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

Edited by Chris Chun & Kyle C. Strobel

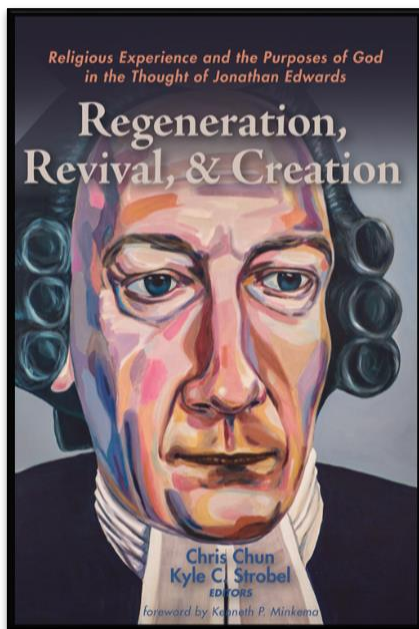
Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers

978-1-5326-9622-0 / paperback / \$39

www.wipfandstock.com

New Title edited by Chris Chun & Kyle C. Strobel

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



Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) is considered one of the greatest theologians and philosophers of evangelicalism, who also served as a pastor, missionary, and revival leader. By underscoring “Regeneration, Revival, and Creation” in Edwards’s thought, this volume uniquely captures the need to delve into Edwards’s theological and philosophical rationale for the revivals, alongside key questions concerning the historical context and Edwards’s standing in his own tradition. This book gathers the work of scholars working in the areas of historical, systematic, and analytic theology, church history, psychology, and biology. It contains papers presented at the inaugural conference of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Gateway Seminary (JEC West). Bringing together some of the leading authorities as well as up-and-coming Edwards scholars working today, this collection advances the questions of regeneration, revival, and creation in fresh new ways.

Chris Chun is Professor of Church History at Gateway Seminary, near Los Angeles, where he also serves as the director of the Jonathan Edwards Center (West). He is the author of *Legacy of Jonathan Edwards in the Theology of Andrew Fuller* (2012).



Kyle Strobel is Associate Professor of Spiritual Theology at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, near Los Angeles. He is the author of *Jonathan Edwards’s Theology: A Reinterpretation* (2013).

Can you tell us about the origins of the Edwards Center at Gateway? How did the Center come to be, and why is it based in California?

Chris Chun: The dream of Jonathan Edwards Center at Gateway (JEC West) started when Adriaan Neele (chapter 1) of the Yale Center approached me about the possibility of hosting an affiliated center on the West coast at Gateway Seminary. In addition to the existence of some notable Edwards scholars on the West Coast, apparently, Yale's JEC website attracts a high amount of internet traffic from California each year. In other words, there is a sizable interest in Edwards from this sector, and I suspect those are some of the essential ingredients for establishing a West Coast Center. After this initial encounter, I worked closely with Yale colleague Kenneth Minkema (foreword), as well as my Gateway colleague John Shouse (chapter 8) to turn this dream into a reality.

What are your long-range goals for the Center?

Chris Chun: Founded in 2018 as one of ten international affiliate centers of Yale University, this center seeks to be the educational epicenter for researching the life and works of America's premier theologian. The JEC (West) hosts conferences followed by publications which include its conference proceedings such as this book, "Regeneration, Revival and Creation: Religious Experience and the Purposes of God in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards." This inaugural conference was held in January 2019. Douglas Sweeney (chapter 2), Michael Haykin (chapter 6), and Oliver Crisp (chapter 11) delivered three plenary papers of this conference. Under the auspices of Gateway Seminary, this center seeks to strengthen existing doctoral and visiting scholar programs, facilitate classes on Edwards and his theology, and network with international scholarly communities as well as local churches.

How can people get involved?

Chris Chun: I would like to encourage people not only visit the JEC at Gateway Seminary website, but invite everyone to come and visit our physical Center in Ontario, California. It is a perfect space to be inspired and research America's greatest theologian. There will be physical holdings of primary and secondary collections as well as a painting portrait of Edwards by Oliver Crisp (book cover). What is more, there will be a central, mahogany trestle library table, an oriental rug, and Edwards's busts, etc. All of these are designed to inspire the researchers! On the other side of the wall is a life-size mural of Edwards's desk. The Jonathan Edwards Society and Rob Boss (chapter 14) have provided an offline installation of The Miscellanies Project. This is accomplished by beautifully visualizing Edwards's "Miscellanies." The Center will have a new computer with a touchscreen that will give access to Yale's digital Works of Jonathan Edwards Online as well as Jonathan Edwards Online Journal. Well-established scholars and pastor theologians are encouraged to serve on the advisory board of JEC at Gateway. We currently have Edwardsean scholars from other institutions serving on the board including John Shouse, Oliver Crisp, Ken Minkema, Robert Caldwell (chapter 16), Mark Rogers (chapter 9), and Kyle Strobel (co-editor).

