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*Reformation*  
& **REVIVAL**  
**JOURNAL**

**JONATHAN EDWARDS:**  
*An Anniversary Celebration*

*A Quarterly for Church Leadership*

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VOLUME 12 · NUMBER 3 · SUMMER 2003

*A Reformation & Revival Journal*  
*Interview with Michael J. McClymond*



During the summer we sat down with Michael J. McClymond to conduct an extensive interview. Michael was our first choice for this issue because of his deep interest in Jonathan Edwards and his wealth of writing and research on the life and thought of Edwards. Dr. McClymond is presently professor of theology at Saint Louis University, where he holds a tenured position and an endowed chair. Dr. McClymond previously held appointments at Wheaton College, Westmont College, Emory University and the University of California in San Diego.

Dr. McClymond completed his B. A. degree at Northwestern University (1980) and his M. Div. at Yale University (1984). He then completed and M. A. (1987) and Ph. D. (1992) at the University of Chicago. A gifted teacher and research professor, Mike is the author of *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford, 1998). A forthcoming book is titled *Familiar Stranger: An Introduction to Jesus of Nazareth* (Eerdmans, 2003).

Michael is also a widely read student of revival movements, the history of Jesus, and American Church history. He regularly writes for journals, magazines and scholarly periodicals.

**RRJ** — Michael, tell us about your personal background. Where were you born and reared?

**MJM** — I was born in Washington, D.C. and my family moved, at about the age of five, to Omaha, Nebraska. My father was a business executive who ended up becoming the vice-president of the company that became Enron. In fact, there was some possibility that my father, rather than the now notorious Ken Lay, might have become CEO. Instead he ended up as head of a spin-off company. I think that was all for the better in light of the history of Enron. My mother, who is now with the Lord, was an artist. I also have a younger sister who lives in the San Francisco area with my brother-in-law and nephew.

**RRJ** — Your religious background was in the Methodist Church. How did you come to personal faith in Christ?

**MJM** — I was raised in the oldest Methodist church in Nebraska, First United Methodist of Omaha, which was founded in 1854. For whatever reason, I did not hear a clear message of repentance growing up in the church. I remember the minister saying, "Be caught up in something greater than yourself." The message had a general moral and spiritual uplift to it, but it was not specifically centered on Christ crucified and risen again. So the person who eventually shared the basic Christian message with me was the janitor at the church. He was a fervent Pentecostal, who would jump into his car with his friends and then they would pray: "Where should we go?" Someone would answer: "Go to Dennys." When they arrived they would rush from their car and speak to the first person they met, and with an open Bible they would enthusiastically say, "God's Word to you is this!" Most of the time their efforts would fall flat. Sometimes, however, they would meet someone who would say, "That's amazing. I was just thinking the very same thing before you spoke to me. Sit down; God must have sent you."

**RRJ** — So this Pentecostal janitor you encountered at the Methodist church impacted your life powerfully. How did that happen?



*"I was not converted while I was president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship." Some people had rather shocked looks on their faces. I told them that John Wesley was actually a missionary before he was converted. This is actually a Methodist tradition if you think about it.*

**MJM** — I began working part-time as a janitor so that is how I came to know him. He was a college student and not much older than I was. The irony of this process was that I had already been president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship. When I later went to speak at the First United Methodist Church I pointed this out and said, "I was not converted while I was president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship." Some people had rather shocked looks on their faces. I told them that John Wesley was actually a missionary before he was converted. This is actually a Methodist tradition if you think about it.

So, I had worked alongside this janitor and began to notice that he had a spiritual radiance about him. He exuded the presence of the Lord. He would be scrubbing toilets and humming "Onward, Christian Soldiers." I was going through a time of questioning and searching. I wish I still had the journal I kept in high school, but I can recall that on the very first page I wrote: "What is a Christian? If anyone were really a

Christian he would have to live as Christ lived." But I didn't see anyone selling their goods, going out and living among the poor, and preaching the good news. So the question I was raising was really quite simple: "Was I a Christian? Were the people around me really Christians?" I had a lot of philosophical questions too. I began to think about things like—what if I actually succeed in my life? (I was studying science at that point and ended up with a degree in chemistry and then worked for two years in research.) So I wondered: What if I become a great chemist? What if I won the Nobel Prize, what then? We might have better tires on our cars, there might be fewer traffic accidents as a result, but then everyone is going to die anyway. If you look at the earth in a cosmic sense you soon realize the sun is going to supernova in a few million of years and the earth will be obliterated. It seemed kind of silly to be thinking about these kinds of things, but they stuck in my mind.

My conversion was a very distinct experience on April 14, 1976, as I was driving home from work at the church. I was alone in my orange Volkswagen fastback and passed Swanson Library at the corner of 90th and Dodge Street. I can't explain it but it seemed as if someone switched the light on. I was overwhelmingly aware of the Lord's presence. I remember going back to read my confirmation Bible that had been on the shelf for years. The very first passage I came to was, "Ask and it shall be given to you." I realized that for years I had been looking for Christ and didn't know it but he had been searching for me.

**R R J** — So you were in high school. What followed this conversion?

**M J M** — Yes, I was in the last month of my senior year and what followed this was a long series of educational institutions. I ended up studying at five colleges, universities, or seminaries and serving as a faculty member at five more.

**R R J** — Talk about this recent appointment at Saint Louis

University. Saint Louis is a Roman Catholic school, in fact it is a Jesuit university. You are a Reformed evangelical Christian. Tell us how this happened and what it is like to teach at Saint Louis.

**M J M** — The short answer is that this was far from my personal intentions but the providence of God can be seen in retrospect. God closed every other door and opened this one. As I look back over the last few years and see what's developed in my life I believe I am where God intends for me to be.

