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JONATHAN EDWARDS IN HIS TIME, AND IN OURS

DAVID D. HALL
Harvard Divinity School

George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003)

Robert E. Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002)

Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003)

Amy Plantinga Pauw, "*The Supreme Harmony of All*": *The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002)

We play tricks on the past, but the past also plays tricks on us. We try to fool the past by reconstructing it in our own image, imposing order and significance on the untidy sources we depend upon. The trick the past plays on us is to remain defiantly strange, ever able to expose what it is that our gestures of sympathetic reconstruction have altered, ignored, or suppressed.

So it is with Jonathan Edwards. With the possible exception of Thomas Jefferson, no one has attracted as much attention during the past fifty years in American intellectual history, and no one else, even Jefferson, has been accorded such reverence or extolled so lavishly, all to the end of making Edwards a living presence among us. Almost fifty years ago Sydney Ahlstrom proclaimed Edwards the most significant figure in the Reformed tradition between Calvin and Barth. Before him, Perry Miller had insisted on Edwards's modernity, and in *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (1966) Alan Heimert described him as a forward-looking millenarian with proto-democratic instincts. For Miller and Heimert, the significance of Edwards was his role in the shaping of an autonomous, high-flying American culture: Edwards the nation maker. More recently, the resurgence of Protestant evangelicalism has prompted those of this persuasion to employ Edwards in re-imagining the past as it bears upon their present situation.

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But the past plays many tricks on the project, however defined, to make Edwards current. Sometimes it is the archive that trumps such efforts, as when more careful readings of Edwards's apocalyptic or "millenarian" texts subverted the argument—alas, still being repeated—that he imagined a distinctive role for New England/America in the end times. Or the problem may be that the past reveals the evasions of the present.[1] Twentieth-century theologians of a liberal bent had to ignore Edwards's fervent reiteration of Calvinist principles. Most modern-day evangelicals are little more likely to affirm such doctrines as a limited atonement, and neither group is entirely comfortable with how he preached the terrors that awaited sinners. For some the problem may be Edwards's self-righteousness, a temperament (or "constitution") he himself noted in responding to the invitation to take up the presidency of the College of New Jersey. Addressing the trustees of the college, he told them that he was affected with "a disagreeable dullness and stiffness, much unfitting me for conversation." A modern scholar has amplified this self-description in noting his "pastoral urge toward the reproof and correction of others, and a lamentable lack of any sense of humor,"[2] qualities that contributed to the most humiliating moment of his life, the decision of his Northampton, Massachusetts, congregation to dismiss him as their minister.

Yet few renounce the project of making him ours. The one historian in recent years who did so, Peter Gay, has become something of a *bête noir* to the Edwards industry. The sticking point for Gay, who denounced Miller and company in *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (1966), was Edwards's understanding of history and Scripture—untouched, it seemed, by the critical spirit of the Enlightenment. To give credit where credit is due, the Edwards industry has rejected or sharply modified some of the claims that Miller and Heimert made. It is no longer acceptable to intimate that Edwards relied on John Locke for his understanding of experience. And although Ahlstrom may be excused for a judgment that was irresistibly appealing in the context of arguing for an independently "American" theological tradition of intellectual stature, he surely knew of Europeans who were far more important makers of the Reformed tradition—Schleiermacher, for one.

What kind of theologian was Edwards? His contemporaries realized that he was no ordinary Calvinist reiterating the commonplaces of the Westminster

1 I point out a few of the evasions, if not the downright lies, of the editor–biographer Sereno Dwight in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 12: *Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 49 n. 4, 52 n. 6.

2 *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 16: *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 726; Ola Winslow, quoted in Amy Plantiga Pauw, *"The Supreme Harmony of All": The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 4.

