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Patrick Ford

Abilene Christian University, patrick.ford@acu.edu

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Eschatological Minority Report: Transcendent Heaven

Patrick J. Ford

Abilene Christian University
Graduate School of Theology, Master of Divinity

Abstract

Far from a mere historical or theological curiosity, eschatology has a profound formative impact on the way adherents view life, purpose and their relationship to Creation. Typical contemporary conceptualizations of heaven in American evangelicalism describe an otherworldly, intangible and wholly spiritual realm in which God's reign is complete and all the faithful reside in total peace and comfort after a final judgment. Such "transcendent-heaven" eschatology is vastly different from historically orthodox eschatology recorded through the eighteenth century and still maintained by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches, among others. This historical-theological survey suggests that transcendent-heaven eschatology was first-articulated by Jonathan Edwards as a result of his experiences in the First Great Awakening and his departure from prevailing Puritan doctrines. Transcendent-heaven eschatology has been promulgated by the evangelicalism which Edwards strongly influenced and by Christian hymnody, beginning in the eighteenth century. These developments are tracked through the published works of both Jonathan Edwards and his contemporary Puritan leaders as well as through the last three centuries of Christian hymnody.

American evangelicalism typically describes heaven as an otherworldly, intangible and wholly spiritual realm in which God reigns and the saints reside. This kind of “transcendent-heaven” eschatology is vastly different from historically orthodox eschatology. This article examines the historical context and first articulations of the transcendent-heaven “minority report” through the written works of Jonathan Edwards. The influence of transcendent-heaven eschatology on evangelical Christianity will be demonstrated through a brief sketch of this minority report’s expression through three centuries of Christian hymnody.

Inquiry into eschatology often digresses into millennial or dispensational controversies. These are not the subject of this article, nor is their analysis necessary to the present investigation, though I recognize that such eschatological dimensions are present in the individuals and movements discussed in this article. Similarly, the First Great Awakening is acknowledged as an important and relevant context for the ministry and written works of Edwards, but the only exploration made in regards to its influence will be that required by the scope of this article.

Historically Orthodox Eschatology

In the vernacular of the contemporary evangelical Christian, one’s eschatological hope and expectation is often expressed as “going to heaven.” Implicit in this simple phrase is the assumption that heaven is elsewhere and transcendent; separate and apart from our present, bodily existence. Heaven is considered to be the present abode of divinity and the eventual, eternal destination of the saints among humanity. Common as this “transcendent-heaven” way of thinking is among evangelical Christians, it is very much the minority report within the corpus of Christianity. Both the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches affirm a historically orthodox eschatology of “renewed earth” or “cosmic redemption,” rather than an abstract, spiritualized heaven.

As early as 180 AD, Irenaeus identified transcendent-heaven eschatologies as heretical, instructing those who hold this misunderstanding that they will “rise again to behold God in this creation which is renovated.”¹ In the following chapter, Irenaeus

¹ New Advent, "Against Heresies (Book V, Chapter 32)," [NewAdvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103532.htm), <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103532.htm> (accessed May 10, 2012).

continued his instruction against heretical eschatology as he comments on Matthew 26:27, “[Jesus] cannot by any means be understood as drinking of the fruit of the vine when settled down with his disciples above in a super-celestial place; nor, again, are they who drink it devoid of flesh, for to drink of that which flows from the vine pertains to flesh, and not spirit.”² For Irenaeus, the resurrection of the saints was a redemptive bodily restoration and inseparable from the restoration of all creation.

This sentiment is echoed in the Orthodox doctrine of cosmic redemption. As Timothy Ware writes, “Not only our human body but the whole of the material creation will eventually be transfigured. . . . This idea of *cosmic redemption* is based . . . upon a right understanding of the Incarnation.”³ For Orthodox Christians, the redemption of material creation is bound up not only in the incarnate nature of humanity, but particularly in the incarnate nature of Jesus.

