Rhys Bezzant (ed.)

Edwards, Germany, and Transatlantic Contexts

The Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University

V&R

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

New Directions in Jonathan Edwards Studies

Edited by
Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema
and Adriaan C. Neele

Volume 3

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

Rhys Bezzant (ed.)

Edwards, Germany, and Transatlantic Contexts

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

With 6 figures

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data available online: https://dnb.de.

Cover design: SchwabScantechnik, Göttingen
Typesetting: le-tex publishing services, Leipzig

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Verlage | www.vandenhoeck-ruprecht-verlage.com

ISSN 2566–7327
ISBN 978–3–647–55461–7

Table of Contents

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

Introduction

Like moths to the flame, students of modern evangelicalism are easily drawn to Anglo-American scholarship. Those of us who work in nations of the British Commonwealth have almost intuitively assumed that our sense of self as Protestant Christians can be attributed to our historical place in the British Empire. Those readers who seek in Jonathan Edwards the "American Augustine" have frequently come to lionise his writing because he has contributed so profoundly to the development of later US theological – perhaps national – history. Even those scholars of evangelical history outside the English-speaking world often turn to Edwards as a way of understanding the impact of the American church, or American missions, on their native land, whether that be Brazil or Japan, Korea or Australia. In Europe, it might be that Edwards can help explain why the American experience of revivalism seems so foreign to their own Christian identity. The size and influence of North American scholarship and publishing nurtures its own gravitational pull, and it easily blinds us to other contributions to the study, impact, and contexts of evangelical history.

It is for these reasons (and more besides) that a book like this is so important. For as much as studies of Jonathan Edwards need to be understood in his British North American context, with an eye to the Anglo-American world of his immediate followers, it is his trans-Atlantic context, both during and after the eighteenth century, that is of critical importance in understanding his world as his world understood itself. The Atlantic was not just an ocean to cross but had also become an identity to embrace. The wealth of the growing British Empire had in the eighteenth century been built on the triangular trade of slaves from West Africa to the British colonies, sugar from the Caribbean to sweeten the tea of the homeland, as well as manufactured goods from Britain being sold in Africa as well as North America. Further, the largest cities of the American colonies, like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, or Charleston, were still nothing compared to the size of London or Glasgow, reinforcing the notion that the colonies were dependent for their prosperity and influence on the life of the metropolis. The trans-Atlantic Republic of Letters consisting of a multidirectional coterie of thinkers, set Edwards and his New World colleagues within the bigger frame of reference of European thinkers, which also funded an openness to, and appreciation of, Enlightenment categories with hopes for a brighter future. Indeed, as Caroline Winterer has pointed out: "Enlightenment was a phenomenon of the age of empires." Correspondence between America and Europe was the result of Empire as well as a factor in allowing thinkers to "venture new ideas, ponder strange possibilities, and juggle uncertainties more freely than

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

in publications".[1] As Britain developed its global Empire, so its proxy wars with France in North America (and elsewhere) gave the British colonies there a sense of occupying a strategic role in the Empire's worldwide significance, until at least the British Crown asked for some measure of recompense for its defence later in the later eighteenth century. Edwards, as a slave-owner, voracious reader of books, connoisseur of hot chocolate, energetic correspondent, and frontiersman experiencing conflict between the English, the French and the native Americans, was profoundly shaped by his trans-Atlantic context, even when his debt to this world was muted.

This book, however, does more than set Edwards within the Anglosphere, as powerful as it was to shape identity. In this volume, we want to engage with a sphere of theological and philosophical exchange which is less frequently commented upon in Edwards scholarship, namely the ways in which Edwards can be positioned or understood in relation to the Teutosphere, another significant element in the transatlantic context. His correspondence, reading, situation in a theological tradition, and ultimately sense of self were enriched by his interactions with continental systematic writing and church revivals, not least in the German-speaking lands. Indeed, learning about revivals in Germany confirmed Edwards's sense that his own experiences were part of something "great".[2] Focus has been given to his engagement with Scotland in a publication ten years ago.[3] But there have been no other collections of essays investigating another cultural context, though the publication this year of *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards* includes several chapters exploring the reception of his work in each of the continents of the world.[4] A focussed national study like this one draws concentrated attention to themes, gives an opportunity to eavesdrop debates which otherwise are overlooked, and makes available to an English-speaking readership scholarship from the perspective of continental European authors. As Stievermann has written elsewhere, "Due to the prevalent monolingualism of the discipline and the long ascendancy of exceptionalist models in American studies based on 'Puritan origins' theories, the rich

1 C. Winterer, *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 12, 11.

2 A. Zakai, "Jonathan Edwards, the Enlightenment, and the Formation of Protestant Tradition in America", in E. Mancke/C. Shammas (ed.), *The Creation of the British Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 206.

3 See for example K.P. Minkema/A.C. Neele/K. van Andel (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards and Scotland* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2011).

4 D.A. Sweeney/J. Stievermann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021.)

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

archives of German-language literatures written in or in exchange with colonial America are almost as neglected as the sources of material culture …"[5].