I spent eight years teaching at two evangelical colleges (Wheaton and Westmont). My teaching contract at Westmont came to an end in 1996 and very sadly my wife also ended our marriage and left the church at the same time. This was an extremely difficult transition. The circumstances related to both my employment and my marriage were quite outside my control. I was not at all sure what would happen next. I was living in southern California and made contact with the eminent biblical scholar, David Noel Freedman, at the University of California in San Diego. This was a university of over 20,000 students and they did not have a religion department. Freedman's appointment was in the history department and in Judaic studies. I had lunch with Freedman twice and, as a result of that, I became the first full-time religion faculty member at the school. I would walk around campus and say, "Hello, my name is Michael McClymond and I am in the religion department." They would say, "I didn't know we had a religion department." It was a very exciting time with a lot of new opportunities. I was told by one of the administrators not to worry if I had three or four students in my first class because no one knew who I was. I offered to do a survey of world religions, which is typically the first course offered in a state university. The administrator, who was not a Christian, said, "Couldn't you specialize a little bit more? How about an introduction to Christianity?" I answered yes immediately. This was what I had been preparing to do all those years teaching at Wheaton and Westmont. So I got the word out on campus that I was going to be teaching this Introduction to Christianity course. I did not

discriminate, but went to all the religious groups on campus, including the Hillel Society and the Muslim Students' Association. Yet the InterVarsity group really responded. I recall speaking before them and saying, "I am teaching an Introduction to Christianity that will be offered here for the first time. I love Jesus and everything I do is for his sake and I would like you to register so I will be able to do this in the future." I had a hundred students in that first class.

**RRJ** — So you taught for two years at UC San Diego? Does the religion department still exist there?

**MJM** — A decision was made later to add a permanent position in religious studies. The dean decided that it would be an opening in Buddhism. (I could not, of course, apply for that job.) They are also adding a position in Islam now. Unfortunately there is no plan ever to add a faculty slot in Christianity.

**RRJ** — Why do you think this happened? You have taught in an evangelical environment, a Catholic environment and in a secular institution. Talk about political correctness and religion in a secular setting. What does pluralism have to do with this? Christianity seems to get pushed down. Why is this?

**MJM** — Well, there are real pressures against course offerings in the field of religion. The University of California is one of the more secular university systems in America. The University of California in Berkeley doesn't even have an undergraduate program in religion.

**RRJ** — I went to a state university in the late 1960s and we had a religion department then. We had both Muslim and Christian professors teaching courses to undergraduate students.

**MJM** — The student radicals at Berkeley demanded the elimination of the religion program there, which hardly seems consistent with their "free speech" stance! That was one thing

that happened in the 1960s that has not yet changed. A large religion program was established at the University of California in Santa Barbara but my mentor, David Noel Freedman, felt that this was done because the idea was to quarantine religion and keep it at one campus.

*I think there is a fundamental misperception in the minds of some academics that Christianity does not enhance diversity. The incredible cultural and global diversity within Christianity somehow doesn't register.*

**RRJ** — Since religion is taught, why does Christianity get the short end of the stick? Is there a liberal social bias against Christianity?

**MJM** — I think there is a fundamental misperception in the minds of some academics that Christianity does not enhance diversity. The incredible cultural and global diversity within Christianity somehow doesn't register. Christianity means Romanian Orthodoxy, and Brazilian Pentecostalism, and house churches in China, and all the rest of this great international mosaic. Sadly the idea is that to enhance diversity and multi-cultural approaches to education means that only non-Christian traditions need to be incorporated in the curriculum. The irony of this was apparent to a colleague of mine who said to the dean, "You are saying you want courses in Buddhism to draw in Asian and Asian-American students, but most of these students are evangelical Christians. They are more interested in studying Christianity than in studying Buddhism."

**RRJ** — After you left California you came to Saint Louis University. Tell us about this appointment and the endowed

chair in theology that you now hold at Saint Louis University. Also, what are you actually teaching at Saint Louis?

**M J M** — My appointment is in theological studies. Unlike some Catholic institutions, Saint Louis University has a very strong Catholic identity. This became quite clear to me early on. Not having spent much time in a Catholic context I did not expect to see such a large number of the students active in practicing their faith. The campus church, St. Francis Xavier College Church, draws about a thousand students to Mass every Sunday night at 10 p.m.

**R R J** — How many students are there at Saint Louis?

*One of the things that is different in the Catholic world is that faith is often more unspoken than spoken. I had to ask students questions like: "What are you doing this summer?" Then I would learn what they were up to. It was a different style than I was accustomed to in an evangelical context.*

**M J M** — About 6,000-7,000 undergraduates. Many of these students are involved in various parishes in the city. Gradually, I began to realize just how many of them participate in summer mission trips to Latin America, building houses with Habitat for Humanity, or teaching inner-city kids how to read.

One thing that is different in the Catholic world is that faith is often more unspoken than spoken. I had to ask students questions like: "What are you doing this summer?" Then I would learn what they were up to. It was a different style than I was accustomed to in an evangelical context. There is a high level of Catholic practice and presence in St.

Louis. There are forty Catholic high schools in the area, more than any other archdiocese in the United States. My department is somewhat unusual among Catholic universities in that it is not at all a world religions department but one devoted to the study of Christianity, particularly historical theology. We really have only one person in our twenty-two member faculty who is doing significant research in a non-Christian tradition. He happens to be an Islamicist. We have one of the largest programs in historical theology of any university in the country, particularly centered in early Church studies, Medieval studies and the modern American period, which is my area. In order to enter more deeply into an understanding of the Jesuit tradition, I engaged in the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius shortly after I came to St. Louis. This is a guided program in meditation on Scripture that I completed during the 1999-2000 school year. I found this to be one of the most valuable experiences of my Christian life.