The Roman Catholic Church also affirms eschatology like that of Irenaeus through this proclamation of the Second Vatican Council, “The Church . . . will attain its full perfection only in the glory of heaven, when there will come the time of the restoration of all things. At that time the human race as well as the entire world, which is intimately related to man and attains to its end through him, will be perfectly reestablished in Christ.”⁴ The minority report, then, is found somewhere within the stream of Protestant churches. Yet, no mention is made in the decrees of the Council of Trent, a silence indicating that even the Protestant heretics condemned through these dogmatic decrees did not contravene this historically orthodox doctrine of the church.

Both John Calvin and Martin Luther authored commentaries on 2 Peter, and their expositions of the potentially problematic passage of 2 Peter 3:10-13 make clear their positions on the “restoration of all things.” William Tyndale’s translation of the New Testament (the English vernacular translation which was contemporary to Luther and Calvin) renders the passage in this way, “. . . in which daye ye hevens shall perisse with

² New Advent, “Against Heresies (Book V, Chapter 33),” NewAdvent.org, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103533.htm> (accessed May 10, 2012).

³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), 234-235.

⁴The Holy See, Documents of the II Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, Ch. VII,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (accessed May 10, 2012).

terrible noyes . . . and the erth with the workes that are therein shall burne.”⁵ Such a seemingly overt declaration of the destruction of the material world caused anxiety among certain individuals caught up in the current of the Protestant Reformation (as Luther acknowledges⁶), but there is no evidence that a legitimate alternative to renewed earth eschatology had yet been articulated or defended.

Calvin offers this analysis sometime between 1547 and 1553: “Of the elements of the world I shall only say this one thing, that they are to be consumed, only that they may be renovated, their substance still remaining the same, as it may be easily gathered from . . . other passages.”⁷ Martin Luther, writing some twenty-five years earlier, says, “Some may disquiet themselves as to whether the saints shall exist in heaven or on the earth. The text seems to imply that man shall dwell upon the earth, yet so that all heaven and earth shall be a paradise where God dwells.”⁸

Their treatment of this passage affirms that both Luther and Calvin hold firmly to renewed earth eschatology. Still, Luther’s commentary (written in 1523) indicates some level of unrest in certain circles regarding the meaning of this passage and its eschatological implications. This is unsurprising, considering that through the agency of the Protestant Reformation, laypersons found themselves engaging the Biblical text anew through vernacular translations, and clergy were tasked with articulating and defending theology on the basis of *sola scriptura* (“by scripture alone”). Yet, as will be noted in the following section, renewed earth eschatology remained uncontested well into the eighteenth century.

New England, Old Eschatology

The socio-religious climate of seventeenth century England led to an exodus of Puritan reformers to the English colonies of the North American continent. These early Puritan immigrants profoundly influenced the fledgling religious and social structure of these colonies, "establish[ing] what was arguably the central strand of American cultural

⁵ William Tyndale, “2 Peter,” Wesley Center Online, http://wesley.nnu.edu/fileadmin/imported_site/tyndale/2pe.txt (accessed May 10, 2012).

⁶ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990), 285.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 421.

⁸ Luther, 285.

life until the twentieth century."⁹ Among the masses of Puritan immigrants was Richard Mather, an ordained Anglican clergyman with Puritan convictions, who arrived with his family in Boston during the summer of 1635.¹⁰ Richard Mather would soon find influence and a pulpit in the Massachusetts colony, allying himself with the preeminent Puritan minister of his day, John Cotton. John Cotton and Richard Mather were among a small group of Puritans who helped shape the development of the church in New England.¹¹

Richard Mather's greatest legacy, however, lay neither in this association with John Cotton nor in his role in the institutional development of the regional church, but in his preaching progeny. His son, Increase, would become the chief leader of Puritan culture and religion, eclipsed only by his son Cotton Mather, who is, perhaps, the most famous of all Puritan preachers. "The high point of New England Puritan culture came in the 1670s," and Increase Mather, who married John Cotton's daughter, Maria, was its greatest champion.¹²

