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Book Review: Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher

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The book concludes with a useful bibliography. One unhappy note: The book contains too many typographical errors. I counted 15, more than one for every 20 pages; one of the more serious of them occurs twice on the same page, 247 (“supposing” for “suppressing truth in unrighteousness”).

Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher, by **John E. Smith**. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992. Pp. x and 150. \$23.95 (Cloth).

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John Smith's new book is a general introduction to Jonathan Edwards. Noting that “Edwards's life was closely intertwined with the doctrines of his treatises and the rhetoric of his sermons” (1), Smith begins by examining his “life and times.” His second chapter investigates Locke's “profound influence” on Edwards (14). These and subsequent chapters stress Edwards's “empirical attitude” (6) and originality.

Smith's discussion of Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* (chapter 4) “is an expository one without critical interruptions that...are more likely to confuse than enlighten a reader” (63). His discussion of *Original Sin* (chapter 5) is also “expository” and free from “critical interruptions.” These chapters provide a reader who is unfamiliar with these works with good general introductions. Those who are already acquainted with them will learn little new.

Smith's decision to largely restrict himself to exposition in these chapters is surprising in view of his success in interweaving exposition and critical discussion in chapters 3, 6, and 7.

Chapter 3 situates the *Religious Affections* in the context of the controversies occasioned by the Great Awakening, and discusses the “signs” by which Edwards believed we can distinguish true from false affections. The key to understanding Edwards, according to Smith, is his attempt to transcend the “heart-head dualism” (31) assumed both by the Awakening's friends and by its opponents. This is an important point. Edwards has a cognitive view of the affections. They are intentional and presuppose an understanding of their object. Understanding, on the other hand, often involves appropriate affections—our grasp of religion, for example, of affections and emotions, of things pertaining to good and evil, and so on. The head and heart are logically implicated in each other.

Although the chapter as a whole is excellent, Smith's brief remarks on the new sense of the heart are inadequate. Rejecting the suggestion “that this is a ‘sixth sense’” (40), Smith identifies it with a new holy “inclination and judgement” (42)—a new understanding of the spiritual beauty of divine things which incorporates the appropriate affective response. I am uncon-

vinced, though, that Edwards's talk of a new sense is metaphorical. Smith ignores the fact that (in Edwards's view) the regenerate acquire a new simple idea, *viz.*, the idea of true beauty. Locke had argued that (internal or external) *sense* is the only source of simple ideas. Edwards apparently agrees. It follows that the converted more or less literally acquire a new sense.

Smith's exposition of "Edwards's theological ethics and moral philosophy" (chapter 6) also contains astute comments. He calls attention, for instance, to an important parallel between *Religious Affections* and *The Nature of True Virtue*. Just as the first distinguishes truly gracious affections from their counterfeits, so the second distinguishes true virtue (the love of being in general) from common morality and its philosophical refinements (Hutcheson's disinterested benevolence, for example).

The History of Redemption employed what Edwards believed to be "an entire new method' in divinity since it is thrown 'into the form of a history'" (120). Smith's discussion of this work (chapter 7) is perhaps the best in the book because of its effective combination of accurate exposition and illuminating commentary. Among Smith's points are these. (1) Edwards's work isn't an account of secular history viewed from a religious perspective. It is a history of *redemption*. It is for this reason that many of the events Edwards discusses will strike an historian of secular history as unimportant. This point also explains Edwards's reliance on biblical prophecy as a third source along with Biblical and secular history. (2) Edwards's work is fundamentally dissimilar to other works it superficially resembles (Bishop Bousset's *Theological Discourse on Universal History*, for example). Unlike these authors (and eighteenth century historians generally) Edwards thought of history not as an instantiation of a series of "ideal types" or as "a series of tableaux succeeding each other in a temporal order much like a museum exhibit devoted to tracing the history of costumes through a century" but "as a dynamic movement from one state to the next involving development and novelty" (135). In doing so, Edwards anticipated the nineteenth century.

Edwards was a Christian thinker whose work was firmly grounded in the Bible and in a deep sense both of our absolute dependence on God for any good and of the gospel's beauty. It is therefore fitting that Smith concludes with a brief but very good chapter entitled "Edwards as preacher and interpreter of scripture."