In this book can be found, for example, essays by Ryan Hoselton and Ken Minkema, which draw attention to Edwards's interest in eminent writers and ministerial practitioners of German-speaking Europe whose work provided immediate impetus to Edwards's own output, whether addressing the Halle Pietists and their commitment to works of love, or authors like Lampe, Pfaff, Wolff or Stapfer, his theological contemporaries. Remarkably, even when later philosophers and thinkers of Germany were not aware of Edwards's oeuvre, there can be traced common systematic insights or understandings of how to parse ultimate reality, given that Edwards's capacity to think and to write were of the highest order and engaged with thinkers, whom later Germans would also read. He may have lived on the perimeter of Empire, but Edwards's passions and pursuits were interwoven with the bigger debates of the metropolitan centres of Europe, which were themselves representative of the greater Western Christian tradition. His writings on ontology, for example, prove to be productive conversation partners for scholars whose interests span continental and American philosophy, so authors in this book, like Walter Schultz on Kant, Philip Fisk on Baumgarten, or Thorsten Dietz on Schleiermacher, demonstrate how comparing Edwards with noted philosophers and theologians can sharpen our approach to both. Katharina Krause addresses issues in practical theology and material history, drawing on the sense of sight and the purpose of meditation for her investigation, which were so central to Edwards's concerns. Still others in this book set themselves the task of placing Edwards is his wider European historical context, for instance Rhys Bezzant on the historiography of Luther and later secularisation, Willem van Vlastuin on the Dutch Awakening, and Jan Stievermann on Edwards's legacy in the Prussian Awakening of the early nineteenth century. Though there will yet be many avenues in Edwards's relationship with Germans and Germany to explore, this book is a taster in how Edwards through his networks negotiated a much larger theological world, how he can be understood against that world, and how his own ministry in preaching and writing have impacted the world beyond Massachusetts. These may have been contexts beyond his immediate ken, but not beyond his capacity to shape.

How appropriate then that this book has been brought to the world by a German publishing house! I want to thank Izaak de Hulster and the editorial team at Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht for their help in such a busy time for their company, and to acknowledge the fine labours of the scholars of three continents who have

5 J. Stievermann, "Introduction", in J. Stievermann/O. Scheiding (ed.), *A Peculiar Mixture: German-Language Cultures and Identities in Eighteenth-Century North America* (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 14.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

contributed to the volume despite the uncertainties and challenges of research under covid conditions. It is worth noting that contributors to this volume also represent the value of the network of Jonathan Edwards Centers around the world, drawing together here reflections on Edwards in the context of German ministry and scholarship, written in Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Australia and the US. I trust that this book might encourage the life of the church wherever it is read, most of all Germany.

Rhys Bezzant
on the Feast of Bede, historian of the church

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

Rhys Bezzant

Telling the Story from Luther's Break of Dawn to Edwards's Glorious Gospel Light

As Luther lay on his deathbed, there was certainly no doubt about his ongoing belief in the Gospel he preached: he refused any sacramental assistance and affirmed the desperate state of humans in need of salvation: "we are all beggars – this is true".[1] However, beyond that room in Eisleben, there was significant doubt about the immediate future of the cause, given the precarious political situation both within Electoral Saxony and beyond in the Empire. In this fragile environment, memorials to Luther were soon being constructed and his story narrated, even by Melanchthon at his funeral. Other reformers would subsequently take up the baton, some of whom he had previously resented as rival champions in the field. But through these carriers of tradition, the Protestant story would be retold and often thereby remade to capture the complexity of reality or to shape it. In some later narratives Luther would even be blamed reductionistically for the problems of modernity, whether fairly or not. Luther's part in the historiography of modernity is an important if not always easy story to tell, for good history-writing acknowledges nuanced interrelationships, diffuse webs of causation, the honesty to note correlations where causation is too ambitious, and of course (where relevant) the overlay of theological considerations. We need historical reflection because patterns of influence or dependence cannot be reduced to ideas alone.

Serving as a case study in history-writing, we can investigate Jonathan Edwards, a North American Protestant serving in Luther's Augustinian wake, who based his identity not on local contingencies alone but saw himself on a world stage incorporating broader historical streams into his identity. As Carol Ball avers, "Even more important to Edwards than … social and cultural associations … was the burgeoning sense of the authority of his own personal piety and special insight into

1 Some parts of this chapter appeared in Rhys S. Bezzant, "Semper Reformanda: The Revivalists and the Reformers", in Mark D. Thompson, Colin Bale, and Edward Loane (ed.), *Celebrating the Reformation: Its Legacy and Continuing Relevance* (London: Apollos, 2017), and are used with permission. I thank Justin Hawkins for reading an earlier draft and providing as ever helpfully pertinent feedback.

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of my late father, John William Bezzant, who died peacefully in the Lord during its composition, and whose enthusiasm for my thinking about Luther and Edwards was always a surprise and a delight.