Although the Puritan immigrants to the American continent have often been credited with making the journey from England in pursuit of "religious freedom," this should not be anachronistically construed as the religious pluralism implied in the contemporary usage of the term. Indeed, Richard Mather's entry into ministry in America was prefaced by theological controversy between John Cotton and Thomas Hooker so vigorous that hundreds of Puritan families decided to abandon their homes in Massachusetts and relocate to Connecticut.¹³ Puritan orthodoxy and orthopraxy were being redefined on this new continent, free from Anglican oppression, but these devoted, pious Christians were concerned with creating a Puritan society, not a "free" society in the contemporary sense. This American Puritanism was distinct from its English roots; the New World birthed new possibilities for the marginalized Puritans. In America, "The Puritan vanguard was dedicated to the destruction of an entire world view, a whole

⁹ Andrew Delbanco. "Puritanism," In *The Reader's Companion to American History*, ed. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 893.

¹⁰ Timothy L. Hall, *American Religious Leaders* (New York: Facts On File, 2003), 234.

¹¹ Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1988), 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, xiv, 155.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16

system of values and meaning woven from Roman liturgical forms and pagan religious traditions in their English manifestations.”¹⁴

Such destruction and reconstitution of a worldview is well beyond the scope of this article, but whatever destruction was accomplished or revision effected through the development of Puritan societies, renewed earth eschatology seems either to have been exempt or untargeted. Cotton Mather’s 1727 treatise, *Trip paradisus*, (published posthumously) offers this unwavering affirmation of historically orthodox eschatology, “But we are sure, that from the Chaos of the Present World there will be a New World CREATED by the Almighty Power of GOD . . . the Restauration [sic] of the Earth, to the State of a PARADISE, or the Putting of the World into the Condition, in which it was, before the Apostasy of Man from the GOD that formed Him.”¹⁵ In Puritan streams, at least, there is not yet the trickle of transcendent-heaven eschatology.

First Issues of the Minority Report

Puritanism and the Mathers, however, would not dominate the American religious landscape forever. Jonathan Edwards, recognized posthumously as “America’s most famous and successful evangelical”¹⁶ would change the landscape of American Protestant Christianity through the First Great Awakening. Edwards’ faith and preaching were rooted in Puritan culture, but his theological and religious legacy would be much broader than Puritanism. In matters of eschatology, Edwards went toe-to-toe with Puritan heavyweights of his day¹⁷ and refuted their expectation of a renewed creation.

Edwards’ maternal grandfather was the Puritan minister Solomon Stoddard, whose call to minister to the Northampton church in 1672 was occasioned by the death of the Reverend Eleazar Mather (an elder brother of Increase Mather). Stoddard filled the void left by Eleazar Mather, both in the Northampton pulpit and the life of Mather’s widow, taking her quickly to wife. Stoddard loosened his predecessor’s restrictions on participation in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, raising the ire of his

¹⁴ Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Puritan Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 48-9, quoted in Michael Hall, 14.

¹⁵ Reiner Smolinski, *The Threefold Paradise of Cotton Mather: An Edition of "Trip paradisus" (1727)* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 270-271.

¹⁶ Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America’s Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), xii.

¹⁷ Gary Scott Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

brother-in-law, Increase.¹⁸ Despite such clashes with his preeminent Puritan in-laws, Stoddard's ministry built on the Puritan practice of "covenant renewal,"¹⁹ and firmly established revivalism as a means of evangelism in the Connecticut River Valley.²⁰

Stoddard's revivalistic evangelism was rooted in Calvinist doctrines of total depravity and irresistible grace, acknowledging "special outpourings of the Spirit . . . [which] would quicken believers' faith, convert grieving sinners, and make careless sinners more interested in the things of God"²¹ as well as understanding preaching as means of grace. Conversions were not simply a matter of preaching; they were an act of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Stoddard advocated preaching the horrors of hell and "dread of damnation"²² in tension with the promise of salvation and glories of grace to convict listeners of their sinfulness and need for salvation. The famous Jonathan Edwards sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," testifies to an inheritance of ministerial style and inclination bequeathed by Stoddard to his grandson.