In my work I have gravitated, in the last couple of years, from undergraduate to graduate teaching. We have a Ph. D. program and I have begun to direct doctoral dissertations. One of the interesting things about the doctoral program is that we have, I think, more evangelical students doing Ph. D. work than Catholics.

**R R J** — What field of study are these evangelical students working in at the doctoral level?

**M J M** — We give doctoral degrees only in historical theology. As I see it this is a strength. We have specificity in our program and that means we have greater depth as well. If we had to cover all the bases—biblical studies, systematic theology, etc.—we would not have the strength we do in this area.

**R R J** — So what would some of your doctoral students, especially your evangelical Protestant students, be writing on for their research?

**M J M** — There are a number working on American Christian-

ity. I have a student who is interested in the theology of baptism, conversion and regeneration in the work of Jonathan Edwards. Another student, who went to Evangel College of the Assemblies of God, is interested in the rise of Oneness Pentecostalism and the paradoxes of non-trinitarian Pentecostalism. Yet another is working on liturgical reform in the Calvinist tradition. One is an ordained Lutheran minister, and is involved in the first ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church) church plant in the city of St. Louis in seventy years. She is very interested in the relationship between mercy ministry and gospel proclamation so she is writing on Hertzberger, a turn-of-the-century figure who was controversial in Lutheran circles because he brought together social justice and forensic justification. So my students are working on widely diverse topics.

One thing I'll add is that there are quite a number of evangelical graduate students who are working in studies related to the early Church and the medieval period. I think this is good because this is not an area of traditional strength for most evangelicals.

**R R J** — Why this interest in early and medieval Church studies among evangelicals? It seems to me that this is growing all across the country right now. You're saying that you see some of this interest among your doctoral students.

**M J M** — We need to put ourselves into the situation of the younger generation. Many feel a lack of landmarks or boundaries along their spiritual path. They are confronted with many choices. The exposure to media is such that they seem to be lacking something. They have encountered so many things so early in their lives. I think that they sense a lack of structure in their spiritual life. I think that many of these students find that non-denominational Christianity doesn't give them a sense of connectedness.

**R R J** — They are really interested in discovering what I think we both would call catholic Christianity, by which I do not

mean specifically Roman Catholic Christianity but rather the great catholic consensus of the historic Church. Another way to put this is that they are looking for their historical, theological and Christian roots.

**M J M** — I agree. They want to be connected to something much bigger than themselves, something that existed long before this nation was settled.

**R R J** — Something bigger than their evangelical culture?

**M J M** — Yes, that too. I think they want to pray prayers that Christians prayed in the second, third and fourth centuries. At the same time many of these students are uncomfortable with the rigidity and narrowness that sometimes arises in the historical liturgical churches. The same problem can occur in many different contexts. There can be narrowness in the liturgical context just as in the non-liturgical. But the ideal, for these younger Christians, is an approach to worship and the Christian life that draws on the wealth and riches of the Christian Church down through the centuries, but is not narrowly circumscribed by inherited traditions. There is a real openness today to adapting and incorporating what is most appropriate for the contemporary setting.

**R R J** — Talk to us about the vision that has recently formed in your own heart regarding the Institute for World Christianity. Our ministry would share in this kind of dream, so tell us more about it.

**M J M** — I'll speak to this by going back to the beginning. The idea originated in late 1999 during a moment in prayer that proved to be a turning point in my spiritual life. To put it in a nutshell, I had an experience in prayer in which God took my intellectual knowledge of Church history and set it on fire. He caused me to see, in a new way, how terribly wrong is much that has transpired in Church history. It was as though I relived a half-century of Church history. It seemed as if I was back

at the time of the Reformation. I had a strong mental picture of Christians murdering one another over the doctrine of the eucharist. I had always realized that this was wrong but I hadn't seen how terribly grievous this was to God. That morning in prayer I had a glimpse of God's own heart. I began to cry, weeping from the inner recesses of my soul. It was a terrible sadness. In the second phase of this experience I was on the coast of Africa and could see the slave ships setting off. There were Christian ministers who were blessing the occasion with their prayer books, openly declaring God's favor on the slave traders. Again I was overwhelmed by sadness. In the third phase of this experience it was as if I had been transported to see the suffering Christians of today. Some of them had scars all over their bodies because they had been tortured to induce them to renounce the faith and yet they had resisted. I was sad because I saw myself completely cut off from these heroic believers. When the experience came to an end I said very little about this to anyone because I didn't know what to do with it. The experience touched on a number of different kinds of divisions—theological divisions, racial divisions, and divisions between the haves and have-nots in the Christian world today. So, the Institute for World Christianity is my effort to work out the implications of that experience and to do what I can in my particular sphere to address issues of divisions among Christian believers.

The aim of the IWC is to create a place where emerging Christian leaders can worship, study, and serve together to heal the divisions in Christ's Church. It will be a unique partnership between a coalition of St. Louis area congregations, the university, and the international Christian community.

**RRJ** — Talk about those leaders that you have envisioned in your mind coming to the Institute. Who are they, and where would they come from? What nationality or ethnic background would they represent? What would transpire because of this effort. It seems to me that you are trying to create a community in some way.



*To put it in a nutshell, I had an experience in prayer in which God took my intellectual knowledge of Church history and set it on fire. He caused me to see, in a new way, how terribly wrong is much that has transpired in Church history. It was as though I relived a half-millennium of Church history. It seemed as if I was back at the time of the Reformation.*

**MJM** — The rationale for the Institute is that we are not currently training younger Christian leaders to minister in a global era or for the global Church. Typically believers will grow up in a particular Christian tradition—Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Orthodox—and will receive training exclusively within that tradition. They will go to a seminary within their tradition and then serve in a parish, or sometimes a para-church context within that same tradition, never breaking out of their own wing of the Church. The purpose of the Institute is to bring together some of the brightest, most innovative, and most committed emerging Church leaders from all regions of the world. So it will be inter-cultural, with participants from Europe, Africa, Latin America, Asia and North America. All the major Christian traditions of the world will be represented—Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, Orthodox, Catholic, charismatic, and non-denominational. The doctrinal basis for the Institute will be the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. I want to bring together people who with all their heart and are willing, at

least on a provisional basis, to acknowledge one another as believers based upon this common confession of faith.