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

Despite the breath of Edwards's work, and the variety of topics in this volume, there is a clear thread that ties the whole together. Recalling, briefly, what has gone before, we can attend to the core focus – *God, as he is in himself, and as he overflows to his creation*. This can be seen in Adriaan Neele's emphasis, noting that Mastricht invites his readers to know *that* God is, *what kind* God is, and *who* he is, leading him to articulate God's blessedness and creaturely gratitude for that blessedness. It is this God of blessedness who creates, and as Lisanne Winslow and Rob Boss highlight, it is this God whose glory, fullness, and beauty are witnessed in creation. As he is in his life *in se*, so God overflows to his creation in grace, to communicate that life and reveal himself to his creatures, not, as Walter Shultz notes, because God is not God without this overflow, but because he wills to overflow to share his goodness with his creation. It is this very emphasis on God's goodness and blessedness in overflow that lead to the questions posed by Chris Woznicki's engagement with personal identity, Oliver Crisp's worries about Edwards's vision of reality, and Robb Torseth's inquiry into exotheology. The question concerning *who* this God is relates precisely to what kind of world we have, and what kinds of creatures are the furniture of reality.

If God is beauty, love, and blessedness, overflowing in grace to his creatures, we expect certain doctrines to follow. This leads naturally, as was seen in Neele, Rob Caldwell, Doug Sweeney, Obbie Todd, John Shouse, and Ryan Martin's essays, to a description of the new "sense of the heart" in Edwards's articulation of regeneration and religious affection. To be "born from above" is to have this new taste of heaven in the soul, an instinct that shapes, but does not overtake Edwards's doctrine of justification as noted by Peter Jung. This led Edwards, rightly noted in Caldwell's articulation, to arrange "his soteriology largely around the concept of *divine love*." Blessedness, affection, glory, and beauty, all major themes in Edwards, ground the reality of God's life *in se*, but also highlight the centrality of the Spirit. Furthermore, this focus establishes Edwards's emphasis on creaturely participation in the divine life, again highlighting his doctrine of regeneration, setting up the unique features of Edwardsean regeneration as developed by the New Divinity (as highlighted by Caldwell above). All of this focus on God and his self-giving to the creature exerts a certain kind of pressure on questions of soteriology and practical theology, which helped to form Edwards's views of prayer, revival, and missions, as articulated by Michael Haykin, Mark Rogers, and Allen Yeh.

Therefore, here, I wish to make more explicit what has been, throughout this volume, mostly implicit in the background of these discussions. To do so, I briefly moor the key issues found here to Edwards's doctrine of God, reminding us that Edwards's theology is a top-down ordering of reality. The theological enterprise, far from the Tower of Babel, is not an act of human presumption and construction, but is the rational reflection of the creature confronted and illumined by God. This brief reflection leads us to consider the "state-of-the-question" in Edwards studies, and seeks to highlight key trajectories where secondary literature can flourish. The goal is to simply point forward to helpful avenues where work is still needing to be done, and where we are still looking for deeper reflection or application of Edwards's thought. (286-287)

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

“This volume of essays, Jonathan Edwards marks an important moment in the history of Edwards scholarship. They are strikingly original and provide an acute and thought-provoking analysis of an Edwards whose significance to scholarship ranges widely across disciplinary and denominational boundaries. Despite these denominational differences, all scholars represented discovered, from their tradition, a usable Edwards whose relevance to the twenty-first century is as great as his relevance to the eighteenth-century. This volume is must read for anyone interested in the most current trends and preoccupations of Edwards scholars from around the world.”

—Harry Stout, Yale University

“Jonathan Edwards was a renowned eighteenth-century pastor, theologian, revival leader, philosopher, and missionary, and the ripple effects of his theology and ministry continue even today. *Regeneration, Revival, and Creation* addresses compelling aspects of Edwards’s teaching and displays the quality work of the inaugural conference of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Gateway Seminary. The seminary, the center, its board, editors Chris Chun and Kyle Strobel, and the contributors are to be commended on this fine achievement.”

—Christopher W. Morgan, co-author of *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*

“Serious scholarship on Jonathan Edwards has reached the point where it is hard to imagine anyone being able to say anything fresh or inviting. The editors and contributors to this fine collection show that there is still rich fruit to be harvested from the New England theologian-pastor-theologian who was a forest of insight in himself. In this case the contributors explore Edwards as an inspiration for personal ‘lived Christianity,’ group Christian renewal, and a God-oriented understanding of the physical realm. The general quality of the book is unusually high.”

—Mark A. Noll, author of *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*