Volker Leppin, *Luther: A Late Medieval Life* (trans. Rhys S. Bezzant and Karen Roe; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 132, 133.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

God's presence and activity in the world".[2] In fact, his part in a longer theological story is the chief way we get to know how he understood his ministry, for he was reticent to share many insights concerning his own soul. It was not of course that he disengaged from the world immediately around him, but it was visions of God's grand design that captivated his mind and motivated his actions, even when frustrations in Northampton occupied his attention. The primary goal of this chapter, then, is to recount how Edwards saw his place in Protestant history with Luther as the chief point of reference, offering a deeper dive into his theological identity than is normally offered when his dependence on writers from the seventeenth century alone is highlighted.[3]

Secondly, I want to situate the relationship between Edwards and Luther in a broader conversation about the merits of the so-called secularisation thesis, a sociological analysis of the development of the modern world, which is sometimes used to describe generically the decline of the practice of religion or a "decrease in organised public religiosity",[4] or on other occasions the failure of religious concepts to offer a sufficiently coherent interpretation of the world. For yet others it refers not to practice or theory but to the place of religion in the centre or on the margins of social life, irrespective of the number of religious adherents or the consistency of its teachings.[5] Though one among many theorists,[6] Charles Taylor is approached as a leading philosopher in the field, and takes a position which highlights the development of pluralism in order to understand secularisation, which "consists, among other things, of a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace".[7] He recognises that, though

2 Carol Ball, *Approaching Jonathan Edwards: The Evolution of a Persona* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 161.

3 We do acknowledge however that seventeenth century continental dogmaticians were leading conversation partners for him, as he sought out allies wherever he could: "His theological formation was in the Puritan and continental post-Reformation traditions … He was a kind of intellectual magpie, gathering up useful material wherever he found it." See Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 3–4.

4 Kenneth G. Appold, "Luther's Abiding Significance for World Protestantism", in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomír Batka (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 604. See further J.C.D. Clark, "Secularization and Modernization: The Failure of a 'Grand Narrative'", *The Historical Journal* 55 (2012) 161–94.

5 See an outline of the application of these theories in David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), ch. 8.

6 See for example Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), Robert R. Reilly, *America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020), or Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

7 Taylor, *Secular Age,* 3.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

problematised in modernity, belief in and commitment to divine engagement with mundane reality has not been eradicated from our contemporary world and retains some philosophical saliency, though as a theological commitment it remains outside the methods of sociology to critique. In presenting the historiographical relationship between Luther and Edwards, I want to relativise theories of the process of secularisation against which backdrop Edwards might be located, putting his reactionary finger in the leaking metaphysical dyke of Protestantism. In Edwards's estimation, Luther's ideas did not contribute to the disenchantment of the world, which Edwards then by his own ministerial labours would feel duty-bound to reverse. Edwards certainly took his part in the epistemological revolution of modernity, but saw himself indebted to Luther for his own understanding of the enchantment of the world and did not interpret their relationship by means of a narrative of declension. Edwards was an optimist about God's ongoing engagement in the world. Rather than speak of decline, Edwards gloried in the expectation of an increase of divine light.

1. "After the Dismal Night of Darkness": An Apocalyptic Account

Edwards and Luther were not worlds apart, despite geographical and chronological distance. Edwards was cut from the same theological cloth as Martin Luther, though it would be too much to say that they sang from the same hymn book – Edwards resisted for the longest time using any hymns at all! Like Luther, Edwards's daily energies were spent not just in abstract theological disputation, but in promoting the cause of the Gospel in local church settings. We must not let Luther's formal status as professor distract us from his parochial commitments, chiefly at St Mary's Wittenberg. They upheld similar views of volition, sin, and salvation (even if their historical context predisposed them to view freedom in slightly different ways).[8] In soteriology and ecclesiology, Edwards inherited Luther's opposition towards Roman Catholicism, and in eschatology he absorbed Luther's anti-papalism, for having used the language of Antichrist in his fight with the papacy Luther had reintroduced apocalyptic thinking into the mainstream of the western Christian tradition and placed his Protestantism on a war footing. Set within a cosmic frame of reference, both Luther and Edwards made spiritual renewal their great cause.[9]

8 See Obbie Todd Tyler, 'Luther v. Edwards: The Human Will,' https://edwardsianblog.wordpress.com/2016/08/28/luther-v-edwards-the-human-will/?fbclid=IwAR3iu4QGw1BlxkOvv7ZDOeURCp1–KRBH_z2UvJjkSeUrbwkxWu8A5c_ywcU. Accessed February 5, 2021.

9 See C. Scott Hendrix, "Martin Luther's Reformation of Spirituality", in Timothy J. Wengert (ed.), *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 244, and D.A. Sweeney, "'The Most Important Thing in the World': Jonathan Edwards on Rebirth

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

Though Edwards was not of the mind that it would be achieved in his own lifetime, he wanted to bring the Reformation to its consummation, to play his part like Puritans and Pietists before him in such an exalted project.[10] He recognised the needs of the church of his own day but did not thereby despair, for the expectation of better days ahead was an expected pattern with the coming of the Kingdom of God:

> So again, before the glorious times of the church commence, the church's wine runs very low, and is almost out; what they alouted with is water—human learning, sapless speculations and dispensations, and dead morality. Formerly the Christian church had wine, as in the times of the primitive church, and in the times of the Reformation, but now their wine is just gone. But after the beginning of those glorious times, their water shall be turned into wine, and much better wine than ever they had before.[11]

