

Regeneration, Revival, and Creation: Religious Experience and the Purposes of God in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards

Chris Chun and Kyle C. Strobel, eds.

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This volume of sixteen essays stems from the inaugural conference of the Jonathan Edwards Center (West) at Gateway Seminary in January 2019. Scholars gathered to discuss the themes of regeneration, revival, and creation in Edwards's thought. During those two days, an interdenominational cross-section of junior and senior scholars from a variety of academic disciplines engaged one another in spirited analysis of the enduring legacy of America's Theologian. Readers will surely benefit from joining the conversations that took place during this thought-provoking conference.

This work has five parts. Sections titled "Before Jonathan Edwards" and "After Jonathan Edwards" bookend the volume, while the other three parts address the themes of regeneration, revival, and creation in Edwards's thought and legacy, and form the book's heart. Chris Chun and Adriaan Neele orient readers to the work with their essays. A reader looking for a concise overview of the volume will find Chun's introduction quite helpful. Neele's essay, "Before Jonathan Edwards," is particularly important, as it contributes to the growing work on the way in which post-Reformation theology influenced Edwards. His well-documented essay underscores the extent to which Edwards's thinking is shaped by his theological predecessors, like Francis Turretin and Petrus van Mastricht. Neele's chapter, much like his larger volume, *Before Jonathan Edwards: Sources of New England Theology* (2019), argues effectively that Edwards's theological forbearers had as significant an influence on his thought, if not more so, than his philosophical forefathers. For this reason, serious Edwards scholars cannot afford to bypass his essay.

The four essays in part 1 offer multiple perspectives on Edwards's doctrine of regeneration. Two of its essays are particularly noteworthy. Douglas Sweeney's chapter cogently argues that Edwards considered regeneration, and its life of holy joy, "the most important thing in the world" (27). This brief chapter, much like Sweeney's broader efforts, continues to reestablish Edwards as a pastoral theologian whose intellectual universe orbited around the Scriptures. This is only a step in the right direction, though, of undoing the

twentieth-century scholarly caricature that depicted Edwards as a trapped cleric who found everything but the Bible and its life of holy joy the most important thing in the world.⁶ Readers interested in theological retrieval will enjoy Peter Jung's essay. He not only clearly articulates Edwards's unique and nuanced understanding of justification, but also helpfully places it against the backdrop of Reformed theology. Having summarized Edwards's thought, Jung then shows how he serves as a unique foil to critique and respond to the objections of the New Perspective on Paul. Jung contends that Edwards would have been contentiously at odds with N. T. Wright's "Antinomian and Neonomian" perspective (98). This essay underscores, therefore, that Edwards deserves a seat at the table in ongoing doctrinal debates. It also highlights the great disservice we do to ourselves when we fail to bring old treasures out of our intellectual storehouses to answer new questions.

The five chapters of part 2 each provide helpful and unique contributions on the broad question of Edwards and revival. The two essays by Ryan Martin and John Shouse are of particular importance, though, as they show how Edwards speaks to Christians today. Martin details how Edwards's understanding of affections differs significantly from the modern conception of emotions. His conclusions serve as a cautious warning that Edwards cannot quickly be adopted by the charismatic movement—which has happened as of late—since an "ugly and historical ditch" remains fixed between Edwards's time and ours, and is only bridged through careful retrieval.⁷ Shouse helps readers by building just such a bridge between Edwards and the modern cognitive theory of emotions. Such work emphasizes that Edwards is an encouragement to Christians who desire to honor God through the cultivation of their affections as they walk the path of joyful obedience.

⁶ Kenneth P. Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 659–87, 677.

⁷ This parodies Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's (1729–1781) famous statement of a "broad and ugly ditch." *Lessing: Philosophical and Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87.

Part 3 focuses on Edwards's protology and contains important additions to debated topics in Edwards scholarship relating to his idealism and God's "dispositions" (205). Beyond these traditional discussions, though, Lisanne Winslow and Robert Boss provide cutting-edge research into one of the more intriguing areas of Edwards's thought with their discussions of his "natural typology" (223). In her chapter, Winslow presents a unique framework for understanding Edwards's "onto-types" (223). Building on her expertise in biology and biochemistry, she proposes, perhaps controversially, that Edwards's view of God's emblematic communication goes "all the way down" to the cellular level (228). That is to say, Winslow contends, even the protozoa speak God's poetry. Boss then helps the reader to appreciate the extent to which Edwards's intricate web of typological theologizing is diffused throughout his immense corpus. In the chapter, Boss employs his fascinating "JEViewer," a visual, mental-mapping research tool that is reframing and reshaping—literally—the landscape of Edwards studies (249–50). These chapters are a must-read for those interested in exciting new developments springing up in this scholastic field.

This volume is commendable for several reasons. First, it is praiseworthy for its authorial diversity. Contributors hail from various strands of the Christian tradition and include scientists, psychologists, theologians, and philosophers, each providing unique perspectives on Northampton's divine. Second, this collection highlights the breadth, depth, and uniqueness of Edwards's thought, having attracted such a diverse group of experts. Third, the book is to be commended because it is clearly and interestingly written, while still making significant contributions to the Edwardsean guild. Finally, Kyle Strobel's concluding essay affords helpful suggestions for additional research, thus setting a course for future scholarship.

The volume is not without weaknesses, however. First, a more global perspective on Edwards in the essays would be desirable. Especially given that Edwards Centers span the globe, it would have been illuminating to see how Edwards's thoughts on creation, regeneration, and revival have been—or could be—received and interpreted in Asian, Latin American, or African contexts. Second, given the recent "calls" for additional work on Edwards's exegesis, some readers may wish that this aspect of his corpus received focused attention. Finally, in this same regard, the volume would have been strengthened with

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an essay on the ways in which Edwards's biblical typology informed his thoughts on regeneration, revival, and creation, given that this exegesis contributes several doctrinal nuances to these loci. That being said, scholar, student, and layperson alike will all reap plentiful fruit from the engaging pages of *Regeneration, Revival, and Creation*.

—CAMERON SCHWEITZER