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Book Reviews

Gareth Jones, Editor

The Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology

Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
(Blackwell Companion to Religion)

2004. xx + 586 pages, ISBN: 0631-20685-X US\$144

Due to the rapidly increasing specialization of theology, most of us find it more and more difficult to keep generally informed and updated in that field. In response to this, we currently experience a flood of new handbooks trying to aid us in that quest. The present specimen of the genre, edited by Gareth Jones of Christ Church University College in Canterbury (UK), is a good one, partly because it has chosen a number of well established researchers (including some typical evangelicals) to write about their particular areas, but partly also because it has limited the number of subject entries to 32, which, in a book of nearly six hundred pages, means that each subject gets some real attention. The book is divided in five major parts. First, seven articles offer a general survey of theology and the practice of faith, theology and biblical studies, theology and philosophy, etc. then come four articles on history, namely patristic, medieval, reformation and modernity. Next are five articles on some particular themes, such as trinity, incarnation, redemption, eschatology, and church and sacraments; followed by eight entries on certain key figures, such as Schleiermacher, Barth and Bonhoeffer. And finally, eight contributions on certain contemporary issues, such as Christianity and other religions, economics and social justice, race, feminism, etc.

The major problem with this book is not what it includes, but what it excludes. Even in a typically British volume, where each entry tries to relate its topic to the British context, it is surprising to find that non-Western church life and theology are more or less totally absent. A few references to Latin-American liberation theology pop up here and there, but the fact that sub-Saharan Africa is now *the* Christian continent seems to be

unknown to the editor and authors, in spite of their wish to present a survey of modern theology. Can the book, on this background, be recommended for African institutions? Well, in the same way as Western theological students eventually will have to familiarize themselves with African theology and church life, African students, too, need to familiarize themselves with Western theology and church life. An, as such, the present book is a good introduction and well worth knowing about. Nevertheless, the deficiency in scope combined with the remarkable price will probably prevent even many academic libraries in Africa from actually buying it.

Professor Knut Holter

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Richard A. Bailey & Gregory A. Wills (eds)
The Salvation of Souls: Nine Previously
Unpublished Sermons on the Call of
Ministry and the Gospel

(By Jonathan Edwards)

Wheaton Illinois: Crossway Books 2002

190 pages, ISBN: 1-58134-451-1

Background of the Author

Jonathan Edwards lived from 1703 to 1758. He was one of the initiators of the first Great Awakening and one of the greatest preachers during that revival, that is, the first transatlantic revival in the 18th century. Edwards was the son of a Congregational minister. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, also was a minister of the Lord who was in charge of the congregation in Northampton, Massachusetts until his death in 1729. Edwards had served as assistant to his grandfather from 1727 to 1729. From 1729 to 1750 he was the only minister of the congregation in Northampton. He had a bachelor's degree from Yale which he had received in 1726. (For more background information on Jonathan Edwards, see Elwell (ed) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* 1984, 344)

From 1750 to his death in 1758, he ministered at Stockbridge, Massachusetts to congregations of Indians and whites. He died on March 22, 1758 as a result of being inoculated for smallpox. In 1750 Edwards was dismissed from Northampton congregation due to matters of principle. He was dismissed because he strongly held the opinion that Holy Communion should be partaken only by people who had professed faith in Christ, those who were judged by the church to be converted. Previously Holy Communion was partaken by anyone, even those who were professedly unconverted. That had been the case during Stoddard's, and even Edwards', early pastoral ministry. (Bailey and Wills (eds) 2002, 16)

Review of the Book

In the introductory remarks by the editors, it is said that right from the beginning the focus of Edwards' ministry was the salvation of sinners. From 1734 to 1735 it is said that Northampton experienced a remarkable revival in which virtually the whole town grew concerned about their eternal welfare and many professed saving faith. Edwards described this event in his *Faithful Narratives of the Surprising Work of God* which was published in 1737. Edwards published with the hope that it would prompt others to pray and preach for the salvation of sinners. This book is said to have set the stage for the vast transatlantic revival which was kindled in 1740 through the salvation preaching of itinerant George Whitefield. Edwards is said to have played a leading role and to have encouraged the awakening by preaching and publishing (Bailey and Wills, 16).

