

**Stoddard, Solomon (bap. 1 Oct. 1643-11 Feb. 1729), Congregational pastor and theologian, was born in Boston,** Massachusetts, the son of Anthony Stoddard, a prominent merchant, and Mary Downing, a niece of Governor John Winthrop (1588-1649) and sister of the wife of Governor Simon Bradstreet. Solomon graduated from Harvard College in 1662, was appointed a fellow or tutor at the college in 1666, and served as its first librarian. He then spent two years as a chaplain in Barbados. He was allegedly about to embark for England in 1669 when a delegation from Northampton, Massachusetts, persuaded him to succeed their recently deceased young pastor, Eleazar Mather. Perhaps lacking the conversion experience that was a necessary condition of full church membership for ministers as well as laymen, he was not officially installed as pastor until September 1672. In March 1670 he married his predecessor's widow, Esther, a daughter of the eminent Reverend John Warham of Windsor, Connecticut. They reared twelve children, three of them Eleazar Mather's, in the parsonage.

During the sixty years of Stoddard's pastorate, Northampton grew from a frontier outpost to a prosperous agricultural community and county seat. The town was blessed with excellent farmland in the Connecticut River floodplain and a strategic location at the crossroads of New England's major inland travel routes. Delegates from Northampton became spokesmen for the western region in the Massachusetts General Court, and Solomon Stoddard's son John (b. 1682, Harvard 1701) became the region's most prominent land speculator, magistrate, and military commander.

Northampton's greatest claim to fame from the 1670s to the 1730s, however, was Solomon Stoddard's success as a preacher. Stoddard's church became renowned for periodic revivals of piety, and his ecclesiology articulated the third phase of the Puritan experiment in New England communities. It appeared to Stoddard and many of his contemporaries that the children of the intensely religious founders were faltering in spiritual intensity. The third generation of religious leaders, coming to power in the 1670s and 1680s, labored inexhaustibly to recall their flocks to anxiety about eternal salvation. They revived the Calvinist program of discounting even highly moral "good works" and trusted only in Christ as the purchaser of God's saving grace for humankind. Impassioned denunciations of the sins of complacency have been labeled "jeremiads" by historians, a favorite sermon technique that linked the contemporary crises of the New England colonies (King Philip's War in 1675-1676, earthquakes and hurricanes, and the 1684-1685 revocation of their charters by King Charles II and King James II) with the abandonment of their forefathers' spiritual mission. Stoddard excelled at the jeremiad--from his country outpost he especially castigated urban fashions in attitude and costume--but he also provided a remarkably popular alternative vision of individual and communal spiritual commitment. He preached God's love as well as God's wrath, and he exhorted all who found in their

hearts any ground of hope for salvation to come into the church. This was a shocking breach with the rules of earlier generations, for it dismissed not only testimony of experienced grace as the criterion for full church membership, but also the second generation's compromise of an additional "half-way" membership status for those who consented to be governed by Christian rules but lacked the "born-again" experience. After years of argument, Stoddard persuaded his church to open the Lord's Supper to all who were not openly sinful in life and to embrace that sacrament as a possible means of receiving God's saving grace.

Denounced by traditionalists, especially the Reverend Increase Mather of Boston, for taking Congregationalism too far toward Presbyterianism and thereby losing the distinction between the church as a body of sanctified persons and the secular community, Stoddard was nevertheless widely followed by ministers and churches in western Massachusetts and Connecticut. He also spread his influence through the Connecticut ministry of his eldest son, Anthony, and the five pastors who married his daughters. Through these daughters, the Stoddard-Williams-Dwight clan became the socioreligious elite of western New England in the first half of the eighteenth century. When Stoddard died he was eulogized in his home region and even in once-hostile Boston as a fallen patriarch.

Stoddard published vigorous arguments for his doctrinal innovations in two thematic clusters that reflect the two sides of his professional personality. One motif was evangelical: he exhorted laymen to trust in Christ's mercy and advised ministers to find Christ within their hearts, not just scholarship in their heads. The most significant publications in this vein were *The Safety of Appearing at the Day of Judgment in the Righteousness of Christ* (1687); *An Appeal to the Learned* (1709); *A Guide to Christ* (1714); and *The Defects of Preachers Reproved* (1724). The second motif, Stoddard's attraction to hierarchical church governance and his disdain for laymen's presumptuousness as judges of souls, is evident in *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches* (1700) and *An Examination of the Power of the Fraternity* (1718).

Stoddard's increasing emphasis on the governing power of the minister and elders within the congregation earned him the epithet "Pope" of the whole Connecticut River Valley. Some churches refused to join the regional bandwagon and adhered instead to the more democratic 1648 Cambridge Platform, which gave lay members great control over church admissions and discipline of alleged sinners. One of the clearest quarrels over these policies came from East Windsor, Connecticut, where Stoddard's son-in-law Timothy Edwards tirelessly advocated Stoddard's system, in its Connecticut manifestation as the Saybrook Platform, against a resistant congregation. It was in this environment that Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) grew up, and after his education at Yale he arrived in Northampton in 1726 to become copastor and presumptive successor to his grandfather. He continued Stoddardean church practice

and theological assumptions through the great revivals of 1735 and 1740-1742, then rejected both for producing neither authentic spiritual regeneration nor godly behavior. Edwards was dismissed in 1750 by the congregation, which still embraced Stoddardean principles.

After midcentury, however, the term "Stoddardean" fell out of use, although many of its elements survived under other doctrinal labels. As a strategy of trying to maintain the old Puritan double goal of a gathered and regenerate church that still embraced the whole community, it was appropriate to its time. Later generations found that secularized institutions served better as a societal adhesive, and particular churches tended to become either doctrinally bland and welcoming to the whole neighborhood or tightly interknit clans of the spiritually intense who maintained no ambitions to govern the town as a political jurisdiction. The unquestioned linkage of Calvinist church and intrusive state that was particularly Puritan in America ended with the reign of "Pope" Stoddard in Northampton.

### Bibliography

No collection of Stoddard's personal papers or manuscript versions of his published writings exists; scattered items can be found in the Mather papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston and in the Forbes Library in Northampton. Most of the extant documents are listed in the notes to Ralph J. Coffman's *Solomon Stoddard* (1978). Stoddard's writings, most of which have not been republished since their first appearance, can be found in microprint in Clifford K. Shipton, ed., *Early American Imprints, 1639-1800* (1955-1963). The Coffman work is the sole book-length biography and critical study, but it has received overwhelmingly negative assessment by other scholars. We still, therefore, must rely on John L. Sibley, *Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University*, vol. 2 (1881), pp. 111-22. Serious students must still consult Perry Miller's seminal article, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," *Harvard Theological Review* 34 (1941): 277-320, although the historiographical tide has turned against his "frontier" interpretation. The best analysis of Stoddard the theologian is Thomas A. Schafer, "Solomon Stoddard and the Theology of the Revival," in *A Miscellany of American Christianity: Essays in Honor of H. Shelton Smith*, ed. Stuart C. Henry (1963), pp. 328-61. See also the discussion of Stoddard's principles and career and an update of the critical bibliography in Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (1980).

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