Not surprisingly, Edwards listed Luther in his Catalogue of Reading and lent a copy of Luther's sermons to his mentee, Samuel Hopkins, for his edification.[12] Most important of all, beyond the details of generic Protestant systematic commitments, Edwards saw his identity in apocalyptic terms, occupying the very same stage in salvation history as Luther, which provided the foundation for his confidence. With an historicist approach to reading the book of Revelation, believing that each chapter in the book tracked with a subsequent stage of history after Christ, Edwards placed the two witnesses of Revelation 11 as pre-Reformation figures:

> 33. CHAPTER 11:3. "And I will give power to my two witnesses." By it may partly be intended those two nations, that were all along witnesses to Christianity, viz. the Waldenses and Albigenses.
> 45. CHAPTER 11:3 … Hereby it is with me undoubted, that respect is had to Moses and Elias. For these witnesses are two prophets … But yet, I believe respect is also had

---

and Its Implications for Christian Life and Thought", in C. Chun/K.C. Strobel (ed.), *Regeneration, Revival, and Creation: Religious Experience and the Purposes of God in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2020) 27–52.

10 Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1979), 241.

11 Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 15; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 359.

12 Jonathan Edwards, "'Catalogue' of Reading", in Peter J. Thuesen (ed.), *Catalogues of Books* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 26; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 126, and Edwards, "Account Book", *WJE* 26:338.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

> to Zerubbabel and Joshua … who were God's instruments for the rebuilding and re-establishing of the church after the Babylonish captivity …[13]

This enabled him to insert himself into the same phase of salvation history as Luther, between the fifth and sixth vials (or bowls in modern parlance) of Revelation 16:

> If these things that have been spoken of, are intended in the prophecy of the sixth vial, it affords, as I conceive, great reason to hope that the beginning of that glorious work of God's Spirit, which in the progress and issue of it, will overthrow Antichrist, and introduce the glory of latter days, is not very far off. Mr. Lowman has, I think, put it beyond all reasonable doubt, that the 5th vial was poured out in the time of the Reformation. It also appears satisfyingly, by his late exposition, that take one vial with another, it has not been 200 years from the beginning of one vial to the beginning of another, but about 180 years. But it is now about 220 years since the 5th vial began to be poured; and it is a long time since the main effects of it have been finished. And therefore if the 6th vial han't already begun to be poured, it may well be speedily expected.[14]

As much as we might commit the "syllabus error" and identify the Reformation and the Great Awakening as two distinct and divided phases of history, most importantly Edwards was not of this mind. Indeed, the "errand into the wilderness" in north America as flight from the Antichrist was commonly held to be a way of bringing the Reformation to its true end,[15] thereby situating Edwards within the Reformation "moment" not just by virtue of an apocalyptic timetable, but closer to home as he participated geographically in that very errand. America was a new canvas, even if God continued to paint the same story:

> And 'tis worthy to be noted that America was discovered about the time of the Reformation, or but little before: which Reformation was the first thing that God did towards the glorious renovation of the world, after it had sunk into the depths of darkness and ruin under the great antichristian apostasy. So that as soon as this new world is (as it were) created, and stands forth in view, God presently goes about doing some great thing to make way for

13 Jonathan Edwards, "Notes on the Apocalypse", in Stephen J. Stein (ed.), *Apocalyptic Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 5; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 137, 144.

14 Edwards, "An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture-Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time", *WJE* 5:421.

15 Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 11.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

> the introduction of the church's latter-day glory, that is to have its first seat in, and is to take its rise from that new world.[16]

Such an apocalyptic frame of reference was further fuelled by more recent historical events. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 reprised earlier anti-Catholic sentiment in England, at the same time that anti-French sentiment was growing in North America. To maintain the United Kingdom's Protestant identity, the British Crown after 1714 was granted to the German Protestant House of Hanover, provoking ongoing Roman Catholic opposition which supported the Stuart line and the Jacobite rebellion of Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745. Edwards in his own writings affirmed British victories over the forces of the Antichrist, for example the defeat of the French at Louisbourg in 1745, or on the spiritual plane lionised victories over the Antichrist during times of refreshment and revival in Northampton in 1734–35, or 1740–41. His international perspective on the work of God in history empowered him to see his own work related to the trajectory of the Reformation, which was for him accomplished in several steps yet was prophesied as a unitary concept:

> And if I may be allowed humbly to offer what appears to me to be the truth with relation to the rise and fall of Antichrist; it is this. As the power of Antichrist, and the corruption of the apostate church, rose not at once, but by several notable steps and degrees; so it will in the like manner fall: and that divers steps and seasons of destruction to the spiritual Babylon, and revival and advancement of the true church, are prophesied of under one. Though it be true, that there is some particular event, that prevails above all others in the intention of the prophecy, some one remarkable season of the destruction of the Church of Rome and papal power and corruption, and advancement of true religion, that the prophecies have a principal respect to.[17]

Indeed, when Edwards surveyed the history of the work of redemption and divided it into three periods (from creation to Christ, Christ's earthly ministry, then from Christ's exaltation to his return), he further subdivided the last period in order to give due attention to the story of the progress of the church in history. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was significant in itself, but was not a turning point without relationship to the more important progress of the defeat of the Antichrist in its chronological development:

16 Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival", in Clarence C. Goen (ed.), *The Great Awakening* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 4; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 355–356.

