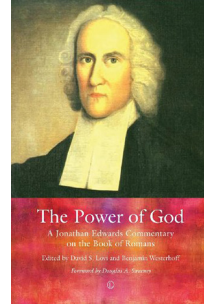


Book Review

David S. Lovi and Benjamin Westerhoff (Eds.)
*The Power of God: A Jonathan Edwards Commentary
on the Book of Romans*
Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press, 2013. pb 402.
ISBN: 978-0718893279, £22.5, \$39.6



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This book is a compilation of excerpts from the writings of the eighteenth century pastor and Reformed theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Inspired by the lectures of the American scholar, John H. Gerstner (1914-1996), on the theology of Edwards, the book aims to “complete what Gerstner started: a major compilation of Edwards’ works in the book of Romans” (x).

Two reasons are offered for the choice of Edwards on Romans. First, the book of Romans was chosen in view of the contemporary relevance of its theological themes for evangelicalism, such as the themes of justification, God’s wrath, sin, Israel, predestination and the church. Second, Edwards was chosen because of his reputation and prolixity. Since Edwards is reputed to be “one of the greatest minds in American history, and one of the greatest pastors” (xii), it is the editors’ hope that the book will be an invaluable resource for both pastors and scholars.

In order to achieve the above intent and objective, excerpts from a wide range of Edwards’ writings are gathered and arranged into two major sections. Entitled “commentary”, the first section is arranged according to the order of chapters and verses in the book of Romans (1-334). Sources employed here include Edwards’ miscellanies entries, published treatises, exegetical manuscripts, letters, and biographical work. The second section consists of Edwards’

exegetical comments drawn from his sermons and arranged according to the order of Romans under the heading, “Explications” (335-77). In the assessment of the editors, the book contains “almost everything Edwards has ever written” on Romans with the exception of “a very small amount of un-transcribed material” (xi). The book ends with a helpful subject index of ten pages (379-88).

Several comments are in order. First, there is currently no comparable work in the field of Edwards research on his treatment of the book of Romans. The most significant antecedent is a work indicated by Sweeney in the Foreword – a volume of Edwards’ sermons on Romans to be edited by Gerstner for Yale University Press but which was never completed (ix). As such, this book fills an obvious lacuna and Lovi and Westerhoff are to be congratulated for their efforts. Second, while the book is the first of its kind, readers should not conclude *ipso facto* that its contribution to Edwards research is significant. There are two major weaknesses that will need to be addressed if the book is to be of significant help to pastors and scholars as the editors intended.

The first weakness is the evident lack of contextual engagement with the writings of Edwards. There is hardly any attempt to locate Edwards within his historical and intellectual context. Did Edwards change his views on the interpretation of certain passages in Romans over time? Were his comments on certain

passages informed by the social, theological, or ecclesiastical problems of his day? What were his exegetical principles? Did he stand within a particular commentarial tradition? What were his exegetical sources for Romans? Since there is no critical introduction that discusses fundamental issues of context, or footnotes that refer to relevant material within the Edwards corpus and related scholarly studies, readers will be hard pressed for answers to the above questions.

The second weakness has to do with editorial matters. It is puzzling that a book described as a “commentary on the book of Romans” does not contain commentary on a significant number of passages. For instance, fourteen verses are without commentary in Paul’s treatment of sin in the first three chapters of Romans, while comment for twenty verses are missing in Paul’s treatment of God’s salvific purposes for Jews and Gentiles in Romans 9-11. Did Edwards not discuss them or are they left out in the light of editorial decisions? Such a significant portion

of missing comments warrants an explanation from the editors. Another curious feature that lacks editorial transparency is the separation of Edwards’ sermonic material (i.e. “Explications”) from the rest of his writings. This decision creates the unnecessary inconvenience for readers of having to go through the flow of Romans twice.

Finally, readers are to note that some content in the main text do not come from Edwards. The commentary for Romans 1:27, for instance, are the words of the editor, Stephen J. Stein, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Volume 24, *The “Blank Bible”* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 985n3. There is also no bibliography.

Lovi and Westerhoff have certainly produced a work whose collated material will be of significant interest to pastors and scholars of Edwards. However, the shortcomings are major ones. Unless they are addressed, it will be difficult for the book to achieve the aims for which it was conceived.