacity; so they will know that he has loved them from eternity, and that he still loves them, and will love them to eternity. And God will then gloriously manifest himself to them, and they shall know that all that happiness and glory of which they are possessed is the fruit of his love. With the same ardor will the saints love the Lord Jesus Christ. And their love shall be accepted, and they shall know that he has loved them with a dying love. They shall then be more sensible than they are now what great love it manifested in Christ, that he should lay down his life for them. Then Christ will open to their view the great fountain of love in his heart far beyond what

they ever before saw... the sight of God's love will fill the saints the more with joy and admiration.²⁹¹

Heaven for Edwards was a place where love is perfected, free from all that tarnishes it in this world such as jealousy or other impure motives and actions. Not only would the saints love and be loved by God perfectly, but they would finally be able to love one another perfectly. Heaven marked an end to the endless discord of earth. Indeed the language of Edwards' heaven is a musical harmony of love. Edwards' hope was that a truly Biblical vision such as this would stir hearts and turn them heavenward. Sometimes it worked, usually it did not.

Man is often unable to fully appreciate the good in life until he has experienced or understood the bad. Edwards learned that if the vision of heaven and its harmonious language of love failed to awaken spirits, then the specter of hell and its dissonant cacophony of hatred could work even better.²⁹² A place of divinely enabled dichotomies of despair; hell was highly populated yet distinguished by utter loneliness, it was full of fire yet marked by utter darkness. Such was the justly deserved eternal state of the wicked. While Edwards had much to say about the joys of heaven as a means of inspiring holiness and spiritual awakening, it was his newfound focus on the agonies of hell that ultimately sparked the revival fires he had so longed to kindle in the colonies.

Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God was first preached at Northampton in June of 1741. But it was the second time Edwards gave the sermon, one month later at Enfield, Connecticut on July 8, where the response inside the walls of the church became the stuff of legend. People inside the building began sobbing, wailing, and fainting at the thought of a holy God who held their sinful lives in his hand as one holds a spider by a thread of its own

²⁹¹ WJE 8:377.

²⁹² For Edwards' defense of preaching about hell as a means to stir awakening, see WJE 4:246-247. His argument is basically that if hell is real, and many men end up there for want of taking it seriously, then is it not a minister's duty to "take great pains to make men sensible of it?"

web over an open fire. The Reverend Stephen Williams of Longmeadow recorded that on July 8, 1741 he “went over to Enfd, where we met Dear Mr E-of N. H.- who preachd a most awakening Sermon - and before ye Sermon - was done there was a great moaning-& crying out throughout ye whole House-what shall I do to be Savd - oh I am going to Hell - oh what shall I do for a christ...- so yt ye minister - was obligd to desist - shrieks & crys - were piercing & Amazing.”²⁹³ It was most unusual that Edwards was unable to finish the sermon due to the agony that had seized his listeners. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. And it was almost certainly not owing to any special method of delivery by him, as he was known to be undemonstrative in the pulpit.²⁹⁴ The dramatic response is at least partly explained by Edwards’ masterful use of images such as that of a furnace, pit, ax, sword, flames, serpent, black clouds of an impending storm, and a bent bow in which there was an arrow destined to be “made drunk with your blood.”²⁹⁵ His text was Deuteronomy 32:35, “Their foot shall slide in due time,” and his doctrine was “there is nothing that keeps wicked men, at any one moment, out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God.” From this basis, he constructed a terrifying picture of individuals on the brink of eternity, with perhaps very little time to repent of their sin and turn to God before divine patience ran out.

It is no security to wicked men for one moment, that there are no *visible means of death* at hand. 'Tis no security to a natural man, that he is now in health, and that he don't see which way he should now immediately go out of the world by any accident, and that there is no visible danger in any respect in his circumstances. The manifold and continual experience of the world in all ages, shows that this is no evidence that a man is not on the very brink of eternity, and that the next step won't be into another world.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Stephen Williams, *Diary*, Storrs Library, Longmeadow, Mass., typescript, vol. 3, pp. 375-76 [sic] as cited in “Editor’s Introduction,” in WJE 22:400.

²⁹⁴ See Ian Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 175.

²⁹⁵ The editors of WJE 22 observe that Edwards used no less than twenty metaphors or descriptive adjectives to describe the wrath of God and the torments of hell in this sermon.

²⁹⁶ WJE 22:407 (emphasis his).

Two and a half centuries on, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* stands alone at the summit of the veritable mountain that is the corpus of American sermons. It remains virtually without peer as the most well known and influential sermon in American history. Its style and content leaves little wonder as to why its effect is still so dramatic on the psyche of readers. But the sermon alone still could not account for the scope of the awakening which touched all the colonies including literally every corner of New England, and was attended to by a multitude of ministers. Surely there were other forces at work beyond Jonathan Edwards' control. This was a fact he was probably all too ready to happily concede.

The marks of genuine spirituality

If *Sinners* was the sermon that officially launched the Great Awakening, then Edwards' revival writings were the treatises that perpetuated and defined it. His first published work on the topic was *A Faithful Narrative* in which he excitedly chronicled the first wave of revival that began in Northampton under his watch. The work, extremely optimistic in tone, registered the conversion experiences of townsfolk such as the aforementioned Abigail Hutchinson and Phebe Bartlet. Its publication on both sides of the Atlantic brought Edwards and his town into the international spotlight for the first time. But not everyone was as excited about the revival as Edwards and his new audience were, as there were many who remained skeptical and even antithetically inclined to what they perceived to be religious excesses. Eventually there arose a division in New England where supporters of the revival were referred to as New Lights and detractors as Old Lights. As the revivals were increasing in stature, Edwards was invited to give the commencement address at Yale on September 10, 1741. His speech was published later that year as *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, and reminded opponents of the revivals not to confine God to one particular

mode of action, nor to decry manifestations of the Holy Spirit such as were common (crying, shrieking, moaning, falling on the floor, etc.). “There is no reason to doubt” that this was a work of God, said Edwards, and “for persons to continue long to refuse to acknowledge Christ in the work, especially those that are set to be teachers in his church, will be in like manner provoking to God, as it was in the Jews of old to refuse to acknowledge Christ.”²⁹⁷

Tensions between the New Lights and the Old Lights increased in large part thanks to some of the ministerial practices of the Great Awakening. Whereas itinerant preaching was not a new phenomenon in New England, its explosion into a “new normal” which saw ministers, Edwards included, often preaching on the road more often than in their own church was something that drew the ire of men like Boston’s Charles Chauncy. While Edwards himself could not be accused of directly subverting the traditional power structures of New England through the practice of itinerating (he was known as a strong traditionalist on local ministerial authority), it was the practices of others that eventually caused the rift between the two sides to deepen. In addition to preaching when and where they had not been invited to, some itinerants such as James Davenport began to openly challenge the genuineness of the faith of ministers who opposed the revival. The resulting fissure threatened to undo much of the good that the awakening had wrought, feared Edwards, and caused him to write *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*. This work was intended to mediate between New Lights and Old Lights, and actually took aim at the former by warning them not to glory in their own religious experiences at the expense of traditional authority structures.

If *Some Thoughts* signaled a slight change of emphasis in Edwards’ thinking, then *Religious Affections* represented his reflections on revivalism at their maturity. Again he singled out New Lights for what he deemed were immature or even un-Biblical behaviors,

²⁹⁷ WJE 4:272.

yet he also continued to support the fact that the awakening truly was of God. The awakening was not the “either or” that the New Lights and Old Lights liked to make it out to be. Instead, as is often the case, reality was much more of a “both and” scenario. There were elements of truth and error on both sides, and *Religious Affections* was Edwards’ attempt to draw this out once and for all. The most enduring aspect of the treatise is perhaps its attempt to distinguish and celebrate genuine religious experiences from counterfeit ones, its author employing his usual surgical precision to achieve these ends. His conclusion was that outward bodily effects and manifestations are not in themselves a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work. Rather, “a genuine work of the Holy Spirit is marked by a divine illumination which produces conviction, humility, charity, and a general sense of the temper of Jesus.”²⁹⁸ Extreme religious fervor was certainly acceptable to Edwards, provided it was accompanied by a changed life with peace, joy, and love at the core. “Holy affections,” said he, “are not heat without light.”²⁹⁹

Among the many fruits of a life which has been genuinely touched by God in being “born again” by the Holy Spirit are strong desires for service and evangelism, or the sharing of one’s faith in Jesus with others. Edwards saw service and evangelism as a natural outflow of personal and corporate revival. Sometimes personal revival led to corporate revival, but sometimes it was the other way around, as individuals were touched by the wider revival culture around them. Either way, personal and corporate revival were the building blocks of societal revival, where the influence of Christ’s ethos of love and service was to permeate society at large. Edwards certainly saw this as pertaining to all manners of good works, with the foremost being evangelism. This dual concern for both body and soul, for providing bread for the hungry body and the “bread of life” (John 6:48) for the hungry soul, has come to

²⁹⁸ R.A. Leo, “Holy Spirit,” in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, ed. Harry S. Stout (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

²⁹⁹ WJE 4:266.

characterize Evangelicalism over the centuries. A hungry man is not concerned about Christ while his belly is empty. At the same time, however, Edwards would ask what good it does to feed his body, which is temporal, but not his soul, which is eternal? This twofold emphasis on body and soul, with a particular concern for the preaching of the “good news” of the gospel was one of the most impactful outcomes of Edwards’ revival vision. He dreamed of the spread of Christian knowledge around the world to the extent that every distant shore would one day gleam with the brightness of the gospel. Indeed, his eschatology depended on it. Global evangelism then, was the driving force behind Edwards’ last great treatise in the revival genre, *An Humble Attempt* (1747).³⁰⁰ There was, in Jonathan Edwards’ estimation, no greater good a man could do for a fellow human being than to warn him of the dangers of hell and then joyously tell him of God’s prescribed plan to save him from such a wretched fate.

³⁰⁰ This will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

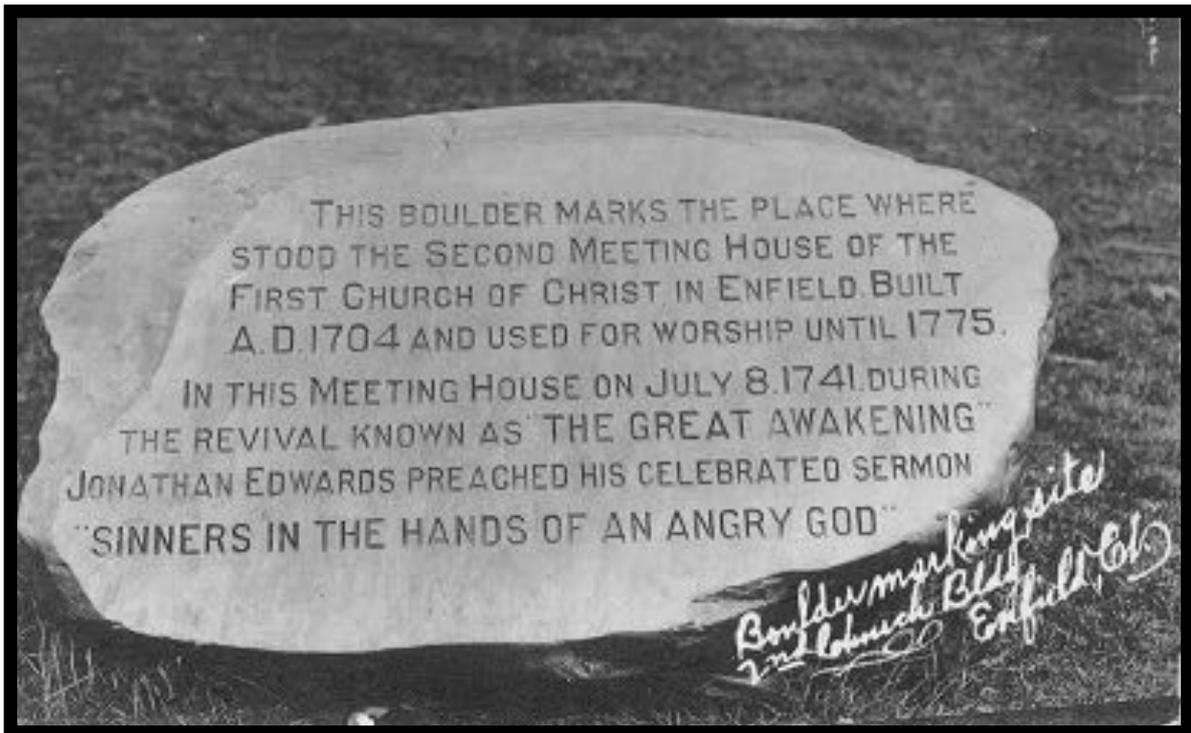


Figure 4: A circa 1920s postcard depicting the marker stone placed at the site where Edwards preached his most famous sermon. Courtesy of Enfield Historical Society.

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

3.4 On the Divine Determiner and the Destinies of Men

Much like Edwards, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb held the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in extremely high regard. Predestination for him was the bedrock that could not be budged from underneath the fertile soil of religious alluvium. “Saying that God does not predestine things from eternity past” was *kufṛ* according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb.³⁰¹ “God knows things altogether before they come into existence, every minute detail and part,” said the Shaykh. “Everything was predestined from eternity past, indeed he cannot increase or decrease, he cannot be early or late; there is nothing that exists except by the volition of God and by his will,” he continued, “for he is all knowing.”³⁰² These things were “self evident” according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, and did not require any special revelation to apprehend.

The Shaykh also agreed with the Reverend however, that mankind was responsible for his actions and genuinely deserving of punishment. Unlike Edwards though, he never did propose a detailed solution to the dichotomous relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom. We might rightfully conclude then, that Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb falls very much within the stream of typical conservative thinkers from both Islam and Christianity who have been happy to live with the tension inherent in the belief that God is sovereign over every detail of the universe while humans are free and responsible for their actions. That this is true of him is most probably due to the fact that there was very little in his immediate context by way of challenge to the doctrine of *al-Qadr*, which he nestled comfortably underneath the banner of Tawḥīd, particularly *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*. Hence Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not need to go to great lengths to explain just how these things worked, as it was a question his listeners simply were not asking. This does not mean

³⁰¹ WMIAW 12:42.

³⁰² Ibid., 43.

that the Shaykh did not think about the issue himself, as he did attempt to resolve it in his exegesis of *sūrat al-Nisa*’ 78-79, which states that people attribute the good in their lives to God, but not the bad. Instead, says the Qur’ān, “All things are from God,” both good and bad.

Drawing on Ibn al-Qayyim, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb concluded that:

The good [in our lives] is from God’s grace, while the bad is from his justice. This is proved by his saying that “God is sovereign over everything” after his saying that [the bad things in life] “are from your own doing.” This is a proclamation of the universality of his might coupled with his justice. And this solidifies [the doctrine of] *al-Qadr* as well as the cause [of calamity] as he [God] added that the cause of calamity is because of themselves - yet universal sovereignty is unto himself. The former precludes coercion while the latter precludes the nullification of *al-Qadr*.³⁰³

In this way, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb preserved the all important doctrine of *al-Qadr* while making space for man’s responsibility. In his view, the good things in life are proof of God’s sovereign grace, while the bad things in life are proof that God is just and that he punishes sin. Ergo God is sovereign but man is still responsible for the evil that befalls him. In his reading of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb on this point, al-‘Uthaymīn comments, “God created the actions of mankind, which therefore take place according to God’s will. However, although these actions are the *creation* of God, the Creator of mankind, they are also the latter’s actual *actions*, in that men and women have their own wills, and therefore they deserve reward or punishment.”³⁰⁴

The predetermination of all things by God is an idea deeply rooted in the Islamic consciousness, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was certain to reinforce this vital truth for his readers by recounting various Aḥādīth that testified to it. “It is narrated that the Messenger of God said, ‘whoever does not believe in *al-Qadr*, both in terms of the good and the bad - Allāh will burn him in hellfire.’”³⁰⁵ This is also why the Shaykh recounted another Ḥadīth, where it was

³⁰³ WMIAW 5:243 *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād* (emphasis mine).

³⁰⁴ al-‘Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*, 115 (emphasis his).

³⁰⁵ WMIAW 1:136.

narrated that, “The first thing that Allāh created was the pen, and he said to it, ‘write!’ The pen replied, ‘Lord, what should I write?’ He said, ‘Write down the destinies of everything until the [final] hour is appointed.’”³⁰⁶ Upon these and other similar stories, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb observed that the true sweetness of faith is lost upon those who deny *al-Qadr*. Furthermore, and perhaps even more troubling, according to his theological scheme, is the fact that “the deeds of one who does not believe in *al-Qadr* are nullified.”³⁰⁷ The implication of course is that if the totality of one’s good deeds are declared null and void, he has no recourse to escape hell.

Hell, sin and “salvation”

The fire of hell was an ever present picture in the minds of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s listeners, and given how often he spoke of its torments, this is probably just how he wanted things to be. In much the same way as his counterpart in eighteenth-century America, the Shaykh knew that people were moved by the threat of hell and he felt an obligation to warn them. There is nothing in his works to suggest that his writing and preaching on the dangers of hell was self-aggrandizing. Rather, there seems to be a genuine desire on his part to save people from the torment of God’s wrath by following what he knew to be the only path of escape.

Although it is true that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had no qualms about pronouncing others unbelievers, he often exercised restraint when it came to the question of their final destiny. Anyone who claimed to know for certain about the fate of another was, in his mind, mislead. “I do not testify that anyone of the Muslims is in paradise or hell,” he wrote to the people of

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

al-Qasīm. Furthermore, “I do not pronounce anyone of the Muslims as an unbeliever... nor do I remove him from the sphere of Islam.”³⁰⁸ He countered the claims of Twelver Shī‘a who said that they would be the only ones to attain to paradise by comparing this boast to the Qur’ān’s chastisement of Christians and Jews who claimed that none would go to heaven except for them.³⁰⁹ In the mind of the Shaykh, such speculation was beyond human capacity. To declare another an unbeliever was one thing, but to confine them to hell was wholly another. It may be, in God’s mercy, that those who are unbelievers (and seemingly headed for hell) could have a dramatic reversal of eternal fortune either just before or even *after* death. Indeed, it seems that this “reversal of eternal fortune” is what most closely approximated the concept of salvation in his mind.

Historically speaking, salvation is a concept in Islam which carries a distinctly different meaning than it does in Christianity. There is a sense in which one can argue that “salvation” is actually void of meaning in Islam proper. This is because the word itself supposes that there is something to be saved from in the first place. In Islam, which lacks a doctrine of original sin, mankind is seen as being born with a moral blank slate, as it were, and is

³⁰⁸ WMIAW, 6:11, *al-Rasā’il al-Shakhsiyya*. Presumably he wrote this letter in defense of his *da‘wa*, in order to convince the people of this settlement to accept it. Read in context, it seems that the Shaykh was trying to assure them that his views were not as extreme as they may have heard, as he would not presume to fully and finally declare any individual “outside the scope of salvation” due to his limited perspective as a human. We know that elsewhere he certainly did pronounce plenty of people as “unbelievers” - but he still refused to issue a decree on their final destiny. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was only comfortable testifying that certain people were in heaven if Muḥammad himself had specifically designated them (as he did with the four Rightly Guided Caliphs and several others among his companions such as Talḥa Ibn ‘Ubayd Allāh). Cf. WMIAW 1:179, *Kashaf al-Shubuhāt*, where the Shaykh would appear to contradict himself on the issue of *takfīr*, however: “For we say, there is no disagreement [among the scholars] that true Tawḥīd consists of the heart, tongue, and actions; and if any of these elements are missing, the man cannot be a Muslim. For if he knows what Tawḥīd truly is, and does not practice it, he is a *kāfir* like Pharaoh or the devil.”

³⁰⁹ WMIAW 12:40, *Risāla fī al-Rudd ‘ala al-Rāfiḍa*. See Qur’ān 2:111.

progressively enlightened through the process of religious education.³¹⁰ The hope is that the proper belief and practice of one's faith will eventually cause the scales of divine justice to tip in one's favor. Heaven and hell are very real places, but, unlike Christianity, there is no sense that hell is the just abode for mankind at large. Human nature, which is seen as corrupt in Christianity, is neutral in Islam. For this reason, it is not a foregone conclusion that humanity *en masse* is headed to hell apart from divine intervention. To the contrary, Islam maintains that at birth some are headed for hell and some are headed for heaven. The only difference is that some will profess and practice a faith which is satisfactory to God while others will not.³¹¹

However, none of this presupposes that "salvation" per se is incompatible with Islam. If one is able to disembody the concept of its "Christian" meaning, namely that mankind at large is headed for hell apart from divine intervention which rescues those who repent and accept God's provision of Christ, it does become possible to use the word in a slightly different manner which is more "Islamic." In this vein, salvation would then apply to mankind in the sense that while no one can be sure if he is predestined for heaven or hell at birth, right belief and practice of faith is what "saves" one from the *possibility* of hell.

³¹⁰ This state of neutrality, morally speaking, can even be seen as a *positive* state when one considers the Islamic doctrine of *fiṭra*, which posits that all mankind is innately imbued with a knowledge of Tawḥīd. As a result, one's environs and upbringing are what divert them from truth, to varying degrees. Learning and applying the religion of Islam (i.e. Qur'ān and Sunna) is what thus restores this pristine, primordial state of *fiṭra*, thereby perfecting it and properly manifesting in the believer as true faith and salvation, according to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. The doctrine of *fiṭra* is not terribly different from Jonathan Edwards' own understanding of humankind's innate knowledge of the Creator, which John Calvin called the *sensus divinitatis* (sense of divinity). Where Christian theologians differed from Muslim thinkers like Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb is in their belief that innate knowledge of God was merely a general, incomplete knowledge. As such, it could not lead to salvation apart from the appropriation of specific revelation from God in the form of his written word in the gospel, which testifies to his living word, Jesus, and his work of redemption. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.1.1-3. For more on Edwards and anthropology, see Jeffrey Waddington, *The Unified Operations of the Human Soul: Jonathan Edwards's Theological Anthropology and Apologetic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015).

³¹¹ At the risk of oversimplification, there is a sense in which God knows the eternal destiny of all people and yet predestines some. This is the realm of his sovereignty, according to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb.

This seems to be largely what Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had in mind when he used the word *najāh* (salvation or rescue). For him, man has no way to be sure whether he belongs to the people of paradise or to those of hell. The only fortification against the latter is the proper profession of Islam’s core doctrines (namely Tawḥīd) and the continual application of good works (including both obligatory and voluntary ones). Even though he would have denied the doctrine of original sin as traditionally understood, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not fail to recognize that humanity is bound by a common disease of the heart that is most directly caused by selfishness and pride. Summarizing again from one of his favorite sources in Ibn al-Qayyim, the Shaykh warned readers:

Take utmost caution from the despotism of the words “I/me,” “mine,” and “I have.” On account of these Satan, Pharaoh and Korah suffered calamity. “I am better than he,” said Satan, and “Mine is the dominion over Egypt,” said Pharaoh, and “I have knowledge,” said Korah. The best way to use the word “I/me” is the worshipper’s saying, “I am the sinful worshipper who is seeking forgiveness and confessing.” Likewise with “mine” he should say, “Mine is the sin, mine is the crime, mine is the paucity, mine is the humiliation.” And with “I have” he should say, “Forgive me my vain efforts, my frailty, my sins, and my vain intentions, for all of these I have.”³¹²

There can be little doubt, based on the above, that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb viewed humanity as steeped in sin and therefore separated from a holy God by virtue of our imperfection. Incidentally, his high regard for Jesus was likely due in large part to the fact that he was well aware of Jesus’ difference from the rest of humanity on this point. It probably did not surprise him that the one the Qur’ān called God’s *kalima* was also the only one whom it referred to as *zakī* (innocent or pure).³¹³ Furthermore, the Shaykh would have been well acquainted with

³¹² WMIAW, *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 5:157.

³¹³ Q 19:19

the Prophet's Ḥadīth about the son of Mary being the only one from among the sons of Adam who escaped the fateful touch of Satan at the moment of birth.³¹⁴

Given this evidence for the general sinfulness of the human race, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb still did not go so far as to pronounce this dreadful reality as a comprehensive cause for all of mankind to be headed for hell. Preferring to leave such lofty pronouncements to God alone, he seemed content to warn a populace who could not know which of Milton's epic poems best described their eternal destiny.³¹⁵ And he was determined to do so by all means necessary, even if the final outcome had already been predetermined by God.

3.5 Of Mosque, State and Home

Rule of law and the role of government

Much has been made of the alliance between the Reformer of Najd and the man who was to become its ruler, Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd of al-Dir'iyya. It is fair to postulate that history would not have spoken so often of either man had they not formed this alliance in 1744. While it is true that theirs was a pact that was chiefly pragmatic, we miss something of the impulse that gave life to it if we write it off as *merely* pragmatic. Aside from his need for asylum, there was an underlying impetus that caused Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb to approach Muḥammad Ibn Sa'ūd with an offer he could not refuse.

As a jurist, the Shaykh saw the public welfare as one of the most crucial aspects of Sharī'a. In a rather compelling display of this fact (admittedly more so for the speaker of Arabic), he famously declared, “Ann al-ma'ṣhā qad tū'athhar fī al-arḍ; wa kadhālik al-

³¹⁴ See al-Bukhārī 59:3286, “Narrated Abū Hurayra, the Prophet said, “When any son of Adam is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except for Jesus the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch [but failed], touching [instead] the placenta.”

³¹⁵ The implicit reference here is to John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671). There is no indication that his work would have been known in Najd, however!

