

("How piety should be combined with knowledge"), a "programmatic" title (48) which might also be taken as a description of how Voetius turns his theological conclusions to practical implications.¹⁰ He saw theology as a *scientia practica* ("practical science") (186–93) which properly used will lead people to worship God and to live lives in service to Him. Indeed, his view of communion with God as the ultimate good of human beings embraces this theological endeavor (196).

Central to the debates between Voetius and Descartes was the question of the relation of theology and philosophy. Beck relates this to the "two-level theory" (200–208) which proposed a dualism between grace and nature, allowing an autonomous role for reason. Voetius stood in the Augustinian-Anselmian tradition of *fides quarens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding") which saw philosophy as a handmaid to theology (206). It is true both that right reason is deployed in theology, and that when it is used correctly in other intellectual endeavors it will not reach conclusions which contradict God's revelation in Scripture. In the same way, natural theology, which is itself grounded in Christ the Logos (157), is a supplementary means of knowing God which uses its own tools. In terms of its contents, it is a sub-set of supernatural theology which derives fuller and saving knowledge of God from revelation given in Scripture (193). Voetius counters any attempt to create a separation between theology and philosophy or between grace and reason.

In Beck's analysis of the theology of Voetius, he has brought to the fore a relatively neglected theologian. His book is a rich source of Reformed orthodox theology which will contribute to understanding in many areas.

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Marsden, George. *An Infinite Fountain of Light: Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century*. Downers Grove, Ill. InterVarsity Academic Press. 2023.

In 2003, George Marsden wrote *the* critical biography of Jonathan Edwards. He wrote a shorter biography on Edwards in 2008 and his latest book, *An Infinite Fountain of Light*, came from a presentation of the Stone

10. See also the title and theme of one of the few recent English-language books on Voetius, Joel R. Beeke, *Gisbertus Voetius: Toward a Reformed Marriage of Knowledge and Piety* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999).

Lecture Series at Princeton Theological Seminary. The subtitle is insightful, *Jonathan Edwards for the Twenty-First Century* and this is the real intent of this book. However, Marsden understands speaking about Edwards in the modern era may prove difficult.

Beginning in chapter one, Marsden responds to this challenge by giving “several factors [which] stand out for understanding him in his personal and historical contexts” (13). First, Edwards grew up around large families, primarily women and children. He had an uncommonly high opinion of women as they were examples of Christian piety. Second, Edwards lived before the age of the “progressive outlooks” that led to the American Revolution. In an important admission, Edwards had enslaved laborers, yet, Marsden says,

while we can acknowledge that Edwards was wrong regarding slave owning, that fault surely does not nullify the value of his insights on many other matters. One good working principle in life is to recognize that we can learn things from people who have serious blind spots and moral failings even while we may criticize those shortcomings (15).

This value judgment is normally inappropriate for historical writing; however, in the recent controversy over Edwards’s enslaving persons, this reviewer found it was necessary. Marsden must be applauded for this attempt. Whether it was persuasive, the reader is left to decide.

The third and fourth factor go together. Edwards lived most of his life on the American frontier (15) and he had British loyalties that never changed. He was a Protestant and England was a Protestant country in opposition with Catholic France, Spain, and Portugal, etc. His biblical postmillennialism led him to regard the pope as the antichrist (15–16).

Lastly, “there is a positive side to Edwards having lived at the time he did” (16). He grew up surrounded by the Puritanism of his father, Timothy Edwards (1668–1759). Simultaneously, he was facing philosophical changes of Enlightenment thinkers that filled him with excitement initially. Taking these five insights into effect, we can expect to receive “light” from Jonathan Edwards. “As we shall see, many of his [Edwards’s] best spiritual and intellectual insights remain illuminating for Christians today” (18).

In chapter two, Marsden reveals his thesis: “My central argument in these reflections is that Edwards’s core vision, grounded as it is in mainstream Augustinian Christianity, has much of value to offer for renewal today” (23). After describing his thesis, Marsden compared Edwards to Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790) and views Franklin as representative

of the modern age. Franklin ultimately became a Deist but held to the objectivate morality from a benevolent Creator that expresses itself in “equal rights, individual opportunities, and liberty and justice for all.” Yet, Marsden surmises that a “gulf that separates their assumptions from the dominant outlooks of the twenty-first century” and Franklin cannot help us answer twenty-first-century challenges without a conception of an objective morality (34–35). Edwards offers a clear alternative to Franklin that Marsden considers in chapter three.