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Confession. Something else was at work, a quality of thinking they termed "metaphysical." The most serious, sustained scholarship on Edwards during the past half-century has started from the premise that he was a philosophical theologian who reflected creatively on a wide range of topics, from the nature of religious experience and the meaning of providence to ethics, the Trinity, original sin, and "the end for which God created the world." Is there a master key to his thinking, a central argument or idea around which all the rest revolves? This is never an easy question to answer, but the task of doing so for Edwards is complicated by three circumstances. One is that Edwards did not live to write the *summa* he sketched in his letter of 1757 to the trustees of the College of New Jersey, where he reported having "on my mind and heart . . . a great work, which I call *A History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entirely new method . . . considering the affair of Christian theology, as the whole of it, in each part, stands in reference to the great work of redemption by Jesus Christ."[3] A second is the challenge represented by the materials that remained in manuscript when he died in 1758, in particular the private notebooks or "Miscellanies." The public Edwards is not always the same as the private Edwards, as Amy Pauw has astutely noted. That much of this manuscript material embodies Edwards's efforts to establish the validity and unity of Scripture or to validate the eternal torments of the damned, efforts of little interest to those within the liberal tradition, adds to the problem. The third is the classic difficulty of mapping someone's intellectual context: what was this person reading, and how did he absorb or rework the ideas or thinkers he encountered? For Edwards, who spent untold hours with the Bible and continued to read the seventeenth-century masters of evangelical divinity, assessing influence or reaction is especially challenging. He does not always give us precise guidance on these matters, for he depended in the main on extracts and summaries he found in learned periodicals of the day, and the "catalogue" he kept of books he heard of and wanted to read is, as Paul Ramsey once remarked, "notoriously 'soft' evidence".[4] The prolonged and eventually fruitless quest to associate him with Locke, like an earlier and equally fruitless quest to trace his "idealism" to the influence of Bishop Berkeley, are examples of ventures in contextualizing that went astray. Though the new wisdom is that Edwards owed a great deal to British writers, any full accounting must encompass, among others, Latitudinarians, liberalizing Nonconformists, virtuosi of the Puritan "practical divinity," deists, Continental Reformed scholastics, Scottish sectarians, historians both ancient and of his time, and "moderates"

3 Ibid., 727–8.

4 *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol. 8: *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsay (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 704.

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of the Scottish Enlightenment. Making sense of this diversity is, to say the least, a difficult undertaking, made all the more so because, as Ramsay has also pointed out, "observing and respecting a distinction between arguments for intellectual affinity and those for literary dependence is central to responsible historical criticism."[5] The project of appropriating Edwards for the present can also throw up obstacles in our way, for those who engage in this project have not always resisted the temptation to foreground only those sources that are in keeping with their own intellectual agenda.

These questions of method and substance are addressed both directly and indirectly in George Marsden's substantial, informative biography. Its stated purpose is to describe Edwards as "a real person in his own time." Asking us to re-imagine Edwards "as an *eighteenth-century* figure" (p. 2, author's italics), Marsden predicates his narrative on two assumptions about colonial New England, where Edwards was born in 1703: that his social world was framed by hierarchy as ideal and as practice, and that learned men of his milieu participated in a transatlantic culture based in Britain. (It is interesting in this regard that, early on, Edwards aspired to publish in London.) The first of these assumptions allows Marsden to write without apology or embarrassment about Edwards's lifelong reliance on high-status patrons, most especially his local champion Colonel John Stoddard, and his expectation that the townspeople of Northampton should respect his authority. The proto-democratic Edwards who figures in some interpretations finds no warrant in these pages. Moreover, Marsden turns the judgment that Edwards was a forebear of modern evangelicalism on its head, asserting that the corporatist social ethics Edwards sought to implement in Northampton, together with his efforts to sustain the alliance of civil magistrate and minister in a society he understood as hierarchical, link him with the Puritan past, not with the evangelical and republican future. To describe Edwards as a citizen of British culture is also to separate him from the world that is to come. For these two reasons alone, Marsden deserves our thanks, for he is surely right on both counts.