ṭā‘a” (“Disobedience affects the land; and so also does obedience”).³¹⁶ What he meant was that the failure of individuals to follow the law of God has a resultant negative effect on society at large, and conversely, when individuals obey God society benefits as a whole. While he was keen to see people voluntarily submitting themselves to God’s law, he was also a realist who knew that apart from some form of governmental imposition society would never be what God intended. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s seeking of a religio-political alliance with Ibn Sa‘ūd suggests that he knew the limits of his own power and calling. He saw himself as a man of religion, not as a politician. However, he knew that God had conjoined the two in the Sharī‘a and he thus endeavored to do the same.

Contrary to what may be supposed about his political ideology, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw the state only as a penultimate factor in the life of the Muslim community. It was there to protect and provide for citizens, and to allow for the proper expression of religion, the ultimate factor. The former, as it were, was birthed by the latter. As such, the Shaykh did not deem the state as necessarily inclined to rule over the daily affairs of men - this was the role of religion. The state existed only to serve the interests of religion.³¹⁷

Given his reliance upon the first generation of Muslims as a shining example for subsequent generations, it may shock some to learn that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb employed a certain degree of flexibility when it came to the actual structure of the alliance between

³¹⁶ WMIAW 1:38, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

³¹⁷ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s political thought has often been misinterpreted, especially in Western media and scholarship. This is largely due to his being lumped together with other thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb, whose ideas, while similar on many points such as their reliance upon the Sunna and Ḥadīth, are markedly different in their conception of the Islamic state. Qutb and others envisioned and encouraged a much more powerful role for the state than Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did. Few Western academics have been able to appreciate the similarities yet see the clear differences between the Shaykh and others on these points. Most probably this is due to a lack of access to the Shaykh’s complete works, or at least a lack of dependence on them for their analyses. The few Western academics who have actually done so readily agree with my analysis in this chapter. Mouline says, “the state was not for him an objective in itself but rather a means to realizing the three O’s” (orthodoxy, orthopraxy, political order). See Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 61. DeLong-Bas concurs, “the purpose of the state was to protect Muslims and implement Islamic law.” See DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 261.

religion and state. In the eighteenth century, the Ottoman Empire was still at its zenith, and its Sunnī caliphs were seen as the *de facto* leaders of the Islamic world. Beginning with Ahmed III who reigned in the year of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s birth and ending with Selim III who was in power at the time of the Shaykh’s death, there were no less than six caliphs in Istanbul who wielded a level of power that the Muslim world had arguably never seen before or since. It is thus a most unusual fact of history that during the very time when Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Ibn Sa‘ūd were constructing the first Saudi state, just beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire, the Shaykh had not one word to say about the caliphs in Istanbul. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb categorically did not call for the overthrow of the Ottoman caliphs, nor did he seek to establish a rival caliphate (*khilāfa*) in Najd. Rather, he seemed to ignore the issue altogether. His writings are conspicuously silent on the matter, suggesting that while he sought a return to the world of the first and second Islamic centuries in nearly every way possible, he did *not* carry this logic forward in the case of the caliphate. The argument from silence is often difficult to make, but not in this case. The Shaykh of Najd urged Muslims to obey their rulers - unless they instructed them to violate the principles of Islam - and seemed utterly unconcerned whether these rulers were known as caliphs (*khulafā’*), shaykhs (*shuyūkh*), *imāms* (*a’imma*), princes (*umarā’*), or kings (*mulūk*), as he used all of these terms at various points in his writing to refer to the leader of a Muslim community. All of this suggests that he either saw the Ottoman caliphs as the legitimate rulers of the worldwide *umma* or, more likely, that he saw the Saudi state of Najd as the center of the world and simply did not have the capacity to consider the larger world of the eighteenth century.

Whichever may be the case, it is nevertheless noteworthy that even within his own world, which he and Ibn Sa‘ūd had created a few short decades before, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not seek to rival the Ottoman Empire, and seemed unconcerned with adopting the title of caliph

either for himself as the religious leader or for his political counterpart.³¹⁸ Instead, the Shaykh's writings and sermons indicate that he saw Ibn Sa'ūd as the legitimate ruler of Najd, and himself as the head shaykh or *imām*. It was for Ibn Sa'ūd to protect and provide for the community, and for him to guide and judge. Although he made use of the term *khalīfa* in many instances, he always did so in a general way, and never once referred to any particular living person as *the* caliph, not even himself. Drawing on his wider body of thought, it may be that he felt that this distinction should be reserved only for the first four Rightly Guided Caliphs. Subsequent rulers, no matter what title they took, could never attain to their level of authority, and thus if they were known as caliph it was only in a localized sense. Because the state was secondary to religion, the former's only *raison d'être* being to serve the latter's needs, it mattered little to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb what form it took in any given locale. Whether imamate, caliphate, shaykhdom or kingdom, the important thing was that it existed to serve religion and implement religious law. Muslims living under such a structure are obligated to submit, provided that the authorities do not require them to disobey God. In a letter explaining his doctrines to the people of al-Qasīm, he stated concerning this issue:

I see that it is necessary for Muslims to listen to and obey the *imāms*, whether they are righteous or licentious, as long as they do not command them to disobey God. As for he who is crowned *khalīfa* - whether by people gathering around him and being pleased with him, or if he has become *khalīfa* by defeating them with the sword - obedience [to him] is mandatory; and it is forbidden to revolt or break away from him.³¹⁹

³¹⁸ Mouline concurs, "Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb thus in no way aspired to establish a universal caliphate or compete with the Ottoman Empire." See Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 66.

³¹⁹ WMIAW 6:11, *al-Risā'il al-Shakhṣiyya*. Notice that the Shaykh uses the terms *imām* and *khalīfa* interchangeably when referring to the leader of the community.

It is truly unjustifiable to suggest that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb desired to form a universal caliphate or subvert the Ottoman Empire.³²⁰ Thus the Shaykh’s political thought called for a state whose powers were not unlimited, but rather very specific in their support for Islam and Islamic Law. Nor did his thought envision a rekindling of the early caliphates of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. His only concern was that the state and its head, by whatever name they chose to be known in a given locale, fulfilled their duty to serve the interests of true religion. And nowhere was this duty more fully displayed than in the protection of the community through the enterprise of *jihād*.

“Holy War” or Jihād?

Any discussion about *jihād* should first be framed within the wider context of the term in the Arabic language and the religion of Islam. This is especially true when examining the works of a revered figure such as Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, whose thoughts on the issue are potentially provocative. Accordingly, when divorced from the realm of religion altogether, the word “*jihād*” is best understood as “striving, straining or struggling.” In order to better grasp the word’s meaning when connected to Islam, we may add to this basic definition the phrase “in the path or cause of God.” Therefore, in its broadest sense, we might best describe *jihād* in the religion of Islam as “striving, straining or struggling in the path or cause of God.” In the first few Islamic centuries, the term was widely understood to refer to

³²⁰ Again, those who argue that the Shaykh sought to revive the caliphate as in the early days of Islam, or that he sought to usurp Ottoman authority have quite obviously not read the sources, which leave no doubt as to the falsity of such claims. Cf. John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 127, who remarks, “beginning in the mid to late eighteenth century... The various campaigns inspired by the teachings of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers directly challenged the claim of the Ottoman rulers... the Ottoman state should thus be regarded as fostering ‘unbelief’ (*kufir*). In the absence of a just polity, the Wahhabiyya claimed the right of a rightly guided vanguard to engage in armed struggle against these manifestations of unbelief in order to establish an Islamic state.” While this was true of later Muwahhidūn, it was most certainly *not* true of the Shaykh himself, who had no control of how his successors interpreted his teachings. By failing to make this distinction, Kelsay and others perpetuate an incorrect view of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb based on “guilt by association.”

the defense and expansion of the Islamic state through military means. Bernard Lewis has accurately observed that “the overwhelming majority of classical theologians, jurists, and traditionists... understood the obligation of *jihād* in a military sense, and have examined it and expounded it accordingly.”³²¹ However in the fifth Islamic century, the scholar al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (1002-1071) is credited with infusing the concept with deeper meaning by citing a Ḥadīth wherein the Prophet and one of his Companions were heard to have remarked, upon returning from battle, that they had returned from the lesser *jihād* (the struggle against actual enemies in war) to face the greater *jihād* (the internal struggle against one’s fleshly desires).³²² Even though this Ḥadīth is considered to have a weak *isnād*, it nevertheless gained much traction within Islam, particularly among Ṣūfīs. And so there arose a distinction between two types of *jihād* that persists until the present. Interestingly, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s favorite muses from the late medieval period, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, both supported the idea of an internal *jihād al-naḥs* whereby the believer must first fight to subdue his own evil desires which run counter to God, before he can engage in any outward warfare in the cause of God.³²³ We can thus be reasonably sure that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was well acquainted with the difference between the greater (*al-ākbar*) and lesser (*al-āṣghar*) *jihād* by virtue of his admiration for his two Ḥanbalī forebears. Moreover, there exists an unpublished manuscript, copied in 1782, entitled “Summary of the Prophetic Guidance” which is attributed to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and lists three types of *jihād*. The first is *jihād*

³²¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 72.

³²² These two types of *jihād* have been referred to as *jihād al-qitāl* (actual fighting with enemies) and *jihād al-naḥs* (the internal struggle against the self). The former refers to the lesser *jihād* and the latter denotes the greater *jihād*, with the implication that the struggle against outward enemies is far easier than that against the self.

³²³ Ibn al-Qayyim quoted Ibn Taymiyya as saying, “*Jihād* against the self and its desires is the root of *jihād* against unbelievers and hypocrites, for one cannot wage *jihād* against them unless he has waged *jihād* against his own self and desires before he goes out against them.” See Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawḍa al-Muḥibīn wa Nuzha al-Mushtāqīn* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfīqiyya, n.d.), 478. Explicit references by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to *jihād* of the self, heart, and tongue can be found in WMIAW, *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 5:158,184,197.

against oneself (learning the Sunna and applying it personally); the second is *jihād* against the devil (resisting temptation and doubt); and the third is *jihād* against infidels and hypocrites (pursued with one's heart, tongue, wealth and blood, *respectively*).³²⁴

The aforementioned notwithstanding, the balance of his thought demonstrates that the literalist Shaykh from Najd saw the primary meaning of the word in the same way that Islam's classical thinkers did - in a military sense. In fact, in keeping with the tradition of many classical jurists, he wrote the brief treatise *Kitāb al-Jihād* as a part of his wider work on Islamic jurisprudence. Fighting in the cause of God was, for the Najdī reformer, an obligation (*farḍ*) for every able-bodied Muslim. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb often used the term *ghazwa* (raid, foray) interchangeably with *jihād*, suggesting that he saw *jihād* as a practical means of filling the state's coffers from time to time and as something less than the dramatic "holy war" which is typically associated with that term. As both an individual and a public obligation, *jihād* "should be waged at least once per year, unless it is required to postpone it, in which case a truce is permitted. And if there is a need for it more than once [per year], then it should be undertaken."³²⁵ Encouraging Muslims to regularly wage *jihād* in the form of a traditional bedouin *ghazwa* was probably Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's way of helping his followers to participate in *jihād* in a method that was culturally familiar to them, helping them to remain battle-ready in the absence of more regular larger campaigns, and ensuring that they remained as close as possible to the example of the Prophet.³²⁶

³²⁴ See al-'Uthaymīn, *Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb*, 101. The author notes that he possesses a manuscript of *Mukhtaṣar al-Hudā al-Nabawī*, copied by a certain Muḥammad Ibn Sayf Ibn Khamīs, dated 1782 and consisting of 48 fos. He also states that there is one other copy which he knows of, preserved in the Saudi Library in Riyadh under MS 48/86.

³²⁵ WMIAW 2:359, *Kitāb al-Jihād*.

³²⁶ The Prophet regularly engaged in *ghazū* (pl.) as a means of obtaining necessary finances for the Muslims *and* as an agent of God's wrath against those who refused his call to Islam.

If raiding was encouraged in order to help a people maintain the obligatory practice of *jihād* even when the threat of an outside attack was not imminent, what were they to do when one was? Lest one think that waging *jihād* was a blind process, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb provided very clear conditions (*sharūf*) for the undertaking thereof. Firstly, if one happens to be present when and where a military confrontation takes place, he is not allowed to flee - he must fight. Secondly, if a country is attacked by an enemy nation, it is the duty of local residents to defend their land. Thirdly, individuals of a given nation should rise up to fight when they are rallied by the *imām*, as “this is the best thing one can volunteer for.”³²⁷ Notice that the first two conditions situate *jihād* in a defensive posture, while the third is also likely to be defensive in nature, as the *imām* should theoretically only rally his men if one of the first two conditions are met. We may conclude then, based on the clear teaching of *Kitāb al-Jihād*, that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw large-scale *jihād* as primarily a defensive undertaking. The only exceptions to this would be his encouragement to practice smaller-scale *jihād* in the form of bedouin raids, or the tactic of waging a particular offensive battle *as one part* of a larger war between nations where Muslims were defending their lands. Admittedly, there is room for interpretation here, as one might feasibly argue that *any* particular offensive serves the larger purposes of defending a nation. It seems then, that this is precisely why the Shaykh made the conditions of *jihād* so unambiguous in his manual on the subject.

Turning from the “when” of *jihād*, we will now consider the question of just who should participate in it. Once again, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb provided clear conditions as to who was obligated to fight in the cause of God. The *fard* of *jihād* was to be undertaken by one who is a Muslim. He should be a male who is mature, of sound mind, and a freeman. He should also

³²⁷ WMIAW 2:360, *Kitāb al-Jihād*.

be free from any bodily disability, and able to afford it.³²⁸ However, *jihād* was not to be restricted only to Muslims. “The seeking of aid from a trustworthy *mushrik* in *jihād* is allowed when needed, as the al-Khazā‘ī tribe of al-‘Uyayna were infidels [and fought alongside Muslims].”³²⁹ To further support the notion that non-Muslims were welcome to fight alongside Muslims in the battle against a common enemy, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb turned to Ibn Ḥanbal, who said, “It does not appeal to me for one to go out [to battle] with the *imām* if he is known by defeat or by leading Muslims astray. However, [a Muslim] may fight alongside him who has compassion on and is protective of the Muslims - even if he is known as a drinker of wine or practices usury - his lifestyle is his own business.”³³⁰ Thus, according to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, while it was obligatory for all Muslims who met the seven conditions listed above to fight in *jihād*, it was also possible for non-Muslims to join them of their own volition. Finally, the leader of *jihād*, with no exceptions, should always be the *imām*. As the spiritual head of a people, the senior *imām* is responsible for all aspects of *jihād*, both practical and tactical.

Martyrdom is another issue that is closely tied to that of *jihād*, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb has often been falsely characterized as a thinker who actively encouraged Muslims to seek death in the cause of God. To the contrary, while he concurred that true martyrs are destined for entrance into paradise, he made a sharp distinction between actual martyrdom on the battlefield and suicide.³³¹ There is a certain “glorification of martyrdom” in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn al-Qayyim and Sayyid Qutb that is “completely absent from Ibn ‘Abd al-

³²⁸ Regarding the last of these seven conditions, it was assumed that participating in *jihād* might cause one to be away from his livelihood for an extended period of time. He should therefore have sufficient funds stored up to account for this, particularly if he has a family to support.

³²⁹ WMIAW 5:252, *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād*.

³³⁰ WMIAW 2:360, *Kitāb al-Jihād*.

³³¹ The battlefield for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was very clearly delineated as the literal space of engagement between two armed forces. Nowhere does he advocate the targeting of non-combatants.

Wahhāb,” says DeLong-Bas.³³² The Shaykh “opposed all forms of suicidal martyrdom and condemned it as forbidden rather than a commendable act,” observes Samira Haj.³³³ Her analysis is particularly helpful here because it is in accord with the reading of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb that this thesis espouses. Namely, Haj notes that the Shaykh cited several Aḥādīth that legislate against suicide because it shortens one’s life, thus lessening his chances to accrue good works. She also notes that the Shaykh said that those who intentionally seek death should not expect paradise but hell.³³⁴ Indeed, the current research confirms the findings of DeLong-Bas and Haj on this pivotal point, that the deliberate sacrificing of one’s own life - even if it is supposedly done in the cause of God - is never championed in the works of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. While those who are killed in battle defending their land against a military foe are divinely rewarded as true martyrs according to the Shaykh, it is simply unfounded to claim that he encouraged suicide or the attacking of non-combatants as legitimate aspects of *jihād*, as a careful reading of his *Mu’allaḥāt* does not turn up such evidence. Again, DeLong-Bas concurs, “At no point in any of his writings does he promote the concept of martyrdom or encourage the Muslim to seek it.”³³⁵

There are numerous other topics that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb addressed in his manual on *jihād*. From the prohibition against killing women and children, to the prohibition against

³³² DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 275.

³³³ Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition*, 32.

³³⁴ Ibid., 32-33. Haj is here relying on the first printing of the *Mu’allaḥāt* of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1976), which contains a work entitled *Āḥkām Tamannī al-Mawt* (*Ordinances on Suicide*) in volume 2 of his *Fiqh*. However, in subsequent printings of the complete works of the Shaykh, the piece has been removed and replaced with a rather detailed document stating that the work was wrongly attributed to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. See Ṣāleḥ Bin Fawzān Bin ‘Abd-Allāh al-Fawzān, *Ibtāl Nisba Kitāb ‘Āḥkām Tamannī al-Mawt’ Ilā Shaykh al-Islām Muḥammad Bin ‘Abd al-Wahhāb* (*Revocation of the Attribution of the Book ‘Ordinances on Suicide’ to the Shaykh of Islam Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb*) in *WMIAW* 3:33ff. The editors of the second edition argue that there is insufficient evidence to attribute this work to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, hence they have excised it from the *Mu’allaḥāt*. It should be noted, however, that even without this treatise, it is virtually impossible to make the case that the Shaykh supported the intentional taking of one’s life for any reason, as he never said so in his works.

³³⁵ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 59.

marrying in foreign lands during battle (unless one is afraid that lust will overpower him, in which case he is to marry a Muslim woman and leave the battlefield), the Najdī Shaykh attempted to cover all possible details of the subject, down to the smallest minutiae. “It is not permissible to separate a mother from her child,” he said.³³⁶ However, if a child is orphaned in the course of war, “he is to be raised as a Muslim, but if his parents are alive, he can stay in his parents’ religion.”³³⁷ Yet none of these are as interesting and relevant to our current discussion as the following rather cryptic statements. “Fight the People of the Book and the Magi until they become Muslim or pay the *jizya*,” said he.³³⁸ He also said that “fighting the People of the Book is better.”³³⁹ “Better than what?” the modern reader may rightly wonder. Or perhaps the bigger question is “why?” Why is it better to fight against Jews and Christians than pagans or Shi‘a? This seems to run counter to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s thinking elsewhere.³⁴⁰ However, our answers to both of these statements which seem somewhat out of place are actually not complicated. The first statement is drawn from the Shaykh’s understanding of a verse in the Qur’ān (9:29),³⁴¹ which he apparently read as a condemnation against the People of the Book.³⁴² The second statement is probably best understood in the

³³⁶ WMIAW 2:363, *Kitāb al-Jihād*.

³³⁷ Ibid., 368.

³³⁸ Ibid., 372.

³³⁹ Ibid., 360.

³⁴⁰ Cf. 4.5 and 4.6 below

³⁴¹ قَاتِلُوا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَا بِالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَا يُحَرِّمُونَ مَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَلَا يَدِينُونَ دِينَ الْحَقِّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَتَّىٰ يُعْطُوا الْجِزْيَةَ عَن يَدٍ وَهُمْ صَاغِرُونَ. (التوبة ٢٩)

³⁴² Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb appears to read Q 9:29 against the People of the Book, which is a common reading of the verse based on the wider context of a chapter that is rather harsh toward Jews and Christians. In this regard, he follows directly the thought of Ibn al-Qayyim (see WMIAW 5:223, *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād*). Support for this view comes not only from the context of the chapter, but also from the fact that the *Ahl al-Kitāb* are the ones who are supposed to pay the poll tax, thus it follows that the verse must be referring to them. I would argue, however, that based solely on the wording of the verse in question, it could alternatively be read against unbelievers *in general* and that “those who have been given the Book” refers to Muslims who try to convince others of the truth of Islam. Furthermore, since the People of the Book *do* believe in God and the Last Day, this would also seem to preclude them from being the object of the verse’s wrath. The verse appears in the above footnote in the original Arabic. My translation is as follows:
 “Fight those who do not believe in Allāh nor the Last Day and who do not forbid what Allāh and his Messenger have forbidden, and do not accept the religion of truth from those who have been given the Book [Qur’ān] - [fight them] until they pay the *jizya* willingly and are submissive.” (al-Tawba 9:29)

context of just who Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had in mind in this sentence. Clearly he had belligerent Byzantine-types in mind, for he says as much later in the paragraph. “Fighting the People of the Book is better” because Ibn al-Mubārak informed the Muslims when he was returning from a battle against the Byzantines that “they fight us based on [because of] religion.”³⁴³ Ibn al-Mubārak’s use of the term “Rūm” (Rome) is a classical Islamic expression for the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire which existed at the time of the Prophet. “Rūm” was, virtually without exception in the sources, a reference to the Byzantines, who at the time of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, had ceased to exist for several centuries! That the Shaykh did not seem to mind this fact when he wrote his manual on *jihād* is yet more evidence that he was a man who seemed to be at ease living in two worlds separated by a thousand years. The ambiguity of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s thought here is somewhat confusing to the modern reader, who may justly be forgiven for misunderstanding the connection between the Byzantines of history and the Christians and Jews of the present. As he does elsewhere, the Shaykh leaves it to his reader to make the connection between the two. Clearly the Christians of the eighteenth century differed from the Byzantines of the seventh century in many ways. Yet insofar as there was any similarity, especially in terms of belligerence based on religious differences, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was ready to connect the two. It seems then, that the Shaykh’s intention in singling out the People of the Book for *jihād* was based on his reading of a hapaxic Qur’ānic passage as well as a rather dubious correlation between an ancient state that was an enemy of the early Muslim state and any modern states who were likewise pugnacious toward Islam.

³⁴³ WMIAW 2:360, *Kitāb al-Jihād*.

For Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, *jihād* was the “epitome of Islam” because the man who practiced it in all of its forms better than anyone else “based his life upon *jihād*.”³⁴⁴ The Messenger of God “succeeded in all types of *jihād*: heart and soul, call and proclamation, sword and spear.”³⁴⁵ This is why God exalted him higher than anyone else. And this is why those who follow Muḥammad’s practice of *jihād* will themselves be exalted both on earth and in heaven. This imitation of the Prophet, though, was not to be some sort of impulsive free-for-all. It was in his day, and should be in each successive generation, according to his eighteenth-century namesake, primarily a defensive undertaking. Any requisite offensive maneuvers were merely for the overall defense of a Muslim state. Much is made of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s practice of *jihād*, but what is not widely known is that, according to the biographer Ibn Ghannām, his first military encounter was actually a defensive one. Antagonized by the success of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s preaching, Ibn Dawwās, *emīr* of Riyadh, stirred a campaign against the Shaykh’s followers in 1747 in an attempt to wrest control of Najd from the hands of the upstart preacher and his political allies. Not only did this campaign fail to detract from the Shaykh’s followers, paradoxically it seems to have hardened their resolve and caused them to realize their need for a more organized structure to defend the fledgling Saudi state. Over the course of the next three decades, Ibn Dawwās’ supporters would clash with those of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in a seemingly endless series of bedouin style raids which left approximately four thousand warriors dead in total.³⁴⁶ Many of the battles in this ongoing “*jihād*” between Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Muwaḥḥidūn and Ibn Dawwās’ *mushrikūn* (for so they were characterized by the Muwaḥḥid chroniclers) resulted in

³⁴⁴ WMIAW 5:158, *Mukhtaṣar Zād al-Ma‘ād*.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

³⁴⁶ Ibn Dawwās was not the only foe of the First Saudi State, as there were others such as ‘Uray’er, *emīr* of al-Aḥsā’ who regularly engaged in skirmishes with them for control of the settlements of Najd.

the deaths of merely a handful of men at a time. Recounting one such skirmish in Riyadh, “A great battle was fought,” said Ibn Bishr, “in which four of the children of error were killed and only one of the Muslims.”³⁴⁷ An incident in which five men were killed would hardly qualify as a “great battle” by anyone’s estimation, although it is easy to see how the scope of a battle can be misconstrued when the actual scale of the conflict is neglected.

In retrospect, perhaps historians would do better to characterize this phenomenon as a series of small skirmishes in a decades long struggle for control of Najd between rivals instead of referring to it as a *jihād* which carries the connotations of a large scale “holy war.” Alternatively, since Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb surely would have wanted the term to be retained, it may serve us better to simply redefine what exactly *jihād* meant in the immediate eighteenth-century context of Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. Although it was certainly military in nature, it did not approach the kind of bloody picture that the mind conjures up when the word is typically used. The actual practice of *jihād* in the life and times of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb then, was much smaller in scale, much less violent, and much less aggressive than is commonly understood. This would also explain Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s usage of the term *ghazwa* interchangeably with *jihād*, as the military confrontations that he envisioned and experienced were much closer to a traditional bedouin raid than an all-out “holy war.” If there is anything definitive that can be said about the Shayk’s conception of *jihād* then, it is that his views, which have tended to take a life of their own at times, were actually no different than those of classical Sunnī jurists over the centuries. If anything, his views were actually more mild than several of his juristic peers such as Ibn Taymiyya.³⁴⁸ As Nabile Mouline has

³⁴⁷ Cited in Ameen Rihani, *Ibn Sa’oud of Arabia* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 2002), Kindle edition, loc. 4061. Further substantiating the small scale of *jihād* in eighteenth-century Najd, Rihani notes that the average number of annual casualties was only about 133 men.