The three words I use to describe what will happen at the Institute are worship, study and service. Worship is first. The kind of personal transformation that needs to take place among Christian leaders must begin here. This is one of the weaknesses of the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century. This movement made contributions in terms of theology and understanding the differences between the churches and the possibilities of rapprochement. It also made contributions in fostering mutual service among Christians. It tended, however, not to keep worship and prayer at the top of the agenda. I would like to begin with that aspect of our common life. I envision beginning with a group of younger Christian leaders who are worshipping together on a daily basis, involving both liturgical and extemporaneous prayer.

*Personal relationships are important and yet so is study. When we look at the historic churches there is a great deal that people in the evangelical and non-denominational churches need to learn in order to understand their fellow believers.*

Study is the second component because many of the divisions within the Church rest on ignorance and misinformation. Some of this can be overcome as these younger leaders live in community with one another and encounter each another. There may be a Catholic, for instance, who thinks that all Pentecostals are wild-eyed fanatics to be avoided. This Catholic becomes friends with a Pentecostal Christian and consequently has a new view of the kind of relationship one can have with someone who follows Jesus in a differing way. Personal relationships are important and yet so is study.

When we look at the historic churches there is a great deal that people in the evangelical and non-denominational churches need to learn in order to understand their fellow believers. For sake of illustration think of a Maronite Catholic. There is no way a Baptist in America can understand a Maronite Catholic unless he or she knows something about the history of how the Maronites emerged in Lebanon and their special relationship to the Vatican that allows them to have a measure of local autonomy.

The third element will be mutual service. I would like to give people who come from all over the world an opportunity to serve the Lord together in various settings in the city of St. Louis. I also have a curriculum in mind that will first involve a look at the common traditions of the churches, the creeds, the ways of reading Scripture, and patterns of worship. A second element of the curriculum concerns Christian division and efforts at reunion. We will also look at the contingent causes for division. This will help students see that divisions have often arisen for good historical reasons but that those divisions, in many cases, need not continue into the present time. The third element of the curriculum looks at cross-cultural encounters in the history of Christianity. The fourth element of this curriculum will be devoted to practical strategies for change in world Christianity. There are a lot of ways that the experiences these believers have in St. Louis could be transferred and translated into other contexts. Ultimately, vision is bigger than that because I would like to see the Institute for World Christianity become a prototype that could be copied. I would love to see something like this in various parts of the world and in languages other than English.

**RRJ** — Then you are seeking reformation in the whole Church. This is dear to my own heart, as you know. You are praying for the Spirit of God to revive and renew Christian leaders so that a long-term difference will be made in the lives of these leaders in the body of Christ across the whole world.

**MJM** — One of my areas of research has been Jonathan

Edwards, as you know. As this vision has been developing, I have had new opportunities to study revivals and awakenings in Church history. I have a new volume coming out next year titled, *Embodying the Spirit: New Dimensions of North American Revivalism* (Johns Hopkins University Press). As a result of that work I also have been asked to prepare a major reference work called, *The Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America* (Greenwood Press), which will be a two-volume 800-plus page work. This will be the first full-scale reference work on revivals in American history. I think this isn't an accident. I believe I am working on revivalism because there is an *inherent connection* between spiritual awakening and the healing of divisions in the Church. As I look at the scene in heaven that occurs in Revelation 7, where there are people from every tribe, nation and tongue gathered before the throne, this is not the Baptist Church or the Orthodox Church or the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it is all of these, yet it is *not* limited to any of the above. I believe it is only a fresh encounter with God and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will bring the change of attitude and heart that is necessary for Christian believers to re-evaluate our relationships with one another. The ultimate aim is *not* organizational amalgamation. There doesn't have to be a super Church of some kind, an ecclesiastical Mt. Everest. Maybe God's purpose is for something more like the Himalayas, a range of mountains that are connected with one another. I look at Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 where he prays that his followers may be one as he and the Father are one. That is an interesting prayer because Jesus' unity with the Father was not a *distinctionless* oneness. There was a oneness of essence in his divinity with the Father, yet a genuine distinction of persons. If the model of unity we have for the Church comes out of John 17 then there must be diversity as well as unity. I deeply believe that there has to be a work of transformation in all of the churches to bring us into a new kind of relationship with one another. And the fundamental conviction that underlines the whole project of the Institute for World Christianity is that the fullness of life does not reside in any single tradition. It isn't a matter of everyone

becoming Lutheran, Baptist, Catholic, or Calvinist.

**RRJ** — Tell the reader, who is uncomfortable with the ideas you have just shared, why they should follow the vision you have outlined. Many, as you readily know, will fear the whole agenda as simply an ecumenism of compromise and a moving away from strong doctrinal Christianity. You are a Reformed Protestant. Speak to these concerns that people in conservative traditions have about such a vision.

**MJM** — We have to begin by realizing that God is a living God and can work in ways that we could never imagine. The past history of the Church doesn't have to determine and limit its future. I will use an analogy. Imagine two brothers who have a falling out in their early life. Something goes wrong and they stop speaking to one another. Family reunions happen but they will not attend and so they do not speak to each other for years. But there is a friend who happens to know them both. The friend comes to one of them and asks, "Have you talked to your brother lately?" He answers, "No, I haven't talked to him for fifteen years." The friend replies, "You know he is an OK guy and he has changed a good bit over the years." To this the man answers his friend, "He's a dirty scoundrel. He was rotten then, he is now, and I have no desire to talk to him." In a case like that it is easier for this individual to stay in the status quo, in the lack of a relationship. To enter into a relationship will involve a risk that will force him to reexamine himself as well as the other person.

