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THE VIEW FROM THE PEW

(A REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS OF FOUR "NEW ORTHODOX" SERMONS)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION: RHYME AND REASON.....	1
2. SIGNS OF THE TIMES.....	2
3. THE SERMONS.....	5
"The Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin", Sermon II by Joseph Bellamy D.D.....	5
"How Chrifians Work Out Their Own Salvation, The Fame Subject Continued", Sermon X by Samuel Hopkins D.D.....	10
"Growth in Knowledge Necessary to Growth in Grace", Sermon LXXXIX by Nathanael Emmons D.D.....	15
"The Duty of Ministers to Preach the Truth", Sermon XII by Jonathon Edwards D.D.....	21
4. FOOD FOR THOUGHT.....	28
5. THE VIEW FROM THE PEW.....	31

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: RHYME AND REASON

This work is primarily a study in depth of four historic Congregational sermons. It's structure is simple. It consists of an introduction, an explanation of historical setting, a review of each sermon, an analysis of critical issues addressed by the sermons, and a conclusion.

I chose this project for two reasons: 1. The critical analysis of sermons has been my springboard to theological reflection since early childhood. It follows that I find a paper like this to be both comfortable in method and intriguing in content. 2. I believe many other 'viewers from the pew' similarly critique the sermons they hear and then receive much of their impetus for Christian growth from this process. Resultantly, I'm convinced of my need, as a future preacher, to take care as I begin creating and delivering sermons. In this paper, then, I critically analyze historical sermons in an attempt to ascertain what might be their critique of the offerings of our pulpits today. I'm seeking sermon preparational advice from four of my ancestors in the faith.

CHAPTER 2

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

The preachers whose sermons I chose to study lived in New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This time is a complex one in the history of all protestant faiths, Congregationalism being no exception. The theology of these men was called "New Orthodox" because they designed to preserve Calvinist (orthodox) foundations while acknowledging and integrating new revelations of the "Enlightenment".

These men were wedged between the first and second "Great Awakenings" (both of which were Calvinist inspired revivals) and they wrestled with Calvinism and it's competing doctrines in a way that is laudable. Although these preachers were never very successful in a strictly historical/critical sense, they did make a solid attempt at an impressive task. They tried to search out a middle ground between the more conservative and liberal theologies of their time. (Only the bravest attempt that same task today.)

The theological climate of New England in the late seventeen and early eighteen hundreds was dominated by mainly three contending ideologies. They were: Calvinism (orthodox), Arminianism (deist enlightenment), and Universalist (rational enlightenment). (The Unitarian movement was also born out of Congregationalism at this time

but it was not as pervasive as the other three.)

I found a wonderful description of these doctrines set in contrast to each other in Geo. L. Curtiss' work of 1894 entitled: Arminianism in History. It follows:

Calvinism, among other things, says that God in Jesus Christ made provision for the salvation of those in the human race who were predestinated and foreordained from all eternity to be saved in heaven, and the remainder are predestinated and foreordained from all eternity to eternal damnation for the glory of God...there is in man a necessitated will, which can act only in certain ways. The will must act, but it is necessitated to act in a certain way. Out of that groove it can not move.

Arminianism teaches that God in Jesus Christ made provision fully for the salvation of all those who, by repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, accept the terms, and all who do thus accept are eternally saved. All who rebel against God, and refuse to accept of Jesus on the terms of proffered mercy, sink under Divine wrath, and are eternally lost...there is a perfect freedom of will regarding man's moral condition and powers. Man must make his own choice of salvation, or choose to reject. He may will freely to use the means provided for his salvation, or he may as freely reject. In either case he must abide by the results of his free choice.

Universalism teaches that God in Christ Jesus has made such an abundant and merciful provision for human salvation that everybody, irrespective of individual moral character, and without repentance and faith in a Savior, shall be saved in heaven. In this doctrine there is no provision for the punishment of sin hereafter. All punishment of sin is in this life...there is no will in salvation. Man is in a condition of salvation without his choice. He is in the stream, and can not do otherwise than go with it into heaven.¹

While it is interesting to note that a multiplicity of theological views is well-known to us today, it's also important to state one striking difference between then and now. Many theologies exist today (and they are occasionally

discussed, especially by those preparing to enter the ordained ministry) but they are not the objects of intense, systematic probing and proving by a great portion of the population as they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was not then uncommon to hear theological discourse among average persons on street corners. For my preachers, "interest in theology was native to their minds, the region, and the time. It was of the texture and essence of their ministry."² Many Christians today bemoan the passing of such a population-wide theocentric interest and are concerned about how to renew it in a contemporary light. I confess that I'm one of those so concerned and that some of my analysis and conclusions will reflect this bias.