Edwards followed his grandfather, not just in style, but in located ministry. When Solomon Stoddard passed away in 1729, the twenty-six-year-old Edwards stepped into his pulpit in Northampton. The successful revivalism of Edwards' father and grandfather conditioned him to expect continued harvests from revivals in his own ministry.²³ As history records the close association between Jonathan Edwards and the broad revivalism of the First Great Awakening, his expectations can only be considered inaccurate in the sense that the revivals of Edwards' ministry far outstripped the revivalism of the preceding generation.²⁴

Jonathan Edwards was America's greatest theologian,²⁵ and, "his portrait of heaven was based upon his interpretation of the Bible, [but] it was shaped by his experiences as a pastor and revivalist."²⁶ The mystical dreams and visions experienced by

¹⁸ Philip F. Gura, "Solomon Stoddard's Irreverent Way," *Early American Literature* 21, no. 1 (March 1986): 31.

¹⁹ Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²² *Ibid.*, 7.

²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 369.

²⁶ Smith, *Heaven*, 33.

many during the First Great Awakening “included alleged visits to or visions of heaven,” and “Edwards generally defended them as genuine manifestations of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷ The impact of these experiences formed Edwards’ understanding of heaven in important ways, most notably in his deviation from predominant Puritan understandings in two respects. First, while Edwards affirmed the Puritan understanding that heaven was meant only for the righteous, the prevalence of the Holy Spirit through the revivalism of the First Great Awakening led him to believe that there would be many righteous saints in heaven, rather than a fiercely ascetic few.²⁸

In a second, perhaps more profound departure from prevailing Puritan eschatology (and one more relevant for our present study), Edwards interprets eschatological expectations about the future of created matter with preference to 2 Peter 3:10-13 (and perhaps the accounts of alleged heavenly visions and visits which occurred during his revival ministry).²⁹ In so doing, Edwards refutes renewed earth eschatology and establishes the basis for transcendent-heaven eschatology, dramatically recasting the eternal future of the material world. Edwards does not deny that the earth will be transformed, but emphatically denies that it will become the purified, transformed home of the saints. In a drastic departure from historically orthodox eschatology, Edwards promotes a vision of the future where the world is transformed, *not* into a realm of heavenly glory, but into hell itself! Gary Scott Smith frames Edwards’ argument thus:

At Christ’s Second Coming, Christians who had endured “hatred, reproach, and contempt” and had been unjustly “reviled and condemned” will be removed from earth and “fully vindicated” in heaven. Then the world will “be turned into a great furnace” with “the fiercest and most raging heat” where “all the enemies of Christ and his church shall be tormented forever.” “All the persecutors of the church of God” will “burn in [this] everlasting fire”; they will “suffer torments far beyond” what they had inflicted on the saints.³⁰

In the following refutation of renewed earth eschatology, we see the confluence of Enlightenment reason, scientific empiricism, disdain for the material world and Edwards’ assertion of the transcendent nature of “God’s everlasting abode.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

If any say that this earth will be heaven after the day of judgment, is it not as easy to say that, after the resurrection, heaven will be the new earth? . . . this globe we now dwell upon is not to be refined to be the place of God's everlasting abode, because it is a moveable globe. . . it is not seemly that God's eternal glorious abode, and fixed and everlasting throne, should be a moveable part of the universe.³¹

According to Edwards, heaven is the site of God's "fixed and everlasting throne" and the place *within* creation from which God rules *over* all creation. He describes heaven as, ". . . a part of the universe which God in the first creation . . . appropriated to himself, to . . . be his residence. . . He dwelt in heaven when he made [this lower world] . . . so he will dwell in heaven when and after it is destroyed and reduced to a chaos again."³²

In contrast with the views of incarnation demonstrated by Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians (accompanied by the doctrines of *eikon* ("image") and *imago dei* ("image of God"), respectively³³), Edwards views full communion with Christ as necessarily precluding our fleshly nature: "This redemption leaves nothing to hinder our highest exaltation, and the utmost intimacy, and fullness of enjoyment of God. . . . The meanness of our nature need be no hinderance . . . for, to remove this obstacle wholly out of the way, Christ has come down . . ."³⁴ Edwards' view of divine transcendence leads him to frame the Incarnation as the divine means by which humanity transcends its natural, corporeal limitations, rather than growing into the fullness of divinely ordained purpose.