**RRJ** — That is a good point. It will involve *real risk*. It also demands *hard work*.

**MJM** — Yes, it is very demanding to listen attentively and to try to hear what people are saying who use a different vocabulary and understand their Christian faith differently than you do. It has been a lot of work for me at Saint Louis University as a Calvinist Presbyterian to listen and read between the lines in conversations with my Catholic colleagues to understand

where they are coming from. What I discover is that they share many of the same convictions that I do but they express them in very different ways. So, I would say to those who are hesitant about this, think of the starting point as the Creed and the single act of praying together. The practical question I would then pose is this: Would you be willing simply to meet with someone who believes as you do in the fundamentals of the faith and spend time worshipping God with them? You both would be praising the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and leaving open the question of what comes after that. You could leave to the Holy Spirit what might follow after that.

**R R J** — I am going to be the Reformed critic at this point and say, "Very good Michael, but there is still this fundamental issue about justification that divided us in the sixteenth century. It has not gone away. Rome is still Rome," as some put it. Scholars in the Roman Church have made headway, in terms of biblical exegesis, but the official dogmatic views are the same. Many Protestant evangelicals would say to you at this point, "These people you are meeting with and praying with



**T**here is an amazing shift in terms of attitudes toward the Scripture. In the 1700s we had popes who forbade Bible reading among Catholics. You get to the late nineteenth century and you have popes saying, "You know, we need to have more biblical instruction among our Catholic clergy." And then you come to *Spiritus parakletos*, which is from the 1920s, and it calls for Bible distribution among lay Catholics.

are part of a church that *denies* the gospel. How can you share Christian fellowship with them so easily?"

**M J M** — I begin my relationship with Roman Catholics with the assumption that things have *changed* since the sixteenth century, for both Protestants and Catholics.

**R R J** — How so?

**M J M** — I am presently doing research on biblical interpretation in America. I read through the whole series of the papal encyclicals dealing with the role of the Bible beginning with *Providentisimus deus* in 1893, then *Divino afflante spiritus* in 1943, and *Dei verbum* in 1965, which was issued at Vatican II. There is an amazing shift in terms of attitudes toward the Scripture. In the 1700s we had popes who forbade Bible reading among Catholics. You get to the late nineteenth century and you have popes saying, "You know, we need to have more biblical instruction among our Catholic clergy." And then you come to *Spiritus parakletos*, which is from the 1920s, and it calls for Bible distribution among lay Catholics. What's interesting is that Bible Societies were actually anathematized in *The Syllabus of Errors* in 1864. So, by 1921, if memory serves me correctly, you have an official Catholic sanctioning of Bible Societies. When you get to 1943, an encyclical opens the door to a renewal of Catholic biblical scholarship. If you talk to evangelical biblical scholars they'll say that Catholic biblical scholarship is doing wonderful and valuable work. Now that doesn't mean that it's happening in the pew, but it means there is a *basis* for change and growth in the Roman Catholic tradition. *Dei verbum* includes a statement that the Catholic magisterium does not have the right to teach anything *contrary* to Scripture. I remember encountering that and being stunned. Now there are other statements alongside of this that make tradition as an important part of the interpretive process. But I can't look at this whole process and say nothing has changed. There most certainly is a renewed appreciation of Scripture. I participated in a Catholic Bible study for a year after I did the spiritual exer-

cises and learned a great deal from Catholic believers in this group who were reading Scripture alongside me. Younger Catholics today, in my experience, are very open to learning from their Protestant friends. I think one of the dangers here is defining Catholicism from historical texts rather than from conversation and relationship with flesh-and-blood people.

**R R J** — Rather than getting out of the historical arguments of earlier eras where we appear to still be stuck, discussing Luther and the Council of Trent, we must pay close attention to the present. Often we are focusing on those historical definitions rather than listening to what is actually being said today. One of the things Protestant evangelicals often say to me is, "Well, the doctrine of the Catholic Church has not *officially* changed so has it *actually* changed at all?" Rome does profess *semper idem*, meaning she never changes. Yet you are saying it has changed. I tend to think that Protestants do not understand how it changes.

**M J M** — I agree. Let's take an illustration. Compare the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) with the Roman Catholic Church. The OPC is confessional in the sense that the Westminster Confession of Faith is a document used day-by-day, week-by-week, to define what is right belief and right practice. Now, I look at the Roman Catholic Church, and outside of a relatively small group of arch-conservatives, this is not the way I see the *historic text* functioning. Even though the documents of the Council of Trent became the law of the church in 1560s they do not determine the way in which most priests and lay people understand and practice their faith today. There is a continual shift, a progress in dogma.

If you want an analogy, think of English Common Law. In this tradition there were laws that were recognized in England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that have never been officially revoked. I think of laws that stipulate for vagrants to be incarcerated. Those laws may be part of the English Common Law tradition. They haven't been revoked officially but they are not really part of the *living legal tradition* in London

today. No one is likely to lock up someone simply because he is homeless. Nor is anyone going to lock a person up in a debtor's prison. If you use that as an analogy it will help the non-Catholic get a sense of how Catholic tradition actually functions. Another thing to remember is that Catholics generally have a different attitude toward law. For many Catholics, church laws are general principles that allow for exceptions rather than hard-and-fast rules.