There is more good news. The early chapters on Edwards's spiritual life, the principal source for which is a text that dates from the end of the 1730s, the "Personal Narrative," are remarkably skillful in mapping the ups and downs that Edwards underwent, ups and downs marked by periods of spiritual depression rooted, it seems plausible to suggest, in his uneasiness with how his father, Timothy Edwards, described conversion as a matter of strictly marked out phases. That we do not know how or when Edwards qualified for "full" church membership underscores the tensions his upbringing forced him to negotiate.

5 Ibid., 692 n. 1.

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The chapters on the politics that erupted in 1741 in response to the excesses of the Great Awakening are equally good at capturing the predicament from which Edwards was never able to escape, that the dismay and anger occasioned by the "New Lights" made it next to impossible to validate the revivals as the work of the Holy Spirit. The much caricatured Charles Chauncy, the Boston minister who helped fashion this predicament, is given his fair due, as are Edwards's mostly evangelical kinsfolk in the Connecticut River valley, the Williamses. The chapters on the politics of the Stockbridge mission are no less excellent, and the narration of Edwards's dismissal is, on the whole, free from the special pleading that mars almost every account of this episode, a special pleading that began with the great man himself, who wove a web of half-truths about the affair.[6]

The emotional center of this biography is, I think, Marsden's fascination with Edwards's strenuous efforts to exemplify the highest possible version of the Christian life. Thus we learn repeatedly that Edwards sometimes went without eating, or ate very little, in order to save time and gain the necessary concentration for his intellectual endeavors. We learn, too, of how rigorous he was in other everyday practices, and how he admired those in whom he found a similar intensity—famously, of course, his wife and the missionary David Brainerd. All of this material, interesting in its own right, resonates with a question Marsden brings from the present to the past: namely, what are the standards by which evangelical Christians, including those who are scholars and intellectuals, should live? Put this way, the question yields more than one answer, for the rigorism that runs through Edwards's life and ministry had its unattractive dimensions, as Marsden is quick to acknowledge and as the townspeople of Northampton realized in their time. Thus, in the midst of the revival of 1735, Edwards envisioned a "virtually monastic standard for all of life" (p. 160) that, in the glow of that event, he regarded his congregation as exemplifying. This ascetic, sectarian Edwards seems far from being Marsden's own ideal. When he resorts to the word "complex" in the closing pages of the book to indicate his attitude toward the great man, it gives point to feelings the reader may also be having, that Edwards was indeed quite different from ourselves. In sum, Marsden's sympathies cannot be reduced

6 At this point I am an interested party, having worked out an interpretation of the "communion" controversy of 1748–50 and its outcome, Edwards's dismissal, in the course of editing the *Ecclesiastical Writings*. The differences between my account and Marsden's are chiefly my insistence on acknowledging expectations about baptism among the laity, or what I term "popular religion," and noting Edwards's contempt for the same. I treat with some skepticism the evidence he created in 1750 to prove he had shared his views with the townspeople, or some of them; and I point out that the Northampton congregation never fully embraced "Stoddardean" practices; Stoddard's views were not what they were defending in 1750.

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to mere affirmation. Though he makes the past familiar to us, it also remains strange.

As for what made Edwards tick as a theologian, Marsden mainly limits himself to citing the sovereignty of God, a traditional answer and in some respects good enough. For two of the books included in this review, however, the central thread is "history," beginning, of course, with sacred history as embodied in the Bible and extending beyond Scripture to include the full sweep of redemption. Most of Edwards's recent interpreters, and especially those who regard him as a philosophical theologian or wish to present him as modern, find little grist for their mill in his extensive commentaries on the Bible. Truth be told, Edwards's understanding of the Bible is stubbornly traditional, if by traditional we mean his insistence on such matters as the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, the veracity of the miracles, the harmony of the Gospels, and the self-authenticating capacity of the Word. Where he is singular in his thinking, as in his expansive version of typology, the connections with modernity, if there are any, must be sought in a putative "American" literary tradition.