³⁴⁸ Even Ibn Taymiyya’s views on *jihād* need to be read in context. He lived at a time when Islamic civilization was facing an existential threat from the Mongols, and his writings reflect this fact.

astutely observed, “There is thus nothing extraordinary about Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s understanding of *jihād*: in his case, one finds neither an outrageously aggressive attitude nor a plan for expansion or desire to subjugate others by force... he had no messianic conception of ‘holy war.’ On the contrary... the better part of his writing on the subject concerns defensive *jihād*.”³⁴⁹

This evidence directly from the pen of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb should silence some of his critics and rebuke some of his followers who have both, at times, misread him on the issue of *jihād*. He did not support unrestrained, offensive *jihād* nor intentional martyrdom. Rather, he believed in waging defensive campaigns whose effectiveness could be sharpened through the regular practice of smaller, calculated raids for booty. Indeed, “Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb *never* called for the wholesale killing of people, not even apostates.”³⁵⁰ Accordingly, disparaging portrayals of the Shaykh as a man of blood are quite unfounded. In light of all that we have seen here, we might therefore say that for Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, “true *jihād*” was an integral component of “true Islam.” And any alteration of the former most surely distorts the latter.

In order to put the finishing touches on our brief survey of *jihād* in the thought of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, it must be mentioned that the Shaykh saw *jihād* as the flip side of the coin of *da‘wa*. For just as one is a *fard*, so is the other. In fact, *jihād* was really only supposed to come into play when *da‘wa* was refused. *Da‘wa* literally means “call” as in “calling to Islam.” The basis for its practice is in the example of the Prophet himself, who issued a series of summons to join the religion of Islam to the leaders of his day. It was hoped that these summons, which went far and wide, would lead to all people peacefully embracing

³⁴⁹ Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*, 66.

³⁵⁰ DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 82 (emphasis hers).

Muḥammad’s message (i.e. the religion of Islam). However, when the overture was rejected, Muḥammad was led to take a more aggressive approach. The reasoning was that if people did not realize that Islam was good for them, then it was the Prophet’s job to make sure they realized it - for their own good and for the glory of God. When the peaceful call to Islam was refused, the door of forceful subjugation was opened, as it were. In this way, a legitimate variance arises between the view that *jihād* should always be defensive and the fact that it was often not so. This tension is also reflected in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, who advocated a peaceful summons to the Muwahḥid doctrine as the best means of advancing his cause. However, when this summons was declined, he saw *jihād* as the natural next step in the process of engagement. As we have seen above however, the first military engagements that the Muwahḥidūn participated in were in fact defensive, as they were attacked by those who refused to adhere to the Shaykh’s teachings. The resulting battles which occupied the better part of three decades, until very near the end of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s life, were more of a back and forth affair than a one-sided attack. However, because of the fact that the Shaykh saw *jihād* as the natural result of the refusal of *da‘wa*, we can safely assume that he was perfectly content with it.

Men, women, and marriage

Another aspect of “true Islam” that was no less integral than *jihād* was that of marriage. When properly lived, marriage was both an institution for procreation and for the fulfillment of natural human desires. Marriage was an agreement, a contract between two parties designed for mutual benefit.³⁵¹ For those who questioned its validity, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb pointed out that the Prophet was in favor of marriage, “I marry women,” he said, and “anyone

³⁵¹ WMIAW 2:657-658, *Kitāb al-Nikāḥ*.

who does not follow my example [in doing likewise] is not one of my followers.”³⁵² Although there are passages in his works that promote the view of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as misogynistic, namely that “women are the among the biggest sources of sedition (or strife),” there are others that cause the astute reader to pause and reconsider, such as the very next line in his *tafsīr* of *sūrat al-Baqara* (v. 102) where he condemns the evil of prostitution and commends married sexuality as that which is truly good in God’s eyes.³⁵³ As far as his teachings on men and women are concerned, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not so much a misogynist as he was a reformer who lived within the confines of his own time and place. It could be said that his reformist views on these issues were actually much closer the Prophet’s intent in brining rights to women who had heretofore possessed few or none in Arabian society. While his views certainly fall short of modern notions of equal rights, such a comparison is unfair because it demands an impossible transposition of context.

Believing it to be the best example for all of life, the Shaykh was extremely concerned that the Sunna be followed in all matters concerning marriage and divorce. For example, he sharply criticized the Shī‘a practice of triple *ṭalāq* (divorce) as un-Islamic because of the teaching that when a man utters three successive divorce pronouncements at one time, he is able to remarry the woman without the required intermediate marriage because the three are

³⁵² Ibid., 637.

³⁵³ WMIAW 5:22, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*. Some have read the Shaykh’s handling of the stoning of the adulteress, referenced in section 1.8 of this thesis, as a last resort after having given the woman time and opportunity to deny the charge. See for example Aḥmed bin Ḥajr Āl Abū Ṭāhī, *al-Shaykh Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb: ‘Aqīdatuhu al-Salafiyya wa Da’wātu al-Islāhiyya wa Thanā’ al-‘Ulamā’ ‘Alayhi*, 31; and DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 27-28. Shaykh Abū Ṭāhī notes that the woman’s adultery was a repeated offense, and that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb made sure of her soundness of mind and emotions before rendering his fateful verdict. Such readings, however, probably fall somewhere between sanguine and utopian.

counted as only one.³⁵⁴ He abhorred the practice of “temporary marriage” (*mut‘a*), whereby a couple signs a marriage contract that is binding for only a short period so that they can legally have sex and then separate.³⁵⁵ He saw this as nothing more than legalized prostitution and forbade it among his followers. In his legal treatise on marriage, *Kitāb al-Nikāh*, he took issue with the practice of Muslim men using foreign women captured in battle as sex slaves. While he admits that there is some genuine debate as to whether such an act is permissible, ultimately he judged that a man should formally marry the woman, thus giving her the rights of a wife instead of a concubine, or else leave her alone. He forbade Muslim men from even *looking* lustfully at women captured in battle unless they were willing to commit to marrying them.³⁵⁶ “God, exalted is he, has made a clear distinction between wives and ‘those whom your right hands possess’ (concubines of war),” said the Shaykh in an attempt to draw attention to an issue that he felt was not properly understood.³⁵⁷ Also pertinent to our study is the fact that he cited Ibn Taymiyya’s ruling that “sex with female captives is only permitted with women who are *not* from the People of the Book.”³⁵⁸ Even though Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb felt that sex with female captives should not be permitted at all, his citing of Ibn Taymiyya here may indicate a desire to stress that even those who disagreed on the finer legal points of the issue could still agree that the *Ahl al-Kitāb* should be held in high regard.

³⁵⁴ WMIAW 12:41-42, *Risāla fī al-Rudd*. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb objected to this because he saw it as an attempt to find a loophole in a clear Qur’ānic injunction (2:230) and widely accepted aspect of the Sunna whereby a man who pronounces divorce of his wife three times must first allow another man marry her, sleep with her, then divorce her, before she becomes available for him to remarry. While such a practice seems shocking to modern sensibilities, the Shaykh saw it as one of the ways Muḥammad attempted to prevent divorce on trivial grounds, as such a statute would surely cause a man to think twice before uttering a threefold (final) divorce decree. According to his logic, this was one way to protect women.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁵⁶ WMIAW 2:658, *Kitāb al-Nikāh*.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 660.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was also concerned with protecting a woman’s honor and reputation, and forbade men from making false accusations against them.³⁵⁹ And he was not shy about declaring the rights of women in two spheres where they historically had none - the bedroom and the courtroom. As for the former, a man “must sleep with his wife at least once every four months” in order to satisfy her desires. If he fails to do this, she is “not obliged to cook or knead dough” for him.³⁶⁰ Perhaps even more startlingly, he declared, “If a woman has hated her husband and thought that by obeying him, she has not been led to the truth of God, she is permitted to initiate a divorce.”³⁶¹ Here we see how the Shaykh regarded the Sharī‘a as a means of safeguarding women as opposed to oppressing them. If a man has sexual desires for which God has proscribed a lawful means of fulfillment (marriage), then why should a woman not share in such a refuge? And if men have the right to divorce their wives for seemingly trivial reasons (cf. his view on trivial divorce above), then why should a woman not have the right to divorce her husband over the serious matter of a lack of spiritual leadership or zeal?

Because marriage was a legal issue, the Shaykh had much to say about every aspect of it in his *fiqh*. From the timing of intercourse and menstrual cycles, to the importance of dowries and the paying of alimony and child support, his voluminous thoughts are more than we can consider in the scope of the current research. Nevertheless, what we can gather from this brief survey of his thoughts on men, women, and marriage is that he was not the chauvinist that some have accused him of being. Instead, he was a man who was genuinely

³⁵⁹ This is evidenced in his lengthy defense of ‘Ā’isha against what he perceived as slander for an incident where she, due to a lost necklace, was found to be in the company of a man besides her husband, Muḥammad, thus exposing her to shame. See WMIAW 12:22-26, *Risāla fī al-Rudd*.

³⁶⁰ WMIAW 2:682, *Kitāb al-Sadāq*.

³⁶¹ WMIAW 2:683, *Kitāb al-Khal‘a*. *Khal‘a* is a form of divorce in Islam which is initiated by the woman. Although it is accepted as a valid form of divorce by the four *madhāhib*, it has historically been shunned and poorly applied.

concerned with the well being of society, both its public *and* private aspects, reaching even to the most intimate details of the human experience. For all of life was to be lived under the banner of God and his religion, and in this was no shame.

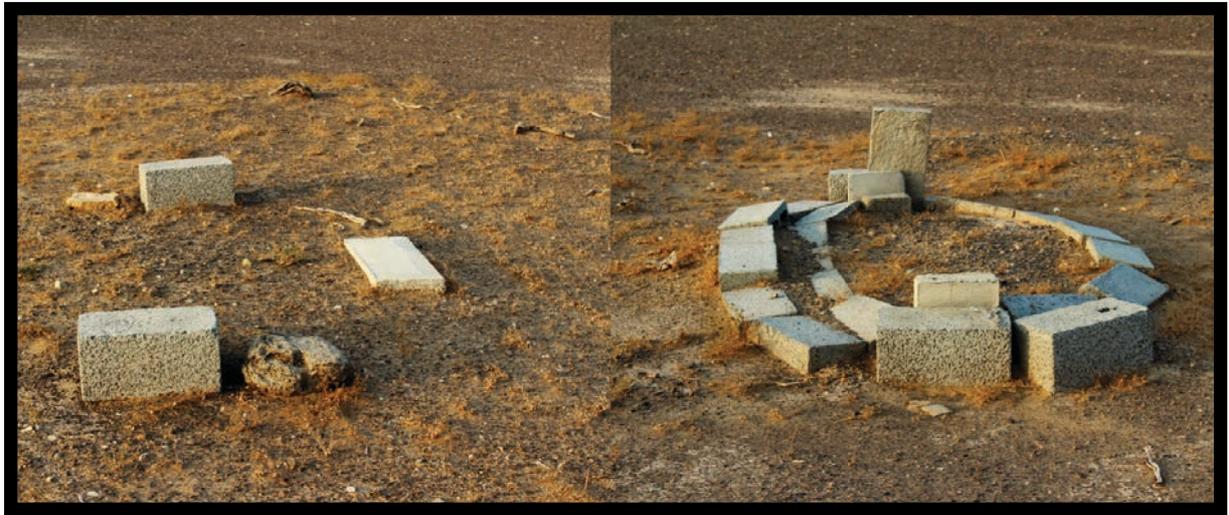


Figure 5: Two Muwahhid missionaries sent to Eastern Arabia during the lifetime of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb now lie buried in the wilderness of Malāqat in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, UAE. Courtesy of the author.

3.6 Reformer and Revivalist

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was neither a madman, a voice of contradiction, nor merely a product of his times. He was sane, consistent, and genuine about the convictions which he held to be in the best interests of all. “Do not think that my words are a rebuke or spoken against you” he once wrote to his “brother bin ‘Abād... for they are my sincere advice.”³⁶² His rejection of the *taqlīd* tradition that was so prevalent in eighteenth-century Arabia was built upon the stance that the primary sources of Islam constituted the only necessary means for Muslims to make sound judgements because they and they alone were divinely ordained.³⁶³ Situated firmly within the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* tradition, he was certainly a *faqīh* and an *‘ālim*. But above all else, he was a *muṣliḥ* and *mujaddid*.³⁶⁴ He was absolutely committed to the mission he sincerely believed God had given him in his generation. Throughout history, Islamic society needed revival or renewal (*tajdīd*) from time to time, and he felt that his era was one such time. This belief was further confirmed by the Prophetic tradition, which held that Muslims should look for a reformer to appear at the head of every century to lead them back to the straight path of Muḥammad’s Sunna. This was a mantle that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was all too ready to carry.

As we have already noted in chapter one, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not the only revivalist show in town, so to speak, during the eighteenth century in the Islamic world.³⁶⁵ From India in the east all the way to Morocco in the west, men like Shah Walī Allāh and Muḥammad bin ‘Abd-Allāh al-Khaṭīb (1710-1790) were respectively busy calling for reform among the

³⁶² WMIAW 6:20, *al-Risā‘il al-Shakṣiyya*.

³⁶³ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s rejection of *taqlīd* in favor of *ijtihād* did not mean that he thought all Muslims should practice independent reasoning. For only well trained scholars such as himself should presume to practice *ijtihād*. Otherwise *bid‘a* could easily result and negate the whole effort.

³⁶⁴ A *faqīh* is an Islamic jurist, an *‘ālim* is a scholar, a *muṣliḥ* is a reformer, and a *mujaddid* is a revivalist.

³⁶⁵ See for example, Ahmad Dallal, “Origins and Objectives of Islamic Revivalist Thought, 1750-1850,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, 3 (1993): 341-359; and Levzion and Voll, eds., *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*.

umma during the same period in history.³⁶⁶ But it was Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s movement that was the most enduring because of two main factors that would seem rise above the rest - its simplicity of doctrine and its vital tie to the al-Sa‘ūd family. While some such as Shah Walī Allāh tended to take a more philosophical approach to the intellectual side of reform, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb could never be accused of this. His single-minded focus on Tawḥīd as the core principle of his movement, which eschewed anything that might be deemed as religious innovation (including speculative philosophical endeavors) was probably the greatest factor in making the Muwahḥhid *da‘wa* as easily maintained and replicated as it was. Simple messages are easier to propagate. In addition, the indelible pact of 1744 between the Āl al-Shaykh and the house of al-Sa‘ūd proved to be the structural basis that gave both legitimacy and longevity to the Muwahḥhid cause. It is unlikely that anyone, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb included, could have foreseen the geographic expansion of his *da‘wa* that took place in his later years and in the immediate aftermath of his death. Yet the combination of the simplicity of his call and the savvy of his well chosen allies formed what may be called a “perfect storm” of religio-political hegemony that has persisted for nearly three centuries.

Muwahḥhidism has endured not because it was a good idea or an expedient one. It has endured because its founder and his followers truly *believed* in its creed. Because they were willing to seal this belief with their own blood, the Muwahḥhidūn were able to achieve a feat that their sources have likened to the era of the early Islamic conquests in terms of its unexpected, rapid expansion. However, we cannot overemphasize the fact that whatever military success the Saudi state enjoyed was at best an indirect result of the Shaykh’s *da‘wa*.

³⁶⁶ Shah Walī Allāh was born in the same year as Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and studied from some of the same teachers in the two holy cities. His message however, would come to find an audience closer to his home in the Indian subcontinent instead of Arabia. Muḥammad bin ‘Abd-Allāh al-Khaṭīb was the Sultan of Morocco, and instituted numerous political, cultural and religious reforms. Notably, in 1777 his government was the first nation to recognize a fledgling country named the United States of America.

Reading his sermons, for example, one finds no concern with geographic expansion or politics. His was a message of religious devotion to God in the form of unbending commitment to the core of Islam. In casting off what he considered centuries of processed religion in favor of the pure milk of God's word and the Prophet's example, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb touched a nerve that ran deep in the hearts of his followers.

As a *muṣliḥ* and *mujaddid*, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's focus on a return to the fundamental sources of Islam in the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth and their fundamental doctrine of Tawḥīd is what has rightly earned him the reputation of a fundamentalist. However, we must not mistake his unyielding focus on the fundamentals of Islam for extremism - to miss the subtle difference between the two is to mutilate his message. While he surely was a fundamentalist by this definition, it is misleading to categorize him as an extremist. For it is not extreme to return to your roots. With that said, we can do no better at this point than to listen to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's own words in the form of an excerpt from a sermon he probably gave multiple times during his life:

Praise be to God who has purified his faithful ones with a description of his glory, and irradiated the hearts of his pure ones with a view of his perfect attributes, endearing them in worshipping him and rendering to them from his grace and favor - I praise him - glory be to him. Blessed be the servant who is sincere toward God in his doings and in his sayings. I testify that there is no god except God alone, who has no partner and no counselor in what he provides nor in what he does. I testify that Muḥammad is his servant and messenger and prophet. God has had grace upon all the people of the earth in sending him on his mission - O God may prayers be upon your servant and messenger Muḥammad and upon all of his companions and kinfolk. O people, fear God most high, fear the Sustainer, and thank him for what he has given you from his abundant grace and goodness. It is incumbent upon you just as it was upon the righteous predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) and the first generation, to conduct yourselves in accordance with what has come through your Prophet, among these are the wisdom [Ḥadīth] and the book which has come down [Qur'ān].³⁶⁷

³⁶⁷ SMIAW, 7-8.

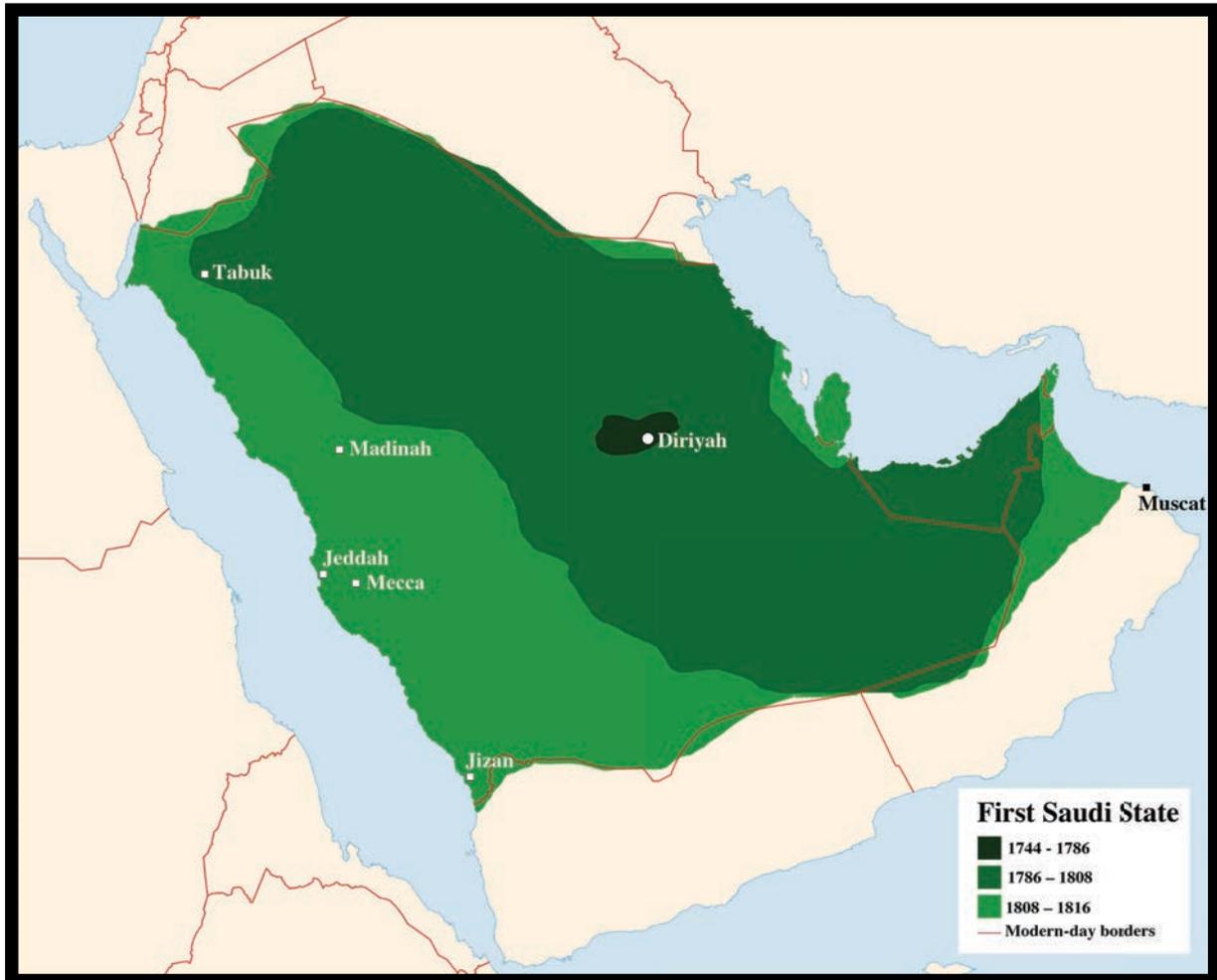


Figure 6: The growth of the First Saudi State, initially known as the Emirate of al-Dir‘iyya. Note that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb ended his public ministry in the first phase. The expansion of later years occurred while he was absent from public life (second phase) and after he had died (third phase). Courtesy of Ameen Mohammad, Creative Commons.

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

3.7 Comparing and Concluding

In terms of their thought on God’s relation to the world, there is perhaps no greater agreement between Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb than on the issue of divine determinism. Predestination or *al-Qadr* dominated the thinking of both scholars inasmuch as they simply could not conceive of a world where absolute sovereignty did not characterize God and his relation to his creation. The grounds for this conviction, in both cases, was Scripture. Although he would not have resonated with the “intra-Trinitarian council” portion of Edwards’ argument, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb certainly agreed that God is the one who predestines every detail of the universe, and presumably would have been well pleased to make use of Edwards’ arguments in *Freedom of the Will* had the need existed in his setting. While their respective contexts for divine determinism were markedly different, the outside observer is able to appreciate the way in which both men’s doctrines of God’s absolute sovereignty create yet more harmony between two thinkers from whom one might least expect it.

In comparison to the Almighty, man was next to nothing in our two scholars’ estimation. Presumably, they would have readily accepted modern scientific views of a universe where earth is merely a speck in the vast cosmos. Man’s significance, both for Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, was only to be found inasmuch as he knew and was known by God. This knowing was not a mere intellectual assent, however. Ultimately it was to lead to true worship through responding to God’s revealed will in obedience and praise. The Reverend and the Shaykh also agreed that mankind was hopelessly steeped in sin and rebellion against the divine. It is here, though, that a significant difference in their thought arises. For

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, man must do something to rectify his wrongs. For Jonathan Edwards, God is the one who rectifies man’s wrongs.

In redemption, Edwards argued that man is not left alone to navigate his way back to God through a set of religious rituals, rites, rules and regulations. However important (or numerous) those “R’s” may be, they are merely signs that serve as a reminder to humanity that God is to be their supreme concern in life. In redemption, another “R” is introduced whereby man is led back to God by God himself, trusting in God to do what is humanly impossible, namely make peace between man and God for the offense of human sin. Edwards’ logic dictated that any offense against an infinite being is accordingly “a violation of infinite obligations.”³⁶⁸ Thus it is utterly incomprehensible that humans could somehow rectify the situation by their own finite efforts. To do so would be to malign divine justice and lower God to the level of a human judge - and an unjust one at that.³⁶⁹ We cannot, as it were, ascend to him unless and until he first descends to us and rectifies our sin and shame for us. An infinite problem demands a solution which is quite literally out of this created universe - this is a job for God alone, and Edwards was keen to see that God alone should receive the glory for it. The prospect of man somehow taking credit for his own salvation because of his adherence to a religious law was an impossible pill for Edwards to swallow. For him, redemption was about God receiving all glory and man receiving none.

³⁶⁸ WJEO 45, *Sermon on Mark 9:44*.

³⁶⁹ On the issue of finite man repenting for infinite sin and receiving mercy from God without a commensurate level of payment, Edwards comments, “If God might have pardoned sin, and yet be just, yet ’tis a thing really incredible that God should let sin go, without any manner of public manifestation of his abhorrence of it... it is really incongruous.” See WJE 13:281. Elsewhere he states, “Repentance without satisfaction is to no purpose. If man should shed an ocean of tears, of blood, that is not a repentance answerable to the least of his sins; that will never take away the guilt except satisfaction is made. Or if man should labor in the fire a thousand years to make amends, it is all to no purpose. God has been dishonored and injured, and his laws have been broken. He requires something else to make amends besides the miserable service of a rebellious worm, so that man himself could do nothing at all towards reconciling God.” See WJE 10:601.

The vast majority of Muslim thinkers over the years have denied the crucifixion of Jesus,³⁷⁰ which means that in Islam, salvation does not come from the redemption that the cross provides, but from successful human effort in following divine precepts.³⁷¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was no different than his predecessors in this respect, as the overwhelming tenor throughout the Shaykh’s works was one of obedience to the Sharī‘a as the means of obtaining eternal life. There is a curious outlier, however, which bespeaks a much closer understanding of salvation between Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Edwards. The Shaykh opened the door to the possibility that mankind is granted entrance into heaven (saved) by what he believes *apart* from what he does, by recalling the words of the Prophet that proper belief can be the basis for God admitting one into heaven “whatever his deeds might be.”³⁷² While this unusual statement is interesting, especially in light of our current study, we must be careful not to read into it more than the context demands. Yet it does suggest that at least in this instance, the Shaykh could be said to find some agreement with the Reverend that good works are merely the evidence of true faith, and not the cause.

