

Pricing and Advertising

The prices charged for Edwards's writings are an index of the going rates, taking into account the cost of type, paper, and ink. In 1741 three hundred copies of Edwards's sermon on the death of William Williams, minister of Hatfield, were sold to a Mr. Obadiah Dickinson by the publisher Joseph Edwards for fifteen pounds, or one shilling each.¹ When *An Humble Inquiry* was in press, publisher Samuel Kneeland informed Joseph Bellamy, one of Edwards's associates, that "the Book, as you will find, contains 20 Sheets, in Quarto, and according to the printed Proposals are 12d a Sheet, the Subscribers have one gratis in every half doz. but as the Number sent you is something considerable, I would propose you, and the other Subscribers for the 200, should have 15 to the Doz. which will considerably lessen the Price."² For the price of the paper alone, then, the book cost one pound per volume, plus the expense of the binding and cover—an expensive price, perhaps because subscriptions were not sufficient to drive down the cost. A few copies were designated for special treatment as presentation copies, indicated by "giltlines," a band or label on the spine, tooling, and other features. Others were wrapped in the simplest and cheapest of covers. *An Humble Attempt* of 1747, the *Boston Weekly News-Letter* announced, would cost "Six Shillings a Piece, old Tenor, stitch'd and cover'd with blue Paper."³ A hardcover was available for two more shillings per volume. *Freedom of Will* of 1754 was a more expensive proposition: "*The Book will be afforded to the Subscribers at one Dollar a Book; provided it exceed not thirty five Sheets, but if less or more, the Price will be accordingly: To be printed in a large Octavo, on a good Paper, and with a fair Character; and handsomely bound in Sheep: Those who subscribe for six Books, shall have a seventh gratis.*"⁴

Consequently books represented a dear investment, and meticulous consumers recorded not only their names in the volumes they purchased but also the price. The flyleaf of a first-edition copy of *Freedom of Will*, signed by its original owner, proclaims, "Stephen Clark His Book prise 33/9d," the approximate value of a dollar at the time.⁵ As a result, authors and publishers went to great lengths to attract customers and sell copies, even before printing began.

One duty that often fell to an author was securing subscribers for a work, with each subscriber promising to buy one or more copies. According to David D. Hall, in the British American colonies "by the middle of the eighteenth century, publishing by subscription, a method of seeking advance orders that became popular in England in the 1670s, was opening up new possibilities linked to the growing numbers of the learned and their allies."⁶ Procuring subscribers, then, was a safety measure

¹ On the cost of supplies and a printer's markup, see Rollo G. Silver, "Publishing in Boston, 1726–1757: The Accounts of Daniel Henschman," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 66, pt. 1 (1956): 17–36, which includes a transcription of Henschman's account book. On the sale of copies of Edwards's sermons to Obadiah Dickinson, see Receipt, March 25, 1742, Misc. Bound Mss., Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

² Samuel Kneeland to Joseph Bellamy, letter C85b, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online* (WJEO), vol. 32, <http://edwards.yale.edu/research/browse>.

³ *Boston Weekly News-Letter*, Aug. 20, 1747, [2].

⁴ [Edwards and Kneeland], *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, in one Volume Octavo, A Treatise Intituled, A careful and strict Enquiry into the modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will . . .* (Boston, 1753). In the announced price of *Freedom of Will*, a "dollar" was the Spanish dollar, or piece of eight, widely used in the colonies because of a lack of English specie.

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of Will* (Boston, 1754), Collections of Jonathan Edwards Center, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. On exchange rates, see John J. McCusker, *Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600–1775* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992); see also Cynthia Z. Stiverson and Gregory A. Stiverson, "The Colonial Retail Book Trade: Availability and Affordability of Reading Material in Mid-Eighteenth Century Virginia," in *Printing and Society in Early America*, ed. William Joyce et al. (Worcester, Mass., 1983), 132–73.

⁶ David D. Hall, "Learned Culture in the Eighteenth Century," in *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, ed.

for the publisher or printer, in order to insure that producing and distributing the work would be worth the cost and effort.