Edwards' preference for transcendent spiritual realities rather than a re-created and fulfilled physical reality is clear. He writes, "The place of God's eternal residence, and the place of the everlasting residence and reign of Christ, and his church, will be heaven; and not this lower world, purified and refined."³⁵ It is difficult to precisely date the materials in which these arguments are made, as they were published posthumously. Although the dates may be uncertain, Edwards is quite adamant in his contentions, and

³¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards: With a Memoir of His Life*, vol. 8, *Miscellaneous Observations* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830), 572.

³² *Ibid.*, 570.

³³ Both *eikon* and *imago dei* are doctrines based on the biblical witness that humanity has been created "in the image of God." Genesis 1:26-27, 5:1-3 and 9:6 form the foundation of these doctrines.

³⁴ Edwards, 560.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 566.

his arguments for a transcendent-heaven eschatology have been propagated through evangelicalism.

Jonathan Edwards was “pivotal in the emergence of international evangelicalism in the eighteenth century,”³⁶ and his convictions about eschatological realities have shaped evangelical understandings of a transcendent heaven. Even a brief historical survey of Edwards’ formative eschatological influence on evangelicalism is much too broad and lengthy for this article. As an alternate means of gauging the impact of these ideas, we turn to a brief sketch of transcendent-heaven themes in Christian hymnody, itself a manifestation of burgeoning evangelicalism.³⁷

Advancement of the Minority Report in Hymnody

The tremulous voice of transcendent-heaven eschatology can be heard through eighteenth and nineteenth century hymnody, rising to crescendo in a pair of twentieth century hymns. The intent of the following analysis is not to malign or misrepresent Christian hymnody, as any expression of heaven (however such union or community with God is conceived) is destined to be inadequate and at least marginally incorrect. Each hymn examined here contains a measure of truth and value. Further, it must be said that hymns neither profess, nor are purposed, to convey a systematic or complete theology. Nevertheless, hymns are indicative of the theology accepted by their authors and audiences; likewise, the strong reciprocal influence of hymnody on theology should not be overlooked.³⁸

Consider this final verse of *Give to Our God Immortal Praise* (written 1719), “Thru this vast world He guides our feet, and leads us to His heav’nly seat: His mercies ever shall endure, when this our world shall be no more.”³⁹ The message of divine guidance from this world to one that will endure comes as the culmination of praise and songs offered to God. *On Jordan’s Stormy Banks* (written 1787) conveys images of such anticipation and earnest desire for “the fair and happy land . . . just across on the

³⁶ Marsden, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

³⁸ Joshua Graves, “A Reflection on Heaven,” Joshua Graves, <http://www.joshuagraves.com/2011/07/19/a-reflection-on-heaven> (accessed May 10, 2012).

³⁹ Alton H. Howard, ed., *Songs of Faith and Praise* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 1997), No. 28.

evergreen shore”⁴⁰ such that the singer “would here no longer stay; Tho Jordan’s waves around [her] roll, Fearless [she’d] launch away.” Heaven here becomes a promise of respite, an irresistible attraction—even distraction—from the gales and storms of life “on Jordan’s stormy banks.”⁴¹

“This dark world of sin,” in *Peace, Perfect Peace* (written 1873),⁴² stands in contradistinction with the heavenly “habitation, built by the living God for all of ev’ry nation who seek that grand abode” described in *There Is a Habitation* (written 1882).⁴³ The characterization of earth in these hymns seems void of the divine purpose which pervades the testimony of Scripture. The corporeal struggles of the human race are described as so pervasive that humanity’s only hope is not redemption through the imminent presence of Immanuel, but escape through death and salvation.⁴⁴

