

Theology of Jonathan Edwards  
(Div/Rel 3240)\*

Spring, 2005  
Thursdays, 11:00 – 12:50; Divinity 138  
Web: [www.vanderbilt.edu/oak](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oak)

James P. Byrd, Jr., Ph.D.  
Email: [james.p.byrd@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:james.p.byrd@vanderbilt.edu)  
Office: 215 Divinity, Phone: 343.3976

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**1. Course Description:**

“Edwards was extraordinary.

By many estimates, he was the most acute early American philosopher  
and the most brilliant of all American theologians.”

-- *George M. Marsden (2003)*

High praise indeed. In this advanced seminar, we will not argue whether or not Jonathan Edwards was America’s greatest theologian, philosopher, or preacher. But we will try to ascertain why others have made such grandiose claims about him. To put the course in context, we will concentrate mostly on Edwards’ thought in reference to the Enlightenment and the Reformed theological tradition.

Most of the reading in the course will focus on Edwards’ writings, including sermons, theological treatises, and ethical works. Edwards wrote a lot. When complete, the Yale University Press edition of his works will total 27 volumes (23 are already on the shelves), and even this edition will not publish everything Edwards wrote. Obviously, therefore, we will not read all of his writings; but we will read most of the major treatises and a variety of his smaller works.

While Edwards wrote a lot, much more has been written about him. Again, we will not come close to reading it all. But in the final four weeks of the course, we will turn our attention to major interpretations of Edwards by Perry Miller and George Marsden, and a book on Edwards’ legacy for American history by Joseph Conforti. My strategy is to encourage students to read Edwards for themselves before engaging the interpretations of others.

An important resource for this course will be the website for The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University {<http://edwards.yale.edu/>}. This site contains a wealth of good information on Edwards, and I recommend it highly.

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\* The Honor Code of Vanderbilt University applies to all aspects of this course.

## **2. Course Requirements:**

- A. *Attendance, Reading, and Participation.* Since the seminar meets only once per week, attendance at all sessions is particularly important. The calendar of topics and assignments details the assigned readings for each session. Students should study the required readings carefully in preparation for class discussions. (30% of final grade).
- B. *Leadership in Seminar Discussion.* Each student shall have two opportunities to lead the seminar in discussion. Seminar leaders should introduce the topic of the week and facilitate the seminar's conversation regarding that topic and the assigned readings. Each seminar leader shall prepare a brief (1 page) agenda that outlines questions or issues for the seminar to consider in discussion. Each seminar leader should distribute copies of the agenda at the beginning of the seminar (20% of final grade).
- C. *Written Assignments.* Students shall pursue one of the options listed below. Students should inform me, in writing, of their preferred option by the second class session (**20 January**).

**Option 1:** Students shall complete the following:

- ❖ A research essay on a topic of interest within the scope of the course. Essays should be approximately 20 pages, double-spaced, with a standard font such as Times New Roman (12 point). Papers should include either footnotes or endnotes, formatted according to the guidelines in Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Students should have topics approved by me no later than **17 February**. I will read and comment on any draft submitted by **17 March**. The final version of the essay is due no later than **29 April**. Students must submit research essays in electronic form, through email attachment or diskette (50% of final grade).

**Option 2:** Students shall complete the following:

- ❖ 5 critical reviews of books selected with my approval. The critical book reviews should be prepared according to guidelines that I will distribute separately. The reviews are due no later than **29 April** (50% of final grade).

In the written assignments for this course, style is as important as content. I encourage students to write clearly and precisely. In preparation for the writing assignments, therefore, students should think carefully about style and consult style guides as necessary. One book that I have found helpful is Edward Bailey's *Writing Clearly*, which I will make available to students in the seminar.

### 3. Calendar of Class Sessions and Assignments

Wk	Date	Assignment
1	Jan. 13	<b>Introduction to the Course</b>
2	Jan. 20	<p><b>Early Writings (September-October, 1723 and August, 1728-February, 1729)</b></p> <p><u>Primary sources:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The Spider Letter</li> <li>❖ Miscellanies 65-81</li> <li>❖ Notes on the Apocalypse (Exposition and Series #s 1-24)</li> <li>❖ Notes on Scripture (Entries 64-73 and 111-141)</li> <li>❖ Images of Divine Things (Entries 1-17)</li> </ul> <p><u>Secondary studies:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ A very brief biography of Edwards {<a href="http://edwards.yale.edu/about-edwards/biography/">http://edwards.yale.edu/about-edwards/biography/</a>}</li> <li>❖ “Edwards &amp; the Bible” {<a href="http://edwards.yale.edu/about-edwards/edwards-and-bible/">http://edwards.yale.edu/about-edwards/edwards-and-bible/</a>}</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">{Seminar leadership presentations scheduled} {Written assignment options selected}</p>
3	Jan. 27	<p><b>The Great Awakening Defended</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ A Faithful Narrative (1737)</li> <li>❖ Some Thoughts (1742)</li> </ul>
4	Feb. 3	<b>History of the Work of Redemption (1739ff.)</b>
5	Feb. 10	<p><b>The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”</li> <li>❖ “The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth”</li> <li>❖ “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption”</li> <li>❖ “A Divine and Supernatural Light”</li> </ul>
6	Feb. 17	<p><b>Treatise on Religious Affections (1746)</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">{Research topics approved}</p>