Now, with that note stated and with the historical setting outlined, I'm ready to move on to a very brief introduction of each of my four "New Orthodox" preachers and to review their sermons. I will begin with Joseph Bellamy and proceed to Samuel Hopkins, Nathanael Emmons, and Jonathon Edwards (the younger), in that order.

CHAPTER 3
THE SERMONS

"The Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin"

Sermon II

by Joseph Bellamy D.D.

"Joseph Bellamy, a Bethlehem, Connecticut, pastor for fifty years, was one of the greatest preachers of this period, with every oratorical gift."³

This sermon, Dr. Bellamy's second in a series of four on the same subject, begins with it's foundational, scriptural premise: "Genesis 1.20. Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good."⁴

Bellamy asserts that two thousand years before the birth of Christ, the world was so depraved that it didn't even recognize it's own sin and need for redemption. Since God had planned the savior's birth in the relatively near future, it became necessary for divine intervention to take place for the purpose of re-awakening in people their understanding of their need for sanctification.

God calls Abraham. He proves most worthy, exhibits a good life, admonishes others as to their conduct, and practices sacrifices foreshadowing the atonement of the Messiah. The lives of Jacob and Joseph also help to accomplish God's overall purpose and God foreknows they

will. God chooses not to hinder the sin of Joseph's brothers when they sell him into slavery because God foreknows the end result will aid the divine plan. Similar sins are not hindered by God for similar purposes. The sin of Potiphar's wife and the sin of the Egyptian pharaoh in Moses' time (which also carried with it much misery for the Israelites) are examples. "A plan, in which so much sin was to be permitted, and so much misery endured, might, by short-sighted mortals, have been thought dishonourable to God, and unhappy for the Israelites; but, under the management of infinite wisdom, it proves the direct contrary. Yea, for aught that appears, God could not have taken a better method, as things then stood in the world, to make himself known, and get honour to his great name, and make the Israelites sensible of their dependance upon him, and obligations to him, and engage them to perpetual obedience, than that."⁵

God employs like plans in succeeding generations, as well. The universal plan is for God to show the divine self, to demonstrate authority, sovereign grace, self-moving goodness, hatred of sin, and mercy to whom God wills. It is also within this plan to show snapshots of humanness to we humans. God works experiments with people to better reveal their nature and to convince them of the need for divine government over morality and of some of the reasons for permitting sin and misery in the world.

Now Bellamy turns to the question of why God EVER permitted sin and misery to enter the world. He answers in six ways: First, we should generalize from Joseph's story to the universal plan. Since God's allowance of sin and misery worked for good with Joseph, so it must with the whole. Secondly, God is perfect in wisdom so we shouldn't doubt the divine intent in this.

In the days of eternity, long before the foundation of the world, this system, now in existence, and this plan which now takes place, and all other possible systems, and all other possible plans, more in number perhaps than the very sands on the sea-shore, all equally lay open to the Divine view, and one as easy to Almightyness as another. He had his choice. He had none to please but himself; beside him there was no Being. He had a perfectly good taste, and nothing to bias his judgment, and was infinite in wisdom: this he chose; and this, of all possible systems, therefore, was the best, infinite wisdom and perfect rectitude being judges. If, therefore, the whole were as absolutely incomprehensible by us as it is by children of four years old, yet we ought firmly to believe the whole to be perfect in wisdom, glory, and beauty.⁶

Bellamy's third answer re-emphasizes his first. Then fourthly, he states: We grow in knowledge and wisdom. It follows that God has designed to allow us to grow in knowledge of the ultimate divine plan which will eventually result in our understanding of the inclusion of sin and misery. Fifthly, the scriptures are the history of the deity which allow us to observe God's repeated conduct and understand its purpose. And lastly is a summation: When we see the moral plan of Israel's redemption as the shadow of the whole divine moral system which God has willed, we

8

cannot help but be convinced of the need for the allowance of sin and misery. This is God's best contrived scheme possible.

However, Bellamy admits that there may be a number of objections to this argument and he is not unwilling to show them in their best light. He states them as questions:

1. How could it honor God to suffer the sin of Satan's seduction of Adam which subjected all persons to death and ruin? 2. How could it have been in God's best interest to inhabit the world with sinners instead of holy angels? 3. Is it not limiting God to say that the inclusion of sin and misery was the only way to make the whole divine system holy and happy? and 4. If God wills sin and misery then they must be pleasing to God (which is an idea contrary to reason and scripture).

Before directly answering these questions, Bellamy sets forth this premise: if God's permission of sin and misery seems dark to us, it is no reason to question the divine plan. God's conduct appears dark only because we have a limited view of and an ill-taste for the beauty of the whole. And the farther we have fallen into sin the worse our view and taste have become. "Moses thought not the less honourably of God's conduct in the overthrow of Pharaoh, because it looked so dark to the Egyptians. Nor do the inhabitants of heaven think the less honourably of God's conduct in the permission and punishment of sin, in general, because it looks so dark to obstinate sinners."⁷

The crucifixion of Christ also appeared dark but, in view of the plan, was not. And we should take a lesson from the Israelites in the wilderness and not grumble against God's plan, lest he allow our carcasses to fall in the desert instead of taking us on to the heavenly Canaan.