17 Edwards, "Humble Attempt", *WJE* 5:407–408.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

> This [the Reformation] was begun about 220 years ago, first in Saxony in Germany by the preaching of Martin Luther, who being stirred in his spirit to see the horrid practices of the popish clergy, and having set himself diligently to inquire after truth by the study of the holy Scriptures and the writings of the ancient fathers of the church, very openly and boldly decried the corruptions and usurpations of the Romish church in his preachings and writings … it went on by the labors of Luther and Melanchthon in Germany, and Zwingli in Switzerland … and particularly Calvin who appeared something after the beginning of the Reformation … Thus God began gloriously to revive his church again and advance the kingdom of his Son after such a **dismal night of darkness** as had been before from the rise of Antichrist to that time.[18]

In using the language of light, Edwards is doing nothing here that Luther had not already done. In typically broad-brush strokes, Luther had set his opposition to medieval scholasticism in terms of darkness and light: "the whole Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light."[19] Neither Luther nor Edwards want to hide their scriptural light under a philosophical bushel, and are inclined to see its removal in apocalyptic terms.

For Edwards, God's victory was not outside history but within it, and the progressive stages of the victory were powered by effusions of God's Spirit. Doctrinal recalibration was certainly a gift of the sixteenth century Reformers to the church, but Edwards when treating Luther appears to draw more critical intelligence from the bigger story than from particular theological notions that Luther may have defended. As Zakai explains:

> Edwards's philosophy of history shows that he was true heir of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant and Puritan historiography, which was founded upon an apocalyptic interpretation of history, although he radically transformed some of its basic assumptions. Edwards inherited the quest to establish the closest possible link between prophecy and history … Yet, in contrast to the Protestant assumption that the historical process is based ultimately on social, political, and ecclesiastical changes, such as the struggle against the Church of Rome, Edwards held that the principal source governing the historical process is God's redemptive plan.[20]

18 Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 9; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 421–422. Emphasis mine.

19 Martin Luther, "A Disputation against Scholastic Theology", in J. Pelikan/H.C. Oswald/H.T. Lehmann (ed.), *Career of the Reformer* (Luther's Works 31; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 12.

20 Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 161–162.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

In making common cause with Luther's broad eschatological framework, Edwards was provided with an escape clause to look beyond his local identity and its origins in particular English ecclesiastical debates to understand himself in more generically Protestant terms. Edwards's apocalyptic providentialism sought to critique the blindness of the modern world to the presence of divine power, rather than oppose all social or political developments since the Reformation. With his acceptance of the growing power of imperial Britain, and of the waves of philosophical modernity couched in the language of light, Edwards took refuge in a new kind of internationalist Protestant identity as the best strategic path to defend the doctrines of grace, with Luther as his cover. This "Protestant interest" was "ecumenically Protestant" and offered a broad canopy, under which many could gather to agitate against Roman Catholic resurgence, leading to an openness to new patterns of Protestant unity and a more cosmopolitan identity in New England.[21]

2. "This Spiritual and Divine Illumination": The Centre of their Story

Edwards believed that he occupied the same eschatological time as Luther, and Luther believed that he was himself a harbinger of light, even if he grew increasingly frustrated that his prophetic ministry was going unheeded.[22] If there was not consistent systematic convergence between them, there was at least ecumenical camaraderie. Indeed, underlying their eschatology was a deeply shared commitment to divine grace, understood experientially as well as intellectually. Though they breathed different epistemological air, both shared the conviction that the blessing of Christian discipleship was an experience of the closeness of the Lord, with common theological ground between eighteenth-century evangelicals and sixteenth-century Reformers mapped in the new birth, "a vital truth of Christianity, and indeed of Luther's Reformation doctrine".[23] Both Luther and Edwards upheld as central the belief that God would communicate powerfully and directly to the soul. Luther encouraged preachers to "take pains to be simple and direct",[24] and Edwards made "spiritual regeneration … the *sine qua non* of true religion in the world".[25] Indeed,

21 Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 52, 70, 72.

22 Despite feeling disappointed that history had not rolled out as he earlier expected, Luther nevertheless maintained in later life his apocalyptic views, summarised in the Schmalkaldic Articles (1537) and outlined in the introduction to his translation of the book of Daniel. See Leppin, *Luther,* 113, 119.

23 Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther for Evangelicals: A Reintroduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 104.

24 Martin Luther, *Table Talk* (Luther's Works 54; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 236.

25 Sweeney, "'The Most Important Thing'", 52.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

with vernacular communication as a reinforcing strategy, Leppin has argued that Luther insisted on "interpreting the text [of the Bible] as a direct address to the believer,"[26] and Brad Gregory argues that "Luther's pioneering approach of appealing directly to the laity about religious matters is in some ways the most astonishing aspect of the movement".[27] Joshua Mitchell has argued that Luther's profound reconception of human equality under God, refuting the "spiritual superiority of the priest over the layman," has shaped both the nature of Christian discipleship, and the significance of more democratic expressions of human association, for "[h]ierarchy, where it exists, is conventional, not fixed in the order of things".[28] For Luther, grace nurtured the sense of individual agency and reasserted the spiritual dignity of every believer, which evangelicals like Edwards in the Puritan tradition came to share.[29] In resisting "the rise of mechanical philosophy," Edwards made natural philosophy "inseparable from his new sense of the immediate presence of God".[30]