Nevertheless, the faith which is implicit for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb is explicit for Edwards. “Faith in *what* or in *whom*?” he may be heard asking his peer from Najd, as faith presumes an object. For Edwards, salvific faith (i.e. faith that goes beyond mere belief in the existence of

³⁷⁰ For a brief survey of some possible exceptions, see Joseph Cumming, “Did Jesus Die on the Cross? The History of Reflection on His Earthly Life in Sunnī Tafsīr Literature,” *Yale Center for Faith and Culture*, May, 2001, accessed March 9, 2017, http://faith.yale.edu/sites/default/files/did_jesus_die_on_the_cross-english.pdf. See also Mahmoud Ayoub, “Towards and Islamic Christology II: The Death of Jesus, Reality or Delusion,” in *The Routledge Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations*, ed. Mona Siddiqui (London: Routledge, 2013), 176-197. Ayoub maintains that “The Qur’ān... does not deny the death of Christ,” 185.

³⁷¹ To be fair, the Qur’ān maintains that the ultimate source of those precepts is God himself. In this way, God is (at least indirectly) the provider of salvation as far as the Shaykh was concerned. The Qur’ān and Sunna are thus a means of divine grace unto salvation for Muslims in much the same way that Jesus and the Gospel are for Christians. This is one of the reasons why it is not always helpful to correlate the Qur’ān to the New Testament and Muḥammad to Jesus. A much more accurate comparison can be made between the Qur’ān as the divine word and Jesus as the divine word; between the Sīra (biography) of Muḥammad and the Gospels; and between the Hadīth and the New Testament as the way (Sunna) for believers to live. In such a scheme, Muḥammad as apostle of Islam is better compared to someone like Paul the apostle of Christianity.

³⁷² See section 2.6 above and 4.7 below

God) had to be *in* something or someone to provide deliverance. And for him, that object was the Messiah, Jesus. God could not be thought to provide deliverance on a whim, with no meting out of justice. Instead, for Edwards, he provided deliverance through a real act in human history - the cross. Based on his reading of the Islamic sources though, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was left with little option but to appeal to the efforts of man to abide by the divine Law as the means of salvation from hell. Interestingly though, Edwards also taught that obedience was not optional - good works are the fruit of true faith in Christ, without them one’s faith is but an empty pronouncement.³⁷³ Thus we might say that for the Shaykh, faith that God exists coupled with obedience to his revealed will was the path to salvation, while for the Reverend, faith that God exists *and* that Jesus has satisfied God’s wrath by his death and resurrection, coupled with obedience to his revealed will was the path to salvation.³⁷⁴

The present chapter has also uncovered some unexpected similarities in the thought of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb concerning their views on religion and state. Both men held that it was the state’s obligation to protect its citizens, which included the practice and promotion of religion. For the Shaykh, who drew on historical precedent in the active example of the early Muslim state, this was a crystal clear point. Edwards’ thought is at times somewhat vague, as he envisioned a slightly more passive role for the state. However, his reliance on Old Testament Israel as a model for Puritan society of a covenant people draws his thought much closer to that of the Shaykh on this matter. Part of the state’s obligation to protect its citizens was to go to war. And both men were in firm agreement that believers are under divine mandate to take up arms when called upon by the appropriate authorities -

³⁷³ See also section 2.7 above. The idea of the accumulation of divine rewards for both thinkers was dependent on human obedience. We do wrong to assume that good works had no place in Edwards’ soteriology. While they were not the *cause* of salvation per se, they were both the proof of salvation *and* the determiner of the degree of one’s experience of salvation in heaven. See WJEO 52, *Sermon 422 on 2 Cor. 9:6*.

³⁷⁴ For more on the issue of Jesus’ death in Islam and Christianity over the centuries, see Mathias Zahniser, *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2008).

whether civil or religious. This is a significant similarity which should not be taken lightly. In like manner, it should also be recalled that the chapter has sought to demonstrate that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s view of *jihād* and Edwards’ view of just war are not nearly as divergent as might be expected. Our Muslim protagonist is not nearly as “bloodthirsty” and our Christian protagonist is not nearly as “peaceful” as they are respectively assumed to be. In reality, both men promoted a strikingly similar, balanced view of war, and the individual and communal obligations of believers under the state in such circumstances.

Another area of nearly seamless overlap in the teaching and preaching of Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was their view of chastity. While unchastity was not tolerated from either sex, it was women for whom the issue was crucial. For reasons that arguably had nothing to do with misogyny and everything to do with religious conviction based on Scripture, both men trumpeted modesty as one of the primary female virtues. In terms of dress, women in both societies were expected to wear garments that extended to their wrists and ankles and did not reveal too much of their figure - and they always covered their heads in public. It is here most appropriate to mention that the vast majority of Christian women, from the early apostolic era until the early twentieth century, dressed modestly, covered their heads during prayer and/or worship, and many (including Puritans) covered their heads in public as well.³⁷⁵ This historical reality delegitimizes the modern notion of a supposed chasm between Christianity and Islam on the issue of modesty and women’s dress, relegating it to a mere blip on the radar of time. Indeed, for the first thirteen centuries of their

³⁷⁵ The reasons for the erosion of this practice in the Christian tradition are varied and beyond the scope of this thesis, but are likely tied to larger cultural shifts that emerged in the West surrounding theological liberalism and aspects of the feminist movement. For specific directions and commentary on the necessity of head coverings for women during prayer and public worship in both Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and Edwards, see WMIAW 2:641, *Kitāb al-Nikāḥ* and WJE 24:1047-1049.

coexistence, Christian and Muslim women dressed very similarly.³⁷⁶ Connected to the issue of modesty was the idea that a woman's reputation was paramount, and it was thus intolerable for her to be gossiped about. There was also the expectation that she would not provide potential gossipers with any kind of possible substantiation for their claims!³⁷⁷ These are facts that are well borne out in the worlds, words and works of the Reverend and the Shaykh. Truly there is much common ground here that today's religious conservatives within Christianity and Islam can happily agree on.

Moreover, both men held the family in high regard, and taught that it was a man's duty to lead and guide his wife and children in all matters of faith and life. Children were expected to obey their parents in all matters, and wives were expected to submit to their husbands accordingly. On the issue of marriage though, a difference emerges. Edwards saw marriage as a picture of God's covenant faithfulness and his union with believers. While it admittedly fulfilled temporal needs such as sexuality and procreation, it was ultimately a holy union that represented a divine covenant with God as the chief witness. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's view of marriage was far more practical. Marriage for him held no deeper foreshadowing of future divine realities as it did for Edwards. Instead, it was a contract made between two parties - chiefly between two families. While it held religious significance inasmuch as it was part of the Sharī'a, the chief witness to a marriage was not God but his earthly representative in the form of a shaykh or judge. In sum, marriage was for Edwards a covenant that pointed to

³⁷⁶ There are still villages in Syria today where Christian and Muslim women are completely indistinguishable from one another by external appearances, for both wear the same *abāya* and *hijāb* outside of their homes. The most natural explanation for this phenomenon is that these villages were mostly isolated from European influences, even during the colonial era, and therefore maintained the traditions that they have held for many centuries.

³⁷⁷ On the issue of the chastity of Mary, Christians have long been accused by Muslims of blasphemy in the doctrine of the Incarnation because of the assumption that it implies sexual union between God and Mary. Besides the obvious fact that sexual union is nowhere implied in the Bible, which testifies to the virgin becoming impregnated supernaturally by the Spirit of God (as does the Qur'ān), Edwards observes that when Christ was conceived in Mary's womb, "her mind was filled with a divine and holy pleasure *instead of sensual pleasure*." See WJE 13:385 (emphasis mine).

something mystical and “other worldly,” while for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb it was a contract that fulfilled practical needs in the here and now.

Finally, it does not take a particularly astute observer to notice the many parallels between Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb concerning their revival ministries. Both men were a part of the wider revivalistic trends in Christianity and Islam in the eighteenth century, and few had a bigger impact within their respective spheres than did our two apocalyptic preachers.³⁷⁸ While fire and brimstone were their typical weapons of choice, there were underlying sincere concerns that drove both men to use whatever means were necessary to achieve their desired results. Namely, the salvation of men’s souls and the reform of society - as both would tend to God’s glory. Similarly, both preachers pressed the obligation of evangelism/*da‘wa* heavily upon their hearers. Edwards’ revivalistic tendency led to a fervent emphasis on evangelism, the spreading of the gospel among individuals and communities through preaching and acts of service. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, whose primary objective in *da‘wa* was the spreading of pure monotheism, also favored preaching as a first line of engagement with individuals and communities. The main difference here is that when his call was refused, he felt obligated to engage in actual armed conflict, whereas such a tendency is completely absent from Edwards.

Given the many aspects of congruence in their thought on God’s relation to the world and mankind’s relation to one another, there is room for hope that religious conservatives within Christianity and Islam who revere Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb will yet be able to

³⁷⁸ It is perhaps an irony of history that 1703 saw not only the birth of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, but also of John Wesley and Shah Walī Allāh, who also stand near the summit of eighteenth-century revivalists in Christianity and Islam. It must have been a divinely ordained year for the birth of revivalists!

engage in productive dialogue. In so doing, one can hope that they will adhere to their own renditions of the old English adage that “the pen is mightier than the sword.”³⁷⁹

³⁷⁹ This phrase was coined by the English poet Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1839. Among its many conceptual precursors are the words of the New Testament, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). There is also a Ḥadīth where the Prophet supposedly said, “The ink of the scholars is superior to the blood of the martyrs.” Although the soundness of this Ḥadīth is nearly universally rejected by Islamic scholars as *mawḍūʿ* (fabricated and/or wrongly ascribed to Muḥammad), admirers of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb are advised to take note of Ibn al-Qayyīm’s judgement on the matter. He said that if the pen of the one who writes is closely connected to the virtue (*al-ṣadīqiyya*) of the first followers of Muḥammad, then his pen is indeed superior to the blood of the martyr who did not attain to the same level of *al-ṣadīqiyya*. The converse is also true, however, with the determining factor being the degree of closeness to this unique virtue of Muḥammad’s earliest companions.

4.0 SPEAKING OF OTHERS

If ecumenical and interfaith conversation seems all too rare in today's world, we should remember that it was virtually nonexistent in the worlds of Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Theirs was an age of polemics, and the writings of both men are replete with examples of their rather formidable polemical abilities. And yet despite this very obvious fact, there remains a certain body of evidence within their works which, when pieced together, reveals a rather interesting strain of thought that cuts across the grain of the majority of their own work and certainly that of most of their contemporaries. It is counterintuitive and therefore surprising to find that both men often made allowances for religious others in a day and age when such allowances were almost unheard of within the contexts of their traditionalist Christian and Muslim circles.

While it is true that we find both Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb continuously succumbing to the the very polemical characterizations that typified their milieus, we can also detect a rather open, even gracious attitude at times. These quiet undertones actually flow underneath their wider and more typical polemical attitudes throughout the course of their intellectual careers. To be sure, they are nothing more than quiet undertones when considered against the backdrop of their overall thought. Nevertheless the current research would not be complete unless some of the very surprising statements that Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb made concerning religious others are not shared herein. Could it be that some of these very statements would serve as the building blocks of a new and direct interfaith encounter between the conservative strands of Christianity and Islam? Both groups have traditionally shied away from such encounters because of the conservative nature of their beliefs, a fact which has often been perceived as "narrow mindedness" by more liberal

strands within both of their faiths. The present chapter attempts to rectify this aversion to direct encounters between fundamentalist Christians and Muslims by highlighting some very encouraging precedents in the thought of two of their most beloved models of religious orthodoxy in the early modern era.

Jonathan Edwards

4.1 Edwards and Religious Others

Jonathan Edwards was peculiar among eighteenth-century divines in that he carried about him an unusually curious spirit concerning world religions. This lifelong interest manifested itself in a copious series of musings spread throughout his writings, and in particular his *Miscellanies* notebooks, which contain several dozen entries focusing on other religions.³⁸⁰ To be sure, Edwards was not unique among his peers in delving into the subject of religious others - there are numerous examples to behold of this type of curiosity among his contemporaries.³⁸¹ However, his interest went beyond mere curiosity. Indeed, he was fascinated by the subject, because for him it was not a peripheral issue. As we will see, much of his theology was focused on the knowledge that religious others had of God and of the gospel. This “strange, new Edwards” is one that is not widely known. “Most have assumed that for Edwards only Christians - and perhaps only Calvinist Christians - had religious truth. They have assumed wrongly.”³⁸² On religious others’ knowledge of the true God as Creator, Edwards wrote in 1737,

³⁸⁰ In addition to the *Miscellanies*, Edwards’ thoughts on the place of non-Jewish and non-Christian peoples in the grand scheme of redemption are reflected in three notebooks that he intended to use to construct his planned *magnum opus* on the subject. Only recently published online, the “*History of Redemption*” Notebooks beckon further research into this fascinating but as yet little known aspect of his thought. See WJEO 31.

³⁸¹ See for example, John Cotton, *The Powing of the Seven Vials* (London: R.S., 1642); and Aaron Burr, *The Watchman’s Answer* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1757).

³⁸² Gerald McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 3.

Socrates, that great gentile philosopher, who worshipped the true God, as he was led by the light of nature, might pray to God, and he attended his duty when he did so; although he knew not the revelation, which God had made of himself in his Word. That great philosopher that was contemporary with the apostle Paul, I mean Seneca, who held one Supreme Being, and had in many respects right notions of the divine perfections and providence, though he did not embrace the gospel, which at that day was preached in the world; yet might pray to that Supreme Being whom he acknowledged.³⁸³

Noting that the Chinese empire dates nearly to the time of the deluge we find Edwards referring to a certain Chinese King “Fohi” as “being the same with Noah.”³⁸⁴ Writing around 1751 in “Miscellany” no. 1181, Edwards made liberal use of Ramsay’s *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* to argue that Trinitarian monotheism existed among the ancient Chinese philosophers.³⁸⁵ He made special note of Ramsay’s claim that the ancient Chinese predicted the incarnation, suffering and atoning death of Jesus centuries before his birth, stating that “Confucius maintained that the Saint [Messiah] was to come from the West.”³⁸⁶

Clearly these are not the words of a closed-minded religious tyrant. The question that arises for the modern reader regarding these and the many other cogitations like them in Edwards’ writings, is this: Why was Edwards so concerned with religions outside of his own, and why did he approach them with an openness which was so totally uncharacteristic of his age? There seem to be two reasons which stand above the rest.

³⁸³ WJE 12:300.

³⁸⁴ WJE 15:535.

³⁸⁵ WJE 23:95-104. See also section 2.2.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

Deism

As we have seen throughout this study, Edwards was immensely concerned about the threat of English deism toward Puritan orthodoxy.³⁸⁷ True to his uncanny ability to discern future events, Edwards rightly predicted that deism would become one of the Western Church's greatest enemies. The age of Enlightenment had carried with it discoveries of far away lands populated by nations, tribes and tongues who knew nothing of the Christian gospel. Thus one of deism's primary components was that the Christian gospel could not be considered as God's only means of granting salvation to the heathen. To suggest that it would be to severely malign man's notion of the justice of God. Surely God would not require knowledge and assent to that which was unknown to so many, would he? This meant that all religions had an equal claim to divine truth, and effectively put the God of the Bible on a level playing field with any and all other comparable claims. Not content to let this dangerous reasoning creep into the Church, Edwards set about to defend the orthodox Biblical position of the particularity of the Christian gospel within the new framework of the deist challenge. In order to do this, he gathered as much information as he could about non-Christian lands and peoples. He then sought to synthesize this information in a way that would demonstrate that God's justice was not at all compromised by the fact that the majority of the world in his day had never even heard the gospel, much less assented to it. Edwards' synthesis was carried out in a variety theological avenues including soteriology, history, typology and missiology.

Edwards viewed the individual's salvation as the result of a pre-existing disposition towards the gospel, so that when a man hears it he assents to it.³⁸⁸ Edwards' thought here

³⁸⁷ To trace the path of Edwards' repeated encounters with his old nemesis of deism up to this point in our study, see sections 1.2 and 2.2.

³⁸⁸ McDermott has aptly called this aspect of Edwards' thought his "dispositional soteriology."

somewhat mirrors that of the earlier Puritan stalwart John Owen (1616-1683) of Oxford, who held that desire or intention is the truest and purest form of an action.³⁸⁹ According to Edwards, there was an underlying disposition in men's hearts that served as the motivation for their actions and habits that was only actualized fully when given the chance to do so. In other words, a disposition may lay dormant until such time as it has the opportunity to come to fruition in a person's life. Such dispositions formed the basis of the full gamut of human behaviors. In terms of salvation, Edwards argued that there was a disposition in some men's hearts, placed there by God, which manifested itself as saving faith in the work of Christ when the person had the chance to finally hear and respond to the gospel. Once the individual had heard the gospel clearly, what had previously only been discernible from their desires and actions was now made manifest in an actual proclamation of faith in the Christian gospel. But what of those who had the disposition to believe the gospel, but no opportunity to hear it? Edwards did not explicitly say so, but he left open a crack in the door of the possibility of their salvation.³⁹⁰ In this we can discern that his soteriology seems to have been informed by the realities of his eighteenth-century context.

Much like he used it in defending the Trinity, the *prisca theologia* was a favorite tool that Edwards plied to synthesize his knowledge of religious others in response to the deists. First employed by Church Fathers such as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Eusebius, the "ancient theology" revived much later, stirred by the challenge of deism, in men like the aforementioned Theophilus Gale, "Chevalier" Ramsay, and the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). They wrote in order to demonstrate that the fundamental principles

³⁸⁹ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2012), 16ff.

³⁹⁰ This potential open door in Edwards' theology should not be confused with another very clearly closed one - that of universal salvation. Edwards was explicit in his belief that salvation was not universal, and was only effectual for the elect. See for example, WJE 13:174 which doubles as a word against universal salvation as well as against the Arminian belief in unlimited atonement.

of Biblical doctrine were existent among ancient cultures, albeit to differing degrees of conformity with the Christian gospel. Edwards was particularly taken with their works because for him they represented exactly the kind of information that he desired to combat the deist challenge of God's moral monstrosity in judging the heathen for a message they did not explicitly hear. The *prisca theologia* was an integral aspect of Edwards' thinking about religious others because it rooted him within a long tradition of Christian thinkers who had all considered the question of the gospel's particularity in their own contexts. Edwards' quotation above on Socrates and Seneca is exactly the kind of admiration for the ancients that the *prisca theologia* evoked, as it pointed to something that reached beyond mere pagan philosophy and into the Biblical realm.

Edwards further synthesized the particularity of the Christian gospel with the reality of a world who had not heard it through another of his preferred means - typology. Edwards believed that gospel types were abundant in nature, such that men could possibly attain to a degree of salvific knowledge of God by perceiving divine attributes in the world around them. Edwards' typology created more latitude on the issue of religious others than most of traditional Reformed orthodoxy allowed for. In a clean break with the thought of Calvin, for example, Edwards believed that without special revelation (Scripture), the heathen could not only know God as Creator; they could also know him as Redeemer.³⁹¹ Interestingly, he did note that even if natural revelation was sufficient to grant men knowledge of God as Redeemer, they would still be unable to attain any degree of certainty as to their future salvation.³⁹² They might be saved, as it were, but with no sense of assurance.

³⁹¹ WJE 23:245.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 175.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for Edwards in answering the challenge of deism was his trumpeting of the cause of Christian missions. If nations do not know the gospel, argued Edwards, then it behooves Christians to go and preach! His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, was known for his passion for missions among the Indians of North America;³⁹³ and it is conceivable that this was one among many other aspects of Stoddard's thought that influenced Edwards. Mutual influence regarding missions also came to Edwards by way of contemporary ministerial colleagues such as Eleazar Wheelock, who founded Dartmouth College in 1769 with the intention of training both white and indigenous missionaries among the Indians. The two often corresponded on all sorts of matters, including missions among the Indians.³⁹⁴

But the most influential of voices in Edwards' ear concerning the urgency of preaching the gospel among religious others was not really a voice at all, but rather the example of the young David Brainerd. After being dismissed from Yale for whispering to a classmate that one of their tutors did not seem to exhibit grace, the young man was commissioned in 1742 by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge to preach to Native American tribes, mainly in New York and New Jersey. Brainerd rode thousands of miles on horseback through the wilderness, almost always alone, where he preached among several different tribes. Through it all, he suffered terribly from tuberculosis which often rendered him infirm for long periods. It was this dreaded disease which eventually caused him to seek shelter at Edwards' Northampton home while attempting to convalesce during a particularly nasty flare up. Here Edwards got a first hand view of the grace that the young Brainerd, just twenty-nine years of age, exhibited as he lay dying. Edwards' seventeen year-old daughter, Jerusha,

³⁹³ See Solomon Stoddard, *Question whether God is not angry with the country for doing so little towards the conversion of the Indians* (Boston, 1723).

³⁹⁴ WJE 16:146.

named after his own beloved sister who had died young, held the responsibility of nursing Brainerd at the house. Sadly, Brainerd succumbed to his illness in October, 1747, with Jerusha tragically following him just four months later. After the death of his young houseguest, Edwards found himself enraptured by Brainerd's diary, which chronicled not only his physical journeys but also his spiritual journey as a missionary. Edwards quickly undertook to edit and publish the diary, which incidentally became the most widely read and best selling of all his works during his lifetime. The *Life of David Brainerd* inspired multitudes of missionaries all over the world, the likes of William Carey and Hudson Taylor among their ranks even in later years.³⁹⁵ Given his passion for missions, it was not a coincidence that he chose to go to the Indian mission at Stockbridge on the colonial frontier when he was dismissed from his Northampton pastorate in 1750.

All told then, it is not difficult to see that Edwards placed a high priority on the spreading of the gospel among nations and tribes who had not yet had a chance to hear it. He did this not only in response to deist challenges, but also from a conviction in Scripture that all nations would first hear the gospel before Jesus returns (Matthew 24:14).

Eschatology

Missions was actually a bridge between Edwards' battle against deism and his thinking on the end times. Indeed, the second reason why Jonathan Edwards was so concerned with the religious state of nations and peoples outside of evangelical Protestantism was that his eschatological scheme depended on it. There was, for Edwards, tremendous eschatological

³⁹⁵ William Carey and Hudson Taylor are two of the most well known Protestant Christian missionaries of all time. Carey sailed for India in 1793, and remained there until his death 41 years later. He translated the Bible into all of India's major languages and worked tirelessly for much needed social reform. Taylor's vision was for the interior of China. In 1865 he founded the China Inland Mission, which became the largest missionary organization in China.

significance to the progress of the gospel among the nations throughout history and into the future. As a postmillennialist, he believed that Christ would return after a literal thousand year period for God's people on the earth where peace, prosperity, righteousness and knowledge would flourish from one corner of the globe to the other. In order for the millennium to commence, however, the gospel would have to spread over all the earth first. The millennium, which Edwards referred to as the Church's ultimate sabbath rest, would be ushered in by the final defeat of the Antichrist; a victory that would be primarily wrought ideologically, not militarily, according to Edwards. Hence the success of Protestant ideology over against all others in the world was of paramount significance to Edwards, whose millenarian vision is summarized below:

There is a kind of a veil now cast over the bigger part of the world that keeps 'em in darkness; but then this veil shall be destroyed, *Isaiah 25:7*... And then all countries and nations, even those that are now most ignorant, shall be full of light and knowledge. Great knowledge shall prevail everywhere. It may be hoped that then many of the Negroes and Indians will be divines, and that excellent books will be published in Africa, in Ethiopia, in Turkey...³⁹⁶

Elsewhere he expanded on this theme,

How happy will that state be, when neither divine nor human learning shall be confined and imprisoned within only two or three nations of Europe, but shall be diffused all over the world, and this lower world shall be all over covered with light, the various parts of it mutually enlightening each other; when the most barbarous nations shall become as bright and polite as England; when ignorant heathen lands shall be stocked with the most profound divines and most learned philosophers; when we shall from time to time have the most excellent books and wonderful performances brought from one end of the earth and another to surprise us...³⁹⁷

The importance of the end times in Edwards' thought is perhaps best underscored by the little known fact that Revelation was the *only* book of the Bible that he wrote a commentary on. Ironically, it was the only book that Calvin did *not* write a commentary on.

³⁹⁶ WJE 9:480.

³⁹⁷ WJE 13:212.

With Biblical theology foremost in his mind, Jonathan Edwards' eschatological scheme utterly depended on the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy concerning the end times. While for others such discussions might have been pure speculation, for Edwards they were the very essence of his faith. Theology was never a purely academic exercise for Edwards, and nowhere was this more true than in his eschatology. The millennial vision of the triumph of Christ's Kingdom in the Church's one thousand year sabbath rest was something that drove Edwards. In the prevailing winds of the Enlightenment, Edwards realized that there was yet much gospel progress to be made. Standing in the way of this progress were three great obstacles: Rome, Islam, and heathenism.