My overall assessment of Smith's book is positive. It is, for the most part, lucid and reliable. But his remarks are occasionally unclear or doubtful. Two of the more serious examples occur in chapter 6. (1) Smith explains why Edwards thinks that true benevolence or virtue (love towards being in general) includes a love of true benevolence, and concludes by asserting: "Stated even more directly, Edwards is moving from the love of God to love of the neighbor" (110). But this won't do. The love of being in general and the love of virtuous being can't be identified with love of God and love of neighbor

respectively. The first includes love of both God *and* the neighbor. The second includes love of God (for His benevolence) and does *not* include love of the *unvirtuous* neighbor (2). As Smith points out, Edwards believes that there are two moralities—"a morality of nature and a morality of grace" (107). Only the second is truly gracious although the first has some value. He then makes the surprising suggestion that "we could understand Edwards's account of true virtue as essentially defining the 'religious' relation to being and not 'the moral dimension'"; the latter is articulated in Edwards's analysis of "common" (or natural) morality (117). This seems to me to misrepresent Edwards. For the latter, *both* true virtue *and* common morality have religious and moral dimensions. The love of being in general, for instance, includes the love of "particular beings" and thus benevolence towards humanity. Natural morality, on the other hand, is capable of recognizing our duty to obey God, to be grateful to Him for His benefits, and to repent when one has offended Him.

I also have three more general reservations (1) Smith stresses Edwards's originality and as evidence cites his repudiation of Puritan covenant theology, "his rejection of the widespread belief that regeneration follows a standard pattern or order in the soul" (6), and his insistence on "heart religion." It is true that covenant theology isn't central to Edwards's thought. Nevertheless, he sometimes uses its language (in *Original Sin* and *The History of Redemption*, for example). More important, covenant theology is *not* (as Smith claims) incompatible with Edwards's doctrine of humanity's absolute dependence on God. Not only is the covenant God's gift, so too is our power to meet its terms and our exercise of this power. It is also true that Edwards insists that the order in which saving experiences occur isn't a reliable sign of their genuineness. Still, he does believe that they typically follow a certain pattern (convictions of guilt, sorrow over one's sinfulness, and sincere efforts to amend followed by experiences of regeneration, and sanctification). His Puritan forbears, on the other hand, denied that God was *bound* to any order. The contrast between Edwards and his predecessors isn't as clear cut, then, as Smith claims. Finally, while Smith is correct in pointing out that "Protestantism becomes quite rationalistic" and scholastic "in the centuries after Luther" (7), Edwards's emphasis on heart religion is less an innovation than a *recovery* of the strong experiential emphasis of early English and American Puritanism.

I do not wish to deny Edwards's originality. I suggest, however, that it lies more in the passion, poetic imagination, and intellectual sophistication with which he articulates and develops his themes, and in the breadth and vision of his system as a whole, than in departures from his theological tradition or radical philosophical innovations.

(2) Smith makes much of Locke's impact on Edwards. Locke's influence on Edwards's epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophical psychology is indeed profound. His metaphysics, on the other hand, appears to

be more strongly affected by Malebranche and (to a lesser extent) Cambridge Platonism, and bears little resemblance to Locke's. This leads to my third reservation.

(3) One of my few serious complaints about Smith's treatment of Edwards is his comparative neglect of the latter's metaphysics—Edwards's identification of God with "being in general," the world's only true substance and only true cause. There is no discussion, for example, of Edwards's immaterialism, occasionalism, reflections on the trinity, or analysis of God's end in creation. While Edwards's treatises on the religious affections, freedom of the will, and ethics have the importance Smith ascribes to them, his nearly exclusive emphasis on these works results in a certain imbalance.

In spite of these weaknesses, however, Smith's book is largely successful. Those who are new to Edwards, or are unfamiliar with his thought as a whole, will find this a useful and generally reliable introduction. I know of no other book which provides as good a one. It therefore achieves what I take to be its primary purpose. Those who know Edwards well will also profit from a number of Smith's insights.

Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection, by **Stephen T. Davis**. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993. Pp. xii and 219. \$16.99 (Paper).

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During a recent Easter morning church service our pastor read the resurrection account from the gospel of John in which two angels appear to Mary of Magdala. My fidgety, apparently inattentive, five-year old son, who had learned a different version of the story in Sunday School, perked up and said: "There was only one angel, or is that a different story? What's he talking about? Oh, never mind." Then he recommenced to pester his father. So began the critico-historical consciousness of my son. Stephen T. Davis's thorough and impressive defense of the resurrection, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*, could have provided some answers to my son's questions (if only he could read). With a mastery of the Biblical data, theological reflection and philosophical disputations, Davis responds with compelling arguments to virtually every objection to and reduction of the bodily resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection of the saints. While he never claims to be able to persuade the ardent objector to miracles and the resurrection, he nonetheless makes a reasonably strong defense of the resurrection in the face of mighty historical, Biblical and philosophical objections. This book is not primarily an evidentialist religious tract designed to prove the resurrection to unbelievers; rather it is a philosophy text mounting an impressive defense of