As the subtitle of this book states, the book is a composition of nine previously unpublished sermons on the call of ministry and the gospel. Only one of the nine sermons, that is, *Ministers to Preach Not Their Own Wisdom but the Word of God*, has been previously published in the *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* (Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 1999). To Edwards, the primary work of the ministry is saving sinners; (see topic of sermon number 9 below). All nine sermons define the nature and the task of the minister of the gospel, as can be seen in the topics:

1. The Death of Faithful Ministers a Sign of God's Displeasure: Isaiah 3:12.
2. Ministers Need the Power of God: 2 Corinthians 4:7.
3. The Kind of Preaching People Want: Micah 2:11.

4. The Minister before the Judgment Seat of Christ: Luke 10:17-18.
5. Deacons to Care for the Body, Ministers for the Soul: Romans 12:4-8.
6. Ministers to Preach Not Their Own Wisdom but the Word of God: 1 Corinthians 2:11-13.
7. Pastor and People Must Look to God: Acts 14:23.
8. Preaching the Gospel Brings Poor Sinners to Christ: Acts 16:9.
9. The Work of the Ministry Is Saving Sinners: Acts 20:28.

Several of these sermons, especially sermons number 4 to 9, were preached during ordination services, during the installation of pastors and deacons. The first sermon was written and preached by Edwards as the congregation of the Northampton church was grieving the deaths of some of the town's leading men, including Solomon Stoddard, their pastor who also was Edwards' grandfather.

Just as Harry S. Stout (Jonathan Edwards Professor of American Christianity at Yale University) points out, this book should "be indispensable reading for seminarians, ministers, and church groups interested in engaging America's greatest philosopher, theologian, and pastor" (Blurb on back cover of *The Salvation of Souls*). Those who have previously been blessed by second-hand testimony about Jonathan Edwards and his achievements for the Lord will now get fresh first-hand blessings from God through the direct sermons of this great man of God. Those who are encountering him for the first time will equally be blessed tremendously.

It is obvious from the contents of each sermon that Edwards did thorough study of the texts which he used for his sermons. Each sermon is based on a main

text which is expounded by use of cross references for support and enlightenment. For example, sermon number 4: "The Minister before the Judgment Seat of Christ" which is based on Luke 10:17-18 as the main text is supported by, among others, Hebrews 13:17 where the ministers of the Gospel are enjoined to watch over the souls of the people whom they are put in charge of as people who must give an account. He also uses

Jeremiah 31:3 to show how God rejoices when people get saved and are made happy for they are objects of His great love.

Richard A. Bailey and Gregory A. Wills have done a superb job of editing and formatting the material according to modern principles of publication. They have rendered Edwards' contractions in their full-word form; for example, "han't" has been rendered as "has not" or "have not," "tis" to "it is," etc. But they have retained some of Edwards' archaic usages; for example, "aspeaking," and "abegging." They have modernized verb forms; for example, "doth" to "does," and "hath" to "has." They also have supplied punctuations and capitalization in accordance with modern literary standards.

Although these sermons were primarily targeting the American hearers of Edwards' day, the reader will find them to be equally challenging and inspiring to people of today in all parts of the Christian world. It is as if Edwards knew that they would live that long and be helpful even to Christians in Africa today. A glance at the title of each sermon awakens the desire to read it at once and get for oneself the riches therein. Indeed, reading each sermon satisfies the reader's expectation and curiosity which is whetted by each sermon title. For example, in the first sermon: *The Death of Faithful Ministers a Sign of God's Displeasure*, Edwards sounded the alarm that the death of the great men of God in Northampton may have been due to the fact that religion was declining, family and government were weakening, and licentiousness among the youth was spreading. Isn't this the same case today, even at an alarming expansion speed, in Africa and other parts of the world? Edwards' sermons are timeless and universal. To this day, they inspire individual Christians and the church as a whole towards revival.

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