4.2 Islam and the Millennium: One of the Last Barriers

Jonathan Edwards saw the wider kingdom of Satan as consisting of three main anti-Christian kingdoms all mentioned in the book of Revelation. Rome was Satan's kingdom in the West, and represented the kingdom of the beast whose head was the Antichrist himself, the Pope. Islam was Satan's kingdom in the East, and represented the kingdom of the false prophet whose head was Muḥammad.³⁹⁸ Heathenism, which was spread out over all the earth among those with no claim to divine revelation in the Abrahamic line, was the kingdom of the dragon. If Edwards' millennial vision was to become a reality, he figured that this unholy trinity which had been set up by the devil to oppose the Kingdom of Christ must first be subdued. As he was often wont to do, Edwards embraced his own role in this crucial process through his preaching and writing.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ See R.A. Leo, "Jonathan Edwards," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History 1500-1900*, ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

³⁹⁹ Edwards' international reputation within Evangelicalism increased throughout his lifetime. This likely contributed to an awareness on his part of the influence that his ministry had, not only in the colonies, but in Europe and possibly beyond.

On the heels of the Great Awakening, Edwards published a treatise in 1747 that was meant to encourage Christians from around the world to join together in unity through regular concerts of prayer. In accordance with Jesus' prayer in John 17, he believed that Christian unity would be a determining precursor to the unveiling of the millennial state because it gave the church the greatest chance of sustained witness to a watching world. It is worth noting the full title of the treatise because in doing so we are able to see exactly what Edwards intended the work to be: *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, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time.*⁴⁰⁰

In *An Humble Attempt* Edwards pleaded, somewhat uncharacteristically, with "Christians of all denominations" to join a movement that originally started among his ministerial colleagues in Scotland in 1744 and promoted ongoing concerts of prayer throughout the year. Herein we have an example of Edwards setting aside his often scathing criticisms of other Christian denominations in favor of a unified call to prayer. In this way a certain hierarchy of theological necessity for Edwards becomes visible to us. It seems that Arminians, for example, who were among the first to be targeted by his criticisms were actually *not* outside of the umbrella of salvation, however wrong some of their views may have been in Edwards' sight. The occasion for this display of solidarity was none other than the facing of the three great kingdoms of Rome, Islam, and the heathen world. How quickly enemies can become allies when faced with common foes.

⁴⁰⁰ WJE 5:307ff.

Edwards envisioned in *An Humble Attempt* the complete and final destruction of the Antichrist in the office of the Pope, as well as “the conversion of all the Jews” and “the full enlightening of all Mahometan and heathen nations, through the whole earth.”⁴⁰¹ During the Great Awakening, most divines were predicting the imminent commencement of the millennium. This fervor only heightened with each passing month and year. By the time *An Humble Attempt* was published, most evangelicals throughout North America, England, and Continental Europe were fully convinced that the world was on the eve of the prophesied utopian state. Edwards did not share their sentiments. Instead, he put forth a rather detailed timetable that was primarily dependent on the fulfillment of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:14 and 28:18-20.⁴⁰² In arguing that the millennium was as yet centuries off, he made explicit reference to Matthew 13:31-33 and Mark 4:26-28, where Jesus spoke of God’s Kingdom growing to fullness like leaven that gradually spreads, or like seed which is cast into the ground and eventually becomes a head of corn. While others were perhaps more provincially inclined, it is not surprising that the man who saw the whole earth as his pulpit could see beyond the revivals that were occurring in the Western world. For him, the Great Awakening in all of its transatlantic manifestations was but the glorious beginning of the pouring out of God’s Spirit which he believed would precede the conversion of all nations.⁴⁰³ Edwards believed that there were certain times in history when the Holy Spirit was poured out in a powerful way so as to initiate major moves of God, such as during the Reformation. He thus

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 410.

⁴⁰² “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). “And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age’” (Matthew 28:18–20).

⁴⁰³ This is a very often misunderstood aspect of Edwards’ theology, as most assume that when he uses phrases such as “that glorious day” he is referring to the millennium, when in fact he is referring to the pouring out of the Spirit which will help usher it in, over the course of many years.

maintained that such an outpouring was what was needed in order to see the Christian gospel vindicated among Roman Catholics, Muslims, and heathens. If the Great Awakening was the start of this promised latter-day outpouring, then Edwards reckoned it would take approximately another 250 years before millennial visions of grandeur such as the one in Habakuk 2:14, where the knowledge of the glory of God fills the earth as the waters cover the sea, could be realized in time and space. He estimated that it would take about fifty years for Protestantism to purify itself of errors such as Arminianism, then another fifty years to triumph over “the popish world,” another fifty for it to “prevail and subdue the greater part of the Mahometan world,” and finally one full century to advance into all the “heathen world.”⁴⁰⁴ Then, and only then, would the millennium commence.

Edwards’ foresight in predicting that Islam and Christianity would be among the dominant world religions after the year 2000 notwithstanding, what is perhaps more telling is the fact that he saw heathenism as a more difficult foe to subdue than Islam. Twice as hard, to be precise, if we are to view it from his own chronological scheme. Why? For the purposes of our present study, the answer is of crucial significance. Edwards viewed Islam as more closely related to Christianity than heathenism was. For the eighteenth-century mind, heathenism evoked a litany of strange religious rituals and practices such as divination and other pagan rites. Even worse, perhaps the primary reason why peoples from “uncivilized” lands were clumped together into this blanket category known as heathenism was that they were not known to have a concept of monotheism. Later sociological research has proven this to be untrue, as it eventually came to light that African Traditional Religionists, for example, have always had a concept of a supreme deity. Nevertheless, in the eighteenth century this was not known, and added to their characterization as savages far beyond the light of

⁴⁰⁴ WJE 5:411.

monotheistic purity. This, coupled with the fact that heathen were known to inhabit the harsh and mysterious lands of interior Africa and Asia made it less probable in Edwards' mind that they would be brought to the true religion of Christianity any time soon. It seemed far more likely within Christian circles in Europe and North America that Muslims, who claimed belief in the God of Abraham, would come to the truth more quickly, despite their own barbaric tendencies which were readily chronicled in Western lore.⁴⁰⁵ Although it was surely a primary factor, belief in the God of Abraham was not the only reason why Edwards saw Islam as more closely related to Christianity than heathenism. His reasons were actually quite extensive, and will become apparent in our analysis of his writings on Islam in what follows below.

4.3 Islam and Redemptive History: Heretics as Executors of Divine Judgement

Even though Edwards' millennial scheme called for much work yet to be done to fulfill Biblical prophecy, as a historicist following after his Protestant predecessors Luther and Calvin, he was also keen to demonstrate the ways in which Biblical prophecy had already been fulfilled in world history. Edwards was convinced that all of history, from the creation to the second coming of Christ, was purposed by God to show forth his glory in the salvation of mankind; each successive epoch allowed another layer of the great redemptive drama to be revealed. Both the creation and the second coming were linked together by the high point of history, the atoning death of Christ and his subsequent resurrection from the dead. From the divine vantage point, which is outside of time and space, the historical unfolding of the redemptive story was meant to communicate the full breadth and depth of God's attributes,

⁴⁰⁵ "Barbaric" tales of Muslim savagery from places like the Barbary Coast were widely reported on in eighteenth-century Europe and America, popularized by novels such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.

namely his mercy and grace toward the very creatures whom he had fashioned for his glory and their eternal good. With this in mind Edwards preached a thirty-part sermon series in 1739 at Northampton entitled *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774). Breaking with the great Puritan tradition of expository preaching, Edwards instead chose a single verse of Scripture as the text from which all of his sermons in this series were drawn. Isaiah 51:8 in Edwards' King James Bible read, "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation." From this single text Edwards crafted one of his most well known, and possibly his most creative, sermon series. Many years later, when the trustees of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) called upon him to leave his post at Stockbridge to accept their offer of the presidency, Edwards was hesitant to oblige them. The reason was none other than his desire to turn *A History of the Work of Redemption* into a *magnum opus* which would most likely have borne the same name. Differing from a traditional systematic theology text, the comprehensive theology, or "body of divinity" as he called it, was to be the "great work" which would define his theological scheme on a grand scale. It would have been, as it were, his supreme theological gift to the Church for succeeding generations. Ever the prophet of his time, Edwards' fears were realized when his reluctant acceptance of the presidency was quickly followed by his untimely death from a smallpox inoculation in February of 1758. We are left to ponder what might have been if he had been able to finish his master work. Given the dozens of times that Islam is mentioned in the sermon series, we can assume that he would have had more to say about it.

Aside from the possibility of meeting a trader or a slave from an Islamic background, the Reverend is not known to have ever met a Muslim personally. The question then is why

did Islam and/or Muḥammad receive nearly three hundred mentions throughout his works? Unlike other divines, Edwards did not seem particularly concerned with the Islam of his day posing a nuisance to Christendom, neither through its continual knocking on the door of Europe via the Turkish threat nor through its enslavement of Europeans via the Barbary threat. He was not unaware of these realities, but he did not focus on them as others did. Instead, Edwards' discussions about Islam tended to be much more concerned with its role in redemptive history as a temporal agent of divine judgment. Just as God had used the Babylonians and the Assyrians to judge Israel and Judah for their idolatry, respectively, so too he used Islam to judge the Church during one of its darkest hours. Edwards noted that Islam arose during the dark night of Christendom when Roman clerics, under papal sanction, were responsible for taking the Bible out of the hands of the common man and thereby promoting widespread ignorance among the masses. Concerning the dark ages he wrote:

During this time also, superstition and ignorance more and more prevailed. The holy Scripture by degrees was taken out of the hands of the laity, the better to promote *the privileges of the clergy*. And instead of promoting knowledge among the people, they industriously promoted ignorance, ignorance, the mother of devotion. And so great was the darkness that learning almost ceased out of the world—the very priests themselves, most of 'em, barbarously ignorant as to any commendable learning or any other knowledge than their hellish craft in oppressing and tyrannizing over the souls of the poor people. The superstition and wickedness of the church of Rome kept growing worse and worse, till the very time of the Reformation. And the whole Christian world were led away into this great defection, excepting the remains of the Christian churches in the eastern empire that had not been utterly overthrown by the Turks...⁴⁰⁶

These and other clerical abuses were coupled with a lack of Christian unity over essential doctrines which earlier ecumenical councils, such as Constantinople in 381 and Chalcedon in 451, had clarified. Such blatant disobedience to the teaching and way of Christ could only reap a harvest of divine judgement - and that is exactly what Edwards saw the Islamic

⁴⁰⁶ WJE 9:414 (emphasis his).

conquests of Christian lands as. Just as he had in the past through Assyria and Babylon, God was using another nation to judge his people for their idolatries.

There is no doubt that Muslim invaders used the sword as a means of conquest. The *degree* to which this is true, however, remains the topic of much debate.⁴⁰⁷ As we will see from his own words below, Edwards saw the use of the sword as a primary means of Islamic triumph during the *futuḥāt* era.⁴⁰⁸ However, Edwards broke from the rhetoric of most other Christian commentators by arguing that Islam also succeeded in Christian lands such as Syria and Egypt by means of willful, although uninformed, conversion. Edwards argued that as a result of their Biblical illiteracy, common Christians were susceptible to a message which appeared very similar to the religion they already professed.⁴⁰⁹ In fact, when Islamic leaders came promising greater freedoms than what they already had under Roman or Byzantine rule, many Christians were eager to take on the religion of the Prophet of Arabia. Given its many similarities with the Christian religion, including Qur'ānic mentions of numerous Biblical prophets and characters - particularly the exalted status of Jesus - and its claim to Abrahamic lineage and the worship of the God of the Jews and Christians, many Christians embraced the

⁴⁰⁷ The majority of Christian commentators over the years have been in agreement that conversions to Islam almost always came at the point of the sword. This perpetuation is largely due to the fact that until recently much Western Oriental scholarship has relied upon early characterizations that were often biased. This rhetoric was especially justified in Edwards' day, as the Battle of Vienna (1683) had only recently ended the Ottoman threat to Europe which had lingered since the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and Barbary piracy in the Mediterranean was coming to its height.

⁴⁰⁸ Literally "the openings." This is the Arabic word which refers to the time of the early Islamic conquests outside of Arabia in the seventh and eighth centuries.

⁴⁰⁹ WJE 9:414.

new faith unwittingly, said Edwards. Like John of Damascus one thousand years before him, Edwards saw Islam as essentially a Christian heresy; it was Arianism reborn.⁴¹⁰

In *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards made one of his most startling comments about Islam. He said, “And hence it is that all that part of the world that now does own the only true God, Christians, Jews, Mohammedans... originally came by knowledge of him.”⁴¹¹ In this shocking admission that Muslims and Christians worship the same God, Edwards made a major break not just with other Puritans, but with theologians across most of Christian history. However, this statement has to be understood in light of the larger context, as he continued, “The Mohammedans that own but one true God at first borrowed the notion from the Scriptures, for the first Mohammedans were those that had been educated in the Christian religion and apostatized from it.”⁴¹² The implication though, is that in order to apostatize one had to first be on the right path. This is why Edwards considered Islam as a Christian heresy. It was like a re-emergence of some of the ancient Christological heresies which, instead of completely dying out, had made their home deep within the confines of the Arabian desert since being cast out of the Roman Empire beginning at Nicaea in 325.

In the two centuries that followed, these heresies continued to fester until the time of Muḥammad, who put the pieces together in a perfect blend of truth and error as the false prophet mentioned in Revelation. Accordingly in *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards gave a brief biography of Muḥammad, whom he said was born in 622, obviously

⁴¹⁰ John of Damascus (d. c. 752) was one of the earliest Christian commentators on Islam. It is possible that his grandfather was among those responsible for surrendering the city of Damascus to the Muslims, and he himself held a lofty position during the Umayyad Caliphate. John wrote *Disputatio Saraceni et Christiani* (*The Discussion of a Christian and a Saracen*), as well as a section about Islam in *De Haeresibus* (*On Heresies*). Both are available in English in the volume *Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, ed. N.A. Newman, trans. John Voorhis (Hatfield, PA: Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute, 1993), 133-162. For more on John of Damascus and Islam, see D. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1972).

⁴¹¹ WJE 9:399.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

confusing the year Muḥammad's birth (570) with the *hijra*. He said that Muḥammad was to be "worshipped as the head next under God." In a blatant inference that the Qur'ān was his own invention, Edwards said that Muḥammad "pretended" to receive his "Alcoran" from the angel Gabriel. Of Muḥammad he then continued:

And being a subtile crafty man, and possessed of considerable wealth, and living amongst a people that were very ignorant and greatly divided in their opinions of religious matters by his subtilty and fair promises of a sensual paradise, he gained a number to be his followers and set up for their prince, and propagates his religion by the sword, and made it meritorious of paradise to fight for him. By which means his party grew, and went fighting till they conquered and brought over the neighboring country. And so his party gradually grew till they overrun [sic] great part of the world.⁴¹³

Edwards concluded his historical sketch of the rise of Islam by recasting the "Saracens that were some of [Muḥammad's] followers" from his Arabian homeland and their conquest of the Eastern Roman Empire as the fulfillment of the prophecy in the ninth chapter of Revelation, "And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth... and the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle."⁴¹⁴ Then came the Turks, a distinct ethnic group from the Saracens who had in common with them the fact that they too were followers of Muḥammad. Edwards conceded that "they became masters of all the eastern empire" when they took Constantinople in 1453. The sorrow in his words is almost palpable as one reads Edwards' recounting of the fall of the cities that housed famous New Testament churches in Jerusalem and Antioch and the pitiful state of the the Christians that yet remained there under Islamic rule. Edwards saw the rise of Islam and the resultant state of the Church under its control as a melancholy picture which was divinely - and deservedly - painted by God. Nevertheless, he surely took solace in recalling the fact that the Assyrians and Babylonians,

⁴¹³ Ibid., 415.

⁴¹⁴ Revelation 9:3, 7 (KJV)

who were used as tools of divine judgement in a similar manner centuries before, were themselves eventually judged by God so that divine truth was ultimately vindicated.

4.4 Islam and Christianity: Deism Deconstructed

In a diatribe which was not directed against Islam nearly as much as it was against his deist opponents, Edwards took advantage of Islam as the perfect foil for the deist position when he penned his most extensive recorded thoughts on Islam in an entry in his unpublished *Miscellanies*.⁴¹⁵ By making a direct comparison between the foundation of Christianity and that of Islam, Edwards hoped to disprove the deist notion that all religions are created equal. Islam was the perfect choice for this endeavor precisely because it was not a comparatively distant theological monster such as heathenism, but was instead a near cousin to Christianity. With an alternate claim to divine revelation, it was exactly the kind of comparison that needed to be made to tackle the elevation of human reason above divine revelation in deist thought. If deist logic held, Islam and Christianity should resemble one another in the benefits they brought to the world such as their contribution to learning or their aesthetic qualities. In deconstructing the deist argument, heathenism would have been too easy a dragon to slay. Northampton's knight decided instead to raise his pen against Islam, specifically against its founding and propagation. If he could show the foundation and spread of Islam to be flawed or morally corrupt in comparison to that of Christianity, he could then disprove the notion that all religions were created equal. Edwards wrote "Miscellany" no. 1334, "In what respects the propagation of Mahometanism is far from being worthy to be

⁴¹⁵ The fact that the *Miscellanies* went unpublished during Edwards' lifetime should not be lost on the reader. Many of the ideas were underdeveloped and marked for further reflection before publication, while others were probably never intended for publication at all, but were meant rather for Edwards' own scholarly use. This helps to explain why the *Miscellanies* contain some of Edwards' more underdeveloped or radical ideas.

looked upon as parallel with the propagation of Christianity,” probably only a year or two before his death.⁴¹⁶ It contains a series of nine points, the contents of which we shall presently summarize and briefly analyze below.

First, Edwards argued the revolution which Islam brought to the world through its propagation was not as great as the one Christianity instigated through its own spread. It is worth noting here that Edwards did acknowledge that Islam brought a revolution to pass, even if he saw it as inferior to Christianity’s. He based his first point on what we might call a “pre-Christian *jāhiliyya*” because he appealed to the debased state of humanity before Christ appeared. Edwards referred to the immediate pre-Christian world as “dark, ignorant, barbarous and wicked” and noted how firmly entrenched these things were over the centuries. In contrast, he did not see the state of Arabia immediately before Islam as totally analogous in its degree of *jāhiliyya* or ignorance.⁴¹⁷ Edwards argued that the change made among the heathen of Arabia through the propagation of Islam was not as great because these people, however unwittingly, had access to some of the “fringe benefits” of the gospel. He said they benefited from some of the “glimmerings of the light of the gospel which had been diffused over great part of the world, even that part of it that had not fully embraced Christianity.”⁴¹⁸ The light they had before Islam appeared, as it were, was due to this diffusion of Christian light, and not due to what the deists deemed “natural religion.”

Edwards’ second major point was that Christianity brought light into an altogether dark world when it first dawned, whereas Islam brought only darkness when it arrived in Christendom. Hence he claimed that the difference between the two revolutions was

⁴¹⁶ WJE 23:325-334.

⁴¹⁷ From his treatment of the subject it appears that Edwards was either unaware of the Islamic notion of *jāhiliyya* or, to the contrary, he was quite aware and therefore speaks as he does in order to better prove his case. Given the wider context of his overall knowledge of Islam the former seems most likely.

⁴¹⁸ WJE 23:326.

“infinitely great with respect to goodness.”⁴¹⁹ Logically, if Islam were a divine religion in the successive lineage of Judaism and Christianity, as it claimed to be, then it should have increased the light which Christianity brought to the world six centuries beforehand. Edwards saw no such increase, and argued that the only change was in the increase of darkness instead of light. He said, “As to rules and precepts, examples and promises, or inducements to virtue of any kind, no addition at all was made.”⁴²⁰ There are, however, two noteworthy statements in Edwards’ second point. The first is that he did acknowledge that there was an increase in light among the heathen where Islam was propagated, although he quickly followed this concession with a reminder that this increase was merely due to the light which Islam had borrowed from Christianity thanks to some common theological themes. The second noteworthy statement is easy to miss because it comes as a brief ripple amidst an otherwise negative tide of statements. Edwards said that the “increase of knowledge that there was, was only by Mahomet...”⁴²¹ In this somewhat cryptic fragment, Edwards seems to acknowledge a special role for Muḥammad whom he saw as having made a vaguely positive contribution to the world. We know that elsewhere Edwards named Muḥammad as the false prophet mentioned in Revelation. Thus here we see, at most, a change of direction in his thinking, or at the very least an acceptance of the idea that even false prophets can bring some good to the world.

Third, central to Edwards’ critique of Islam was the assertion that Christianity stood in opposition to man’s carnal desire, while Islam made special provision for it. Islam was successful in its propagation largely because it catered to man’s carnal appetite both in this

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 327.

world and the next. Given promises of tangible goods and services like treasures, slaves, and sex in this life *and* the next for those who fought in the way of God, who could resist? If such a clarion call appealed to the carnality of a normal man, how much more to the barbarous, uneducated bedouin of Arabia? At this juncture Edwards made use of one of his favorite sources, Moses Lowman (1680-1752), by quoting five brief Latin paragraphs from him on this subject directly into the text.⁴²² Besides catering to the flesh, Islam was made to fit the pre-existing religious and cultural milieu of the Jews, Christians, and heathens of Arabia. Edwards included Lowman's citation of the Protestant theologian Christian Reineccius (1688-1752), who translated the Qur'ān into Latin in 1721 and said in his editor's introduction to that volume that Islam was designed as a mixture of "the true and false ideas of both the Jews and the Christians and has been increased by the dreams belonging to that impostor [Muḥammad] and of cooperating Gnostics and Nestorians..."⁴²³ He also said that Muḥammad chose to keep ancient religious rituals such as the pilgrimage to Mecca and the fast of Ramadan as a means of making Islam more palatable and familiar for his audience. Edwards concurred with other Protestant observers that Islam's appeal was due to its carnality and its clever incorporation of familiar pagan, Jewish and Christian elements, along with strands of Gnosticism, that served its goal of creating a cohesive alternative narrative to the Bible.

The fourth and fifth points can be taken together. In them Edwards turned to consider the greatness of Greek and Roman civilization in the first century as compared to the relative cultural and societal darkness of Arabia in the seventh century. That Christianity overcame the world in a time when human learning was at its zenith, while Islam had comparatively

⁴²² Lowman was an Englishman whose *Paraphrase and Notes on the Revelation* (1737) contributed greatly to Edwards' understanding of Islam in the end times.

⁴²³ Cited in WJE 26:328.

little to overcome was further evidence of the difference between the two. Only a divinely inspired religion could have overcome Rome. Triumphant over dark and uneducated corners of the world however, was no sign of divine favor.

Sixth, the means of Christian triumph over Rome was not in wielding the sword, but by being subjected to it! By displaying the meekness, humility and love of Jesus, by promoting reasoning and inquiry, and by the working of divine, historically attested miracles, Christianity was propagated against all odds. Islam, on the other hand, was propagated “not by encouraging reasoning and search but by discouraging knowledge and learning... and forbidding inquiry.”⁴²⁴ Further, it “was propagated by the power of the sword” and unlike the meek and martyred apostles and other early Christian leaders, it was propagated “by potent sultans, absolute tyrants and mighty armies.”⁴²⁵ Then in a slight change of pace, Edwards postulated that Islam may have gained traction among Christians because it took advantage of theological and ecclesiastical tensions of the day.

Edwards’ seventh proof of Islam’s non-divine origin is rooted in the historical verifiability of its claims, particularly its supernatural ones, over against those of Christianity. He argued that Christian claims would have been easily discredited by persons who were alive during the time the New Testament was written and saw Jesus and the apostles say and do things often in front of crowds of many thousands. Consistently though, eyewitness accounts corroborated both the mundane and the miraculous. “Mahometanism” however, “pretends to no facts for the proof and foundation, but only Mahomet’s pretenses to intercourse with heaven, and his success in rapine, murder and violence.”⁴²⁶ Apparently the

⁴²⁴ WJE 23:330.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 331.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 332.

unverifiable experience of a solitary man in a cave was simply not convincing to Edwards when viewed alongside the historicity of the New Testament.

The eighth point in Jonathan Edwards' longest recorded critique of Islam contains some of his most interesting reflections on the matter. Edwards said that the elements of truth in Islam serve to strengthen the Christian case rather than weaken it, "because the Mahometan religion itself owns the principal facts of Christianity..."⁴²⁷ By this he meant that Jesus is considered a great prophet and messenger of God according to Islam. As such, Muslims recognize his miraculous healing of the blind, lame, and leprous, as well as his raising the dead. Thanks to Johann Stapfer (1708-1775), Edwards' most trusted Protestant source on Islam, he also knew that Muslims affirmed the Spirit-enabled miraculous conception and birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary, as well as his sinless life, and his status as the divine word, "as Mahomet himself confessed."⁴²⁸ Edwards concluded, somewhat startlingly, "Now owning this is, in effect, owning the whole, for 'tis the foundation of the whole, and proves the rest... Mahomet owns Jesus... he owned Jesus to be the Messiah foretold in the Law and the Prophets."⁴²⁹

Edwards ended his diatribe against the deists with a standing rebuke of their simplistic notions of natural religion. Islam, he contended, actually confirmed the truth of revealed religion when it preached Christian truths. However, in the many areas where it fell short of the Biblical standard, it only confirmed that without divine revelation man's mind is darkened and blinded in religious matters. "How greatly [men] stand in need of a divine guide and divine grace" he concluded, "such as the gospel reveals."⁴³⁰ That mankind is darkened and

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 333.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. Edwards notes that Stapfer refers to Q 3:45 here.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 334.

helpless in matters of religion when left to his own devices is a fact which should be self evident, but just in case it is not, Edwards reminds us that this principle is also a Biblical one.