Otherwise, the challenge posed by his biblical work is twofold: to recover the context in which he was working and to explore the connections between that work and his broader intellectual program. Doing so has been greatly aided by the recent publication in the Yale University Press *Works* series of material that was little known, even to most specialists: Edwards's writings on typology in volume 11 and his "Notes on Scripture" in volume 15.[7] Several of the "Miscellanies" are treatises in their own right on aspects of Scripture. Another point of access is the sermon series he preached in 1739, published after his death as *A History of the Work of Redemption*, and available in the *Works* as volume 9 (1989). Because the phrase "A History of the Work of Redemption" reappears in the famous letter of 1757, the search for what he was envisioning has seemed to point back to those sermons of 1739.

In what context did Edwards work as an exegete? Stephen Stein noted in his introduction to *Notes on Scripture* that Edwards shared the "common assumptions" of a long-practiced "commentarial tradition." For him, as for others in this tradition, the Bible was "a comprehensive source of knowledge," the canon was closed, and its texts were in harmony with one another (*Works*, 15:4–6). The task of commentators was to eliminate or minimize any possible confusion over meaning and to connect the texts to the ongoing life of the Church. But as Stein also pointed out, the context in which Edwards wrote

7 Edited by Wallace E. Anderson and Mason I. Lowance, Jr, and by Stephen J. Stein respectively, with substantial introductions. Stein had previously edited vol. 5 of the *Works*, the *Apocalyptic Writings* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977). Still to come in this series are other exegetical writings.

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extended to the "critical" perspective on Scripture taken by Spinoza and Hobbes in the seventeenth century and, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth, by many others within the Enlightenment who privileged reason over revelation or, as in the case of Locke, used reason to question the scriptural basis for doctrines like original sin and the Trinity. Was Edwards untouched by these new currents, as Peter Gay asserted in *A Loss of Mastery*, or did they affect his thinking?

Robert Brown's *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* strengthens the case for engagement, or, to put the matter somewhat more neutrally, for recognizing the "rationalist pressures" on Edwards.[8] The scope of Brown's inquiry is limited to the "Miscellanies" and other texts in which Edwards defended the veracity of the Bible and dealt with the epistemology of religious knowledge; there is nothing here on the exegetical aspects of Edwards's preaching or the place of Scripture in his doctrinal treatises. Acknowledging that Edwards was entirely "traditional" in exempting Scripture from the taint of history, Brown insists that the challenge of responding to the deists required Edwards to base his defense of the Bible's accuracy on "rational and empirical grounds" (p. xvi). Context is crucial to the success of this argument. Brown transforms the question of whether Edwards was "modern" (a question attributed to Gay) to one of whether he was "engaged with and his thought transformed by the problems of historical modernity" (p. xix), the answer being yes in both respects.

To support this argument, Brown provides a distinctive version of context and of what it means to be "engaged." Rebuking Gay for fixing on Voltaire, Hume, and their like as the standard of comparison, he insists that the reference group with whom Edwards should be juxtaposed consisted of persons who retained an "essentially traditional outlook" (p. 96) even though they may have favored "natural or historical causes" or abandoned some features of the older apologetics. Painting many Protestant intellectuals as ambivalent, neither wholly modern nor traditional, he declares, with some warrant, that "hard distinctions between critical and pre-critical thought simply do not hold for the era" (p. 98). He asks, too, that we employ an eighteenth-century framework for "critical" as synonymous with "judicious" and erudite (p. xviii). This recasting of categories comes at a price, for Brown sometimes means "engage" in the sense of "aware of," not engage as actively learning from and acknowledging one's opponents.

