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BOOK REVIEW

Gilsun Ryu. *The Federal Theology of Jonathan Edwards: An Exegetical Perspective*. Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. xvi + 334 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9781683594574. \$29.99.

The *Federal Theology of Jonathan Edwards* by Gilsun Ryu is another well-executed monograph in the Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology series by Lexham Press. The series seeks to make peer-reviewed scholarly research available to a broad audience in affordable paperback and electronic editions. Now containing twenty-five volumes, the series includes many reworked dissertations, like this one, and covers a broad range of topics consistent with the evangelical aims of Lexham, which is the publishing branch of Faithlife.

The monograph by Ryu is the reworking of his PhD dissertation completed at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School under Dr. Douglas Sweeney. Ryu is now an adjunct professor at Kukje Theological University and Seminary in South Korea. This book is a thoroughly researched monograph as one expects from a quality dissertation. Ryu displays a comprehensive knowledge and insight into the primary sources and provides detailed interaction with an extensive array of secondary literature. In addition, Ryu brings together two fascinating topics, Jonathan Edwards and federal theology.

Jonathan Edwards was born in 1703 and spent most of his life as pastor of a congregationalist church in Northampton, Massachusetts. Even with the daily responsibilities of the pastorate, Edwards is one of the most famous American revivalists. Some also consider Jonathan Edwards one of the most brilliant American-born philosophers and theologians; as George Marsden says, “Edwards was extraordinary” (Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 1).

Therefore, it is of little surprise that despite a quarter of a millennium passing since his death, there is still much the academy and church can learn from him. While a book covering any detail of Edwards's life and thought is typically a quality seller, one that addresses federal theology and the covenant of redemption, which is less explored in Puritan writings, is sure to draw attention.

Covenant theology is experiencing a boom of publications as of late, but there are few focusing on the covenant of redemption. According to theological persuasions influenced by the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, the covenant of redemption is an intratrinitarian covenant made between the Father and the Son prior to creation. In this covenant, the two parties agree to the plan of salvation accomplished by Christ on the cross. In this book, Ryu explores Edwards's articulation of this covenant within his framework of the history of redemption, i.e., *historia salutis*. The book is organized into four parts that logically build from historical background to practical application.

The first part of the book "Redemption and History in Reformed Orthodoxy" (21–73) provides a historical survey of those who influenced Edwards on covenant theology in general and the doctrines of redemption specifically. As typical of dissertations, here Ryu provides a historical landscape of the topic by directly exploring the topic of federal theology and the history of redemption in the writings of Johannes Cocceius, Herman Witsius, Petrus Van Mastricht, and Francis Turretin. Ryu displays an intimate knowledge of the primary sources rather than mere reductionistic second-hand information. Readers, new and old to the topics, will find the chapter very insightful in summarizing these matters in a straightforward manner. The survey serves as a foundation for understanding and evaluating the continuities and departures of Edwards from his predecessors.

The second part is titled "Redemptive History in Jonathan Edwards" (73–166). Ryu turns to situate Edwards within the stream of redemption and federal theology as articulated in the heritage of Reformed Orthodoxy. The writings of Edwards indicate that he inherited the contours and framework of his federal theology from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed pre-

decessors, most prominently Turretin and Cocceius. However, Edwards did not simply repeat what the previous generations had concluded.

Ryu contends that Edwards's departure from the prior federal theologians is methodological in nature. Specifically, Edwards based his federal theology, not on covenant schemas and builds inductively but on exegetical and theological reflections of his understanding of redemptive history. Drawing heavily upon Edwards's unfinished project, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Ryu indicates that Edwards was intentionally trying to create an entirely new method of doing theology.

For Edwards, the history of redemption should be the defining structure for reading, interpreting, and articulating theology. For Edwards, the contours of the history of redemption are ascertained through three main sources: biblical history, prophecy, and secular history. Consequently, Edwards sees salvation history as the framework for all histories, biblical and secular.

Ryu does an impressive job of drawing from the complete corpus of Edwards's writings, sermons, and personal letters, to arrive at a nuanced understanding of Edwards's thoughts. He notes that the methodological departures by Edwards were conscious, but Ryu contends that Edwards's federal theology is not novel.