That we have such extended thoughts on Islam from Edwards is really thanks to his deist opponents. It does not seem that Edwards had any designs on directly using his arguments in “Miscellany” no. 1334 against a Muslim, because at that time such an opponent could have only been considered a figment of one’s colonial imagination.⁴³¹ However, he did intend for the aforementioned thoughts to stimulate his own case that the deist position, which he foresaw as being a destructive force in Christianity, was easily disproved by the simple comparison of just one aspect of Christianity and its supposed Abrahamic cousin, Islam. If such was the case for Islam, which Edwards admitted contained Biblical light, what was to be said of heathen religions that were far more debased and contained even less light, whom deists also set parallel to Christianity?

(mis)Understanding Islam: the issue of sources

In addition to Moses Lowman’s aforementioned work on Revelation, Edwards consulted several other Orientalist sources on Islam that all leaned toward polemics or just poor history. As an example of the latter, he read Cambridge scholar Simon Ockley’s (1678-1720) *History of the Saracens*, printed in two volumes a decade apart (1708, 1718). As an example of the former, he read Swiss theologian Johann Stapfer, who, as we noted, probably influenced Edwards’ views on Islam more than anyone else. His *Institutiones Theologicae Polemicae Universae* (5 vols., 1743-1747) was a resource that Edwards

⁴³¹ Awareness of Muslims residing in the colonies, among whom were many slaves from West Africa, seems to have been lost on most from this period. Even George Washington appears blissfully ignorant of the fact that he owned two Muslim slaves named “Fatimer and Little Fatimer.” See Denise Spellberg, *Thomas Jefferson’s Qur’an* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 7.

frequently consulted in his quest to synthesize Reformed thought with Enlightenment principals emanating from Europe. In addition to a heavy dose of Continental Reformed thought, the Latin work contains an entire chapter of sixty pages on Islam which Edwards seems to have internalized rather fully, at times quoting Stapfer on Islam directly.⁴³²

To his credit, Edwards has listed in his *Catalogues of Books*, “The New Translation of the Alcoran of Mohammed” which referred to Englishman George Sale’s 1734 edition - the first English translation of the Qur’ān directly from Arabic.⁴³³ Interestingly, Yale’s Dummer collection, which Edwards frequented, also included Alexander Ross’ English edition of the Qur’ān (1649) which was translated from Andre du Ryer’s 1647 French translation from the Arabic. Peter Thuesen speculates that “Edwards may have seen this in New Haven,” thereby doubling the possibility that Edwards may have read the holy book of Islam for himself.⁴³⁴ As for Islam’s other primary source materials, it is unlikely that Edwards knew about the Ḥadīth collections, much less that he ever saw them for himself. Whether the Reverend actually possessed his own copy of Sale’s 1734 translation (he did not necessarily own all of the books listed in his catalogue), or at least read Yale’s copy of Ross’ 1649 translation, we cannot be certain. What is certain is that much of his thought on Islam was not original; he repeated much of the same information that he found in the secondary sources he read.

One of his favorite secondary sources, as we have already noted, was Ramsay. Tucked away deep in his *Miscellanies* notebooks, Edwards copied a section of Ramsay’s work on

⁴³² See Johann Friedrich Stapfer, *De Muhammedanismo in Institutiones Theologicae Polemicae Universae* (Tiguri: Heideggerum and Socios, 1743-1747), vol. 3, 289-349.

⁴³³ WJE 26:214. Also of note here is that fact that Edwards was not a stranger to the Arabic language. His interest in Arabic, however, was not really for its Islamic significance. Rather, he valued Arabic as a philological cognate of Hebrew and Aramaic to help decipher arcane Biblical words. See for example, WJE 24:145, where Edwards compares the Hebrew אֶפְרַיִם with the Arabic خَشَب جَمْر when discussing the wood of Noah’s Ark. For more on early American interest in Arabic, see Jeffrey Einboden, *The Islamic Lineage of American Literary Culture: Muslim Sources from the Revolution to Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ch. 1.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 106, “Editor’s Introduction.”

Persian and Turkish conceptions of humility which he had taken from the French orientalist Barthélemy d'Herbelot's (1625-1695) work *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697). That he copied such a substantial section of the work suggests that Edwards must have been duly impressed with what he read.⁴³⁵ When he read about "that glorious surrender to God" as described by Persian and Turkish authors, one can not help but wonder if Edwards realized that he was reading Islamic sources. It is not surprising that he would find statements such as, "there is properly no other true light, but God alone" and, "I serve God by love, and I cannot but serve him" to be immensely agreeable to his own theology. But they probably paled in comparison to the synchronicity of spirit he must have felt when he read the following: "When I retire into myself, I see nothing in the universe more vile and miserable" and, "Thy friend, O God, has no view to any other advantage in this world, than to praise thee; and pretends to nothing in heaven, but the enjoyment of thee" and finally, "The man never dies, O God, who lives but for thee: a thousand times happy he then, whom thou animatest by thy spirit."⁴³⁶ It is extremely unlikely that Edwards was unaware that the authors of the words he admired enough to copy at length were Muslims. His knowledge of the world was such that he surely knew Persia and Turkey were Muslim societies - his own writings testify to this fact as he often spoke of both peoples in other works where he referenced their religion. Added to this is the fact that Ramsay noted the very obviously Islamic sounding names of the authors whom d'Herbelot drew from such as, "Abou Hassan" and "Abdalaziz." All this seems to imply that not only did Edwards know he was reading Muslim theological reflections, but he found them quite agreeable to his own.

⁴³⁵ See WJE 23:192-194.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

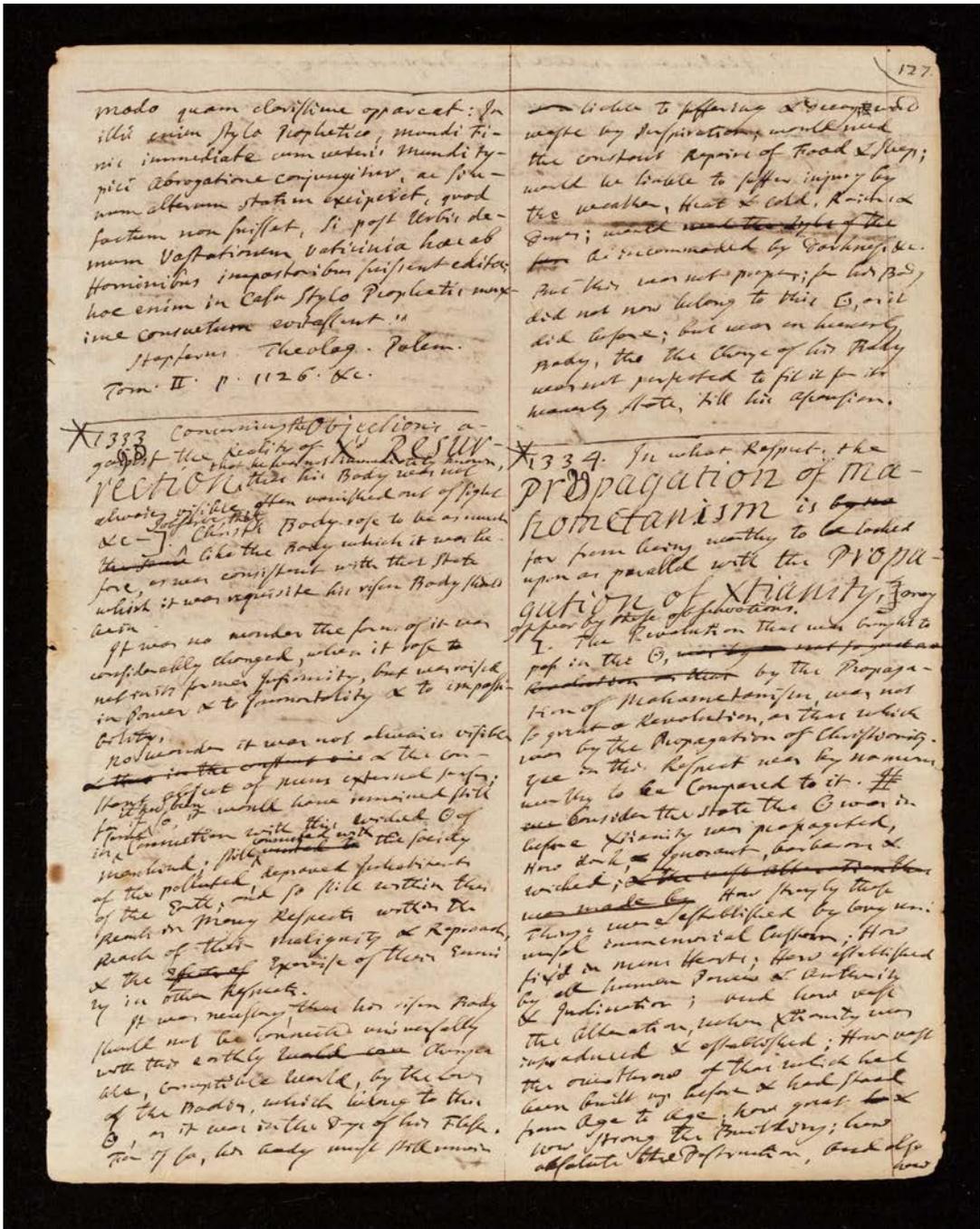


Figure 7: "Miscellanies," Book 9, showing the beginning of no. 1334, "In what respects the propagation of Mahometanism is far from being worthy to be looked upon as parallel with the propagation of Christianity." Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

4.5 Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “Theology of Religions”

It is admittedly an oxymoron of sorts to speak of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s “theology of religions” because his thought concerning religious others was extremely monochromatic. As much as we might like to discern some sort of significant hierarchy in his views toward religious others, there is a sense in which his works simply do not justify such a conclusion. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had no tolerance for any violation of Tawḥīd and according to his belief, anyone who did not apply monotheism the way that the Prophet did as recorded in the Sunna was in violation of the most sacred aspect of Islam. In this way, the Shaykh unequivocally grouped all religious others together as *kuffār* and/or *mushrikūn*. However, none of this means that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not see some religious others as closer to the truth than others. He certainly did. Yet in his estimation, the degree of one’s closeness to the truth of Tawḥīd did not in any way guarantee that they would move closer to that truth, but instead were more likely to move farther away over time. From his perspective, it mattered not whether the crack in the hull of a boat was small or large, because eventually either would lead to its sinking. Thus while there is a distinction regarding other religions in his thinking, it fades away in light of his belief that even the slightest degree of impurity apropos the doctrine of God’s absolute oneness makes one subject to damnation. Throughout his writings, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb reminds us over and over again that God is forgiving and merciful toward whomever he pleases, with one exception - those who commit the unpardonable sin of *shirk*. Indeed his repeated reference to the Qur’ānic reminders in *sūrat al-Nisā’* 4:48, 116 makes this clear, “ Surely God does not forgive *shirk*, but he does forgive what is lesser [of a sin] for whomever he wills.”⁴³⁷

⁴³⁷ See for example WMIAW 1:18, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s uniform categorization of religious others is perhaps best summarized by his statement below:

The Prophet appeared among a people who were diverse in their worship; among whom were those who worshiped angels, those who worshipped the prophets and other righteous persons, those who worshipped trees and stones, and those who worshipped the sun and moon. Yet the Prophet of God *fought against them all without differentiating between them*. And the supporting evidence of this is the saying of the Most High, “Fight against them until there is no *fitna* (dissension in religion) and all worship will belong to God alone.” *ṣūrat al-Ānfāl, āyat 9* [sic].⁴³⁸

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s unmistakable logic here was that if Muḥammad himself did not differentiate in fighting equally against all those who did not fully embrace Islam (viz. its core tenet of Tawḥīd) in his own day, why should his followers do so today? It mattered not whether one’s worship of God was somehow connected to Abraham, Jesus or ‘Alī, or whether one simply worshipped a tree or a stone instead - all were equally worthy of opposition in the cause of Islam, with the end goal of all human worship fully submitted to God.⁴³⁹ There are numerous other examples in the writings of Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb which seem to characterize him as a religiously colorblind *takfīrī* who only saw black and white categories which differentiated those who subscribed to *his* understanding of Islam from everyone else on the planet, including other Muslims who did not agree with his doctrines.

⁴³⁸ WMIAW 1:201, *al-Qowā'id al-Ārb'a* (emphasis mine). Cited herein is Q 8:39a, however the text contains a typographical error and reads verse “9” instead of “39.”

⁴³⁹ Contrary to popular belief, the word “Islam” means “submission (to God),” not “peace.” Many would argue however, that submission to God is what brings peace.

The Superiority of Islam

One of the foremost examples of his thinking on this issue is his treatise, *Faḍl al-Islām* (*The Superiority of Islam*).⁴⁴⁰ Most likely written early in his ministry, perhaps on the heels of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, *Faḍl al-Islām* was meant as a series of proofs for the virtue, supremacy, and superiority of true Islam over against all religious others. Its format is most unusual in that all thirteen chapters are merely compilations of Aḥādīth and verses from the Qurʾān - there is very little commentary. Clearly the Shaykh did not feel the need to expound on what he felt was already quite clear from the material he had presented to the reader. The titles of some of the chapters are very telling concerning his opinions on Islam and religious others (including those who take the name of Islam but are guilty of *bidʿa* or *shirk*). The chapters include:

- “The Superiority of Islam” - The opening chapter shares its name with the overall treatise and begins with, “Today I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as a religion” (Q 5:3).
- “The Necessity of Islam” - Opens with the dire warning that, “Whoever desires a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers” (Q 3:85).
- “An Exposition of Islam” - Explains the *shahāda* and the five pillars of Islam.
- “Whoever Desires to Practice a Religion Other Than Islam, It Will Not be Received From Him” - This self-evidently titled chapter concludes with a Ḥadīth from the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha, who related that the Prophet said, “Whoever does [religious] works which were not commanded by us has apostatized.”
- “Necessity of Exclusion of Following Any Other Book” - Here a Ḥadīth is recounted where ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was found to possess a page from the *Tawrāt*, prompting a stern rebuke from the Prophet, followed by his statement that, “If Moses were alive

⁴⁴⁰ WMIAW 1:203-226, *Faḍl al-Islām*. This title could also be translated, *The Virtue of Islam*. The reason why I have chosen to use “superiority” instead of “virtue” is clarified by the contents of the treatise.

today, he would have no choice but to follow me.” The implications are clear enough to lend support to the name of the chapter.

- “The Consequences of Leaving the Community” - This chapter recounts some of the lessons to be learned from the time of *jāhiliyya* where the tribalistic mentality typical of that period is the very antithesis of authentic community in Islam.
- “Necessity of Total Immersion in Islam” - Argues that inasmuch as anyone follows what is written in the Qur’ān, abandoning anything else, he is on the right path.
- “Regarding How *Bid’a* is Worse Than the Biggest Sins” - Innovation in religion is more dangerous and more grievous than all sins except for polytheism.
- “God Does Not Accept Repentance From He Who Practices *Bid’a*” - In the same way that God will not forgive those who commit polytheism, he will not forgive those who practice *bid’a*.
- “Oh People of the Book, Do Not Fear What is Around You” - Argues that Christians and Jews, whose asceticism in the way of Abraham is admirable, often push their ascetic practices beyond the bounds, thus diluting the pure religion of Abraham.
- “Set Your Face Upon the Ḥanīfs” - Is an encouragement to the reader to seek the innate pureness of the religion of some of Islam’s forerunners such as Abraham. It is by far the longest chapter, and recounts numerous stories meant to warn Muslims from wandering from the path of Muḥammad.
- “Concerning Foreignness of Muslims and Their Superiority” - Argues that true believers are not supposed to be part of the accepted crowd within a tribe, indeed they should be regarded as outcasts.
- “Beware of *Bid’a*” - The treatise’s final chapter is once again a warning not to fall victim to the pitfalls of religious innovation that are typical of every generation, especially those that are sure to come after the Prophet. True to his usual method of using Aḥādīth that fit whatever point he sought to make, sometimes irrespective of the strength of the *isnād*, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb here chose to cite a Ḥadīth of suspect origin. He recounted that the Prophet said, “Whoever lives long among you will see numerous sects emerge, and it is incumbent upon you to follow my Sunna and the Sunna of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, biting onto them [holding fast] with your molars... for every *bid’a* will lead you astray.” The obvious anachronism of the

Ḥadīth in mentioning the Rightly Guided Caliphs did not deter the Shaykh from using it, nor from declaring that it was trustworthy.

Shades of gray

It seems obvious from what has been written above that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was hopelessly beyond any positive statement or recognition regarding religious others. However, for the one who takes the time to delve more deeply into his works and perhaps more importantly, his world, it is possible to unearth strange new shades of gray from material that may at first seem very black and white.

While it is often difficult for modern readers to comprehend Edwards outside of eighteenth-century New England, is virtually impossible to understand Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb outside of eighteenth-century Najd, which was among the most secluded environments in the world. Until Egyptian forces under Ibrahim Pasha (1789-1848) occupied Najd in the Ottoman bid to crush the Muwaḥḥid movement in the early nineteenth century, no outside force had ever occupied the barren stretch of central Arabia. This is a picture that could justifiably lead one to conclude that the Shaykh’s extreme views were merely a product of his place and time in history. However, it is also important to note that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was exposed to religious views other than Sunnī, Ḥanbalī doctrine in various ways. Caravans of pilgrims regularly trekked through Najd on their way to perform the *ḥajj* and *‘umra*. At the very least, these pilgrims (who undoubtedly included Ṣūfīs as well as Shī‘a) must have left some sort of mark on the local population, even if only in passing. We also know that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had plenty of contact with Ṣūfīs in Medina, as his teacher there was himself a Ṣūfī.⁴⁴¹ Finally, in addition to the many Shī‘a which provoked his ire in Basra, it is likely that Ibn ‘Abd al-

⁴⁴¹ Muḥammad Ḥayyā al-Sindī belonged to the Naqshabandiyya *tarīqa*.

Wahhāb came into contact with Christians and Jews there as well. Understanding this duality of isolation *and* exposure pertaining to his immediate and experiential contexts then, helps one to better make sense of his views of religious others. It is most likely this duality that accounts for the seemingly contradictory tones that the Shaykh's works sometimes exhibit concerning religious others.

It can be said that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb saw unbelief in three general categories - unbelief *outside* the house of Islam, unbelief among the *cousins* of Islam, and unbelief *inside* the house of Islam. Those outside the house of Islam included those who either had no divine revelation (such as atheists) or those who claimed revelation other than the Bible or Qur'ān such as Zoroastrians (whom he referred to as "*Majūs*"). Proportionately Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb spent very little time discussing *kufr* outside the house of Islam, most probably because he saw this as so far outside the realm of truth or likelihood of exposure in Arabia that the threat it posed was minimal. *Kufr* among Islam's cousins was, for Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, exemplified by the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book). Jews and Christians received a fair amount of attention in his works, mostly as negative historical examples of what can happen to a people who do not safeguard what has been entrusted to them. Finally, and most importantly for the Shaykh, was the issue of *kufr* within the house of Islam. Because danger from within is always more enticing in its familiarity and immediate in its availability, it is not surprising that Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb spent far more time dealing with the grievous sins of those who claimed to be Muslims but whose worship said otherwise to him. And it is to this issue that we now turn.

4.6 Danger from Within

Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s works are full of warnings against Ṣūfī practices. He repeatedly condemned the building of shrines and the exaltation of holy men. Moreover, he put his injunctions into practice by leading several campaigns to destroy Ṣūfī shrines or holy trees around Najd where people would often go to worship. None of this, however, meant that the Shaykh was categorically opposed to *Taṣawwuf*. He maintained that “Some [people] concern themselves with *fiqh*, such as the jurists, and some concern themselves with worship and seeking the hereafter, such as the Ṣūfīs. God sent his Prophet with this religion which encompasses both kinds.”⁴⁴² Clearly the Shaykh did not have a problem with Ṣūfism per se, but rather with many of its *practices*. Indeed, many of Sunnī Islam’s most revered thinkers identified as Ṣūfīs, among them Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s Ḥanbalī forerunners Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim. Furthermore, as we have already noted above, even his mentor in Medina, Shaykh Muḥammad Hayyā al-Sindī was a Ṣūfī. Perhaps Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s reluctance to overtly name Ṣūfism as an object of his wrath was occasioned by his belief that the “problems” he sought to address were not confined to Ṣūfism as much as they were tied to an overall set of practices that any Muslim was in danger of falling into if they were not careful. In this way Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was able to condemn many of Ṣūfism’s harmful practices without condemning the rich tradition it offered Muslims throughout history. In short, whatever Ṣūfism brought to Islam that did not foster *shirk* was acceptable to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab. But those things that led to *shirk*, such as the building of shrines or worship at graves or trees were to be forbidden, and even violently opposed if need be.

Far more dangerous for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb than the threat of Ṣūfism gone awry was the threat posed by Shī‘ism. The *Rāfiḍa* (Refusers), as he called them, were more than an odious

⁴⁴² WMIAW 4:31, *Fatāwā wa Masa‘il*.

threat to the purity of Islam - they represented an existential threat to the faith itself.⁴⁴³ Owing to the vileness of their doctrines in his eyes, the Shaykh did not really consider Shī‘a as Muslims. Therefore, the knowledge that they considered themselves Muslims raised the fervency of his ire toward them all the more. Like a cancer in the body that must be contained if it cannot be fully eradicated, Shī‘a were, for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, the devil from within the house of Islam. This is what led him to pen a rather detailed critique against them entitled *Treatise on the Refutation of the Rāfiḍa*. Although it is not one of his better known works, it contains some of his most original thought. In a series of thirty-two specific points of contention, the Shaykh attempted to methodically deconstruct the Shī‘a position. This fact alone shows us a couple of important things about Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb; namely that the issue at hand was of monumental importance to him, but also that he had good knowledge about Shī‘ism. The latter is significant because he has often been accused of unfamiliarity with Shī‘ism by critics who argue that he was unqualified to speak on the subject. *The Refutation of the Rāfiḍa* seems to definitively prove otherwise, as Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s familiarity with Shī‘a doctrines and practices is made rather evident by his analysis therein.

The fact that this theological critique is the only one of its kind among Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s various works is testament to the danger he perceived the Shī‘a to pose to Muslims. Chief among a long list of grievances with the Shī‘a in the piece was the Shaykh’s contention that their falsification of the Ḥadīth in order to justify the exaltation of ‘Alī was the most grievous of sins that could be committed. As if the act that branded them “the Refusers” in the first place, the rejection of the first three caliphs, was not enough to consign them as heretics, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb accused the Shī‘a of constructing narratives and inserting them

⁴⁴³ Shī‘a were deemed *Rāfiḍa* because of their refusal to accept the authority of the first three caliphs, Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān, as they argue that ‘Alī should have been the Prophet’s rightful successor instead of fourth in line.

into the tradition of the Prophet wherein he supposedly made provision for ‘Alī to be his successor. It was this apparent slandering of the Prophet that most troubled him, as he stated, “Whoever has permitted falsehood regarding the Messenger of God has committed *kufr*, and he who permits it is indeed debauched.”⁴⁴⁴

After expressing his extreme displeasure with their deliberate lies and slandering of Muḥammad, which alone was enough to brand them as unbelievers instead of Muslims in his mind, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb accused the Shī‘a of many fatal errors. Their rejection of the consensus (*ijmā’*) of the Companions of Muḥammad and the early Muslim community in choosing Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Uthmān as the first three caliphs instead of the Prophet’s nephew, ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, was the foundation of their apostasy according to him.⁴⁴⁵ In placing family ties above the consensus opinion of the *umma*, he felt that they were scorning some of the Prophet’s most enduring words, as he was reported to have said, “My community will never agree in error” (here interpreted to apply to the issue of succession). And in scorning his words, the Shī‘a “had scorned the Prophet” himself, thus justifying their designation as *kuffār*.⁴⁴⁶ It is this difference of opinion regarding the succession of leadership in the early caliphate that caused an impasse in the first Islamic century which seems unlikely to ever be reconciled.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb also criticized what he felt was Shī‘a revilement regarding the *Ṣaḥāba* which led to further apostasy. He addressed the way that their doctrines “diminished the Qur’ān” and that their insistence on the infallibility of the twelve *imāms* was “lacking in evidence from the [Qur’ān] and Sunna, from Islamic consensus, and from sound reasoning or

⁴⁴⁴ WMIAW 12:7, *Risāla fī al-Rudd ‘ala al-Rāfiḍa*.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 8-12.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

mentality” thus proving their “deluded” state.⁴⁴⁷ The Shaykh was particularly incensed over what he saw as massive defects in the Shī‘a view of women surrounding marriage and divorce, as well as their contempt for the Prophet’s youngest wife, ‘Ā’isha.⁴⁴⁸ Additionally, he was displeased with the Shī‘a doctrine of *taqiyya* (dissimulation) whereby in times of extreme duress one could hide his true identity in order to preserve his life. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb disagreed with their Qur’ānic exegesis on this point because he felt that the Shī‘a excessively exalted the doctrine far beyond its original intent among the first generation of Muslims, essentially using it as an excuse for dishonesty in a number of areas.⁴⁴⁹ This form of “religious innovation” developed by “those liars” was purely “from fear of man” and had no place in Islam as Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw it.⁴⁵⁰ In constructing his argument against the Shī‘a view of *taqiyya*, the Shaykh further demonstrated his grasp of Shī‘a thought by quoting from al-Kāfī, the most well known collection of Ḥadīth among Twelver Shī‘a circles. Al-Kāfī related the words of J‘afar al-Ṣādiq as, “*Taqiyya* is my religion as well as the religion of my fathers.”⁴⁵¹ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb strongly objected to this Ḥadīth, stating, “Far be it!” that these words were ever spoken by the noble J‘afar al-Ṣādiq, whom Sunnīs regard as an important early figure in Islam.⁴⁵²

And so we see that once again, the supposed falsification of the Ḥadīth is what drew Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s condemnation of Shī‘ism to the extent that he cast them out of the fold of

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 14-15, 27-28.