Prior to undertaking the production of a lengthy work, copies of a printed broadside proposal were issued. Edwards himself received such proposals from other authors or publishers, directly or indirectly, and used them as a means of keeping track of forthcoming books in which he was interested. For example, incorporated into a manuscript sermon from 1746 is a printed proposal, dated May 1, 1744, to republish a work of Increase Mather, *Soul-Saving Gospel Truths; Delivered in several Sermons*.⁷

Early in his career, however, Edwards did not have to concern himself so much with procuring subscribers, mainly because his publications were limited to sermons, which were usually meant for local consumption, relatively inexpensive to produce, and, as Rollo G. Silver has shown for colonial New England sermons in general, usually subsidized by someone else.⁸ The very title pages give the evidence. His 1731 Boston lecture, *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption*, was “Published at the Desire of several, Ministers and Others, in *Boston*, who heard it”; *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, preached in Northampton in 1733 and issued the following year, was “Published At The Desire Of Some Of The Hearers.”⁹ Depending on the sermon, then, the price could be assumed by a select few of the “hearers,” a general contribution from the congregation, or by the printer, since an investment in pamphlet-sized imprints with paper wrappers was much less than for full-blown, hardcover treatises and held the potential to sell well.

Generally, on most occasions when Edwards was invited to speak outside of his own church, the sponsoring body paid the cost of publication. Such occasions became more frequent as Edwards aged. As he gained seniority and respect among fellow ministers, he attracted a coterie of students who sought to do postgraduate study with him in his informal parsonage school. Subsequently, he was asked to preach a number of ordination and installation sermons, which were part of the ceremonies in which a pastor was settled over a congregation; and these sermons were likewise traditionally printed at the cost of the congregation involved. Similarly, when Edwards delivered a sermon entitled *True Grace, Distinguished From The Experience Of Devils* before the Presbyterian Synod of New York in September 1752, the piece was published at the behest of the synod itself. Interestingly, Edwards’s most noted sermon, *Sinners In the Hands of an Angry God*, lacks any mention of who paid for it; it may have been Edwards himself, or perhaps printer Samuel Kneeland recognized a good thing when he saw it and assumed the cost.¹⁰

Hugh Amory and Hall, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America*, ed. Hall (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2007), 411–433 (quotation, 427). See also Silver, “Financing the Publication of Early New England Sermons,” *Studies in Bibliography* 11 (1958): 163–78, esp. 175–78.

⁷ See manuscript sermon on Is. 37:31 (no. 811, March 1746), Edwards Papers, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn. Increase Mather’s work had been previously published in 1703, 1712, and 1720, and reprinted in 1744. See also “‘Catalogue’ of Reading,” entry no. [633], in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 26, *Catalogues of Books*, ed. Peter J. Thuesen (New Haven, Conn., 2008), 287, regarding John Gillies’s *Historical collections relating to remarkable periods of the success of the Gospel . . .*, 2 vols. (Glasgow, 1754), in which Edwards reminded himself to “see the proposals for printing in a shelf of the Closet next the Street.”

⁸ Silver, *Studies in Bibliography* 11: 163–78. Silver uses the publication of sermons by Cotton Mather as an example of the diversity of financing methods.

⁹ Edwards, *God Glorified in the Work of Redemption . . .* (Boston, 1731), title page (“Ministers”); Edwards, *A Divine and Supernatural Light . . .* (Boston, 1734), title page (“Hearers”).

¹⁰ On parsonage schools, see Mary Latimer Gambrell, *Ministerial Training in Eighteenth-Century New England* (New York, 1937); Richard Warch, *School of the Prophets: Yale College, 1701–1740* (New Haven, Conn., 1973); Melvin B. Endy Jr., “Theology and Learning in Early America,” in *Schools of Thought in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Patrick Henry (Philadelphia, 1984), 125–51. On the history and reception of “that sermon,” see Wilson H. Kimnach, Caleb J. D.