The third part of the book is "The Doctrinal Harmony of Scripture" (167–272). Given that Edwards sees the salvation history of Christ as the controlling feature for theology and human history, the next question to address is if and how Edwards interprets Scripture through the lens of salvation history. Ryu answers that question by explaining that redemptive history is not the sole framework for Edwards's exegetical process. The exegetical methods used were largely in agreement with the Puritan stream he stood in, which drew on the linguistic, canonical, and theological dimensions of a text. However, similar to some medieval approaches, Edwards also believed that exegetical methods must be multidimensional. Unfortunately, Ryu notes that "Edwards does not provide the key concepts that typify his exegetical method" (170).

However, Ryu explains that the lens of salvation history en-

tails two components for Edwards, the first is the order of salvation, and the second is redemptive history more broadly. The former concerns the salvation of an individual, and the latter is the divine providential control of the entire universe. How these two relate in Edwards is that the former is always an outworking of the divine desires in the latter.

In this chapter, one sees the distinctiveness of Edwards's position and overall theological framework. He is certainly not outside of Reformed Orthodoxy but distinct from his Puritan milieu and federal theology predecessors. For instance, Edwards developed a pneumatological understanding of the covenant of redemption that is not typical of covenantal schemas. The source of this unique approach arises from Edwards using the history of redemption not just for federal theology but also to develop his doctrine of the trinity. Therefore, Edwards critiqued the typical articulation of the covenant of redemption as disregarding the Spirit's involvement in the relationship between the Father and the Son.

To remedy what he saw as a weakness, Edwards drew upon a number of scriptural passages to indicate the trinitarian elements of the history of redemption. By highlighting the involvement of the Spirit in redemptive history, for Edwards, it follows that the Spirit must play an essential role within the covenant of redemption too. Ryu does an exceptional job of drawing together Edwards's comments from many different writings.

The fourth and final part is "Federal Theology and Ecclesiology" (273–316). One interesting element highlighted by Ryu is how Edwards interweaves covenant theology with ecclesiastical and practical aspects. For instance, Ryu contends that Edwards sees redemptive history as a controlling factor for all doctrinal interpretation. Therefore, Ryu concludes that Edwards sees redemption as "far from being a finished product achieved by Christ, but rather, it is teleological. That is, redemption is a process continuing through history, a process revealed in scripture and leading ultimately to the glory of God" (315). For Edwards, doctrines concerning covenant theology, justification, and the history of redemption are not separate from but interwoven with the present ministerial context. This conclusion serves to explain

why certain doctrines, such as covenant theology and justification, are stated in significantly different terms by Edwards than his predecessors.

A brief word about a couple of criticisms that will prepare readers: first, as a reworked dissertation, the book has an immense amount of research that undergirds it. Consequently, one can feel that Ryu is addressing questions that the reader is not asking, and that is because he is addressing scholarly debates behind the scenes. Also, the book was certainly written in stages like a dissertation making the tone from one section to another feel different. This is not a criticism for some readers because the reader is assured of a thoroughly researched work. I, for one, appreciate knowing I am reading an accurate work over one that is sloppy.

The second word of preparation concerns the use of the word “exegetical” in the subtitle of the book which may create unfulfilled expectations. Readers familiar with historical theology or church history in general, however, may find Ryu’s approach welcome. Conversely, readers who typically consult modern (post-nineteenth century) commentaries may be disappointed that no section provides a verse-by-verse commentary or analysis of key passages. One will have to look elsewhere for such exegetical elements concerning the covenant of redemption.

Those caveats aside, I believe that all readers interested in theology, covenants, church history, or Edwards specifically will enjoy and benefit from this book. As a pastor and scholar, I recommend putting it on the To-Read list. Readers will be confronted with at least two primary outcomes. First, Ryu contends that Jonathan Edwards had distinctive thoughts and articulations concerning federal theology, but his thoughts were firmly within the broad stream of the Reformers from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. Second, Edwards faced the challenges of critical rationalism and philosophy but did not respond with dry doctrinal polemics. Rather, Edwards held a federal theology that was thoroughly spiritual (pneumatological), practical, and in many ways colorful.

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