In attempting to answer objections to his ideas, Bellamy re-asserts the authority of the Bible as the "authentic history of the conduct of the Deity"⁸ and draws some further points from its teaching.

Some people believe there are 2 competing Gods, one bad and one good which can account for sin. Bellamy says that the Bible teaches only one God whose providence is over all things good and bad. Some assert that God didn't foresee the conduct of free agents and was taken by surprise by sin. Bellamy shows that scripture proves many instances of God's foreknowledge of the conduct of free agents.

Some say that it was not within God's power to create free agents who would not fall into sin. Bellamy asserts that God created Christ Jesus and the angels, all of whom are free agents yet in a confirmed state of non-sin. Some don't believe in an eternal hell but Bellamy counters that there is too much evidence for it in the Bible. He then restates that God foreknew and allowed sin and misery because it was the best of all plans for the whole. Then he offers this prayer:

Now, God, of his infinite mercy, grant, that by a diligent attention to the divine oracles, and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we may come to such

an understanding of this dispensation of his providence, as may tend to create in us the greatest dread of sin, and the highest veneration for the divine majesty; and show us our entire, absolute dependance on God, and infinite obligations to him; that we may learn to be perfectly self-diffident; to trust wholly in God, and live wholly to him, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory in the church, world without end. AMEN.⁹

**"How Chrifians Work Out Their Own Salvation,
The Fame Subject Continued"**

Sermon X

by Samuel Hopkins D.D.

"Hopkins power was more intellectual...[he was] the most famous instructor of his time."¹⁰

Dr. Hopkins begins this sermon with his background scripture: "Phil. ii. 12, 13. Work out your own falvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleafure."¹¹ Hopkins is concerned with the mechanics of the process of working out one's own salvation. He discusses the negative aspect of this process (the renunciation of evil) in his first sermon on the subject. Now, he turns to explore the positive side. "We come now to confider the pofitive part of that work in doing which Chrifians work out their own falvation, which is fummarily expreffed in the following words: 'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteoufnefs and true holinefs."¹²

'Putting on the new man', according to Hopkins, consists in obeying divine commands. These divine commands have two branches. One branch is duties of which God is the direct object. The other branch is duties with respect to other persons.

The first branch is primary. The Christian's whole self is owed to the devotion of God. This implies constant exercises of the heart toward God. Christians must believe in God and Jesus Christ and be attendant to the revelation of God's whole character and the way of salvation in the Bible. God must be the complete and supreme object of our desire and affection without any selfishness. "The more Christians are swallowed up in views of the glory of God, and their hearts desire and rejoice in the unchangeable and eternal glory and felicity of the Infinite Being, as the object of their whole pursuit, interest and happiness, which does not consist in the least degree in selfish affection; the more is their own salvation promoted, and the greater is their enjoyment, and the nearer do they get to heaven."¹³

Further, any degree of self love will turn a Christian's affections away from God and hence, place personal desires above God's universal plans. Self love is folly because it is as if one grain of sand has decided that its personal worth is greater than the rest of the whole material world. Many professing Christians pursue a scheme of practical religion that is contrary to the truth. They believe that they should love God only because they have been convinced

that God first loved them. But this is really self love. Jesus says, "If ye love them who love you,' (i.e. merely because they love you,) 'what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the fame?"¹⁴

We do love because God first loved us but not because we believe God first loved us. God's loving causes us to be born again which results in our love for God. Those who are not born again do not love God unselfishly and are not working out their salvation.

Christians must acquiesce in God's governing providence over the greatest and the least. This requires many exercises of the heart. The Christian must labor in self-denial. There must be confessions of Christ publicly whenever possible and the Sabbath must be kept with meditations on the Bible. There must be attendance at the Lord's supper and maintenance of religious instruction in the home. Christians must especially pray, both publicly and secretly. They should also watch over their brothers and sisters in the covenanted church, exercise discipline, and be "constantly concerned that [their] conversation **sh**ould be as becometh the gofpel of Chrifft."¹⁵

The other branch of a Christian's process of working out salvation concerns duties with respect to fellow persons. Christians must do justice, love mercy, and make peace using the holy scripture as their constant rule. They must conduct themselves carefully, set good examples, and be generous in 'brotherly love'. Christians must be diligent in their

callings, providing for their own households and giving relief to the needy. But they must also redeem time for religious exercises and the improvement of the mind, making all of their moments useful.

