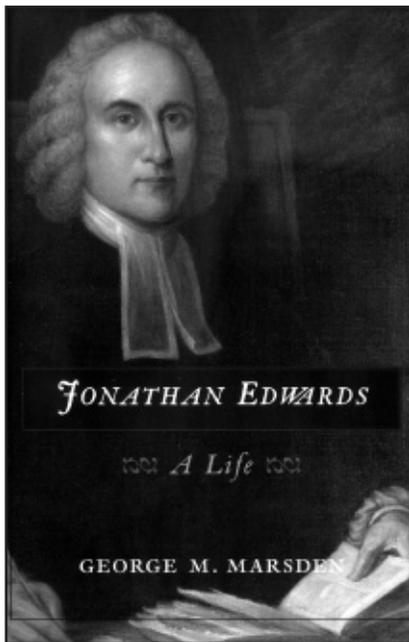


Book Reviews



Jonathan Edwards: A Life. By George M. Marsden. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003. 640 pp. \$35.00.)

There can hardly be a time more appropriate for the publication of a new comprehensive biography of Jonathan Edwards than now, as the year 2003 marks the 300th anniversary of the birth of the most celebrated figure in Puritan America. George Marsden, professor of history at the University of Notre Dame, has made an invaluable contribution to scholarship and to the general readership with a work that establishes itself as the standard for decades to come. *Jonathan*

Edwards: A Life is a biography in its fullest sense: everything worth appearing in print is there, from young Jonathan's suppressed sexual desire and father-son conflict, his youthful anxieties over failure and gnawing doubts about his own conversion, to his fondness for music and singing, rivalry with his cousins, and intricate relationships with George Whitfield and other prominent leaders of the Great Awakening. Readers are introduced to well-known Edwards lore as well as many new findings made available by the recent progress of the publication of Yale University's *Works of Jonathan Edwards* and by the recent Edwards scholarship, notably of Ken Minkema and Ava Chamberlain.

The readers of this Journal had the privilege of viewing an excerpt of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* in the Spring 2003 issue (Vol. 81, No. 1). If that excerpt was enticing, an even more engaging chapter follows in the book with a recounting of a tense game of distrust among the English, French, and Indian forces in New England during Edwards's Stockbridge years. Most of the pages like a novel. Indeed, this is an extraordinary story of an extraordinary man.

Marsden's *Edwards*, however, is not a product of the

imagination. The author suggests that Perry Miller's enigmatic and modern Edwards is about as close to the true Edwards as Hamlet is to the actual Danish prince (61) and offers a sobering characterization in its place. Edwards is essentially a person of another era who tried to pour new wine into old wine skins (213), a thoroughly pre-Revolutionary traditionalist who paradoxically promoted popular spirit (259), an aristocrat and medievalist uncomfortably situated in the era of rising democracy, individualism, and capitalism (229), whose world was built on blood-clan patriarchs such as William Williams and John Stoddard and therefore whose power constantly and irreparably declined as these patrons passed (343).

Reading becomes sluggish in the last few chapters where the content of Edwards's later major works is reviewed. This part could have been shorter, as the author disclaims clearly in his introduction that this is not "a theological work" or even "an intellectual biography." Indeed, the book does not seem to have profited much from any of the theological books listed in the endnotes (599–600). This is somewhat in disjunction with the author's hope to "help bridge the gap" between historians and

theologians and to work as a cultural historian “with an eye on the theological question” (502). In the final analysis, however, it proves wise not to have waded into the discussions these monographs raise, for it would have made this 600+-page book even more daunting.

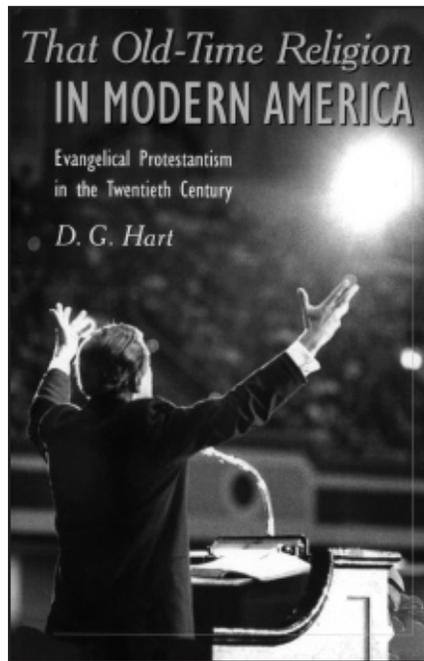
Readers interested in Presbyterian history may be comforted to know that Edwards’s entire professional career is embraced by two affectionate commitments to Presbyterian affiliation: his ministry in a New York church and his presidency at Princeton University. Brief though these periods were, they represent two genuinely delightful and gratifying experiences for this lifelong sojourner in the midst of much travail.

Anri Morimoto
International Christian University
Tokyo, Japan

That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century. By D. G. Hart. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002. 246 pp. \$24.95.)

Over the past quarter century, an outpouring of scholarship has greatly enriched our understanding of American evangelicals in the twentieth century. Yet relatively few scholars have attempted to synthesize this scholarship into a coherent narrative. In this volume D. G. Hart employs his extensive knowledge of evangelicals and his sharp, accessible prose to provide us with a valuable account of contemporary evangelicalism.

Hart begins with the period 1920–1960. After the Scopes



trial, evangelicals retreated into a “religious ghetto,” from which they would not emerge in significant numbers until the turmoil of the 1960s. While they remained in this ghetto, evangelicals crafted both institutional and ideological structures for survival. They began to recognize an ever-widening divide between themselves and the rest of society—a divide caused by mainstream society’s drift away from America’s religious roots. Evangelicals also recoiled at the invidious liberalism infecting their churches. The secularization of society and the apostasy of mainline churches created a sense of alienation and awkwardness among evangelicals. Yet they did not resign themselves to defeat. On the contrary, evangelicals affirmed earlier notions about the necessary and proper role of religion in society—and soon began to reassert themselves in American life.

The turmoil of the 1960s called into question the ideal of secular liberalism, and evan-

gelicals knew why: only with religion providing a solid foundation for society could America continue to enjoy success. The nation had lost its moorings, and evangelicals felt called to anchor the ship. Some evangelicals set about renewing their intellectual life at colleges like Wheaton. Others moved into the political sphere, believing that America needed to restore morality to save itself. And a new generation of evangelicals appropriated the musical styles of popular culture. They were willing to embrace cutting-edge styles and technologies in order to spread the gospel. All these trends pointed toward evangelicals’ “pietistic” conception of Christianity. According to Hart, the primary emphasis of pietism is “the cultivation of godly zeal and behavior through personal practices of devotion” (204). This mindset emboldened evangelicals to reclaim their place in American society. But the roadblock of secularization frustrated many of their efforts and produced the tension between contemporary evangelicals and mainstream society.

Hart’s sprint through twentieth-century evangelicalism falters in its understanding of evangelicals’ relation to society. Hart believes evangelicals account for only 7 percent of the U.S. population. This proportion underestimates evangelical strength and leads to Hart’s exaggeration of the tension between evangelicals and American society. Because evangelicals cannot separate religion from their public activities, says Hart, they have insisted on bringing faith to the fore as they have become more engaged with society. But because contemporary society has embraced