Edwards had contact to two different worlds: Puritanism and Enlightenment. As a child he was raised in the puritanism of his parents to hold to the absolute sovereignty of God, yet this involves a paradox: “How can God be sovereign and hold man morally responsible?” (40–41). Puritans said, according to Marsden, if all else fails, go with the sovereignty of God. But as a teenager, Edwards was persuaded by the Enlightenment philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) about the rights of man. Edwards was faced with a choice to establish belief in the sovereignty of God or man. Marsden relays the words in the *Personal Narrative*, “I...had quite another kind of sense of God’s sovereignty, than I had [earlier]. I have often since, not only had a conviction, but a *delightful* conviction... [an] inward, sweet delight in God and divine things.” But not only is God sovereign over everything that He has made, Edwards believed that God displays His sovereignty in His triune love. God is most essentially love and therefore, calls His people to experience the “dynamic of love” as “the center of reality” (50). This, Marsden concludes, was a turning point in his life.

That leads to another question, “If God is truly sovereign and loving how does this explain human suffering?” Edwards says that the loving God not only allows human suffering but *participates* in our suffering. When the Son of God was incarnated and suffered on the cross to save sinners, it was out of love for His people and dissatisfaction with the injustice of the world. In the modern world, one is taught from the earliest age that the world is to be seen as only physical and material, and to embrace natural laws as the source of ruling the creation. However, if God is essentially a loving being, He communicates that love everywhere and in everything. The greatest example of this love includes redemption through the person and work Christ. The embracing of a Trinitarian love enables one to find freedom, delight, and joy (65). When we come to experience the love of the person Jesus Christ, it effects our lives and therefore, we love what God loves (70).

In chapter four, Marsden takes a reprieve from Edwards and focuses on George Whitefield (1714–1770). Whitefield’s evangelicalism has produced several negative traits that have bearing on modern evangelicalism. Marsden shows several of them including (but not limited to) anti-authoritarianism; increasing levels of individualism versus institutions; a willingness to divide over doctrines and practices; strict puritanical self-examination and Lutheran pietism. However, Marsden explains that the most problematic of Whitefield’s evangelicalism was the innovative use of *sola Scriptura*. The Reformers, says Marsden, meant by this that the pope was not the highest authority of the church (93). They often used tradition of the patristic and medieval exegetes to get to the closest meaning of the God-inspired text.

In evangelicalism between the first and second great awakening, clergymen disregarded any tradition that fell into a posture contrary to Reformers. This concept gave birth to many *democratized* movements of Christianity such as the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Christ begun by Barton Stone (1772–1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788–1866). These churches desired Christians to reclaim the New Testament Church that expressed belief in the ongoing miracles, speaking in tongues, and new revelations. Though there were many pitfalls of the “Churches that Whitefield Built,” yet “the core gospel message that George Whitefield would recognize has survived... the Holy Spirit continues to speak offering to needy sinners a gospel that is the revolutionary message of God’s love manifest in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross” (101).

In the final chapter, Marsden gleans an insightful exposition of Edwards’s treatise on *Religious Affections*, or what Marsden calls, *A Treatise of Religious Loves*. The *Religious Affections* has many things to offer modern evangelicalism (104–39). To conclude the book, Marsden has an appendix on the sermon of “A Divine and Supernatural Life” preached in 1733.

I have two criticisms of Marsden’s book. In chapter four, Marsden expresses a very low assessment of George Whitefield and holds him responsible for the “negative traits” which still hinder modern American evangelicals. A more balanced approach seems necessary. I wonder if Whitefield bears more of the blame than he ought.

Second, Marsden leaves something to be desired in the claim in his discussion of *sola Scriptura*. True, the Reformers used tradition, but they meant more than simply the pope was not infallible. As a representative of the belief of the Reformers, one can cite the *Westminster Confession of Faith* chapter 1. These men meant by *sola Scriptura*, that God, who Himself is truth, inspired a Word which is true, and, although there are many proofs

to assume these things, the only “infallible truth” is the Holy Spirit “bearing witness with the Word in our hearts” of this truth. Not only that the pope was not infallible source of truth, or even the church, but all men were subject to the truth as it is only found in Scripture, which is most necessary, authoritative, and efficacious. The only infallible interpretation is the Scripture compared with other Scriptures to get the clear meaning of the text.

Overall, Marsden’s latest book is a notable work although it is introductory in nature. The reviewer would suggest that one whose interest has been piqued by the *Infinite Foundation* move on to read the *Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* before advancing to *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*.

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