As lengthier and lengthier essays emanated from Edwards's study, his efforts to broadcast his forthcoming publications and to secure subscribers became more and more involved. The printer commonly began the process by issuing a run of broadside proposals, with room at the bottom of each sheet for subscribers to give their name, location, and number of copies they desired. These sheets were circulated by the printer and the author, signed, collected, and returned to the publisher.¹¹ The proposal for *Freedom of Will*, for example, after providing an abstract of the book written by Edwards, the size, and price, ended with: "We whose Names are underwritten, do promise to take off the Books we here subscribe for, within three Months after we shall have Notice of their Publication."¹²

Edwards often recruited friends and colleagues at strategic locations to work on his behalf. We have such a recruitment letter by Edwards from September 1748, when the *Life of David Brainerd* was in press, to Reverend Eleazar Wheelock of Lebanon, Connecticut. Here, Edwards notes that he had inserted Wheelock's name "in the printed proposals; some of which I have here enclosed to you, desiring you to take some pains to promote subscriptions in your parts."¹³ In particular, Edwards had two Boston associates whom he worked with closely on a regular basis: Joseph Bellamy and Thomas Foxcroft. For instance, in May 1749, Bellamy assisted with the advertising campaign for *An Humble Inquiry Into The Rules of the Word of God, Concerning The Qualifications Requisite to Compleat Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church* by writing Foxcroft urging him to ensure lots of lead time in the newspapers. "When the book is printed," Bellamy stipulated, "I wish it might be advertised 5 or 6 weeks going in the publick prints. (To this day I believe not half the Country have ever so much as heard of Mr. Edwards peice upon the Scotland Concert). [I]f the News effectually gets thro' the Country I doubt not they will Sell."¹⁴ Sometimes, as with *Misrepresentations Corrected, And Truth Vindicated*, Edwards cast a broad net for help promoting his publications, though with less than desirable results. "There are but few of the written proposals I have sent abroad yet come in," he wrote to Foxcroft:

Three or four have appeared willing to subscribe in this town [Stockbridge]. I should be glad that the printed proposals when done might be forwarded to Col. [Timothy] Dwight of Northampton, with all convenient speed. . . .

I desire you would use some endeavors to promote subscriptions in other places, where you think it feasible, and that, to that end, you would speak or write to the Rogerses [John Rogers, Sr. and Jr.], to Mr. [William] Hobby, Mr. [David] Hall, Mr. [Joshua] Eaton, [Mr. David] Goddard, etc.¹⁵

Maskell, and Kenneth P. Minkema eds., *Jonathan Edwards's Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: A Casebook* (New Haven, Conn., 2010).

¹¹ Alternatively, the author could have made master lists from collected subscription sheets, as seems to have been the case with Edwards and *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (Boston, 1746). Fragments of several subscription sheets, with the subscribers' original signatures, are to be found in Edwards's manuscript sermons on Matt. 12:41 (no. 861), Matt. 12:42 (no. 862), and Tit. 3:2 (no. 864), all from May 1747 and all in *WJEO*, vol. 65.

¹² [Edwards and Kneeland], *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, in one Volume Octavo, A Treatise Intituled, A careful and strict Enquiry into the modern prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will . . .* (Boston, 1753).

¹³ Edwards to Eleazar Wheelock, Sept. 14, 1748, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, Conn., 1998), 251.

¹⁴ Bellamy to Thomas Foxcroft, May 6, 1749, letter C84, in *WJEO*, vol. 32. Edwards's "peice upon the Scotland Concert" is *An Humble Attempt To promote Explicit Agreement And Visible Union Of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer . . .* of 1748.

¹⁵ Edwards to Foxcroft, June 30, 1752, *ibid.*, 16: 486–87. These figures were the ministers, respectively, of Ipswich, Kittery, Reading, Sutton, Spencer, and Leicester, Mass. See also Edwards's draft of the proposal for

The printed proposals for both the *Life of David Brainerd* and *Freedom of Will* took the preemptive move of identifying area agents. The latter ended: “Subscriptions taken in by S. KNEELAND in Boston, the Rev. Mr. J. BELLAMY in Bethlem, Mr. J. TOWNSEND in New-Haven, Mr. N. HAZZARD in New-York, Mr. S. HAZZARD in Philadelphia, and by the Author in Stockbridge.”¹⁶