The basic thesis of this book is sound, namely, that Edwards relied in part on historical evidence *such as he understood it* to validate Scripture. Although the significance of the letter of 1757 can never be fully settled, he was certainly thinking of history as a necessary, and possibly foundational, dimension of his grand apologetics. In Brown's final, relatively brief chapter, he lays out the case

8 Pauw, "*The Supreme Harmony of All*", 125.

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for the importance of history in what might have become that final synthesis or systematics, arguing that Edwards would have paid significant attention to the authenticity of Scripture in keeping with the interests that show up in the "Miscellanies" of the 1740s and 1750s. In an earlier, more substantial chapter, he describes Edwards's place in the Enlightenment debate on the limits of reason, experience, and revelation. Here, the emphasis falls on the connections between Edwards and the Anglican Latitudinarians, with Locke relegated to the side as of minor importance. Brown's goal is to have us recognize that Edwards had a "broader" view of reason or rationality than Matthew Tindal, who ardently employed that faculty to deflate the authority of revelation.[9] Another challenge was to deal with the deists' argument that ancient, pre-Christian wisdom was entirely divorced from revelation, that is, that "natural religion" existed apart from the historical particularities of Christianity. As Brown points out elsewhere in his book, Edwards resorted to the tradition of *prisca theologia*—that God has revealed divine wisdom to humans from the very beginning of time—to counter this argument. For Brown, this curiously uncritical (in any sense of the term) form of apologetics demonstrates, anew, Edwards's engagement with critical historical concerns.[10]

When Brown turns to the commentarial writings, things take on a somewhat different cast. On inspiration, authorship, and canon there is not much to say. Edwards was "exposed to" or was "well aware" of problems posed mainly by the deists, yet "consistently" resolved such problems in favor of traditional answers. That he used "evidential arguments rooted in appeals to historical fact" is a valid statement on several counts, but its punch is limited by the fragile definition of historical fact, which for Edwards included a great deal of traditional lore. He was not a textual scholar equipped to deal with pre-Christian or Jewish texts. For him, it sufficed that, in his words, "the antient writers . . . inform us of it as a fact continuously received as undoubtedly true" (p. 110). For Brown, such references count as signs of Edwards's appropriation of critical thought about history.

The Edwards of Brown's book is thus a two-sided figure. On the one hand,

> his writings about controverted issues of biblical interpretation almost always served an apologetic purpose, were polemical in their tone, and were modest in their departures from traditional historical judgments. He did not engage the issues in a rigorously erudite

9 Edwards singled Tindal out as his opponent in a late "Miscellany" (no. 1340), a text in which, however, Edwards flatly affirmed the priority of divine revelation in establishing key matters of doctrine, revelation witnessed, perhaps, by history (that is, providence) but perceived even more securely by "intuitive" ways of knowing.

10 But the case doesn't seem particularly strong, especially if we bear in mind that the "historical plausibility [of this theory] was already being undermined in Edwards's day" (Pauw, "*The Supreme Harmony of All,*" 54 n. 136).

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study . . . ; he worked primarily as a theologian absorbing the impact of critical thought with an intent to moderate it, rather than as a historical critic per se. Like many of his contemporaries, he found it difficult to negotiate the boundaries between tradition and its revision. (p. 94)

On the other,

What is clear [from the 'Miscellanies'] . . . is that Edwards had markedly absorbed the historical sensibilities of the age . . . Historical interpretation intruded upon and even competed with his native inclinations toward theological interpretations . . . To the degree that modern historical thought and biblical interpretation can be characterized by a preoccupation with questions of factuality and the employment of historical forms of explanation, Edwards can arguably be cast as someone who had decidedly imbibed the modern historical consciousness and had imported it into his perception of sacred narrative. (pp. 114–15)

The qualifications in the second of these statements bespeak a difficulty intrinsic to all of intellectual history, one that Brown's narrative exposes on almost every page: what is the appropriate context or standard for judging those aspects of someone's intellectual life that seem so out of step with our own assumptions, be it race, gender, class, astrology, or, in this instance, the Bible as history? To my taste, the careful counterpoint that Brown seeks to sustain may veer a little too close to suggesting that Edwards was really one of us (that is, participating in the modern project). Yet Marsden and others cite this book positively.