*It hardly seems fair to say that we can change in our traditions, but are not going to allow Catholics to change. We do this, seemingly, because we want to keep a wall between us. We are much more comfortable if we can keep Catholics in a box.*

I had an interesting encounter with some radio DJs in the St. Louis area after I did a live radio call-in show some months ago. I invited an Orthodox colleague and a Roman Catholic Jesuit colleague to join me in the discussion on a variety of issues related to church and theology. Before I went on the air the two DJs came down to Saint Louis University. They had never been on the campus before and they wanted to talk to me about the upcoming radio program. I found out near the end of lunch that they were concerned about putting a Catholic on the air and they believed that they would take flack from listeners who would not be happy about this. In this conversation one of the DJs kept hammering away at the Council of Trent saying, "The Council of Trent said so-and-so." Knowing he was somewhat familiar with the Calvinist tradition, I asked: "Do you know the story of Calvin and Servetus?" He said, "Yes, I do." Servetus, as I reminded him, was a non-trinitarian who was put to death in Geneva with Calvin's consent. He said, "Yes, I know that story." I asked him, "What would you say if I were a skeptic and I said, 'You

Presbyterians are all the same because you are ready to kill anyone who opposes your theology?" He paused for a moment and said, "Well, I guess I would say that that was then and this is now. A lot has changed for us in the last five hundred years." I said, "Exactly—that is my point as well. The same is true among Catholics." It hardly seems fair to say that we can change in our traditions, but not allow Catholics to change. We do this, seemingly, because we want to keep a wall between us. We are much more comfortable if we can keep Catholics in a box.

**RRJ** — That would be truly absurd.

**MJM** — Let's begin then with this reality of change. I think sometimes that traditionalist Protestants are, in a strange way, in consensus with traditionalist Catholics who argue that the church has *never* changed. They argue that nothing new emerges, that everything simply stays the same. Traditionalist Protestants would feel more comfortable maintaining the divisions of the sixteenth century. To gain an intellectual basis for understanding this idea of change, look at John Henry Newman's essay on the development of doctrine which has been absolutely central in terms of modern Catholic theology and modern Catholic historiography. Newman argues that there is an organic process of growth and change that has occurred through the centuries. All but a very few Catholic theologians today are convinced by this argument. So what is the part of a non-Catholic Christian in this situation? I would say that we should begin with a willingness to spend time with Catholics and listen to them. Get to know them and the way they practice their faith. The starting point is not, in any sense, setting aside one's convictions. My minister in England used to tell the story of a Baptist, Pentecostal, Lutheran and Catholic who meet one another. They turn to the Baptist and say, "You know we are all really uncomfortable with this adult baptism by immersion argument. Could you just change your view on this?" He pauses and says, "OK." So they turn to the Catholic and say, "Transubstantiation bothers us too. Would

you be willing to stop teaching that?" So the Catholic nods yes and they turn to the Lutheran and say, "You are a bit extreme on your justification position so would you tone that down a bit?" He agreed. Then they said to the Pentecostal, "Would you do this tongues thing in private and not talk about it so much?" The Pentecostal agrees. At that point they all look at one another and say, "My brother." Then they lunge together into a holy huddle, and cry out, "My brother! My sister!" What's wrong with this picture? This is an external unity that isn't based on *shared* convictions. That is not what I am interested in at all. I am interested in *deepening* our convictions regarding Jesus Christ as God incarnate, crucified, risen again and returning in glory. I want to go so deep into that in an evangelical way—and in the power of the Holy Spirit, submitted to the authority of Scripture, and guided by the historic tradition—that we can find a common basis for unity across the divisions within the Church.

**RRJ** — Let's transition to discussion about Jonathan Edwards. Tell us how the work of Jonathan Edwards became such an important academic interest of yours?

**MJM** — Perhaps I became a Calvinist in part because of my conversion experience. This was something that happened to me, rather than something I chose to happen. It's like what C. S. Lewis said regarding his own conversion: "Does the mouse find the cat?" While I was studying abroad in England in 1978-79, I chanced upon a copy of Louis Berkhof's, *Systematic Theology*, in a second-hand bookshop. Although I was studying chemistry at the time, I read all 700 pages and loved it! Later, while studying at Yale, I took a course on the Reformed tradition with David Kelsey. He underscored the importance of Edwards, and of course Edwards himself had graduated from Yale, and his personal papers are housed there. So that got me started on Jonathan Edwards. I was also attracted to John Calvin, but felt that there might be more room for fresh work on Edwards.

**R R J** — Which of the works of Jonathan Edwards have been most influential for you?

**M J M** — Outside of the assigned readings on Edwards in my first course, the first text I read was *End of Creation*. In 1985 I received the two-volume Banner of Truth edition of Edwards' works as a Christmas present. I was drawn unaccountably to this treatise, perhaps because I have always been a closet philosopher and this text deals with the ultimate "Why" question: "Why is there a world at all?" Later, when I studied philosophy, I discovered that both Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein—arguably the two most influential philosophers of the last century—had certain moments in their life when they were seized with wonder over the question of "Why is there something rather than nothing?" If Aristotle is correct in saying that philosophy begins in wonder, then this is a really fundamental sort of wonder in the face of reality. And Edwards' response is to say with Augustine, "Because God is good, therefore we exist."

For Edwards, as for the biblical authors, at the core of all existence is the astonishing goodness, grace and holiness of God. And praise is what creation renders to God because of its very existence. Intelligent beings share the special privilege of conscious and willing participation in this undying chorus of cosmic adoration. So, this great book, *End of Creation*, moved me deeply. It was the primary text I examined in my doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago. Remarkably enough, I discovered that although *True Virtue*—the companion piece to *End of Creation*—had evoked a number of books and articles, *End of Creation* had been ignored by scholars. Prior to my first article on the subject, there was only one article exclusively devoted to *End of Creation*, and that was written by an associate of Charles Finney about 150 years ago. Just recently, to my surprise and delight, I discovered that John Piper republished *End of Creation* with an introduction that said it had a major impact on his thinking and spiritual life. I wrote a letter to Piper, and got a nice reply by mail. Like many of Edwards' texts, it's not exactly light

reading, but it is well worth the effort.

