

Book Reviews

Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions And Advice to Young Converts, ed. Stephen J. Nichols (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2001), 40 pages.

This booklet well displays a side of Jonathan Edwards that unhappily has not always been remembered. In popular thinking Edwards is primarily pictured as a hellfire and brimstone preacher. There is little doubt that he was well aware of his responsibility as a Christian minister to warn his fellow inhabitants in this sin-soaked world that they must repent of their sins and believe in Christ or face a future of wrath and woe. His most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, preached during the Great Awakening of the 1740s, is more than adequate proof of this fact. However, when many are first introduced to his writings they are surprised to find the winsomeness and beauty of his spiritual vision. Nourished as he was by Puritan spirituality, Edwards is indeed a spiritual mentor *par excellence*.

In the two works of Edwards reprinted in this small booklet, we see at firsthand the depth and maturity of his spirituality. Their value has long been recognized—witness the numerous reprints of them during the past three hundred years. The first text is his youthful *Resolutions* (1722-1723), in which, at the outset of his ministry, he drew up a list of 70 guidelines to help keep him passionate in his pursuit of God and his glory. Though young when he wrote these resolutions, they bespeak a mature understanding of genuine piety and the way such piety should be evident in all of life. In Resolution 26, for example, he “resolved, to cast away such things as I find do abate my assurance [of salvation].” Resolution 40, written on January 7, 1723, subjected his eating and drinking habits to scrutiny: “Resolved, to inquire every night, before I go to bed, whether I have acted in the best way I possibly could, with respect to eating and drinking.” The final resolution recognizes the importance of being circumspect in all of his speech: “Let there be something of benevolence in all that I speak.”

Advice to Young Converts, the second text, originated as a letter to a young woman named Deborah Hatheway (1722-1753). A member of the Congregationalist church in Suffield, Massachusetts, Hatheway turned to Edwards for advice about how to live the Christian life

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during a period of time when her church was without a pastor. Edwards wrote to her on June 3, 1741, little knowing that by 1875 at least 328,000 copies of this letter would have been printed. The letter has nineteen pieces of advice, most of which centre upon growth in humility and holiness, and the cultivation of a deep sense of gratitude to God for forgiveness and salvation. "In all your course," Edwards advises her, "walk with God and follow Christ as a poor, helpless child, taking hold of Christ's hand, keeping your eye on the mark of the wounds on his hands and side. From these wounds came the blood that cleanses you from sin and hides your nakedness under the skirt of the white shining robe of his righteousness" (No.18).

Editor Stephen J. Nichols, an assistant professor at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School, does an excellent job of introducing the two texts and setting them in their historical context.

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Stephen J. Nichols, *An Absolute Sort of Certainty. The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2003), xii+202 pages.

This new work by Stephen Nichols explores what he sees as a central, though hitherto neglected, area in Edwards' thought. Nichols decisively demonstrates that a recent perspective on Edwards' apologetics, namely that of John H. Gerstner—in which Edwards is cast as a classic evidentialist—is deeply flawed. Fitting Edwards into the Reformed background of divines like John Calvin and John Owen, Nichols shows that for Edwards, the cogency of Christianity is ultimately rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit. He alone gives spiritual knowledge and bears convincing witness to Christian truth claims. And because pneumatology suffuses the Edwardsean corpus—and so is central to Edwards' apologetic—Nichols believes he has found a clue to "the elusive center" (p.177) of Edwards' thought. Whether or not he is right in this claim, he has certainly given students and lovers of Edwards a superb analysis of his apologetics.

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