

Jonathan Edwards and the Church

Rhys S. Bezzant

Though Edwards spent most of his life working in local churches, and saw himself primarily as a pastor, his own views on the theology of the church have never been explored in depth. This book presents Edwards's views on ecclesiology by tracking the development of his convictions during the course of his tumultuous career. Drawing on Reformation foundations and the Puritan background of his ministry, Edwards refreshes our understanding of the church by connecting it to a nuanced interpretation of revival, allowing a dynamic view of the place of church in history and new thinking about its institutional structure. Indeed in Edwards's writing the church has an exalted status as the bride of Christ, joined to him forever. Building on the recent completion of the works of Jonathan Edwards, and material newly published online, this book, the first ever on Edwards's ecclesiology, demonstrates his commitment to corporate Christian experience shaped by theological convictions and his aspirations towards the visibility and unity of the Christian church. In a final section, Bezzant discusses topics relating to ecclesiology (such as hymnody, discipline, and polity), that occupied Edwards throughout his ministry. Edwards preached a Gospel concerned with God's purposes for the world, so it is the growth of the church, not merely the conversion of individuals, that is the necessary fruit of his preaching. The church in the West is rediscovering the importance of ecclesiology as it emerges from its Christendom constraints. Edwards's struggle to understand the church and its place within God's cosmic design is a case study that helps us to appreciate the church in the modern world.

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