Hopkins moves on now to assert that both of these branches of the working out of salvation are to be carefully and continually maintained unto death by those who wish to attain heaven. "They only who overcome, are faithful unto death, and endure to the end, shall be saved..."¹⁶

And not only must Christians continue in the work of salvation but they must also progress, increasing in grace and holiness. We are like apprentice youths who will grow in the skill of the trade. The apostles (and especially Paul) constantly teach the need for Christian progress in the work of the Lord. They use the word 'abound' to emphasize this idea as in: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment:

[Phil. i. 9.]"¹⁷ Jesus also discusses the bearing of fruit which is equivalent to growth in grace. If a professed Christian does not grow, then they are false and will not work out their own salvation.

Some ask this question of Hopkins: If this is the only way to work out one's salvation, then who will be saved? The task is too great for Christians to constantly, day and night, unendingly, tirelessly do good for the glory of God and to then witness God's demands of them increase each day as they progress in their work. Hopkins answers that for

mere persons the work is impossible, but for those who are reborn of God, this high calling is not only possible but even enjoyable.

Hopkins now proposes some closing observations:

1. It is not to be assumed that because Christians must work out their salvation, that they are saved by works. No. Christians are saved by their first exercise of faith on Christ. They have a place in salvation immediately upon re-birth which occasions the beginning of their progression in working out that salvation. "And all they do in working out their own falvation confifts effentially in this, in coming to Chrifit for all, and receiving all from him, even ftrength, righteoufnens and falvation, in a fenfe of their total unworthinefs and falvation, in a fenfe of their total unworthinefs of the leaft good, and defert of infinite evil."¹⁸

2. Christians are in themselves, totally unequal to the task of their working out of salvation. They accomplish it only by the powerful influences of the spirit of God.

3. Though the exercise of holiness does not earn salvation, it is as important as if it did. It is a contradiction to claim rebirth and then to live without working and progressing in holiness.

4. Further, though persons are unable to will and to do the work of salvation without God, this does not mean that the good works are done by God. They are influenced by God but are the will and accomplishment of those who do them.

Thus, there is virtue in the Christian and not only in God.
 "Upon the whole, to conclude this head, it appears that
 Chrifftians have a great work to do, which is abfolutely
 neceffary in order to be faved, in which they muft be active,
 muft will and do it... AMEN."¹⁹

"Growth in Knowledge Necessary to Growth in Grace"

Sermon LXXXIX

Nathanael Emmons D.D.

"Toward the end of their period the more clear-visioned
 came to see that sin was selfishness and goodness was love.
 This was preeminently the contribution of [Nathanael]
 Emmons...The list of his published sermons, addresses, and
 works fills almost two pages in Sprague's Annals."²⁰

Dr. Emmons opens his sermon with this scriptural proof
 text: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord
 and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18."²¹ He then asserts
 that "Peter, in writing to Christians in general, seems to
 have but one great object in view, and that is, to urge upon
 them the importance of their growing in grace, which would
 afford them the best support under their trials, and the best
 security against all the snares and seductions of their
 spiritual enemies."²² Further, growth in grace is dependent

on growth in knowledge. Knowledge is the means to the end which is grace.

"This, therefore, will be the leading sentiment in the present discourse:--That Christians must grow in knowledge, in order to grow in grace. I shall, I. Consider what is meant by their growing in grace. II. Consider why they must grow in knowledge in order to grow in grace. [and] III. Show the importance of their growing in both these respects."²³

I. In considering what is meant by growing in grace, Emmons first defines grace. Grace, in this particular context, is the love, faith, repentance, and holy affections of Christians. Growth in such grace must occur both with respect to constancy and uniformity. Christians should attempt to exercise grace at all times. They should live as if they see God at all times and do all things for God's glory. With respect to uniformity, Christians should exercise all the various types of holy affections which constitute grace. They should not be sound in some things and unsound in others. As Paul has said "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity."²⁴

II. Why is growth in knowledge necessary to growth in grace? Emmons answers that God has given the written word in the Bible and has appointed leaders to teach it. God has

always used knowledge as the means to promote holiness. Some, however, contend that knowledge obstructs rather than promotes grace which is why this discourse is so important.

Additional arguments in favor of knowledge are that it tends to increase obligations to grow in grace and that it increases the holiness of holy affections.