Indeed, *When the Roll is Called Up Yonder* (written 1893), the “saved of earth” look forward to gathering, but not here on earth. There is no anticipation of a terrestrial celebration of Christ’s victory over death or the fulfillment of the promise that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Rather, the celebration is to take place “on the other shore,” seeming to draw more from the imagery of the River Styx than that of a new heaven and a new earth—a restored and refined Creation. The promised glory of Christ’s resurrection is meant to inspire the faithful to “labor for the master from the dawn till setting sun . . . talk[ing] of all His wondrous love and care.” The emphasis on the work of evangelism seems appropriate for such an anthem of evangelicalism; the promise of completing the appointed earthly work, and leaving the earth, ever driving the faithful to strive onward.⁴⁵

The Old Rugged Cross (written 1913) looks forward to that “someday” when Jesus calls Christians to their “home far away,” where his cross will be exchanged for personal crowns. There is, of course, great admiration for the life, death and redeeming sacrifice of the crucifixion in this hymn, but its emphasis lies in cherishing the exchange of cross for crown in a far-off land, rather than the embrace of a *kenotic*, self-emptying

⁴⁰ Ibid., No. 886.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., No. 479.

⁴³ Ibid., No. 860.

⁴⁴ Ibid., No. 479.

⁴⁵ Ibid., No. 852.

ethic (typified in the crucifixion and in the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5-11) in the here-and-now. One wonders what purpose the cross was meant to serve, save to provide an exit route for humanity from creation.⁴⁶

Living by Faith (written 1918) extends this divinely-sanctioned escapism beyond the cross to the *parousia* (“the second coming of Christ”). In this song, a faithful life is characterized by a preoccupation with one’s other-worldly destination, which reduces concern about temporal circumstances: “Our Lord will return to this earth some sweet day, Our troubles will then all be o’er, The Master so gently will lead us away, Beyond that blest heavenly shore.”⁴⁷ Evidently, Christ returns to earth from his distant heavenly abode for the express purpose of leading those who have “lived by faith” away from the divinely created terrestrial realm.

The transcendent-heaven anthem resounds, perhaps most loudly, in a pair of hymns authored by Albert E. Brumley: *I’ll Fly Away* (written 1932)⁴⁸ and *This World Is Not My Home* (written 1937).⁴⁹ The discontent with present, imperfect realities expressed in the refrain, “I can’t feel at home in this world anymore,” rings true, but the implications of the opening phrase, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passing thru,”⁵⁰ are profoundly disturbing, especially when contrasted with the more historically orthodox, “This Is My Father’s World.”⁵¹ To say, “This is my Father’s world,” affirms an ordained existential purpose; life and creation have inherent meaning and value. On the other hand, saying, “This world is not my home,” exacerbates the existential tension of human existence, and everything between birth and death—that individual human epoch called “life”—becomes an interminable postponement of purpose.

If the latter case represents human experience (or one’s perception of experience), it is no wonder that *I’ll Fly Away* strikes such a resonant chord. World-weariness seeps through these lyrics, “Some glad morning when this life is o’er, I’ll fly away . . . Just a few more weary days and then, I’ll fly away.”⁵² Such statements are saturated with

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, No. 313.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, No. 560.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, No. 851.

⁴⁹ International Gospel Hour, “This World Is Not My Home,” International Gospel Hour, <http://www.gospelhour.net/2288.html> (accessed May 10, 2012).

⁵⁰ Howard, No. 957.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, No. 991.

⁵² *Ibid.*, No. 851.

sincere, deep spirituality; these are not flippant offerings. Yet, they carry transcendent-heaven eschatology to a depressingly logical, if poetic, existential conclusion: the point of human life is to arrive at death, where “true life” begins.

Reviewing the Minority Report

The influence of transcendent-heaven eschatology in Christian hymnody is apparent. Such hymnody, in turn, influences contemporary theology and this theology frames the way in which evangelical Christians think about and perceive life and purpose. The historical evidence indicates that this eschatological minority report was first articulated by Jonathan Edwards around the mid-eighteenth century. Edwards’ eschatology deviated from Puritan and historically orthodox eschatology, at least in part, due to his experience with the revivalism of the First Great Awakening. The evangelical movement, which grew substantially through these early colonial revivals, has carried forward Edwards’ eschatological minority report as its orthodox eschatological doctrine.

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