**R R J** — What do you think Edwards might say about American evangelicalism today? What would please him about the Church? Do you think he would have done anything differently if he saw the problems facing the Church today?

**M J M** — In some of his millennial speculations Edwards predicted the worldwide expansion of Christianity, and said that fine "books of divinity" would be written by Africans as well as by Europeans. He foresaw an age of increasing international travel and commerce and the diffusion of new technologies and knowledge. Think of the changes in the Church even in the twentieth century. In 1900 there were perhaps 10 million Christians in Africa. Today there may be as many as 400 million. That's an increase of 4,000%. I think Edwards would be staggered by such demographic growth. He would see this as a sign of the impending "glorious times" for the Church.

On the other hand, I feel certain that Edwards would be displeased with some elements in the North American Church. In the conclusion to *Encounters with God*, I noted that that Edwards was the apostle to the spiritually indifferent. The wealth, ease, complacency, and pleasure orientation of the American Church would be quite distressing to him. (Perhaps I should say "is distressing" rather than "would be," since Edwards clearly taught that departed saints are aware of what transpires on earth.) Since Edwards believed both in up-and-down cycles in the history of the Church, as well as in a linear progress through the ages, the present complacency and spiritual "stupidity" (in the eighteenth-century sense—meaning lack of perception) would not lead him to despair. Instead, it would probably drive him to renewed efforts in personal prayer and in organizing "concerts of prayer." He would thank God for the worldwide expansion and renewal of the Church and seek God for showers of spiritual blessing to moisten the dry and hardened soil of North America.

**R R J** — You wrote a work on Jonathan Edwards in 1998,

published by Oxford University Press titled, *Encounters with God*. What was your thesis that led to your publishing this major work?

**MJM** — The thing that I find most remarkable about Edwards was his walk with Christ. He was a disciple first and an intellectual second. If you read what some academics write about him they are captivated by his utter brilliance. The late Perry Miller, as an example, called him the greatest philosopher-theologian to ever grace the American scene. George Marsden, who unlike Perry Miller is a believer, commented that no matter how long and hard you study Jonathan Edwards, he is always smarter than you are. So it is easy to be captivated by the splendor of his intellect, but when I read his personal narrative I am most taken with his profound love for Christ. He says that the heaven he desired was a heaven of holiness. It was his continual struggle day and night to know how he might live a more holy life. When he begins to talk about his relationship with Christ, his prose soars. His words evoke an echo in me regarding experiences with the Lord whom I also know and desire. When I perceived Edwards' capacity both for spiritual experience and for intellectual analysis, I was captivated. In my work I sought to bring together the experiential and the intellectual and to show that his entire approach to religious experience is a kind of apologetic. There is an element of traditional apologetics in his writings, i.e., the offering of evidences for Christianity, but this is not what I mean here. His most important line of argument, in attempting to vindicate the Christian faith is to say that faith itself is a form of direct perception of God. Or as I say, "How you can see God without leaving earth?" By the way, Edwards was converted not by reading a gospel invitation in Scripture, but rather a doxology. He says that immediately after his conversion, the appearance of everything was altered. He saw something of the divine glory in the trees, the streams, and the hillsides. Wherever he looked he saw the glory of God. His whole way of looking at the world was altered by his encounter with Christ.



*Edwards often describes faith in visual words, or in terms of tasting God. I find this particularly interesting because tasting is perhaps our most intimate sense. We do not put something in our mouths without it becoming part of us. There are many things we look at but never dream of putting into our mouths. Edwards uses this language of the senses profoundly.*

**R RJ** — So the burden of your book is to explore this whole subject of Edwards and how the human soul encounters God.

**MJM** — That is correct. I describe the book not like a circle with a single center but more like an ellipse with two foci. My first focus is spiritual experience, this idea of faith as an encounter with God. Edwards often describes faith in visual words, or in terms of tasting God. I find this particularly interesting because tasting is perhaps our most intimate sense. We do not put something in our mouths without it becoming part of us. There are many things we look at but never dream of putting into our mouths. Edwards uses this language of the senses profoundly. The second focus of the book is the area of apologetics. Edwards, in an interesting way, mediates between theological conservative and theological liberal. The liberals under Schleiermacher were very concerned about spiritual experience. But Schleiermacher, and the liberals of his time, especially in Germany and later in Britain and North America, lost a sense of the distinct work of God in the space-time physical universe. Schleiermacher said that a miracle is just another religious name for an event, and thus every event is a

miracle if we have eyes to see. Edwards disagreed. He believed in a God who acted in specific and concrete ways, and yet he never became so focused on the external world that he lost a concern with individual sensibility and experience of God. He brings them together in a way that is very helpful. This is one of the reasons why Edwards is so popular among people of very different theological persuasions.

**RRJ** — That leads me to the next question that I think flows quite naturally from what you have said. Why do you think Edwards is so popular today? There has been a renaissance of Edwards study over the last forty years. How do you explain this interest among academics? What has this interest accomplished? Does it bring valuable fruit to the Church and where do you see this interest going in the future? Does this have anything to contribute to the kind of ecumenicity we spoke about earlier? What does this all have to do with revival?

**MJM** — I think Edwards is, arguably, the most important writer, not only in the modern period or in Protestantism, but in all the history of the Church on the subject of spiritual discernment. Edwards showed an openness to the variety of ways in which God could work. He says in his revival writings that no one can judge any work of the Holy Spirit *a priori*. By this he meant that you could not judge in advance what God may or may not do. When George Whitefield was preaching in the 1740s, and people were shouting out and falling to the ground, some immediately wrote this off and said, "God can't be doing this." Edwards went to Scripture and saw people falling to the ground in the presence of God there. So there is this openness in Edwards and, at the same time, a real care and caution in the way he identified the work of God and the ways of the Holy Spirit. He wasn't ready to look at an external event and assume that it was necessarily a work of God.

