

# 2nd Opinion: Of Jonathan Edwards & McDonald's

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Driving back over the Appalachian Mountains from a family wedding in Canada, we passed Stockbridge, Mass. This town was the lesser-known base of operations for Jonathan Edwards' missionary labors. More famously, Edwards resided in Northampton, the central location for the dramatic 18th century revivals of the Great Awakening in New England.

As an Edwards aficionado, I was aware of the Edwards/Stockbridge connection. I wasn't cognizant of the even less-well-known relationship between Edwards and McDonald's until, as we hurtled by Stockbridge in our minivan, we decided time had come to eat. And behold, we did what surely would have surprised the famous evangelical leader. We picked up a drive-thru McDonald's.

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I wondered whether Edwards and McDonald's have anything in common. Could it be that the slight guilty feeling as I munched the salty fries was reminiscent of the stellar theological tome *Original Sin*, penned in Stockbridge? Was our choice to do a drive-thru right there and then predetermined in a classically philosophically charged "freedom of the will" fashion? Or was the can-do spirit of the frontier that surrounded Edwards' missionary journey represented, albeit somewhat differently, by the can-do

franchise dominance of fast-food chains in America?

Whimsical thoughts aside, I also began to wonder how—or whether—Edwards would critique McDonald's. Could Edwards approvingly have been involved in a “super-size me” Puritan Jeremiad of fast-food, gut-busting obesity issues in the modern West? Or, rather more pointedly, how is it that the Puritan genetic code in the foundation of the country has managed to be expressed in mercantile relations of Big Macs and milkshakes? Was there something in the original theological code that was liable to be taken in such a direction, or has modern life encapsulated the gospel (sanitized it) in gilded-cage commercial enterprises?

I am not the first—and certainly won't be the last—to ask about the development of corporate American sensibilities from Puritan foundations. What makes the question significant today are other, more-grating comparisons apparent to the watchful eye than even Edwards and McDonald's. How is it that a city with many large—even mega—churches can allow signs on its highways that direct travelers to pornographic boutiques? What is happening in our church culture when a schoolteacher can remark that it is the church kids who are most often in trouble with the principal? What do the terms “Christian,” “biblical,” “evangelical” and “Baptist” mean when their linguistic heritage is downgraded by their behavioral aberrations?

What do Edwards and McDonald's have in common? I have nothing against McDonald's. The Stockbridge drive-thru is not the first I have frequented. I'm just asking what it means to have an authentic spirituality as a Christian these days. It seems that Jesus had a simple answer to that: “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

In our appropriate and worthy desire to be involved with church and all that is allied with Christianity, let us not forget to ask ourselves about more than our community connections. Let us ask ourselves about our

spirituality. Let us be careful to examine our lifestyle. Let us fall in love with Jesus again, not merely be enthusiastic for his organization or celebrate this or that movement or emphasis. Let us have our hearts open to his Spirit and his personal involvement with us. Let us embrace God not as a product to be marketed by our churches but as a person to be worshipped.

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