That knowledge increases obligation is a certainty. It is obvious that the more you know, the more there will be expected of you. Many Biblical passages support this. That knowledge increases the holiness of holy affections is a more profound idea. Emmons states: "The more real Christians become acquainted with their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the better they understand the great and essential truths of the gospel, and the more they attend to the great things which God has done, is doing, and has promised to do, to accomplish the glorious design of redeeming love, the more gracious exercises they will probably have; and it is certain that the virtue of all their gracious exercises will increase, as their knowledge increases. The virtue of their desires to promote the glory of God will be in proportion to their knowledge of God."²⁵

III. To defend the importance of growing in both respects of knowledge and grace, Emmons makes two assertions:

First, Christians must grow for the honor of religion. Other persons may be disposed to despise religion were it not for the example of doubly growing Christians. "When they find professors who are deficient in knowledge, they ascribe

all their apparent sanctity to ignorance, superstition or enthusiasm. Or when they find professors whose knowledge surpasses their apparent sanctity, they then ascribe all their apparent religion to hypocrisy. But when they find Christians who understand the gospel, and are able to give a reason of the hope that is within them, they are constrained to believe and to acknowledge, that their religion is a divine reality."²⁶ Jesus encompassed both knowledge and grace and we are to be like him as examples to the world.

And secondly, Christians must grow in both knowledge and grace in order to avoid being personally deceived by false doctrines. Emmons is concerned about the fatal errors of wicked teachers who will lead true believers astray if they do not "clearly understand and faithfully practice their own religion."²⁷ If true Christians do grow in grace and knowledge, they will have all doubts removed from their minds and their spirits will be lightened. They will be in peace.

They will also be energetic workers; delighting in the performance of their duties to God. "Growing saints are ready to hear the voice of God in his word and providence, and to run in the way of his commandments, with peculiar pleasure and delight."²⁸ And they are ready to face the 'closing scene' of their days . They are ready to humbly hope for life everlasting.

Emmons now turns to his 'improvement' section. He expounds three important points for our edification:

1. As knowledge is necessary to growth in grace, so

'sentimental' (theological) preaching is necessary to growth in knowledge. Simple 'practical' (morality) preaching is preferred by many but it does not encourage the kind of growth essential for true Christians. "...there is reason to believe that saints as well as sinners, at this day, stand in great need of being instructed in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. This knowledge lies at the foundation of all true devotion, and true devotion lies at the foundation of all practical piety and Christian morality."²⁹ Christ was a 'sentimental' preacher, teaching the doctrine of disinterested love; and so also was Paul.

One reason why so many prefer what they call practical preaching to sentimental, is because they do not love the soul-humbling, and self-denying doctrines of the gospel. They hate to hear preachers explain and inculcate the doctrines of divine decrees, of divine sovereignty, of divine agency, of special grace, and of the continued influence of the Holy Spirit in the performance of every duty. They are much better pleased to hear discourses upon external duties, than upon internal graces. But though sentimental preaching be not the most pleasing and popular, it is the most necessary and profitable. This appears to be true, by universal observation and experience. If we search the history of the church, from Christ's day to the present time, we shall find that devotional and practical piety has always flourished the most, under the most sentimental and instructive preaching.³⁰

2. Since knowledge is necessary to growth in grace, then Christians should take pains to converse instructively with each other about religion. Much conversation will be wasted in idle talk when it could be used for the mutual edification and growth of the conversers. Jesus always

conversed instructively with his disciples and Christians are expressly discouraged of idle chatter in the Bible. Free and frequent religious conversation produces greater knowledge which produces greater grace.

And 3. Divine knowledge promotes a growing sense of the goodness of their estate in Christians. Knowledgeable and graceful Christians slowly become more secure in the ability to discern between nature and grace, between creaturely and divine urges. They experience an increasing understanding of their total dependency on God and of their complete unworthiness in the sight of God. They become more thankful for their salvation and more desirous to the tasks of producing fruit.

But, Emmons concludes, those Christians who are declining rather than growing are in an unhappy and dangerous state. "It is their immediate duty to make their calling and election sure, by growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. As new-born babes, let them desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby. God has promised to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Let them wait upon the Lord, and they shall renew their strength; they shall run, and not be weary, and they shall walk, and not faint."³¹

"The Duty of Ministers to Preach the Truth"

Sermon XII

by Jonathon Edwards D.D.

"Jonathon Edwards was born at Northampton, Mass., in 1745; graduated at Princeton in 1765; pastor at New Haven, 1769-1795, pastor at Colebrook Conn., 1796-1799; president of Union College, Schenectady, N.Y., to his death in Aug. 1, 1801. In gifts and experiences he was curiously like his father."³²

Like his colleagues, Dr. Edwards begins his sermon with a scriptural text as a foundation: "John 18:37.--To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."³³ from this text he deduces the doctrine that ministers of the gospel must preach the truth. He then proceeds to define the truth that must be preached and to evidence some reasons confirming this doctrine.

There are many kinds of truth contained in the natural sciences and history. However, these are not the proper subjects for evangelical ministers. They should only be preached if they relate to or illustrate the gospel. Evangelical truth, then is that which should be preached by ministers and it basically consists of all truths relating to the nature and sovereignty of God, the nature of Jesus, the nature of our dependent state as sinners, and the nature of

the conditions requisite to atonement and salvation.