Avihu Zakai's narrative returns us to the dichotomies that Brown has been at such pains to overcome. Relying almost entirely on secondary sources for his portrait of the Enlightenment, Zakai reminds us that its radicals rejected a theological understanding of history in favor of naturalism. Hence, he insists, the program Edwards undertook to restore the presence and agency of God. A second challenge was to figure out how two orders of time that Augustine had separated from each other, historical time and the economy of grace, are connected. The stage is thus prepared for Edwards's "radical" imagining of *all* historical time as encompassed within the history of redemption, a means of re-joining what Augustine had sundered.

Zakai argues that two circumstances account for this project of "re-enchantment." Chronologically the first was Edwards's conversion experience, here described quite differently from how it is by Marsden. In and through this experience Edwards arrived at a "*theologia gloria*," a near rapturous appreciation of the all-encompassing reality of divine sovereignty. A second was the revivals of the 1730s, which led Edwards to wonder how such eruptions of the Holy Spirit could be installed at the center of an understanding of divine providence. Zakai's is, then, a story of intellectual development culminating in the late 1730s, when Edwards is said to have embraced redemption as the master theme uniting grace

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and time, creation and the unfolding of God's activity in the world. Where we encounter this radical understanding of history—radical because it departed from Augustine, Eusebius, and the Puritans' version of providence as "arbitrary"—is in *A History of the Work of Redemption* and the tracts defending the awakenings of the 1740s, for like the "little awakening" of the 1730s these events reaffirmed God's active, albeit curiously interrupted, presence in the world.

This version of Edwards is at odds with Brown's account in three major respects. Here, the emphasis is on the stark either/or of disenchantment or enchantment, with the mediating tradition Brown describes nowhere in view. Moreover, Edwards seems curiously solitary, an impression strengthened by the emphasis placed upon his conversion and the "little awakening" of the 1730s as source and provocation. And what counts as history for Brown, the critical historical ways of thinking that emerged in the late seventeenth century, differs from the theological rendering of history that we find in Zakai. For this reader, the broad (and in some respects conventional) strokes that characterize Zakai's narrative are less engaging than Brown's careful counterpoint. Nor am I persuaded that Edwards broke so thoroughly with the Puritan/Reformed understanding of providence, or with Eusebius's focus on the Church as the locus of the history of redemption.

In the sermons published as *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards retold biblical history. Once past the earliest centuries of the Church, that retelling carries us through subsequent periods of Church history and the actions of Satan and the Anti-Christ in the centuries thereafter, to the final stages described (or so Edwards believed) in Revelation. So ordinary is the historical material that John F. Wilson, ever mindful of Peter Gay's critique, reclassified the sermons as "theological" in their point of view. To the extent that we can discern Edwards's hopes for his final *summa*, it surely would have been a means of foregrounding a sovereign God whose glory and love are communicated throughout the whole of creation, qualities that are also embodied in the dynamic unfolding of salvation history. As Marsden aptly remarks, Edwards was always in search of a holistic point of view. The final project was surely one that would enable him to both describe and extol the glorious "harmony" of all things, the realm of pure being or beauty in which the redeemed were able to participate.

Complexity and ambivalence return to center stage in Amy Plantinga Pauw's careful study of Edwards and the Trinity. Her disciplinary location as a theologian serves her well, for she brings to her topic an awareness not only of Edwards's immediate historical situation but also of models of the Trinity within Christian thought from Augustine to the present day. One aspect of that situation was the Enlightenment rationalists' dismantling of the Trinity and what Pauw regards as the "weakness" of the orthodox defense. But a more important aspect of the situation is that Edwards inherited two versions of the Trinity, each with

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its advantages and difficulties. His predecessors in the Reformed tradition, be it Peter van Mastricht or Puritans such as Richard Sibbes,[11] affirmed a "social" model of the Trinity that emphasized "the love and intimate fellowship among the members of the Trinity, by likening them to a family, a society, or a community of friends" (p. 30). Within a second model that dates from Augustine, the emphasis falls on the Godhead as knowing and loving itself. In Edwards's appropriation of this model, the Holy Spirit becomes the means by which God as a "communicative being" manifests his love to the saints and encloses them within the divine union or harmony represented by the Trinity itself.