⁴⁴⁸ On the subject of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s view of women and gender issues, see chapter 3 of this thesis, where these issues are dealt with further.

⁴⁴⁹ Historically speaking, Q 3:28 and 16:106 are two of the primary verses which scholars have used in the development of the doctrine of *taqiyya*. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb took exception to Shī‘a exegesis of these passages, as well as Q 49:13 which makes use of the same Arabic word.

⁴⁵⁰ WMIAW 12:20-22, *Risāla fī al-Rudd ‘ala al-Rāfiḍa*.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁵² Ibid. Shī‘a also claim J‘afar al-Ṣādiq as their own and revere him as the sixth *imām* and the developer of the doctrine of *taqiyya*, which was often used to help protect the Shī‘a from Sunnī persecution.

Islam altogether. “Therefore,” he concluded, “I do not believe that he who commits *kufr* against that which is [truly] from God is a Muslim. And there is no Islam within he who has *kufr*, and I believe that he who has *kufr* is an unbeliever.”⁴⁵³ As evidence of divine displeasure with the sin of *bid‘a* which leads to unbelief, the Shaykh recounted a story whereby “the Jews were turned into apes and pigs, and it has been passed down that the same thing happened to some of the *Rāfiḍa* in glorious Medina and other places.”⁴⁵⁴ In his mind, the penalty for perverting what God has revealed to the *Ahl al-Sunna* was of the gravest consequence, and it could not be rightfully deemed “Islam.” The *Rāfiḍa*, according to Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, were not merely, as has been suggested, “an extremist sect of Shī‘a”⁴⁵⁵ - they were *all* Shī‘a. Perhaps, as related in the above story, only *some* were turned into apes and pigs (presumably the most vile among them). And yet the differences among those who refused the reign of God’s anointed Rightly Guided Caliphs, preferring instead to cling to their own beliefs and perverting the revelation of God himself in order to justify their errors were of a very slight degree indeed. The Shaykh would allow for the fact that such could be walking in darkness as men or as apes. Either way, the Shī‘a were “more malevolent to the religion than the Jews and the Christians.”⁴⁵⁶ Beyond being yet another condemnation of Shī‘ism, such a statement is proof of the fact that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did see differences in religious others, and for the purposes of this study it clearly obliges us to look further into his mindset on the matter.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam*, 84.

⁴⁵⁶ WMIAW 12:14, *Risāla fī al-Rudd ‘ala al-Rāfiḍa*.

4.7 The People of the Book

If Shī‘a were the danger from within, then the People of the Book - Christians and Jews - were the danger from without. If Shī‘a were the danger of the present, then the People of the Book were the danger of the past.⁴⁵⁷ As we have noted, it is possible, perhaps even likely, that the Shaykh had met Christians and/or Jews during his stay in Basra. Both groups were long present in Iraq, which, by the dawn of the eighteenth century had already housed the patriarchal see of the Church of the East for more than a thousand years.⁴⁵⁸ Although the majority of Iraq’s Christians were historically located further north between Baghdad and Mosul, Basra nevertheless had its own metropolitan see from the ninth century. Furthermore, based on Basra’s position as a strategic port city, it is likely that Christians formed a substantial minority of the city’s heterogeneous population. This would also have been the case for Jews, whose involvement in economic centres throughout the region is well documented. Curiously though, neither Christians nor Jews appear to have been the cause of the stirring that prompted Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s foray into public preaching during his time in Basra - that ignominious honor appears to belong to the city’s large Shī‘a population. “How can you confess that the Prophet of God and his companions and the *imāms* who came after him have laid a foundation for our practice, and then deny him more than you would deny the religion of the Jews and the Christians?” he once lamented concerning the folk Islamic practices of other so-called Muslims.⁴⁵⁹ The implication of this statement seems to be that in the Shaykh’s eyes, it was better to be a Jew or a Christian than to follow Islam wrongly.

⁴⁵⁷ See R.A. Leo, “Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History 1500-1900*, ed. David Thomas and John Chesworth (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

⁴⁵⁸ For an excellent overview on the vast extent and later decline of the Church of the East, see Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia - and How it Died* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

⁴⁵⁹ WMIAW 5:42-43, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*.

Perhaps the most intriguing feature concerning Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s treatment of the People of the Book is the gaping absence in his reflections of any genuine interaction with Christianity or Judaism as living faiths. This vacuity is particularly puzzling concerning Christianity, whose adherents in the eighteenth century made up almost a quarter of the world’s population, a fact that appears to have been lost on Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, perhaps more by ignorance than by intent. There are, however, a few interesting exceptions to this general rule in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. In a discussion on the issue of the protected status of subjugated peoples (*dhimma*) in his *fiqh* collection, the Shaykh was resolute in pronouncing that protected status is only applicable to Christians and Jews.⁴⁶⁰ He further specified just who could benefit from *dhimmī* status by breaking down the *Ahl al-Kitāb* into various sects found in and around his immediate environs:

And it [*dhimmī* status] cannot be contracted except for the People of the Book, or those who have the likeness of a book, for the People of the Book are the Jews and the Christians, and whoever resembles their religion such as the Samaritans who follow the Law of Moses, although they disagree with him in certain respects, and the branches of Christians among whom are the Jacobites, Nestorians, Melkites, Catholics, Byzantines, Armenians and others who belong to the Law of Jesus - and others besides these are not the People of the Book... [such as] those with the likeness of a book, like the *Majūs* (Zoroastrians).⁴⁶¹

In a stark departure from the typical tone of his works, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb here demonstrates two unusual insights. Firstly, his statement that Jews and Christians are the only legally acceptable beneficiaries of the *dhimma* system suggests that he was aware that Jews and Christians existed within Islamic lands in his day. Secondly, his listing of multiple Christian communities and his brief discussion of the Samaritans leads one to believe that the Shaykh knew more about this issue than most commentators give him credit for. Thus, at the

⁴⁶⁰ He did so presumably to counter what he deemed as *bid‘a* by those who eventually included Hindus, Buddhists, and others into the expanding Islamic empire over time. This is consonant with the view that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was, at his core, committed to reforming Islam based on the realities that existed during the days of the Prophet and his *Ṣaḥāba*.

⁴⁶¹ WMIAW 2:401, *al-Fiqh: Bab ‘Aqd al-Dhimma*.

risk of drawing conclusions that are too far removed from the evidence at hand, we may at least deduce that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was both aware and somewhat knowledgeable of Christian and Jewish elements in his wider proximity. Again, this example is not indicative of the general content of the Shaykh’s works, as he largely fails to interact with either Judaism or Christianity in a way that would suggest he saw either religion as relevant in his day and age.

Another peculiarity of his thought is that he often lumped Christians and Jews together into one general category as the receivers of divine revelation (the *Injīl* and the *Tawrāt*) who had fallen away. His exegesis of the opening *sūra* of the Qur’ān, a prayer which asks God to “guide us to the straight path, the path of those upon whom you have shown grace, not of those who have evoked your anger, nor of those who have gone astray” (Q 1:6-7) makes this abundantly clear. He wrote, “the ones who have evoked your anger are those who have been instructed but do not do what they have been taught, and the ones who have gone astray are those who act without proper knowledge - the first describes the Jews and the second describes the Christians.”⁴⁶² In a rejection of the *imago Dei* motif in Genesis 1 in the Hebrew Bible and of the doctrine of the Incarnation in John 1 of the New Testament, the Shaykh observed, “The Jews liken the Creator to the created, and the Christians liken the created to the Creator.”⁴⁶³ Turning his attention to their conceptions of the love of God, the Shaykh had this to say:

Following Sharī‘a and practicing *jihād* are among the main things that differentiate those who truly love God from those who merely claim to love God, who hold a general sense of his lordship mixed with some *bid’a*. This mere claim of love is in many ways similar to what the Jews and Christians claim... this is a hypocrisy which could place them in the lowest level of hell. In the *Tawrāt* and *Injīl* there is consensus among Jews and Christians with regard to the love of God, inasmuch as they have the

⁴⁶² WMIAW 5:17-18, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*.

⁴⁶³ WMIAW 12:12, *Mulḥiq al-Muṣnafāt: Hāthahi Masā’il*.

greatest commandment in the Law... In the *Injīl* the Messiah said, ‘The greatest commandment of the Messiah is to love God with all your heart, mind, and soul.’ The Christians claim that their love for God is manifest in their asceticism and worship, but they miss the love of God altogether if they do not follow what God loves, but instead follow what angers God and hate what pleases him, thus nullifying their deeds.⁴⁶⁴

Later he recalled the warning of Muḥammad to the first generation of Muslims that they should not assume that just because they had received divine guidance in the form of the Qur’ān that they were not in danger of falling away from their book as the Christians and Jews had. In the mind of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, Christians and Jews were, above all else, an historical negative example for Muslims of the pitfalls of *shirk* and *kufr*. Neither the possession of a holy book nor a long record of prophetic visitation made a people immune from these two enemies of true faith. Allāh had allowed Christians and Jews to become *mushrikūn* and *kuffār* as a warning to Muslims, and anyone who now doubted the veracity of what Muḥammad brought was in danger of the same. Indeed, “a man who doubts does not know what God has sent down to his Messenger, and cannot distinguish between the religion of the Messenger and the religion of the Christians.”⁴⁶⁵ Exactly *how* Christians and Jews had strayed from the straight path is not always clear in the Shaykh’s words. Was it because they corrupted the text of the Bible, or because they distorted its plain *meaning*?⁴⁶⁶ The Shaykh does not say. It is of note that the only instance of the term *tahrīf* (corruption) found in the index to his *Mu’allafāt* is not in reference to the Bible, but the Qur’ān. In claiming that some people distort the meaning of the Qur’ān, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was unable to contain his

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 17-18. Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb here accurately relays Jesus’ summary of the greatest commandment in the Law as recorded in Matthw 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27 in the New Testament.

⁴⁶⁵ WMIAW 5:261, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*.

⁴⁶⁶ This speaks to the difference between *tahrīf* of the text itself and *tahrīf* of the meaning or interpretation of the text. Throughout the centuries, there have been many Muslim views on *tahrīf* both of the Bible and the Qur’ān. It was common for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his followers to accuse the Shī’a and others of tampering with the Qur’ān (both in the text itself and in the exegesis of it). Likewise, Muslim authors have held a number of positions on *tahrīf* and the Bible. The concept is largely drawn from Q 2:75, 4:46, 5:13, 41.

sarcasm, calling this a real “wonder of wonders!”⁴⁶⁷ However the *Ahl al-Kitāb* were led astray then is less important to the Shaykh than the fact that they had been supplanted by the *Ahl al-Sunna*. The issue of recency, not primacy, is what seems most pivotal to him. The message of Muḥammad, as it were, was God’s most recent, and final restoration of his original revelation of Islam, which had lost its luster among those who came before.

(mis)Understanding Christianity: the issue of sources

Throughout Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s works, Christianity, Christians, and Jesus are token straw men who are continually summoned to make a point. Apart from demonstrating a surface knowledge of Eastern Christian sects, and accurately quoting Jesus’ words from the New Testament about the greatest commandment in the Law, the overwhelming majority of his discussions regarding the religion of ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of even the most basic Christian concepts or historical facts. The above exception from the *Injīl* notwithstanding, he continually cited the Ḥadīth or the Qur’ān as his main sources of information. This led him to consistently misunderstand and misrepresent Christian doctrines in virtually the same way that much of the earliest Islamic tradition did. One prime example is the characterization of the doctrine of the Trinity as the belief in three gods, namely God, Jesus, and Mary. This of course is emphatically not the historic Christian position, and is clearly derived from the Qur’ānic passage which makes the same claim.⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ WMIAW 4:21, *Fatāwa wa Masā’il*.

⁴⁶⁸ See Q 5:116. Scholars have suggested that the background to this characterization of the Trinity in the Qur’ān may stem from a possible encounter between Muḥammad and a heretical sect known as the Collyridians, who believed that Mary was a part of the Trinity and consequently were banished from the Byzantine Empire, eventually settling in Arabia. See J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1990), 68.

In his commentary on *sūrat al-Kaf* (Q 18) he stated concerning the Qur'ān, “The revelation upon his [God’s] servant [Muḥammad] nullifies the doctrine of the Christians and the polytheists and also discloses his grace upon them [Muslims] whence he revealed it to a man [Muḥammad] from among them.”⁴⁶⁹ If in his opinion the Qur'ān voids Christian doctrine, then on what basis can one reasonably expect that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb would have had an understanding of Christianity that was anything other than classically Islamic? Ironically, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s claim here goes even further than the Qur'ān does on the matter of previous divine revelation, as Q 5:48 states, “And we have revealed to you the book [Qur'ān] with the truth, confirming the book [Bible] which is before it (lit. “between its two hands”) and as a guardian over it.” The Qur'ān thus claims to confirm and guard Christian doctrine, while the Shaykh argues the very opposite. In fairness, however, it should be noted that the Qur'ān here only speaks of confirming the Bible itself, and not necessarily Christian doctrine, while the Shaykh clearly states that what is voided is Christian *doctrine*, not necessarily the Bible. Yet the point still remains that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s major difficulty in assessing Christianity was his strong reliance on Islamic sources for information.

Although scholars have argued that the Arabic Bible - or at least the Gospels - probably existed in Arabia even before the rise of Islam,⁴⁷⁰ there is very little indication that the Shaykh ever laid eyes on the Bible for himself. Indeed, whatever portions of the Bible may have remained in Arabia during the thousand years prior were likely to have vanished by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s time. Even so, his instructive retelling of the Ḥadīth wherein ‘Umar once possessed a page of the *Tawrāt* and was strongly forbidden from reading it by the Prophet

⁴⁶⁹ WMIAW 5:240, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*.

⁴⁷⁰ See Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century*, (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 427-429; and Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

demonstrates that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb would probably not have read the Bible even if it had been available to him.

Even though Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb never likely saw a Bible, through the Ḥadīth he absorbed and thus incorporated plenty of Biblical themes into his work.⁴⁷¹ The first Ḥadīth mentioned in the treatise *Faḍl al-Islām* is not only indicative of his perspective on the religions of Islam’s predecessors, but it is also telling of the way that Islamic tradition often borrowed from the Bible. The Shaykh quoted from al-Bukhārī:

Your [Muslims] example and the example of the People of the two Books is like the example of a man hiring workers who said: ‘Who will work for me from morning until midday for one *qīrāṭ*?’ And the Jews did so. Then he said: ‘Who will work for me from midday until the afternoon prayer for one *qīrāṭ*?’ And the Christians did so. Then he said: ‘Who will work for me from the afternoon prayer until the sun sets for two *qīrāṭs*?’ For you [Muslims] are they. So the Jews and the Christians became angry and they said, ‘Why have we worked more and yet received less reward?’ He replied, ‘Have I given you less than what was rightfully yours?’ They said ‘no,’ and he replied, ‘Such is my favor which I bestow upon whomever I will.’⁴⁷²

For the one with knowledge of Jesus’ parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) the parallel is unmistakable. Here is a picture of Islam, infused with Biblical “DNA,” and perfectly fitted to the worldview of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. The Shaykh continued with his selection of “Biblical” Aḥādīth:

God intentionally hid [the blessing of the holy day] Friday from those who came before us, as Saturday was for the Jews and Sunday was for the Christians. God came to us and guided us to Friday, and in this way they will follow us on the Day of Resurrection. We are the last among the people of this world but the first on the Day of Resurrection.⁴⁷³

Again, the Biblical parallel is strikingly obvious, as the parable of the workers in the vineyard ends with this decree from Jesus, “So the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16).

In this and in many other instances Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb unwittingly incorporated numerous

⁴⁷¹ See section 4.8 below.

⁴⁷² WMIAW 1:206, *Faḍl al-Islām*.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

Biblical themes into his analyses. Not surprisingly, he made no attempt to meaningfully interact with the doctrines of the Bible, especially since it is unlikely that the Shaykh knew of the Biblical origins of such Aḥādīth. Nevertheless, as these selections from his works demonstrate, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not harbor animosity toward the People of the Book, nor did he claim that their books were corrupted. He simply maintained that with the coming of Islam, they had been supplanted.⁴⁷⁴

4.8 ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam

“Recognize the specialness of Jesus being the word of God,” Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb instructed his audience, and “Note Jesus being a spirit from him,” he continued.⁴⁷⁵ It may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb sincerely loved, appreciated and admired Jesus. In fact, his love for Jesus is something that he shared with most Muslims through the ages. Owing to his exalted Qur’ānic titles as God’s word and spirit, as well as his virgin birth and miracle working ministry, Jesus is accorded what amounts to the second highest status in Islam’s unofficial hierarchy of prophets and messengers behind only Muḥammad. Consider the following Ḥadīth, recorded in both al-Bukhārī and Mūsliḥ, and presented by Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb near the beginning of his most well known treatise, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*:

Whoever testifies that there is no god but God alone, who has no partner, and that Muḥammad is his slave and messenger, and that Jesus is his slave and messenger and his word whom he bespoke unto Mary, and a spirit from him, and that heaven is real and that hell is real - God will admit him to heaven, no matter what his deeds may be.⁴⁷⁶

⁴⁷⁴ This lack of animosity toward the *Ahl al-Kitāb* is also seen in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s retelling of ‘Umar’s lowering of the *jizya* for the Christians of Najran when their earnings declined. He saw this as instructive, and commended ‘Umar for it. See WMIAW 12:171, *Mulḥiq al-Muṣṣafāt: Hāthahi Masā’il*.

⁴⁷⁵ WMIAW 1:14, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

In addition to the aforementioned imperatives the Shaykh gave readers to recognize the special status of Jesus as God's word and spirit in this passage, he also instructed them to "Reflect upon the collective nature of Jesus and Muḥammad as the slaves and messengers of God."⁴⁷⁷ Clearly Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb held the son of Mary in high regard.

As Islamic historical literature teems with retellings of Jesus' renown, Muslim parents since the time of Muḥammad have commonly named their sons 'Īsā in Jesus' honor. And yet we must not lose sight of one small caveat - the love that Muslims, including the Shaykh, have traditionally lavished upon Jesus is love for the *Islamic* Jesus, not the Biblical one.⁴⁷⁸ This Islamic Jesus - the portrayal of Jesus in Muslim sources - presumably originated from the contact that Muḥammad had with Christians in the formative period of Islam and continued to develop over the centuries as the Muslim empire increasingly came into contact with Christendom.⁴⁷⁹ The former produced the Jesus of the Qur'ān, while the latter occasioned the Jesus of the Ḥadīth. Both caricatures are fraught with their own historiographical challenges, yet they share a common polemical imperative to refashion Jesus into an Islamic mold. Many of the stories of Jesus in the Qur'ān resemble passages from the New Testament, but it is the Jesus of the Ḥadīth, a product of later Islamic interaction with Christians and their highly developed theologies, that really begins to make one wonder whether he is in fact reading passages directly from the New Testament; in many

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁴⁷⁸ See Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

⁴⁷⁹ See for example, John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Alfred Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam: An Introduction to the Study of Hadith Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 132ff; and Ignaz Goldziher, "Hadith and New Testament," *Muslim Studies* 2 (1971): 346-362.

cases a given passage is only betrayed by the fact that it contains a small but obvious Islamic “twist.”⁴⁸⁰

Into this long established milieu stepped Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, whose view of Jesus is impossible to comprehend apart from the existence of this tradition in Islam. The Shaykh repeatedly asserted the classic Islamic contention that belief in Jesus *in the way that Christians profess and practice it* constitutes *shirk* and *kufr*.⁴⁸¹ By worshiping Jesus, a mere man, as God, Christians have committed what is for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb the unpardonable sin. There is a sense in which he sees this as an unfortunate occurrence, as in his view Christians were supposedly once on God’s true path, but they fell away when they began to claim that Jesus is divine. Apparently Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was not aware that from the very beginning Christians have equated Jesus with the Divine, as Jesus himself claimed ontological equality with God in the Gospels. “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” Jesus said in John 14:9.⁴⁸² In this way, the supposed “falling away” from Tawḥīd that plagued Christianity is very difficult to justify Biblically - but not necessarily historically. Indeed, the Christological debates of the centuries that immediately preceded the rise of Islam must have served to give early Muslims the impression that Christian doctrine had been corrupted. Beginning with Nicaea in 325, Christological discussions featured prominently in every ecumenical church council that preceded the rise of Islam. In a very real sense, it can be argued that Islam came of age in the soil of Christological controversy that still dotted the

⁴⁸⁰ See section 4.7 above.

⁴⁸¹ WMIAW 1:167, *Kashaf al-Shubuhāt*. This is merely one among countless examples found throughout Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s works where he makes this claim.

⁴⁸² “Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves (John 14:8–11).’” This is one of many passages in the Bible that demonstrate Jesus’ claim to divinity.

landscape of the ancient Near East at the time of Muḥammad.⁴⁸³ Thus, from an Islamic vantage point, while it was truly regrettable that a divinely revealed religion such as Christianity had been corrupted, this notion may have been theologically appealing to Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to the extent that he saw the entrance of *shirk* into Christianity as preordained by God to serve as an example to later believers (the Muslims).

Time and again, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb stood ready to defend Jesus - *his* Jesus - from threats to his identity, his esteem in God’s sight, his place in heaven, and even his mother. We must not forget that according to the Shaykh, none of the *shirk* or *kufr* committed by Jesus’ followers was the fault of Jesus. For “among the greatest of the righteous who commit *shirk* are those who resemble the Christians, and Jesus is innocent with respect to them.”⁴⁸⁴ The Shaykh would also have us remember that when people accused Muḥammad of ridiculing or cursing Jesus, they could not have been further from the truth, for “he never cursed Jesus or his mother” but instead gave Jesus the honor he was due.⁴⁸⁵ For “when he mentioned that praying to Jesus was of no benefit, they considered it cursing.”⁴⁸⁶ Far from being a curse, in setting the record straight the Prophet was actually demonstrating his love, respect and admiration for Jesus - he was clearing his name. And when certain Twelver Shī‘a alleged that Jesus was possibly in hellfire, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb rushed to his defense, claiming that the

⁴⁸³ The Christological debates of the early church were nothing like the debates between later Muslim polemicists and orthodox Christians. In the former case, both sides were debating issues that stemmed from an already existent Biblical text which was not in question - it was the *meaning* of the text that was being debated. Eventually it was agreed by the majority that the orthodox position on Jesus’ divinity was the plain teaching of the Biblical text itself. In the latter case, however, Muslim polemicists appealed to an array of extra-Biblical texts to support their position that Jesus was not divine. Nevertheless, the Christological stances of men like Arius only served to fuel traditional Muslim accusations against Christians.

⁴⁸⁴ WMIAW 6:175, *al-Risā’ il al-Shakhṣiyya*.

⁴⁸⁵ WMIAW 1:355, *Majmū‘at Risā’ il fī al-Tawḥīd*.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Qur'ān clearly affirmed his place in heaven, and to say otherwise is to effectively disbelieve Muḥammad's message.⁴⁸⁷

While Christians have often highlighted the difference between the old covenant (the very literal Law of Moses) and the new covenant (the figurative “law” of grace), Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb knew nothing of such a distinction. This is why he spoke of the Sharī‘a of Moses and the Sharī‘a of Jesus as if they were merely different manifestations of the same divine legal pact (which is not very different from Edwards’ own mono-covenantal view). In referencing “the Sharī‘a of Jesus” Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb demonstrated that he was superimposing an Islamic worldview onto Jesus. Again though, we should not rush to judge the Shaykh by holding him to a standard that he literally knew nothing of. He did not know that the gospel (“good news”) was that mankind could now be justified in God’s sight not by keeping an impossibly rigid religious law, but by exercising faith in Jesus and his work of atonement. As far as he was concerned, the Islamic Jesus was the *only* Jesus worth discussing, and as such the *Injīl* was the source of his Sharī‘a just as the *Tawrāt* was the source of Mūsā’s and the Qur’ān was the source of Muḥammad’s. We have no idea what exactly Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw as the content of Jesus’ Sharī‘a (the gospel) but we may safely assume that he figured it was a message of repentance from idolatry and embracing the worship of God in Tawḥīd.⁴⁸⁸

It is rather telling that Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb only mentioned the cross twice. Once was in his recounting of a Ḥadīth which claims that Jesus will “pulverize” the cross when he returns to earth, supposedly justifying once and for all the Islamic contention that the cross has no significance, despite the vociferous Christian claim to the contrary. The Shaykh recounted that, “The Messenger of God said ‘[in the last days] Jesus will be ruling

⁴⁸⁷ WMIAW 6:64, *al-Risā‘il al-Shakhṣiyya*.

⁴⁸⁸ This is confirmed by the Shaykh’s own retelling of Jesus’ admonition in the New Testament to love God with all one’s heart, mind, and soul (see section 4.7 above).

over my *umma* justly... he will pulverize the cross, slaughter the pig, and abolish the *jizya*.”⁴⁸⁹ The second time the Shaykh mentioned the cross is in the same volume of his collection of Ḥadīth, where he used the term “*Ahl al-Ṣalīb*” (People of the Cross) to refer to Christians and noted that “the cross will be defeated.”⁴⁹⁰ In both instances we can see that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb seems to agree with classical Muslim commentary that the cross - the symbol of Christianity - is of no theological significance. The fact that he mentioned the cross so sparingly throughout his voluminous works and numerous personal correspondences indicates that he did not see it as worthy of consideration. The central symbol of Christianity, literally the crux of the world’s largest faith, was virtually ignored by the Shaykh. Standing as he did upon the shoulders of generations of Islamic scholars before him, we may assume that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb did not believe that Jesus died on the cross. However, this is an argument from silence, as he never denied the death of Jesus anywhere in his works.

Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

4.9 Comparing and Concluding

What can Christians and Muslims today learn from the Reverend and the Shaykh when it comes to religious others? Specifically, how can people who are fully committed to their Scriptures improve upon the good that these two icons demonstrated in this area while simultaneously attempting to correct some of their nearsightedness? Can Christians, following Edwards’ example, see anything beneficial in Islam or Muslims? Can Muslims, following the example of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, see anything beneficial in Christianity or Christians?

⁴⁸⁹ WMIAW 11:208, *Qasim al-Ḥadīth: al-Mujallid al-Thālith*.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

Both Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb sought to use one another’s faiths to help gauge the genuineness of their own. We have already seen how Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb continually referred to Christianity as a foil to remind Muslims of what *not* to do, thereby helping them to measure their own standing before God. Jonathan Edwards did something very similar. In *Religious Affections* he referenced Muslims as an example of committed religionists who were, however sincere in their beliefs, sincerely wrong, inasmuch as they follow their religion not based on reason but on what they have been taught:

Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion, because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it. That belief of the truth of the Christian religion which is built on the very same grounds, with Mahometans’ belief of the Mahometan religion, is the same sort of belief. And though the thing believed happens to be better; yet that don’t make the belief itself, to be of a better sort: for though the thing believed happens to be true; yet the belief of it is not owing to this truth, but to education. So that as the conviction is no better than the Mahometans’ conviction; so the affections that flow from it, are no better, in themselves, than the religious affections of Mahometans.⁴⁹¹

Both men, then, were wont to make use of the other’s religion as a mirror or a spiritual thermometer of sorts so as to more accurately discern their own faith. As we might expect, they saw the other as being on the wrong side of their particular position. And yet, at times they tended to speak in such a way as to honor the other by attempting to spin their differences in a positive light for their own community’s benefit. Christians and Muslims today might do well to follow suit. They may, as it were, clarify their own worship or theology by respectfully juxtaposing it with their closest religious relatives.

Although his writing tends to suggest otherwise, it is commendable that Jonathan Edwards listed the Qu’rān in his personal reading catalogue because it leaves open the

⁴⁹¹ WJE 2:295

possibility that he may have read the Qur'ān for himself.⁴⁹² We know of no such possibility with respect to the Bible in the case of Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb who, based on his understanding of the Ḥadīth, probably would not have read it even if he did possess a copy. His problem was not so much a belief that Bible was unreliable as it was that the Qur'ān had superseded it. Essentially, it is safe to assume that neither man had a meaningful encounter with the Scriptures of the other. Furthermore, in the same way that the Reverend used polemical Christian sources to shape his view of Islam, the Shaykh relied on polemical Islamic sources for his understanding of Christianity. There are two main lessons herein that we can take from our two protagonists: The first is that primary sources are called such for a good reason, namely that because they are foundational to our understanding they should be consulted *first*. The second lesson is that one should rely as much as possible on objective, non-polemical, academically reputable secondary sources *preferably* (but not necessarily exclusively) written by a member of the other faith community. The failure to learn these two lessons will inevitably lead to more of the same harsh assessments and misunderstandings that often characterized Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's views on the religion of the other.

There are some remarkable similarities in the views of the Reverend and the Shaykh on apostasy and apostates, namely what constituted it and who they were. Regarding what constituted apostasy, there is a certain amount of fluidity and ambiguity evident in both men. Yet at the most basic level, it is proper to assert that both clerics saw the rejection of the Scriptures and the forsaking of religious tradition as the foundation for apostasy of all kinds. However, it is the identity of apostates that gives us cause for deeper reflection here.

⁴⁹² We also know from his *Catalogues of Books* that Edwards owned *The Compleat History of the Turks* (1701) by David Jones. He notes that the volume was lent out to different individuals on several occasions, thus prompting the conclusion that Edwards was keen to share his knowledge on the subject. For more on this, see R.A. Leo, "Jonathan Edwards" in *Christian-Muslim Relations*.

Regarding this identity, both men seemed to construct a certain hierarchy of apostasy which is evidenced throughout their writings. They tended to categorize apostates along a spectrum which we might call an “Abrahamic family tree of apostasy,” beginning with siblings, moving on to near cousins, and concluding with distant cousins.⁴⁹³

In the first category Edwards placed Arminians, commended for their *mostly* orthodox theology, they were like brothers among whom a sharp disagreement had arisen, in this case over Reformed doctrines which Arminians had taken issue with such as Calvin’s five points.⁴⁹⁴ In this case, Edwards saw Arminians as having slipped into a state or degree of apostasy that did not necessarily disqualify them from calling themselves Christians, but certainly jeopardized it. This is why we might say that Edwards saw Arminians as “sibling apostates.” Likewise, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb tended to categorize certain other Sunnīs whose doctrines he found to be dangerous inasmuch as they could lead to *bid‘a* as apostates. Included in this category were those whose Ṣūfī practices led to polytheism or *shirk*. He seemed to be able to hold in tension the fact that some of his own theologically formative instructors such as Ibn Taymiyya and al-Sindī were Ṣūfīs, while simultaneously vigorously opposing Ṣūfī practices to the point of destroying their shrines. This is why it is not wrong to say that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had a category of apostasy that was reserved for “siblings” within Sunnī Islam who were always on the verge of completely falling away, as it were. And so we see that both Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had “sibling apostates” within their family who were, according to them, either already in a state of apostasy or perpetually close to it owing to their faulty doctrines or practices. Although their criticism of Arminians in the

⁴⁹³ It goes without saying that both men considered pagans and/or those totally outside of the Abrahamic lineage as apostates. This marked, as it were, a wholly other category of apostasy in the shared thought of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb that goes beyond the bounds of our current discussion.

⁴⁹⁴ Arminius and his followers were actually the first to popularize the five points of Calvinism by making use of them to frame their theological disagreements. It was precisely these very points that they took issue with (as opposed to the rest of Calvin’s theology with which they agreed).

case of Edwards and Ṣūfīs in the case of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was both vociferous and constant, they seemed willing to allow for the fact that these “sibling apostates” could still dwell within the wider bounds of orthodoxy - provided they heeded their warnings!

The grace that the Reverend and the Shaykh extended to “sibling apostates” from within their own tradition quickly faded when they turned their sights toward the next level of apostasy in our aforementioned continuum. Not quite close enough to be siblings who deserved of the benefit of the doubt, and not quite far enough to be distant cousins whose faults could be more easily excused, it was near cousins who were, in Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s estimation, the most dangerous of all. Since their doctrines and practices *claimed* to be Christian or Muslim, yet clearly proved otherwise in the sight of our two protagonists, it was “near cousin” apostates who posed the greatest threat to Christianity and Islam. For Edwards, this meant Roman Catholicism. Claiming to be the rightful and only successor of the apostles and of Christ, the church of Rome was, in his view, Satan’s greatest hindrance to the true Church. And the head of this evil institution, the Pope, was the Antichrist himself. If Arminianism was a danger to be fought against for its ability to lead the faithful astray by sultry doctrines, at least it was an heir to the Reformation struggle against the greatest pseudo-Christian institution of all time, Rome. Hence Edwards argued that Roman Catholicism was by far the greatest danger to Christianity, primarily because it claimed the name of the faith but its doctrines and practices were most assuredly un-Christian. Catholics had, according to Edwards, fallen into this grave apostasy primarily because they had neglected and mishandled God’s revelation in the Bible. Just like the Reverend saw Christianity’s greatest enemy as the “near cousin” of Rome, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw Islam’s greatest enemy as its own “near cousin” in the form of Shī‘ism. Shī‘a were more dangerous to Islam than Ṣūfīs because, while claiming to be Muslims, their beliefs

and practices did not align with the earliest Muslim community and instead were a result of their own construction that ran completely counter to the Qur'ān and Sunna. It is no wonder that the Shaykh reserved his most severe criticism for those whose very existence was a black mark on all of Islam.

The third and final level of apostasy that we can ascertain in the writings of Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb is the level that they reserved for one another.⁴⁹⁵ It is easy to assume that the Reverend and the Shaykh would have seen each other's religion as so far outside the bounds of orthodoxy that they either ravaged it or discounted it altogether. And while the works of both men bear evidence of the former, they most certainly do not exhibit the latter. Some statements that both men made concerning the religion of the other are sure to surprise most readers. Many, for example, are much more likely to be familiar with the Edwards who pronounced Muḥammad as being inspired by Satan than the Edwards who pronounced him as "owning Jesus" in all of the Biblical truths he espoused concerning the central figure of Christianity. That Edwards was willing to make one theological concession after another toward Islam says much about his own desire to see the hand of an omniscient God at work in ways and means often beyond human comprehension. Likewise, many are likely to be quite familiar with the Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb who pronounced Christians as polytheists in danger of hellfire, yet they might find themselves staggered at the Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb who called for their protection and even defended Jesus against that which he deemed slanderous.

⁴⁹⁵ From an Islamic perspective, who was to say that men like Arius were wrong when they claimed that Jesus was not truly divine? This is why Edwards (and many other Christian thinkers) have at times characterized Islam as basically a re-rendering of Arianism and/or other early Christological heresies. Likewise, Muslims have historically maintained that all people (Christians included) are really Muslims by birth but do not realize or acknowledge it.

This final and most surprising level of distant cousin apostasy beckons us further, and is perhaps the most fitting way to conclude the current research.⁴⁹⁶

	<u>Edwards</u>	<u>Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb</u>
<u>Siblings</u>	Arminians	Şūfis
<u>Near Cousins</u>	Roman Catholics	Shī’a
<u>Distant Cousins</u>	Muslims Jews	Christians Jews

Table 1: Abrahamic Family Tree of Apostasy

Islam was assuredly *not* a pagan religion for Jonathan Edwards. He contrasted Islam with heathenism to the extent that he evidenced a belief that Islam was immensely closer to Christianity than perhaps any other religion except Judaism. As we have seen, he actually showed more grace toward Islam than he did toward Catholicism. In accepting that Muḥammad and his followers worshiped the God of Abraham, the Reverend further displayed an openness that was uncharacteristic of both his time and ours. Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb saw something similar in Christianity. Perhaps grounded in the Qur’ānic

⁴⁹⁶ Both Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb also saw Jews, however begrudgingly, as members of this final category in the continuum of apostasy that is the Abrahamic family tree.

assertion that Muslims' closest companions are Christians (Q 5:82), the Shaykh readily accepted the fact that Christians were among the privileged few peoples who had received authentic revelation from the divine. Moreover, we have seen in his writings that Christians were worthy of more respect and trust than even other Muslims such as the Shī'a. In addition, where Christians dwelt in Muslim lands, they were to be protected by the state and allowed to worship just as they had been in the time of the Prophet and his Companions. All this seems to point to the fact that Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb saw one another's faiths as cousins in the same line as the man through whom they both traced their lineage - Abraham.

CONCLUSION

Looking back

In bringing together two figures as seemingly disparate as Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, we have sought to demonstrate that the traditionalist streams of Christianity and Islam, of which both men are respectively iconic figures, are more closely related than most would realize. Our initial chapter demonstrated how their contexts helped to shape their thought, and that many of the similarities that we have discerned in this thesis originated with uncanny parallels in their backgrounds. Their unique personal piety, traditional education, family structure and clerical lineage, frontier-type residence, and desire to shape their inherited traditionalist religious and philosophical influences for their own day, supplemented by a sense of divine calling for the task, all combined to set the proverbial table for correspondences in their later thought and ministries.

Next, in chapter two we peered into the core of their thought by examining their views of God. In Edwards’ use of the economy of the Trinity and in Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s use of Tawḥīd of divine names and attributes we unearthed some rather striking common ground for further study between Christianity and Islam. Edwards’ highlighting of Jesus’ subordination to God the Father in his role as the (relational, not biological) Son and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s highlighting of the word as eternal and worthy of men seeking refuge in it (while elsewhere accentuating Jesus as the word), would seem to demand further discussion by followers of both religions today. Most similar of all was their rock solid dependence on the sovereignty and majesty of the divine being. Ultimately, we saw that the point where our two clerics diverged was upon the fundamental essence of that being. In addition to their different historical traditions, it seems that a main reason for their divergence was that their

commitment to Scripture, which was equally as vigorous, rested on two different texts. Edwards' being was irreducibly plural because God's fundamental essence of love was demanded by logic, demonstrated in nature, and most importantly, demarcated in the Bible. In contrast, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's being was a singularity whose primary essence was his unity in all things, as demanded by the Qur'ān.⁴⁹⁷

Edwards' focus on the distinction between the immanent oneness of God, which is absolute, and the economic oneness of God, which is differentiated - the Father as supreme head and the Son as obedient servant - sets him apart from other orthodox Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Calvin. This distinction, typified in his statement that the Father is "God in some peculiar sense that the other persons of the Trinity are not," is a most unexpected bridge between conservative Christianity and Islam. Further research may indeed demonstrate that Edwards' Trinitarianism makes Christian monotheism far more palatable to Muslim tastes than anyone would expect. In like manner, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's distinction between three types of Tawhīd (*al-rubūbiyya*, *al-ulūhiyya*, and *al-asmā' wa al-sifāt*) may signal a theological confluence between the rivers of Islam and Christianity that springs from the most unlikely of tributaries. His elevation of the word, while not entirely *sui generis* within the larger confines of Sunnī thought per se, is actually quite unique within Muwahhīdism because it opens a mysterious door to the very thing that Muwahhīdūn would be expected to categorically reject - divine plurality. On the basis of the Prophet's emphatic statement that it is *not shirk* to do so, the Shaykh reasoned that seeking refuge in God's word, as that which is eternally "of Him," is no different than seeking refuge in God himself. In this way, although he confined it to an interstice between divine attributes and essence, the

⁴⁹⁷ It may well be that logic and nature could also be marshaled in support of Tawhīd, but Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb did not appeal to them to make his case the way that Edwards did to make his.

Shaykh's own elevation of the word above the other attributes is a truly striking finding. Further study on Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's doctrine of Tawhīd, particularly of divine names and attributes, may yet bring Islamic thinking on God's oneness far closer to the Christian mind than any others have before.

Thereafter, chapter three examined Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's views on man, both in his relation to God and to his fellow humans. Here we also uncovered numerous congruences on issues that related to the majesty of God such as creation and predestination. While they also agreed on the universality of human sinfulness, they differed sharply on the root and the solution. For Edwards, sin was the predisposition of every human heart, and as an offense against an eternal God it demanded that commensurate justice be served. Men could choose to satisfy divine justice by accepting God's gift of salvation or by paying for their own debt of sin in hell. In Jesus, God offered redemption. For Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, the human heart was originally morally neutral, and needed to be led away from its tendency to sin by a proper understanding of religion. Men were in danger of being misled all the way to hell, and they needed to learn how to avoid this peril. In Islam, God offered guidance.

We concluded this chapter by shedding light on three uncanny similarities in the thought of the Reverend and the Shaykh that deserve further attention. Firstly, their views of religion and state, including the individual's obligation in times of war, are worthy of closer scrutiny. Edwards was certainly not the pacifist that many assume him to be, nor was Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb the bloodthirsty warrior that many often envision - the truth is much closer to the middle. Like the Shaykh, the Reverend taught that men were compelled to fight for a just cause when called upon by the powers that be. Like the Reverend, the Shaykh sought to create a just society as he envisioned God to want it (and did *not* attempt to resurrect the caliphate or oppose the Ottomans). These are significant observations precisely because they

stem from the pens of two thinkers for whom such findings are entirely unexpected within their traditions. Secondly, their views on the family and women's issues, especially modesty and chastity, demonstrate a degree of common ground that most today would struggle to believe. In calling Christian women away from revealing clothing and outward (physical) beauty to modest clothing (including head coverings) and inward (spiritual) beauty, Edwards beckoned his flock much closer to Muslim sensibilities. In granting women rights within marriage that take into account their (God-given) sexuality as well as their individuality, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb drew his flock much closer to Christian sensibilities. Thirdly, the hearts of both men were evinced by a revivalistic fervor that shaped local, regional, national, and even international religious and geopolitical realities for generations to come. In terms of the former, the evangelistic zeal of religious conservatives who have been influenced by the Reverend and the Shaykh has led to the rapid expansion of both religions around the world. Regarding the latter, historians have looked at the Great Awakening as a primary factor in the unification of the colonies that led to the creation of modern America, just as they have seen the Muwahhīd / al-Sa'ūd alliance as the primary factor in the creation of modern Saudi Arabia. Truly, the arresting similarities uncovered in chapter three only point to further congruences between conservative Christians and Muslims that would call for additional research.

The fourth and final chapter of our study concerned Edwards and Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's views on religious others in general, and on each other's religion in particular. Although we have no cause to suspect that our two scholars even knew about each other's existence, the nature of our comparative research compelled us to bring their thought together in such a way as if they had. Owing to his eschatology, Edwards displayed a curiosity about religious others that was nearly unparalleled in his time. His curiosity was piqued as he strained to counter

deism by finding evidence for Biblical truth among pagan nations in history. Islam was important to Edwards not just because it was the perfect foil for deist arguments, but also because he saw it as one of the three false kingdoms Satan had erected in opposition to the true Kingdom of God. Even as he ascribed the spirit of the “false prophet” to Muḥammad, Edwards still had regard for his reverence of Jesus, and saw Islam as much more closely related to Christianity than any pagan religion could ever hope to be. Muslims, he believed, shared a common spiritual ancestry going back to Abraham, a common love for Jesus, and even a common notion of God.⁴⁹⁸

Much like Edwards did regarding Islam and Muslims, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb vacillated back and forth between discussing Christianity and Christians in an abstract sense - as mere historical artifacts - and as a living faith community in his own day and age. The Shaykh tended to prefer the former, as the majority of his references were to Byzantine-era Christians who predominated the early Islamic literature with which he was so consumed. He did demonstrate a limited awareness of different Christian sects that still existed in the eighteenth century, but he never sought to interact with their particularities beyond simplistically grouping them together as the Qur’ānic *Ahl al-Kitāb*. Although his criticisms largely centered on Christians as *mushrikūn*, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb had no problem allowing that they had received authentic revelation in the Bible and worshipped the one true God, although both were compromised by the Qur’ān’s succession of the Bible and by the ignorance of men in elevating Jesus to divine status. Even so, his writings reveal a degree of acceptance of Christians that was absolutely not afforded even to other Muslims whom he deemed as apostates such as the Shī‘a. Finally, although his Jesus is dressed in Islamic garb, many Christians will be surprised to learn of the Shaykh’s abiding love for ‘Īsā al-Masīḥ which was

⁴⁹⁸ Albeit the latter two were truncated by “faulty knowledge” of the Bible according to Edwards.

evidenced by his retelling of parallel stories of Jesus that appear to be plucked straight from the New Testament, and his readiness to jump to Jesus' defense against any who would detract from his exalted position as God's word and spirit.

Looking ahead

The influence of Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, which began in North America and the Arabian Gulf, respectively, now spans the entire globe. Because of the all-encompassing religious nature of their thought, the fingerprints of the Reverend and the Shaykh can be found in virtually every sphere of society. One can scarcely find a sector where they have not made an impact. From politics to philosophy, war to women's issues, science to sociology, and epistemology to economics, the list of their impact goes on and on. Thanks to the globalization of religion, in particular the more conservative branches of Christianity and Islam which are focused on expansion, we can no longer speak of a world where Edwards' thought is confined to North America and Europe, or where Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's thought is confined to the Arabian Gulf and the Middle East. Global migration trends, economic and political, as well as air travel and ultimately the internet, have only hastened the spread of their ideas everywhere. Contrary to the predictions of some social scientists, the world is becoming *more* religious, not less. And the religious flavor of choice is increasingly conservative in taste. All of this speaks to the urgency of bringing religious conservatives together. Yet these same conservatives, historically averse to such encounters, might rightly inquire, "On what basis shall we come together?" The answer is found in this research. For when Jonathan Edwards and Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb can be brought together and shown to exhibit numerous, surprising points of convergence, without

minimizing their real differences, then there is solid precedent upon which to build interfaith engagement among fundamentalists today.⁴⁹⁹

Truly, this encounter between our two eighteenth-century figures, who have been proven to be far less hostile and far less exclusive than expected, has much to teach us about interfaith engagement at present. Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb both granting that the other faith’s practitioners worshipped the same God speaks to a contentious issue at the moment for religious fundamentalists on both sides.⁵⁰⁰ In this way, the Reverend and the Shaykh have shown us that theological conservatives, and not only liberals, are also able to wrestle with questions of exclusivity without sacrificing their own particularities. It bears repeating that Edwards’ stress on the economy of the persons of the Trinity and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s elevation of the eternal word above the other divine attributes are quite possibly two of the best springboards for interfaith reflection that today’s conservative theologians might dare imagine. Here, in the heights of such lofty philosophical rumination, arises an example of how Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb may even have something to offer each other by filling in gaps in one another’s thinking. Even if only for the questions they pose, they may help each other to identify blind spots and inconsistencies in their own thought.

A natural starting point for such discussion could begin with the person of Jesus, as some of the most promising findings in this research center on him. His subordination to God

⁴⁹⁹ While some of the parallels in their thought are deep and striking, others are admittedly only superficial. The latter should not negate the pursuit of the former. For an example of traditionalist Christians and Muslims engaging with one another and even learning from one another today, see Chris Seiple, “Evangelical-Islamist Encounters, Part II: Dialogue with Islamists and Salafis,” The Center for Public Justice, October 12, 2012, accessed March 19, 2017, https://www.cpjustice.org/public/capital_commentary/article/481.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. The recent controversy at Wheaton College over Christian professor Larycia Hawkins’ wearing of a *hijāb* in solidarity with Muslims and claiming that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. This led to her termination at the conservative Christian institution. See Ruth Graham, “The Professor wore a Hijab in Solidarity - Then Lost Her Job,” *New York Times Magazine*, October 13, 2016, accessed April 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/magazine/the-professor-wore-a-hijab-in-solidarity-then-lost-her-job.html>. The reader is also referred to the ongoing controversy in Malaysia over whether Christians in the Muslim-majority nation have the right to use the word “Allāh” to refer to God in their translation of the Bible. See Baradan Kuppusamy, “Can Christians Say ‘Allāh’? In Malaysia, Muslims Say No,” *Time*, January 8, 2010, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1952497,00.html>.

(in *role* for Edwards and in *essence* for Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb), and his identity as God’s *kalima* are among the most crucial areas for potential greater agreement between Christian and Muslim religious conservatives today. The potentiality of looking at Jesus with fresh eyes as a means of achieving greater understanding between conservatives is not only borne out by the thought of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb in this research, but by his own gracious character which both men clearly revered.

Even in their failures, the Reverend and the Shaykh can still arm us with important tools for interfaith engagement today. Their reliance upon polemical sources from within their own faith traditions for information about the other is not helpful, and demonstrates that a serious study of the other’s primary source documents is essential for true understanding. Christians would do well not to write off the Qur’ān because of its violence, but instead attempt to read it in context, much like they do with their own Old Testament. Similarly, instead of appealing to *tahrīf* every time something in the Bible disagrees with the Qur’ān, Muslims would do well to read the Bible as authentic Scripture whose relevance is not dependent on the fact that it was revealed centuries before the Qur’ān (and thus no longer applicable), but on its enduring divine message.⁵⁰¹ For if our assessment that Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb would have seen one another as cousins in the family tree of Abraham is correct, then it behooves their traditionalist followers within Christianity and Islam today to take a more open, nuanced approach concerning one another and their respective texts.

⁵⁰¹ The Cambridge Interfaith Program’s development of Scriptural Reasoning is an excellent example of this type of engagement between committed believers today. As their website claims, “Scriptural Reasoning is a genuine opportunity for committed religious people to engage in inter-faith practice without undermining particularity.” Accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/>. For an example of the kind of open, nuanced approach which I advocate here, see Abdullah Saeed, “The Charge of Distortion of Jewish and Christian Scriptures,” in *The Muslim World* 92, no. 3/4 (2002): 419-436. Saeed argues that most classical scholars of the Qur’ān, including Ibn Taymiyya, regarded the text of the Bible as unaltered because they, along with the earliest Muslim community, primarily saw *tahrīf* as applying to the *interpretation* of the text.

Part of what makes it difficult to speculate about the implications of this research is the possibility that disciples of Edwards and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb might reject its findings *bilā kayf*, for no other reason than they do not approve of them. However, for those who are willing to accept them, the surprising findings of this research should prove to be an excellent starting point for discussion across a variety of disciplines and sectors of society. There is common ground here for political scientists, theologians, sociologists, historians, jurists, clerics, military scientists, and others to commence with meaningful engagement and further study that builds on the current findings. In calling for serious engagement between the more conservative strands of Christianity and Islam, we must not seek the false middle ground of an *argumentum ad temperantiam*, but rather the solid ground of an honest encounter with the most robust aspects of both faiths.⁵⁰² Striving to avoid the syncretism often typified by more liberal approaches, this study is evidence that such an engagement is indeed possible. We have sought to avoid proffering the fallacy of a “straw man” comparison between the Reverend and the Shaykh, as this would only further cloud an already overcast sky. Instead, by acknowledging legitimate differences and exposing various parallelisms in the lives and thought of two seemingly polar opposite figures, this study has endeavored to open up new horizons for research and engagement between conservative Christians and Muslims to their own mutual benefit, as well as to the benefit of a clear sky all around them.

⁵⁰² The “argument to moderation” is a logical fallacy that says truth must be found as a compromise between two opposing positions.

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