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| 7  | Feb. 24  | <b>Freedom of the Will (1754)</b>  |
| 8  | March 3  | <b>Original Sin (1758)</b>   |
| 9  | March 17 | <b>Two Dissertations: The End for Which God Created the World (1765)</b>   |
| 10 | March 24 | <b>Two Dissertations: Nature of True Virtue (1765)</b><br><i>{Draft submissions due}</i>   |
| 11 | March 31 | <b>Interpreting Jonathan Edwards: Perry Miller</b><br><br>Perry Miller. <i>Jonathan Edwards</i> . [New York]: W. Sloane Associates, 1949.  |
| 12 | April 7  | {open week}  |
| 13 | April 14 | <b>Interpreting Jonathan Edwards: George Marsden</b><br><br>George M. Marsden. <i>Jonathan Edwards: A Life</i> . New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2003.                               |
| 14 | April 21 | <b>The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards</b><br><br>Joseph A. Conforti. <i>Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, &amp; American Culture</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. |

#### 4. The Availability of Selected Works of Jonathan Edwards

While Edwards's writings have been printed in various forms over the years, the definitive publication of Edwards's works is the Yale edition, which is an ongoing project. The first volume, *Freedom of the Will*, appeared in 1957 and the latest, *Vol. 23: The "Miscellanies," 1153-1360*, was published in 2004. The editors of the Yale volumes are leading scholars in Edwards studies and the editorial introductions to the volumes provide excellent guides to Edwards's thought. The one drawback to the Yale edition is price; volumes typically retail for approximately \$85.00. The instructor, therefore, does not expect students to purchase the Yale volumes, though they are on reserve in the library and students are encouraged to use them.

The following table lists many of the assigned readings for the semester (along with a few others) and the location of these texts in various editions of Edwards's works and on the Internet. *Please note that most of the readings will be available online through the course web site in OAK. {[www.vanderbilt.edu/oak](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/oak)}*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>BT</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>SR</b>	<b>www?</b>
The Spider Letter	6.163-169						www1
Miscellanies 65-81	13.235-248						
Miscellanies 331-384	13.409-453						
Notes on the Apocalypse	5.97-135						
The Mind	6.332-338						www1
Notes on Scripture	15.68-69, 81-90						
Images of Divine Things	11.51-55						
Faithful Narrative	4.129-211	1.344-364	3.1-71	3.1-71	3.229-272		www1
Some Thoughts	4.289-530	1.365-430	6.1-206		3.273-425		
Miscellanies 668-688	18.212-251						
History of Redemption	v.9	1.532-619	5.11-282	5.11-303	1.291-516		www1
Reality of Conversion						83-104	
Sinners in the Hands		2.7-12	6.450-464		4.313-321	49-65	www1
Heaven is a World	8.366-397					242-272	
I Know My Redeemer						141-160	
Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth						26-48	
God Glorified in the Work of Redemption						66-82	
Divine and Supernatural Light						121-140	
Religious Affections	v.2	1.234-343	4.1-351	4.1-351	3.vii-228		www1
Freedom of the Will	v.1	1.1-93	1.123-437		2.1-182		www2
Original Sin	v.3	1.143-233	2.79-387	2.79-387	2.307-510		www1
The End	8.401-536	1.94-121	1.439-535		1.191-257		www1
Nature of True Virtue	8.539-627	1.122-142	2.7-78	2.7-78	2.259-304		www1

Y      *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 19 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-.

- BT *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, With a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight.* 2 vols. Edward Hickman, ed. Carlisle and Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974.
- F *The Works of President Edwards.* 10 vols. Edward Williams and Edward Parsons, eds. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968.
- L *The Works of President Edwards in Eight Volumes.* 8 vols. Leeds: E. Baines, 1806-1811.
- W *The Works of President Edwards in Four Volumes.* 4 vols. New York: Leavitt and Allen, 1857.
- SR *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader.* W. H. Kinnach, K. P. Minkema, & D. A. Sweeney, eds. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- www Availability of Edwards's works on the Internet:
- www1 Works of Jonathan Edwards currently available online at [www.jonathanedwards.com](http://www.jonathanedwards.com)
- www2 Freedom of the Will currently available at [www.ccel.org/e/edwards/will/home.html](http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/will/home.html)