Here are some reasons in support of this doctrine of truthful preaching: 1. Jesus Christ was a truth preacher and we should be like him. 2. The prophets and the apostles were truth preachers and we should be like them. and 3. The knowledge of the truth is necessary to enable both true affection and true practice in Christianity. True affection is the love of God which is based in the true knowledge of God. We may love an idea of God that sees the divine system as designed in our own personal interest but that would not be loving the true God who has set up a world-wide intellectual system for all. It would not be true holy affection. Likewise, genuine religious practice is based on knowledge of the truth. There can be no genuine practice without genuine affection and no genuine affection without knowledge of the true God.

Now that Edwards has explained and confirmed the doctrine of the necessity for preaching the truth, he moves on to expound upon nine inferences he has drawn from this doctrine:

"1. Hence we see the groundlessness of a sentiment holden and advanced by many in these days, that it is of no importance what a man's religious creed or sentiments are, provided he be an honest man and sincere in his religion."³⁴ If 'sincerity' were all that was of importance in religion then scripture would not condemn the 'sincere' worshippers of Dagon and Baal. And if 'honesty' and 'sincerity' (defined as

just and moral behavior: love of neighbor) were all that mattered, then we would not have been instructed to love God before all others, i.e. the one true God. We can only be what we believe and belief is grounded in the knowledge of truth.

"2. Hence we see the mistake of those who hold, that we need not know much of the doctrines of christianity; that it is not useful either for the purpose of conviction to sinners or edification to saints; that such knowledge rather tends to stifle and prevent both conviction and edification; that we may be just as good christians without that knowledge as with it; yea better, because it rather obstructs christian experience and exercise, and quenches christian zeal and fervor."³⁵ What some may believe to be edification and conviction are in reality only mere enthusiasms because they are not based on the true knowledge of God. Love of the true God is the source of all genuine edification and conviction. The more we know of God, the more we love. When persons have a taste for music or art, they are more delighted with it if they have received some professional instruction. We are more delighted with God when we receive sound instruction. The only convictions that are obstructed by truth are unsound doctrines which should be blocked anyway because they lead the soul fatally astray.

"3. Hence we infer the duty of all, who live under the light of the gospel, diligently to study the doctrines of it and of the whole word of God...[and] 4. Especially are

ministers of the gospel under obligation to the careful study of its doctrines."³⁶ They should diligently study the scriptures and seek their own edification:

Yet not only are some ministers to negligent of this duty of thoroughly studying the doctrines of scripture, but some designedly avoid it. They mean to preach practically and not to puzzle their people with deep doctrines. No doubt that preaching which is truly practical, is the best and most useful. But that a minister may preach practically and most usefully, it is not necessary that he be ignorant of the doctrines of the gospel; nor is it necessary that he should not preach those doctrines. That is the most practical preaching, which most happily conduces to promote christian experience and practice; and that preaching most happily conduces to promote these, which is founded on the truth and which urges all the motives and arguments, which the truth affords, to excite to christian experience and practice; and any other arguments than these are not proper to be urged, nor do they on the whole lead to christian experience and practice, but to enthusiasm, and ultimately to irreligion and infidelity.³⁷

Other ministers neglect the study of the scriptures out of sheer laziness, which is inexcusable. Still others neglect the study of truths on the ground that they fear becoming convinced of doctrines which in some places may be considered unpopular:

Therefore they do not wish to be convinced of their truth, and will not attend to them, lest they should be convinced; or lest they should be under a necessity of giving their opinion concerning them, and thus expose themselves to the censure of one party or the other, either the advocates or the opposers of those doctrines. For this reason they will not read those books, in which those doctrines are contained, nor converse much with those persons, who hold them. And if they be asked their opinion, they make this apology for not giving it, that they have not read the books, nor examined the arguments relating to those doctrines; and of set purpose they avoid to do either.³⁸

This cannot be justified. It is the action of a person who is unwilling to be open to both sides of an argument and who is afraid of receiving light.

"Hence we learn, that it is the duty of ministers of the gospel, to preach the truth plainly and in a manner that is intelligible to their people in general."³⁹

Preaching obscure truth is almost as useful as not preaching at all. There are two ways of obscurity that should be avoided: First, neglecting some truths because the preacher fears unpopularity, is obscurity. Second, employing words or phrases in a manner unfamiliar to the hearers or preaching advanced truths before building a foundation of the more basic ones is obscurity.

"6. It is the sentiment and doctrine of some, that on all disputable points, ministers should preach in scripture language; that this would be a happy way to avoid all disputes in religion; that all public formulas, creeds, confessions and doctrines of faith, should be drawn up in scripture language entirely; that thus christians would be agreed, and dissensions, parties and separations would be at an end."⁴⁰ But all of the gospel doctrines are disputable, so it would follow that preaching should consist solely in the reading of scripture. Those who hold this view believe that the language of scripture was chosen by God and as such can not be improved by additional human words. Edwards argues that we daily improve the works of God when we plow the fields or grind the grain and no one sees it as

impious. Though the language of scripture is best for the whole, it is still possible to add to it, interpret it, or translate it for greater edification of the varied congregations of particular times and places.