It is beyond the scope of this review to specify how Edwards reiterated or reworked each of these models or why he employed one or the other in certain situations. Rather, let me underscore what seems to me the great merit of Pauw's book, to draw us into Edwards's theological workshop by showing us the shifting modalities of his Trinitarianism and, as she points out repeatedly, his flexibility or "ambivalence" about which model to prefer. This ambivalence emerges with particular acuteness in her chapter dealing with the relationship between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace; if the former is about God's overflowing love, the latter is about a Christ who comes in love *and* judgment. In it, too, the covenantal language runs the risk of sliding into "bilateralism." If the logic of the first is implicitly universalist, the explicit logic of the second is that only some are saved. Because Pauw recovers these and other tensions so skillfully, her story is historically contextual in ways that go well beyond Brown or Zakai. Moreover, her way of proceeding may be regarded as a rebuke, though modestly expressed, to the many interpreters of Edwards who regard him as a supremely logical system-maker.[12] This rebuke resonates with her own situation as a Reformed theologian who quotes Rowan Williams urging us to practice a "generously expansive, assimilative and confident approach to theological language" (p. 42), the very approach she finds in Edwards's typology. She seems also to feel that her tradition has placed too much emphasis on a narrow view of divine sovereignty. Though Pauw is not a modernizer, working on Edwards has nourished her own Trinitarianism and especially her preference for a theological method that moves beyond "the abstract" to articulating "the web of interconnected signs, relationships, and actions within which specific

11 The debate within American Puritan studies over "preparationism" casts a shadow over Pauw's preference for Richard Sibbes and John Cotton as Edwards's predecessors, despite there being no evidence that Edwards read either and his lavish citing of Cotton's great opponent, Thomas Shepard.

12 Pauw's chapter on "The Trinity and Pastoral Perplexities," which encompasses the "communion controversy" of 1748–50, is also a rebuke to historians like myself who have largely ignored the connections between ecclesiology and other branches of theology.

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terms are deployed" (p. 188), a statement guaranteed to warm the heart of any intellectual or cultural historian.

As with Brown and history, so for Pauw and the Trinity the ultimate question is, how would this doctrine have figured in Edwards's unwritten *summa*? Construing the Trinity as "relational," Pauw argues that this relationality is the central theme not only of Edwards's metaphysics but also of redemption history. As she imagines the *unwritten* "History of the Work of Redemption," it would be about the "communicative" action of the Trinity (though especially, perhaps, the Holy Spirit). Creation thus becomes subsumed within redemption in a manner that embodies the separate yet harmonious aspects of the Trinity. As Pauw so rightly indicates, the Trinity for Edwards was not merely a standard theological topos but something much more, a means of restating a theological vision grounded in an understanding of God and the Trinity as relational and communicative.

Collectively, these books aspire to accomplish what all good intellectual history has as its goal, to make sense of a major figure in the context of his times. They aspire as well to explicate what made Edwards singular if not unique. In my reading, the arguments and evidence in all four (though Pauw in some respects is an interesting exception) make it difficult to sever Edwards from his Puritan predecessors, the scholastics he first encountered as a student at Yale, and the anti-deist apologists of the eighteenth century. These books also remind us that the quest for context is rarely of interest solely for its own sake. What shapes our interest in Edwards shapes our version of his times. The elasticity of Edwards that Pauw is almost alone in recognizing surely is a sign that past and present in Edwards scholarship will continue to play tricks on one another.

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