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Book Review: Jonathan Edwards and the Church

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these movements simply cannot be explained adequately when social historians and intellectual historians work in isolation from one another. The theological chapters are informative, if perhaps more impressionistic than the historical chapters.

Many contributors argue that it can be difficult to clearly draw the line at times between fundamentalists and evangelicals in Britain. Lloyd-Jones is a clear individual example of this phenomenon, while the Brethren and many more conservative British Baptists illustrate it on a larger scale. In the second edition of his classic work *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, George Marsden suggests the category of “fundamentalistic evangelicals” to describe militantly conservative evangelicals who nevertheless demonstrate more theological diversity and greater hesitancy toward ecclesial separation than self-confessed fundamentalists. Marsden applies this category to key leaders in the early Religious Right and the conservative dissenters who gained control of the Southern Baptist Convention in the 1980s (*Fundamentalism and American Culture* [new ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006], 229–57). Perhaps this terminology could provide some explanatory power to Lloyd-Jones and others who defy simplistic categorization.

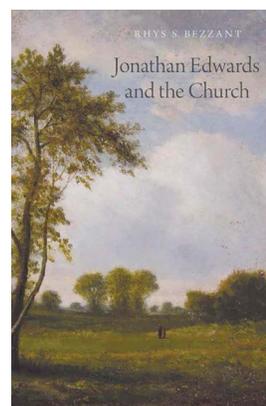
Bebbington and Jones have edited an important work that should inspire scores of subsequent monographs, essays, and theses. Unfortunately, Oxford University Press has priced the volume out of the reach of most scholars. A book this significant deserves a quality paperback volume that can be more widely read by scholars and especially the graduate students who will build upon its insights and further our understanding of modern conservative Protestantism in the British Isles.

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Rhys S. Bezzant. *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 314 pp. £30.52/\$49.95.

With all the recent scholarship devoted to Jonathan Edwards, it is a wonder that there would be any kind of gaping holes in the coverage of his doctrinal content, even taking into account his extensive corpus of writings. To be sure, there are still areas in Edwards studied that need to be covered in greater detail, but it is surprising to think that there has been a genuine neglect of an extensive study of Edwards’s ecclesiology amongst scholars. This, however, is no longer the case due to Rhys Bezzant’s recent work *Jonathan Edwards and the Church*. The author gives a telling account of Edwards’s ecclesiology that is “orderly but not ordinary” (see Chapter 6).

Bezzant is the Dean of Missional Leadership and Lecturer in Christian Thought at Ridley Melbourne. The author works diachronically through the years of Edwards’s pastoral leadership, supplying an understanding of his ecclesiological development. Alongside of this analysis Bezzant also offers helpful systematic formulations addressing the nature and significance of Edwards’s doctrine of the church. This approach supplies the reader with an exploration of several of Edwards’s major writings and sermons, with an eye to their ecclesiological implications.



In regards to the thesis of this work, Bezzant maintains that for Edwards, “The church is not an afterthought in the otherwise individualistic plans of God, but is the focused domain where God’s promises, presence, and purpose are to be discovered” (p. ix). More specifically, Bezzant claims that Edwards held fast to “fundamental Protestant convictions while creating space for fresh expressions of church life” (p. xi). This renewal in ecclesial life came about through various means, such as revivals, itinerancy, concerts of prayer, missionary initiatives, and doctrinal clarification.

The first chapter sets Edwards in his historical context, noting several key features regarding the New England ecclesiological order. Dating back to the Reformation, debates raged regarding the relationship between the church and state, and within the Puritan context of New England a new concern arose concerning the membership and disciplinary procedures of the church. With the rise of articles establishing New England ecclesiology, such as the Saybrook Platform and the Half-Way Covenant, Edwards sought to bring about an “ecclesiological recalibration.” Bezzant avers, “Not only did Edwards face the challenge of providing for the already-conflicted Puritan church in New England renewed clarity, stability, and unity, but he had to do this in the midst of revivalist fervor and new fissures within the received polity” (p. 11). As seen throughout this work, Edwards always sought to balance and find the good in two diverging strands of ecclesiological thought.