In the final analysis, if polemical works of a fairly regional and intramural scope, such as *An Humble Inquiry Into The Rules of the Word of God, Concerning The Qualifications Requisite to Compleat Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church and Misrepresentations Corrected*, fell rather flat in terms of sales despite his best efforts, Edwards was quite successful in drawing subscribers for other books that addressed issues of wider cultural interest. Lists of subscribers were printed for some works of note, and we have them for several of Edwards’s treatises; indeed, subscribers’ lists are often valuable for indicating colonial and transatlantic loyalties. His treatise *Freedom of Will*, for example, initially garnered orders totaling 772 copies from 301 individuals, including more than 50 from Scotland; the publication of the volume was delayed because Edwards was waiting for his Scottish supporters to sign up. But it was the *Life of David Brainerd* that attracted the most attention: 1,953 subscribers from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and even a lone individual from South Carolina—and this excluded a further unknown amount, since, as a note at the end of the list read, all of the names had not yet “come to Hand.”¹⁷ With these kinds of presale figures, the *Life of*

Misrepresentations Corrected, which concludes: “This Piece is near finish’d, & will be put to the Press as soon as a sufficient Number of Subscriptions is obtaind. It will be of about the same Bulk with Mr. Edwards’s former discourse on this subject, and Care will be taken that the Printer shall be agreed with on as easy & reasonable Terms as may be.— They that are willing to encourage the printing this Book [by purchasing one or more of the Books] are desired hereto to subscribe their Names, with the number of Books they are willing to take.” MS, n.d. [1752], Edwards Collection, f. ND5.7, Franklin Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, Mass. See also “Proposal for Printing *Misrepresentations*,” WJEO, vol. 33.

¹⁶ [Edwards and Kneeland], *Proposals for Printing by Subscription, in one Volume Octavo, A Treatise Intituled, A careful and strict Enquiry . . .* (Boston, 1753), quotation; [Edwards and Henchman], *Proposals For Printing by Subscription, An Account of the Life of . . . Mr. David Brainerd* (Boston, 1748).

¹⁷ *An Account of the Life of the late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd* (Boston, 1749), [xxx] (quotation). As with *Religious Affections*, for *An Humble Inquiry Into The Rules of the Word of God, Concerning The Qualifications Requisite to Compleat Standing and full Communion in the Visible Christian Church* (Boston, 1749), Edwards seems to have made a master list of subscribers for the printer from subscription sheets collected at Northampton. Fragments of copies of the printed proposal for *Humble Inquiry* can be found in Edwards’s manuscript sermons on I John 5:1–4 (no. 962, July 1750) and Mal. 1:8 (no. 968, October 1750), which preserve autograph portions of the lists of individual subscribers. Both are housed in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The former sermon has the following:

John Owen of Simsbury in Connecti[cut] subscribes for four Books to b[e] well Bound Sewed on Bands Also for four of Mr Brainard's Journals provided they be printed, & if [they] are printed in ye Same Shape with M[r] Brainard's Life, Let them be Bound to[ge]ther, if not Let them be well Bou[nd] by themselves—Simsbury October 5th A:D: 1748
N:B: Let ye Books be printed on ye best pap[er]
Gideon Mills of Simsbury subscribes for two Books well bound and Sew[ed] on Bands.

John Owen was a layman who corresponded with Edwards; see Owen to Edwards, June 2, 1750, letter B87, WJEO, vol. 32. He requested “four of Mr Brainard’s Journals,” because the proposals for printing *Life of Brainerd*, issued in June 1748, also proposed reprinting Brainerd’s *Mirabilia Dei inter Indicos* (1746). The latter sermon contains a partial list, shorn on the left side, of subscribers (the surnames indicate these were most likely residents of Northampton):

[. . . S]eth strong: one book

David Brainerd, as Joseph Conforti has pointed out, qualifies as Edwards's bestseller, both then and now.¹⁸

[. . .] Parsons one book
[. . .] Clark one book
[. . .] Lyman one book
[. . .] Lyman one Book
[. . .] Lyman one Book
[. . .] Tho]mas Wait one Book
[. . .] Clap one Book
[. . .] Lyman one Book
[. . .] Kingsley one Book

¹⁸ Joseph Conforti, "Jonathan Edwards's Most Popular Work: 'The Life of David Brainerd' and Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Culture" *Church History* 54, no. 2 (June 1985): 188–201. A list of 216 (including 36 Scottish) subscribers was also included in *Original Sin* (1758), for orders totaling 488 copies.