Though Luther wrote on many topics, he was no systematician in modern terms, yet his protest was extraordinarily focused, centred on a radical re-conception of the nature of grace and its application to human lives captured in the doctrine of justification by faith. If grace in the late medieval world had been commodified, with the church as the clearing-house of exchange overseen by the mediating power of the priesthood and exemplified in penance as preparation for the mass, then spiritual renewal would only be possible when sermons taught, theology defended, and sacraments instantiated, an experience of grace as direct encounter with the living Lord.[31] Of course, Luther's insights did not come overnight, even though Protestant hagiographical accounts of his breakthrough might intimate this. His insights were hard won, arrived at in haltering fashion, and only gradually were formed together into some kind of coherent shape. But their object was to give to every believer a confidence in God's nearness and therefore accessibility. Divine initiative to come close subverted the human psychological inclination to force

26 Leppin, *Luther,* 21.

27 Brad S. Gregory, *Rebel in the Ranks: Martin Luther, the Reformation, and the Conflicts That Continue to Shape Our World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 105.

28 Carl R. Trueman, "Reformers, Puritans and Evangelicals: The Lay Connection", in D.W. Lovegrove (ed.), *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (London: Routledge, 2002), 18, 19; Joshua Mitchell, "The Equality of the All under the One in Luther and Rousseau: Thoughts on Christianity and Political Theory", *Journal of Religion* 72 (1992) 351–65, on p.356.

29 Lovelace, *American Pietism,* 94.

30 Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 130.

31 Lyndal Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London: The Bodley Head, 2016), 84, 117, 167.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

God's hand in order to grasp power through superstitious mechanisms.[32] Luther reacted against a mechanistic and impersonal understanding of grace and replaced it with an organic one. His agenda was not to demolish the medieval church but instead to renovate it on firmer foundations. Of course, Luther did contribute to the process of "demystification," which promoted the "duty of the Church … to proclaim grace, not to mediate purification".[33] He also uphold a kind of declericalisation.[34] But this process did not result in "discarding a sacred view of the universe" often termed secularisation or disenchantment.[35] Indeed, among others like Scribner or Collinson, Hendrix has argued that the Reformers were evangelising the peoples of Europe through catechesis and homiletics perhaps for the first time, after their prior nominal "Christianisation".[36] Luther's adjustments to sacramental theology were not so much a sign of his program to reject God's closeness, but rather his attempt to protect a worldview, in which believers could meet the Lord directly in his sacramental word:

> The displacement of the holy from the physical to the personal was not a removal of the sacred from the world but a different way of giving the faithful access to the sacred … reformers did not think of themselves as slowing down a process of secularization but of combating, to different degrees, the improper sacralization of Christendom, namely, those practices that reformers considered remnants of paganism or superstitious accretions.[37]

He was not merely reforming the external structure of the church but radically reassessing its animating principle: "Let this then stand fast: The church can give no promise of grace: that is the work of God alone."[38] Or in the words of Joshua Mitchell:

> The great paradox in Luther … is that the world is *not* disenchanted … Luther's pronouncements of the stark disjunction between the two worlds must be juxtaposed with his view that *this* world is not emancipated from the other … This world however does not become disenchanted as a consequence of separating religious and worldly affairs …

32 Scott H. Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 11.

33 Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition, Reason, and Religion, 1250–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 157, 158.

34 Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard,* 184n30.

35 Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard,* 154.

36 Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard,* 35, 42

37 Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyard,* 154, 155.

38 Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church", in H.T. Lehmann (ed.), *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 239.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

> It is my contention … that Protestant thought does not disenchant the Roman Church-dominated world but, rather, enchants the world in a different manner than does the Roman Church.[39]

Luther stood against the disenchanting possibilities of late medieval Christian experience.

For Luther, this type of experiential Christianity was itself built on renewed Christology. To reject the pope as focus of the life of the church was to require a new theological centre, which Christ filled, thereby judging other doctrinal positions and pastoral postures.[40] There would now be just two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, because these two alone had been authorised by the Lord. In hermeneutics, Luther argued that the Scriptures consisted of law and Gospel, whereby the law that condemned would drive believers to Christ who in turn forgave. As monk and friar, Luther's exasperation with the scholastic syllabus led in 1518 to his infamous outburst against the "theologians of glory," whose rationalistic methods smoothed out any existential ardour which had both birthed his breakthrough and characterised his preaching. He represented the "theology of the cross," the "theologia crucis," which focused on the veiled vision of Christ's existential nearness. In each of these instances, Luther's Christological agenda is prominent. Neither mysticism nor scholasticism gave security: only a renewed understanding of transcendence centred on Christ could protect the possibility of divine immanence.[41]

Luther believed that renewal came as a result of God's gracious intervention to draw near, not as a result of cultivating habit or unlocking mathematical secrets or suppressing the physical, which entail a more dramatic separation of the material from the spiritual.[42] It has been assumed that Luther's understanding of human passivity in justification represents "a philosophical and metaphysical position on the relationship between divine and human causality" – a kind of univocalism that does not allow for a coordinated approach to the divine/human encounter – but

---

39 Joshua Mitchell, "Protestant Thought and Republican Spirit: How Luther Enchanted the World", *American Political Science Review* 86 (1992) 688–95, on p. 689. Emphasis original. Further see J. Mitchell, *Not by Reason Alone: Religion, History and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), which recognises the inadequacy of Charles Taylor's thesis of disenchantment as applied to the Reformation.