Edwards is an important figure, a Church Father for the twenty-first century. He's the American Augustine, to borrow a phrase from George Marsden. His biblical commentaries are just now appearing in the Yale edition. And his "Blank Bible,"

with all the annotations in the margins, is coming into print for the first time as well. With the vanity of a new author, I went online to see who was quoting my Edwards book and I did a Google search on the web. I found articles citing my work in Portuguese, written by Brazilians who are producing new studies on Edwards. Since I do not read Portuguese, I do not know what they said about my work, good or bad. Yes, Edwards is clearly becoming an international figure that evangelicals throughout the world are turning to as a source of inspiration and insight. I noticed recently during the revival events in Toronto and Pensacola that in the web-based articles Edwards was cited by both sides, those who were praising the revivals and those who were expressing deep reservations. As we pray and look to God for an international movement of the Spirit in the twenty-first century I think Jonathan Edwards will become an increasingly important figure.

**RRJ** — Is it because of this keen discernment that you have mentioned?

**MJM** — I think that's correct. God uniquely prepared Edwards through life experience. He was, of course, instrumental in the 1734-35 revival, sometimes called "The Little Awakening" in Northampton. Edwards saw how religious excitement and enthusiasm crested within his community, and then because he was a pastor and had the care of souls in Northampton, he also saw what happened *after* revival. He saw that many of those who were the most ready to stand before his congregation and profess to having had extraordinary spiritual experiences, had fallen away from the faith only three or four years later. Consequently when Whitefield came to America in 1740 and The Great Awakening began throughout the colonies, Edwards was more cautious than some who got caught up in the excitement of Whitefield's preaching. Thus Edwards brought together openness and caution regarding spiritual movements.

**RRJ** — I have always been intrigued by the observation that

Charles Hodge, one of the most important Reformed theologians of the nineteenth century, was anything but a friend to revival. He cited the "fall-away ratio" as a critic of revival. Do you have any thoughts about this?

**M J M** — Hodge *was* critical of Edwards at many points. You may recall that one of Hodge's most famous statements (though it is generally cited out of context) is this: "There was never a new idea in Princeton." I think that Hodge, in some sense, had a personal and theological temperament that was not very open to novelty and newness. And let's face it, as far as I can tell in Church history, there has never been a major move of the Holy Spirit in which there is no messiness. Take the Pensacola Revival, for example. Here I do not have a strong opinion (since I was not a direct participant), but I have read some things that indicate many people came into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. There were people of a very secular and profane background that came under deep conviction of sin. Yet when someone claimed that a person had been raised from the dead, many standing on the sidelines jumped on that and were ready to write off the revival in its entirety. That violates one of the principles I see in Edwards, namely that we must not judge the whole of a revival by any part. If we judge the Great Awakening of the 1740s by a part we would look at James Davenport's actions, the arch-fanatic of the movement, and be critical. Davenport claimed to judge people's spiritual state merely by looking at them. When Charles Chauncy opposed the Awakening he appealed to Davenport and was ready to write off the whole Awakening. So I think we need to recognize that messiness, human frailty and foolishness are always an unfortunate part of genuine spiritual awakening. I don't think Charles Hodge had the same degree of tolerance for messiness and ambiguity that Edwards had.

**R R J** — Christians struggle, especially those who are preparing for vocational ministry, with the question of how to live in the world and not be of the world. What advice would you give to emerging Church leaders in this regard?

*I think that too many younger Christians are preoccupied with the question: How can I have a maximum impact or influence on the secular world? This is really not the right question, in my opinion. If you begin reading the biographies of eminent Christians, you soon see that many of them had a profound influence on their world in a lot of completely unexpected ways.*

**M J M** — I think that too many younger Christians are preoccupied with the question: How can I have a maximum impact or influence on the secular world? This is really not the right question, in my opinion. If you begin reading the biographies of eminent Christians, you soon see that many of them had a profound influence on their world in a lot of completely unexpected ways. By worrying about "impact" or "influence" we limit our own thinking and acting to that which we are able to understand and anticipate. We run the risk of leaving out God!

I am quite sure that Mother Teresa was not thinking about her "impact" on the world when she went to serve the poor of Calcutta. She didn't seek to be known. Instead the world came to her. John Wesley did not intend to transform the lives of the lower classes in England. No, Wesley once said his whole aim was to "spread scriptural holiness across the land," and everything else was just a side effect. In the Bible, there are few individuals who had a greater impact in their day than did Joseph. Yet when Joseph was rotting away in an Egyptian prison there was absolutely nothing in his situation to indicate how God intended to use him. Very early on God gave him a dream—an anticipation of what lay ahead—but most of Joseph's earlier life was a summons to radical faithfulness.

in disorienting and disconcerting circumstances. He was betrayed by his brother and experienced exile in Egypt. And of course he experienced an attempted seduction, an unjust accusation of rape, and the misery of an undeserved prison sentence.

The question before each of us should be: To what specific work or task has God called me, and how can I be radically faithful to this calling? God reveals our specific calling to us over time, in consultation and in conversation with other believers, as we live a life of deep intimacy with him in prayer and in the Word of God. He does have a purpose for each of us, and my message to those training for the ministry is this: Go in the direction that God indicates to you, even if it doesn't fit any of your preconceived notions! As long as your perceived calling is consistent with God's Word, don't worry if it seems to set you outside the mainstream. Don't fret if you end up in *terra incognita*. God will be with you in that foreign land, just as God was with Joseph, blessing his work (Genesis 39:2). In my own life I have had to pass through some strange and agonizing seasons when it seemed for a time that the earth was iron and the heavens were brass and nothing made any sense to me at all. Yet God sent people to encourage me during those periods, and over time I have found that God's purposes for my life were very different from anything that I had anticipated for myself and were in fact very much better than what I might have anticipated.