"7. Hence we infer that ministers are not bound to preach plain things only. They are to preach 'plain'ly (as in readily understandable). However, when 'plain' refers to nothing challenging or new, then preachers must be more than 'plain' or never fulfill their calling to teach.

"8. Also hence we see the absurdity of parents refusing to teach their children any particular sentiments in religion, even those which they themselves believe; and leaving them to judge for themselves, without any such instruction."⁴² Some parents avoid religious instruction because they do not wish to deny their children the right of judgment or to stifle their children's genius. This argument carries no weight since education has never been shown to bely personal discernment or stifle anything. On the contrary, it provides a basis on which to make judgments and the raw materials out of which genius can be built.

"9. If ministers be bound to teach the truths and doctrines of the gospel; people are bound to attend, to hear and learn those truths."⁴³ Edwards ends his sermon with two addresses: one to the newly installed minister for whom he has written this piece and one to the congregation receiving their new pastor. He exhorts the pastor elect to be watchful and industrious, cunning as the serpent and kind as

the dove. He exhorts the congregation to listen to and learn from their preacher, acknowledging him as the gift of Christ which will lead them faithfully in the sight of God.

CHAPTER 4
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In attempting to extract from these sermons some 'critical issues' for consideration, I am not so much concerned with defining particular theological points of doctrine as I am with searching out and naming the general fundamental themes that seem to provide these works with a common ground. In other words, I'm not attempting to identify beliefs, but rather the foundational premises upon which beliefs are built.

In the sermons of these four 'New Orthodox' preachers, I see at least three foundational premises: First, there is the premise that God is sovereign. God has ordered the universe and sits in final judgement over it. God is primary, the alpha and the omega, and there is no more important realization for a Christian than this. Bellamy speaks of the divine Planner who's most basic intent is to demonstrate authority and government over morality. Hopkins concentrates on the loving God whose governing providence is over the greatest and the least. Emmons exhorts us to do all things to God's glory and Edward's definition of truth includes first and foremost the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

Secondly, there is the foundational premise that the correct knowledge of God and of the divine plan is absolutely essential and that that knowledge can only be

gained through a thorough examination of the holy scriptures combined with diligent and consistent theological discourse. Bellamy uses the whole of his sermon to test and prove a portion of God's nature and plan and uses the Bible (God's authentic history) as his primary support for his conclusions. He further addresses many theological positions opposed to him, presents them clearly, and then extensively argues his convictions. Hopkins also maps out a portion of God's plan and instructs Christians in their proper pursuits. He exhorts them to pray and meditate on the Bible, to keep the Sabbath and maintain religious instruction in the home, and to practice religious exercises and the improvement of the mind. The importance of pursuing the knowledge of God is the very thesis for Emmons' work and he expounds it by including a call for the necessity of both preachers and lay to discourse theologically. Obviously, Edwards is also concerned with the pursuit of truth and grounds it in a scriptural and theological search for light. He especially emphasizes the need for Christians to 'read more than one book'; insisting that they should be open to the testing and proving of all doctrines, popular and unpopular alike.

Thirdly, there is the foundational premise that knowledge of God produces love of God and that love of God produces the only genuine morality. Or conversely, that any morality which does not arise from love of God grounded in knowledge of God is no true morality at all but merely an

empty, self-serving act. Bellamy shows the moral plan of Israel's redemption to be a shadow of God's whole universal, moral system and charges that the closer we are to God, the better our view of and taste for the beauty of this plan will be. Hopkins requires Christians to be reborn of God for without such rebirth they have no hope of fulfilling their calling to work out their own salvation. He urges Christians to labor in self-denial with constant exercises of the heart toward God. Emmons insists that the knowledge of Christ is the foundation of true devotion to God and that all 'practical piety' is built on this foundation. True morality arises from internal graces rather than external duties. Finally, Edwards speaks of the interrelatedness of true knowledge, true affection, and true practice in Christianity. He exhorts that love of God is the only source of genuine conviction and edification.

CHAPTER 5

THE VIEW FROM THE PEW

Granted, my four "New Orthodox" preachers were concerned in their sermons with many other and more particular issues than just the three afore-mentioned premises. However, I do hold that those premises were solidly foundational and hence, it can be assumed that they made up a vital portion of what was "the view from the pew" in the churches to which these men were called. Members of Bellamy's, Hopkins', Emmons', and Edwards' congregations would have clearly seen men who were unquestioningly dedicated to God, industrious and complex in their search to know God (adverse to easy answers), and virtuous as a direct result of their personal relationships with God.