40 Paul D. L. Avis, *The Church in the Theology of the Reformers* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 3, 13.

41 William C. Placher, *The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking About God Went Wrong* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 138.

42 For a more detailed discussion of late medieval science, see G.B. Deason, "Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature", in D.C. Lindberg/R.L. Numbers (ed.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 178.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

this has come under serious review, for as Simeon Zahl argues it leaves out the core driver, namely Luther's existential angst, which may obscure his otherwise keen philosophical mind or alternatively help his commentators to locate him historically.[43] Luther's soteriology is not the last word on his metaphysics. In fact, Luther's approach to understanding the "inner man" – as distinct from the "outer man" – in his tract of 1520 *On Christian Freedom,* or in *On Secular Authority* of 1523 should perhaps be understood in less contrastive terms, for "the Platonic tradition with its rationalistic optimism misinterpreted Paul's teaching on the conflict between the Spirit and the flesh" which "cast the human moral conflict *repressively* – that is, as a battle of the mind for supremacy over wayward bodily desires".[44] Lutheran scholar Paul Hinlicky explains:

> Surely one of Luther's greatest achievements as a student of Paul was to discover that distinctions such as the inner and the outer person, or akin to it, spirit and flesh, are not *anthropological* dualisms at all. Rather, these oppositions signal the invasion of God's new creation coming to redeem the fallen world They are reflections of the battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil, the city of God and the earthly city, humanity in Christ and humanity in Adam.[45]

Further, Luther's immersion in Platonic thinking, which shaped him so profoundly through the writings of Augustine, encouraged a worldview that enabled a textured, participatory and anagogical ontology. Placher notes that the "Aristotelian tradition thought of God as an external cause producing motion in the things of the world", whereas "neo-Platonism considered God as the ultimate form in which all finite things participate, and who is thus internal to them".[46] On this spectrum, Luther "was very critical" of the "syntheses of 'Aristotelian' philosophy and Christian thought",[47] and upheld those theological postures that sought out the relationships between, rather than the distinctions within, the created order, not least in regards to the integrity of the human person. This kind of graded reality promoted hierarchy, appreciated the enchantment of the world around him, and assumed the *analogia entis,* the ontological commitment to categories of this world truthfully communicating the divine nature. Christ could be near because created matter

43 Simeon Zahl, "Non-Competitive Agency and Luther's Experiential Argument against Virtue", *Modern Theology* 35 (2019) 199–222, on p.219.

44 Hinlicky, *Luther for Evangelicals,* 57.

45 Hinlicky, *Luther for Evangelicals,* 65.

46 Placher, *Domestication of Transcendence,* 113.

47 Theodor Dieter, "Martin Luther", in G. Oppy/N. Trakakis (ed.), *The History of Western Philosophy: Early Modern Philosophy of Religion* (vol 3; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

could mediate his presence, as Luther illustrated: "In red-hot iron, for instance, the two substances, fire and iron are so mingled that every part is both fire and iron."[48]

Edwards espoused a spirituality which, like Luther, resisted mechanism and promoted personalism. For example, Edwards wanted the church to understand how God's power in and through nature, described in his conversion account "The Personal Narrative", attests first God's communicative ability then God's gracious approach to the soul. Indeed, this Narrative provides a model of spirituality, in which God animates the affections and prompts our delight in his presence not just our duty to his commandments. Without any official representative of the church present during this experience in the fields, Edwards contemplated the deep theological unities which hold all things together and his place in God's grand design. In fact, in the "Images of Divine Things," he said, "The things of the world are ordered [and] designed to shadow forth spiritual things".[49] Unlike Luther's Christological focus, Edwards, resisting modern anthropocentric categories, took up a text from 1 Timothy 1, in which using more traditional theocentric terminology God's transcendence was stressed.[50] Edwards celebrated divine design, which communicated divine presence through typology and analogy. What happened in Edwards's soul – the reintegration of his energies – is then projected onto the historical plane.

In Edwards's context, in which the Enlightenment's empowerment of individual autonomy was celebrated, Edwards's agenda was to renew the church through traditional affirmation of the Lord's initiative to come close, paying particular attention to promote the Spirit's agency and personhood. He first of all used the language of sense perception with attending philosophical categories to prosecute this belief: Edwards valorised the visual tropes of the Enlightenment, for "grace is of the nature of light".[51] In highlighting its Scriptural warrant, Edwards wrote: "This plainly shows, that there is such a thing as a discovery of the divine superlative glory and excellency of God and Christ; and also that 'tis as immediately from God, as light from the sun … 'tis a kind of emanation of God's beauty, and is related to God as the light is to the sun". This "spiritual and divine illumination"[52] promoted God's

48 Luther, "Babylonian Captivity", 148.

49 Jonathan Edwards, "Images of Divine Things", in W.E. Anderson (ed.), *Typological Writings* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 11; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 53.

