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Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo, eds. *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Pp. xvi + 214. \$18.00 (Paper).

[1] Jonathan Edwards is widely acknowledged to be America's premier philosopher-theologian. Nevertheless, for the most part, his work has been examined only in the context of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Any consideration of his thought as a resource for issues of the twentieth, or now the twenty-first, century has been lacking. Thus the importance of *Edwards in Our Time*, a collection of essays originating at a conference on Edwards held in Philadelphia in 1996 - the fourth in a series of national conferences on the eighteenth-century divine sponsored primarily by The Works of Jonathan Edwards at Yale University.

[2] In his introduction, Harry Stout asks whether perennial questions actually exist: "The skeptics say no: philosophical questions that seem universal across the ages are in fact radically conditioned by particular temporal, geographical, and cultural circumstances" (ix). Even if true perennial problems elude us, however, Stout continues, perennially popular thinkers do exist, and no American thinker better exemplifies this than Jonathan Edwards. As this volume of collected essays shows, the principal reason for Edwards continued popularity is the artistic creativity and intellectual force of his speculations.

[3] In his keynote address, John E. Smith paints a compelling picture of the "perennial Edwards," by highlighting three particularly durable elements in Edwards's thought: his notion of religious affections, which challenges the presumed dichotomy between the head and the heart in religion; his philosophical realism, as opposed to nominalism, which posits a single humanity united with Adam through the continuous creation of God; and his conception of history, in which God's work of redemption proceeds on the individual level in an endlessly recurring pattern and on the world-historical level in a dynamic succession of interrelated dispensations.

[4] The remaining essays explore the continuing relevance of Edwards's thought under four themes. In Part I ("God, Being, and Nature"), Sang Hyun Lee and Stephen H. Daniel argue that Edwards's ontology speaks as much to philosophers and theologians today as it did to

Edwards' contemporaries. Lee shows the relevance of Edwards' ontological speculations to ongoing discussions of God's being. Edwards conceived of God as at once fully actual and fully dispositional, or simultaneously being and becoming. In probing the complexities of God's "disposition," Edwards anticipated much later discussions of God's dynamic involvement in the world. Lee thus finds in Edwards resources for contemporary ecological theology, wherein humans participate with the material environment in the glorification of the divine being.

[5] Daniel takes Lee's "dispositional ontology" one step further by asking why Edwards's God has a disposition to communicate, whether *ad intra* (within the Trinity) or *ad extra* (with creation). Daniel's answer is that Edwards's God does not exist apart from communication. Indeed God is the discursive space in which everything else has its identity. God is inseparable from his revelation, which provides the grammar and syntax for interpreting all other texts.

[6] The question of being flows naturally into the question of ethical existence, and in Part II ("Ethics"), Roland A. Delattre and Allen C. Guelzo mine the depths of Edwards's writings on human responsibility. Both highlight Edwards's radically theocentric ethical perspective, though Guelzo concludes that, in elaborating on the preeminence of divine will over human initiative, Edwards failed to build a logically impermeable case for traditional Calvinism. Delattre finds in Edwards's ethics an alternative to the two ethical approaches long regnant in philosophy: deontology, which attempts to theorize duty and right action, and teleology, which focuses on the consequences of ends of our actions.

[7] In Part III ("Preaching and Revival"), Walter V. L. Eversley and Helen P. Westra assess the practical side of Edwards's career and offer a mixed account of his legacy for today's clergy. For Eversley, Edwards's tenure as a pastor illustrates the abiding tension in American Protestantism between conversionism and sacramentalism. Edwards did not regard conversionism and sacramentalism as contradictory. Indeed, he intimately linked the two when he abandoned the open communion policy of his grandfather and predecessor, Solomon Stoddard, in favor of admitting only those persons who had experienced genuine conversion. Eversley concludes that Edwards's policy was pastorally ungenerous and politically disastrous. He sees in Edwards's unsuccessful attempt to serve the two masters a lesson for contemporary pastors: the ecclesial context inevitably will dictate which of these two means is most effective for evangelism.

[8] Westra focuses on the conversion side of the conversion-sacrament dialect, arguing that for Edwards the revival was the central element in the great drama of redemption. Westra finds ample evidence of his belief in a divinely ordained, recurring pattern of revival-declension-revival. Edwards conformed his ministry to this divine design; he considered it his duty to announce his parishioners' apostasy with unflinching resolve and to inspire a continual renewal of their covenant with God. As an interpreter of the cycle of revival, Westra concludes, Edwards remains a model for contemporary revivalists, who seek to discern a similar pattern in salvation history.

[9] The end of salvation history is the concern of Robert W. Jensen and Gerald R. McDermott, who in Part IV ("Eschatology") examine the relevance of Edwards's end-time speculations. Jensen is attracted to the pre-Enlightenment impulse in Edwards's thought: the

notion that God's reason and our reason may not be identical, which requires Christians to trust in the sufficiency of revelation. McDermott, meanwhile, commends the more "enlightened" aspect of Edwards's thinking, namely, the tendency to embrace reason, even if it is found outside of a specifically Christian context. Jenson endorses Edwards's eschatological vision of the end as music, or the sweet harmony of the saints in heaven singing together. McDermott's concerns himself with the question of who will inherit this heavenly reward, and he finds in Edwards a heretofore unrecognized openness to the possibility that some non-Christians will be saved. Edwards believed, McDermott suggests, that nearly all humans receive divine revelation, even though it is often distorted by the superstitions and idolatries of non-Christian religions. Thus, yet again, Edwards appears surprisingly relevant to our times, in this case to contemporary discussions of religious pluralism.

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