The majority of the book concentrates on tracing Edwards’s ecclesiological development in a chronological fashion, asking at each juncture what his writings contribute to this topic (chapters 2–4). Within each chapter the author focuses on several of Edwards’s major writings or sermons, explicating from each their overall ecclesiological content. As one traces these writings diachronically, one can see that during the period of the revivals (mid 1730s to the early 1740s) Edwards centers his attention on the church as the necessary framework for understanding and channeling spiritual ardor. The latter part of his ministry coalesces around the international and eschatological shape of his ecclesiology (p. 257). After this treatment of Edwards’s works, Bezzant offers a synthetic summary of his ecclesiology, centered on three specific areas: worship, discipline, and polity. It is here the reader sees not only a theological summary of the previous chapters, but also the practical ways in which Edwards’s ecclesiology shaped the actual life of the church. The work concludes with a chapter summarizing how in fact Edwards’s ecclesiology is rooted in Reformed tradition, and yet innovative in developing an evangelical ecclesiology with “revivalist tendencies at its core” (pp. 256–57).

This is an outstanding work on a topic that has not received the attention it rightly deserves. Bezzant is right to highlight the work of Schafer, Sweeney, Plantinga Pauw, and Hall throughout his books, as these writers have contributed to this topic in meaningful ways. The author, however, certainly goes beyond them in this monograph, and at points diverges with their scholarship, suggesting Edwards was a pastor-theologian with a robust evangelical ecclesiology.

One great strength of this work is the way in which Bezzant outlined the New England historical context whilst also focusing so readily on Edwards’s original writings. With this dualistic focus, Bezzant was able to highlight to a great degree the ways in which Edwards’s ecclesiology developed in his own mind, but also in relation to the constraining forces of society and church tradition. As such, the reader experiences theological vigor alongside of a nearly biographical approach that produces a robust depiction of ecclesiology that shaped several generations in America.

Bezzant sheds light on several facets of Edwards’s life and career throughout the work. Perhaps one of the more surprising to the average reader would be his accounting of Edwards’s dismissal from his church in Northampton. Many may argue that Edwards was ejected from his pastorate due to his

attempt to reestablish an ossified, authoritarian form of leadership that simply did not comport with his present milieu. Bezzant argues, to the contrary, that the real issue was his biblical understanding of the church and the way in which he sought to see the gospel transform church and society in very specific ways. This is the case, as Edwards's ecclesiology was shaped by a certain eschatological understanding, which gave rise to a particular view of church life and the pursuit of virtue.

Bezzant's work is an outstanding example of how one can delve into historical theology, offering up both biographical insights as well as astute theological promulgations. It also demonstrates that ecclesiology should not be thought of as a mere secondary doctrine; rather ecclesiology should be seen as connective tissue, demonstrating how the various loci of theology are intimately linked. Pastors, scholars, and seminary students alike will benefit greatly from this work, one that is truly a contribution to the field of Christian scholarship.

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Paul Blowers. *Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. xvi + 424 pp. \$160.00.

Although there are numerous studies that analyze various aspects of early Christian theologies of creation—such as cosmological models of the God-world relation, the development of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and early Christian interpretations of Genesis 1–2—what Paul Blowers achieves in this recent book is unique. Instead of restricting himself to a specific aspect or expression of early Christian theology on creation, Blowers widens the scope of his study and provides a panoramic view of what he refers to as the “early Christian vision of creation” (p. 5). Patristic theological reflection on this vision, as he argues throughout the book, cannot be isolated from further reflection on the identity and action of the Creator, the drama and experience of salvation, and the “performance” of Christian faith in liturgical, sacramental, ethical, and ascetical practices. The comprehensive approach that Blowers pursues, then, is meant to illustrate the interconnected nature of these various themes in early Christianity and their “pastoral function” in shaping Christian identity and practice (p. 5).

Following a very thorough outline of the book's contents in the introduction, chapters two and three analyze both Greco-Roman and Hellenistic-Jewish approaches to cosmology and cosmogony as important backdrops for early Christian theology. Blowers dismisses any attempt to analyze early Christian thought according to a strict Hellenic/Hebraic distinction, and argues that both streams provided both inspiration and material for critique. The Greco-Roman cosmological tradition, for instance, not only offered a philosophical sparring partner for early Christians, but also served as an inspirational stimulus for Christian theological reflection through themes such as teleology, creationism, and the “first principles” of the universe. Similarly, while Hellenistic-Jewish cosmology ultimately fell short of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, it also bequeathed important exegetical insights to later Christian theology, such as the mediatorial role of wisdom and the “double creation” interpretation of Gen 1–2.