As I stated in my introduction to this paper, I am a modern divinity student seeking sermon preparational advice from four of my ancestors in the faith. In other words, I'm concerned about 'the view from the pew' in history, in our present day, and in the future (when I am preaching). I believe the three foundational premises of these "New Orthodox" men provide an intriguing critique of pulpits through the ages and, as such, may afford me the advice for which I'm seeking.

Obviously, these premises were not universal convictions for all of the preachers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. If they had been, Emmons wouldn't have needed to

discourse at length about the virtues of 'sentimental' as opposed to mere 'practical' preaching. Nor would Edwards feel disposed to reprimand those who avoided reading controversial books or doctrines out of laziness or fear. And, just as obviously, these premises are not the universal convictions of all preachers today. One of conservatism's strongest critiques of the liberal sermon is that it sometimes concentrates on social ethics or personal morality without grounding itself in the Word and Being of God. Likewise, one of liberalism's strongest critiques of the conservative sermon is that it sometimes allows for only a single, over-simplified understanding of God; ignorant of other theologies and intent on staying that way.

What is profound about Bellamy, Hopkins, Emmons, and Edwards is that they not only struck a balance between God-centered works and knowledge-centered faith, but that they made it their fundamental commitment to preserve that balance. And herein, I believe, lies the ancestral advice I seek. I believe that if my "New Orthodox" preachers were here today they would advise me of their foundational premises (among other things) and critique the dualism of our contemporary faith/works controversies.

I confess that the sermons of these four men have deeply touched me and I intend to take much of their advice (at least as defined by their three premises). In the future, I hope that the view of God from the pews I serve will be one of a vast, complex, encompassing creator to whom Christians

owe their deepest affection and by whom they are given a newness of nature which transforms them into persons capable of genuine morality. I plan to commit myself to industry and thoroughness in my pursuit of knowledge and to a loving relationship with God (above all else), expecting not to do good but to be good by virtue of the divine, creative mystery within me. And I will continue to read sermons of the past.

This project has been both engrossing and fulfilling for me. I recommend such work to anyone who has a burning interest in sermons and in their varied impacts on 'the view from the pew'.

END NOTES

¹Geo. L. Curtiss, Arminianism in History; or, The Revolt from Predestinationism, (Cincinnati: Cranston & Curts, New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1894), 10-11.

²Gaius Glenn Atkins and Frederick L. Fagley, History of American Congregationalism, (Boston and Chicago: The Pilgrim Press, 1942), 169.

³Ibid., 169.

⁴Joseph Bellamy, "The Wisdom of God in the Permission of Sin," sermon 2 in The Works of the Rev. Joseph Bellamy, D.D. vol. 2, (New York: Stephen Dodge, 1811), 29.

⁵Ibid., 31.

⁶Ibid., 35.

⁷Ibid., 42.

⁸Ibid., 49.

⁹Ibid., 50.

¹⁰Atkins and Fagley, 169-170.

¹¹Samuel Hopkins, "How Chrifistians Work Out Their Own Salvation, The Fame Subject Continued," sermon 10 in Twenty-One Sermons, on a Variety of Interesting Subjects, Sentimental and Practical, (Salem: Joshua Cushing for the author, 1803), 162.

¹²Ibid., 162.

¹³Ibid., 164.

¹⁴Ibid., 166.

¹⁵Ibid., 168.

¹⁶Ibid., 170.

¹⁷Ibid., 172.

¹⁸Ibid., 175.

¹⁹Ibid., 178.

²⁰Atkins and Fagley, 170-171.

²¹Nathanael Emmons, "Growth in Knowledge Necessary to

Growth in Grace," sermon 89 in The Works of Nathanael Emmons, D.D. with a Memoir of His Life, vol. 3, ed. Jacob Ide, (Boston: Congregational Board of Publication, 1860), 490.

22Ibid., 490.

23Ibid., 491.

24Ibid., 493.

25Ibid., 495-496.

26Ibid., 496.

27Ibid., 497.

28Ibid., 499.

29Ibid., 500.

30Ibid., 501.

31Ibid., 505.

32Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism, With an Introduction by Douglas Horton, (Philadelphia and Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1960 and 1969), 529.

33Jonathon Edwards, "The Duty of Ministers to Preach the Truth", sermon 12 in The Works of Jonathon Edwards, D.D., With a Memoir of His Life and Character by Tryon Edwards, vol. 2, (Andover: Allen, Morrill, & Wardwell (and others), 1842), 210.

34Ibid., 213.

35Ibid., 214.

36Ibid., 215-216.

37Ibid., 216.

38Ibid., 217.

39Ibid., 217.

40Ibid., 218.

41Ibid., 220.

42Ibid., 220.

43Ibid., 221.

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