50 Michael A. G. Haykin, *Jonathan Edwards: The Holy Spirit in Revival: The Lasting Influence of the Holy Spirit in the Heart of Man* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2005), 166, in which Haykin affirms both Michael McClymond and Hans Frei on their understanding of the anthropocentric turn of modernity.

51 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 2; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 235.

52 Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light", in M. Valeri (ed.), *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 17; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 418, 422, 426.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

freedom to engage with humans powerfully and directly and placed Edwards within the longer Protestant tradition outlined in this chapter. However, in Edwards's writing the divine initiative to come close was also set within an occasionalist philosophical framework, in which – this time in contrast with Luther – all things created "including human creatures, are merely the 'occasions' of God's action", denying all human agency.[53] Where deism grew in influence, so divine closeness needed renewed theological and philosophical defence. Jan Stievermann takes up this case when he appeals to the philosophical Edwards and his occasionalism to assert that Edwards "in the strongest possible terms denied that history progresses through human agency … as a reaction to the perceived danger of a secularism that he feared".[54] Like Luther, Edwards can be viewed as denigrating the role of human beings in God's plans to highlight instead divine power.

However, it is frequently the case that the pastoral Edwards does affirm the role of human agency in the divine design, and elsewhere draws on the notion of the image of God or the gift of the Spirit to dignify our responsibilities in time and space. He calls on the clergy to expend effort in promoting teleological concerns: "'Tis God's design to make use of ministers thus: to correct the mistakes of his people and gradually introduce an increase of light. God will make use of means and instruments [to achieve his ends]."[55] In the "Redemption Discourse", Edwards frequently affirms the ministry of "eminent Christians" to demonstrate their human agency in a narrative in which God is the primary actor. In preaching, Edwards addressed the very particular demographic groupings present in the congregation, and through exhortation urged them to conform to divine expectations for their discipleship. If human participation in the Lord (using the language of 2 Peter 1:4) assumes neither identity between them nor incommunicability, Edwards encouraged his hearers towards real moral responsibility before God:

> They [the redeemed] have spiritual excellency and joy by a kind of participation of God. They are made excellent by a communication of God's excellency: God puts his own beauty, i.e. his beautiful likeness, upon their souls. They are made 'partakers of the divine nature', or moral image of God … as the moon and planets are bright by the sun's light.[56]

53 Oliver D. Crisp, "Occasionalism", in H.S. Stout/K.P. Minkema/A.C. Neele (ed.), *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 415.

54 Jan Stievermann, "History, Providence, and Eschatology", in D.A. Sweeney/J. Stievermann (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 231–32. See also Rhys S. Bezzant, *Edwards the Mentor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 90–91.

55 Jonathan Edwards, "One End in God's Appointing the Ministry", in W.H. Kimnach (ed.), *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758* (The Works of Jonathan Edwards 25; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 446.

56 Edwards, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence", *WJE* 17:208.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617

Indeed, Edwards expanded the possibilities for lay leadership. He believed divine light would be attainable "by persons of mean capacities, and advantages, as well as those that are of the greatest parts and learning".[57] He collaborated with evangelical friends in Scotland to launch the program of Concerts of Prayer, which involved laity and clergy together coordinating prayer meetings outside of the normal hours of Sunday services. Further, emotional expression could be understood as enabling a sense of agency, and this was not always uncoupled from physical sensations, like shrieking or barking. Bodies as conduits of responsiveness to divine closeness was one more way to promote his project of reintegrating the person and affirming the enchantment of the world.[58] Ultimately Edwards championed a new way of understanding the Lord's Supper, where individuals could only partake with confidence if they had known the Spirit's regenerating work: Edwards displaced the received language of covenant to celebrate divine propinquity in the language of communion.[59] Although this was in the end his undoing in Northampton, it placed an expectation on the individual to look for and work towards an experience of grace in their own heart. No spectators here. Meeting the Lord may have been adapted to modern conditions, but it fundamentally promoted Edwards's premodern assumptions which aligned with those of Luther, channelling "the monastic tradition that was more directed to experiential or affective faith".[60] Even if Edwards's pastoral reflexes need further philosophical integration, or are ultimately inconsistent with his anti-realist ontology, Edwards was conscious that human beings must be intentional in setting themselves within the history of redemption, for God had not left the field and would raise up champions for his cause. Edwards's resistance to deism incorporated both divine and human strategies.

3. "Covered with Glorious Gospel Light": A Protestant Narrative

Both Luther and Edwards, in different contexts, propounded a narrative not of God's disengagement from the world, but of divine transcendence making possible divine propinquity and human responsibility. Luther's apocalyptic response to corruption in the church and his desire not to reduce God's ways to what was logically demonstrable was a spoke in the wheel of late medieval scholastic theology

57 Edwards, "Divine and Supernatural Light", *WJE* 17:423.

58 See Kathryn Reklis, *Theology and the Kinesthetic Imagination: Jonathan Edwards and the Making of Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

59 William J. Danaher, "By Sensible Signs Represented: Jonathan Edwards' Sermons on the Lord's Supper", *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (1998) 261–87, on p. 269.

60 Adriaan C. Neele, "Prelude: Locating Jonathan Edwards's Spirituality", in K.C. Strobel/A.C. Neele/K.P. Minkema (ed.), *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019) 5.

ISBN Print: 9783525554616 — ISBN E-Book: 9783647554617