

## Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards

The purpose of this Appendix is to allow an advocate of the Triumph view of church history to set out his case. I have commented from time to time.

The following comes from Jonathan Edwards' *History of Redemption*. Edwards was speaking of how, down the centuries, Christ has stepped into history to move the church (as Edwards saw it) from one stage of glory to another:

By each of these comings [that is, interventions] of Christ, God works a glorious deliverance for his church. Each of them is accompanied with a glorious advancement of the state of the church.

I take up Edwards' account with the fall of Jerusalem in AD70, the final end of the old covenant – or, as Edwards, with his Reformed covenant-theology view would have mistakenly described it, the final demise of 'the Jewish dispensation of the one covenant of grace':

The first [intervention by Christ], which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem, was attended with bringing the church into the glorious state of the gospel, a glorious state of the church very much prophesied of old, whereby the church was advanced into far more glorious circumstances than it was in before under the Jewish dispensation.

As I have made clear in many works, I disagree very strongly with this way of dismissing the radical discontinuity between the old and new covenants.<sup>1</sup> Israel was not 'the Jewish church' (something which never existed), and the old and new covenants, though there is some continuity between them, are radically discontinuous. The new-covenant economy and the gospel is not a more glorious version of the old-covenant

---

<sup>1</sup> See, principally, my *Christ*. But see also my '*A Gospel Church*'.

## *Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards*

economy and the law. To think it is runs utterly contrary to Scripture.

Edwards then moved his account to the fourth century:

The second [great intervention by Christ], which was in Constantine's time, was accompanied with an advancement of the church into a state of liberty from persecution, and the countenance of civil authority, and triumph over their heathen persecutors.

It is true, of course, that Constantine ended the dreadful persecution of believers under Diocletian, but that certainly did not spell the end of all persecution! Moreover, Constantine's actions led very rapidly to the setting up of Christendom – the major disaster of this present age.

It is at this point that Edwards was showing his prophetic hand, his postmillennialism; namely, he was predicting a glorious period for the church before Christ's return:

The third [great intervention by Christ], which shall be at the downfall of antichrist, will be accompanied with an advancement of the church into that state of the glorious prevalence of truth, liberty, peace, and joy, that we so often read of in the prophetic parts of Scripture.

After which, Christ will come:

The last [intervention by Christ] will be attended with the advancement of the church to consummate glory in both soul and body in heaven...

Having set out the general scheme as he saw it, Edwards retraced his steps to make specific points.

*First, Constantine:*

There are several things which I would take notice of which attended or immediately followed Constantine's coming to the throne. (1). The Christian church<sup>2</sup> was thereby wholly

---

<sup>2</sup> Edwards was distinguishing between the so-called Jewish church and the Christian church. This takes us back to the previous note, which see.

## *Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards*

delivered from persecution. Now the day of her deliverance came after such a dark night of affliction. Weeping had continued for a night, but now deliverance and joy came in the morning. Now God appeared to judge his people, and repented himself for his servants, when he saw their power was gone, and that there was none shut up or left. Christians had no persecutions now to fear.

I must break in. I should like to see Edwards telling this to the countless number tortured, butchered or burnt to death under Roman persecution, the Spanish Inquisition, or to believers today in, say, China, North Korea, parts of Africa, and so on. ‘Christians had no persecutions now to fear’? Really! Which part of cloud-cuckoo land was Edwards living in?

Edwards:

Their persecutors now were all put down, and their rulers were some of them Christians like themselves.

There is some truth in Edwards’ claim, I concede as above; with Constantine, some persecution did cease – for a time. But I very seriously question that Constantine was converted.

Edwards moved on to the second and subsequent gains (as he saw them) under Constantine:

(2). God now appeared to execute terrible judgments on their [that is, believers’] enemies. Remarkable are the accounts which history gives us of the fearful ends to which the heathen emperors, and princes, and generals, and captains, and other great men came, who had exerted themselves in persecuting the Christians, dying miserably, one and another, under exquisite torments of body, and horrors of conscience, with a most visible hand of God upon them. So that what now came to pass might very fitly be compared to their hiding themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains.

Next:

(3). Heathenism now was in a great measure abolished throughout the Roman empire. Images were now destroyed, and heathen temples pulled down. Images of gold and silver were melted down, and coined into money. Some of the chief

## *Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards*

of their idols, which were curiously wrought, were brought to Constantinople, and there drawn with ropes up and down the streets for the people to behold and laugh at. The heathen priests were dispersed and banished.

Well, that's a highly-selective reading of history!

Edwards went on:

(4). The Christian church<sup>3</sup> was brought into a state of great peace and prosperity. Now all heathen magistrates were put down, and only Christians were advanced to places of authority all over the empire. They had now Christian presidents, Christian governors, Christian judges and officers, instead of their old heathenish ones. Constantine set himself to put honour upon Christian bishops or ministers, and to build and adorn churches. And now large and beautiful Christian churches were erected in all parts of the world, instead of the old heathen temples. This revolution was the greatest revolution and change in the face of things that ever came to pass in the world since the flood. Satan, the prince of darkness, that king and god of the heathen world, was cast out. The roaring lion was conquered by the Lamb of God, in the strongest dominion that ever he had, even the Roman empire. This was a remarkable accomplishment of Jeremiah 10:11: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens'. The chief part of the world was now brought utterly to cast off their old gods and their old religion, to which they had been accustomed much longer than any of their histories give an account of. They had been accustomed to worship the gods so long, that they knew not any beginning of it. It was formerly spoken of as a thing unknown for a nation to change their gods (Jer. 2:10-11), but now the greater part of the nations of the known world were brought to cast off all their former gods. That multitude of gods that they worshipped were all forsaken. Thousands of them were cast away for the worship of the true God, and Christ the only Saviour. And there was a most remarkable fulfilment of that in Isaiah 2:17-18: 'And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols he shall utterly

---

<sup>3</sup> See earlier note.

## Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards

abolish'. And since that, it has come to pass, that those gods that were once so famous in the world, as Jupiter, and Saturn, and Minerva, and Juno, *etc.* are only heard of as things which were of old. They have no temples, no altars, no worshippers, and have not had for many hundred years. Now is come the end of the old heathen world in the principal part of it, the Roman empire. And this great revolution and change of the state of the world, with that terrible destruction of the great men who had been persecutors, is compared, in Revelation 6, to the end of the world, and Christ's coming to judgment, and is what is most immediately signified under the sixth seal, which followed upon the souls under the altar crying: 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?' This vision of the sixth seal, by the general consent of divines and expositors, has respect to this downfall of the heathen Roman empire. Though it has a more remote respect to the day of judgment, or this was a type of it. The day of judgment cannot be what is immediately intended, because we have an account of many events which were to come to pass under the seventh seal, and so were to follow after those of the sixth seal. What came to pass now is also represented by the devil's being cast out of heaven to the earth. In his great strength and glory, in that mighty Roman empire, he had as it were exalted his throne up to heaven. But now he fell like lightning from heaven, and was confined to the earth. His kingdom was confined to the meaner and more barbarous nations, or to the lower parts of the world of mankind. This is the event foretold, Revelation 12:9, *etc.* 'And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the devil and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him', *etc.* Satan tempted Christ, and promised to give him the glory of the kingdoms of the world. But now he is obliged to give it to him even against his will. This was a glorious fulfilment of that promise which God made to his Son, that we have an account of in Isaiah 53:12: 'Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he has poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors, and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors'. This was a great fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the glorious time of the gospel, and particularly of the prophecies of Daniel. Now the kingdom of heaven is come

## Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards

in a glorious degree. It pleased the Lord God of heaven to set up a kingdom on the ruins of Satan's kingdom. And such success is there of the purchase of Christ's redemption, and such honour does the Father put upon Christ for the disgrace he suffered when on earth. And now see to what a height that glorious building is erected, which had been building ever since the fall.

Phew! Edwards clearly saw Constantine as a massive advance for the church, the best thing before sliced bread! As I have argued in many works – and earlier in this present volume – the fact is, Constantine, with his contribution to the invention of Christendom, inflicted a terrible curse on the *ekklēsia*, in particular, and the world, in general. Christendom, with its establishment of the laity/clergy split, hierarchy, the virtual elimination of the priesthood of all believers – replacing it with priestcraft, the absolute dominance of the monologue sermon – sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, vicious persecution of nonconformist believers,<sup>4</sup> the rise of Romanism, infant sprinkling with baptismal regeneration, the erection of sacred buildings, and the like – what a catalogue!<sup>5</sup> Each of the disasters in that list would have made enough trouble for the *ekklēsia*; in combination, words fail!

Not for Edwards; he continued:

*Inference.* From what has been said of the success of the gospel from Christ's ascension to the time of Constantine, we may deduce a strong argument of the truth of the Christian religion, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is really from God... The gospel's prevailing as it did against such powerful opposition, plainly shows the hand of God. The Roman government, that did so violently set itself to hinder the

---

<sup>4</sup> I do not use the term here in the narrow sense of the 15th-century Separatists and others who refused to conform to the Church of England. I am speaking of those who refuse allegiance to the institutions of Christendom. In the early days, the Donatists; later, the Albigenes and Waldensians, Lollards and Hussites, Anabaptists, and so on.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, my *The Pastor; The Priesthood; Priesthood; Infant; Battle; Laying; Luther on Baptism*.

## *Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards*

success of the gospel, and to subdue the church of Christ, was the most powerful human government that ever was in the world. And not only so, but they seemed as it were to have the church in their hands. The Christians were mostly their subjects, under their command, and never took up arms to defend themselves; they did not gather together, and stand in their own defence. They armed themselves with nothing but patience, and such like spiritual weapons. And yet this mighty power could not conquer them. But, on the contrary, Christianity conquered them. The Roman empire had subdued the world. They had subdued many mighty and potent kingdoms. They subdued the Grecian monarchy, when they were not their subjects, and made the utmost resistance. And yet they could not conquer the church which was in their hands, but, on the contrary, were subdued, and finally triumphed over by the church.

Not only that:

No other sufficient cause can possibly be assigned of this propagation of the gospel, but only God's own power. Nothing else can be devised as the reason of it but this. There was certainly some reason. Here was a great and wonderful effect, the most remarkable change that ever was in the face of the world of mankind since the flood. And this effect was not without some cause. Now, what other cause can be devised but only the divine power? It was not the outward strength of the instruments which were employed in it. At first, the gospel was preached only by a few fishermen, who were without power and worldly interest to support them. It was not their craft and policy that produced this wonderful effect. For they were poor illiterate men. It was not the agreeableness of the story they had to tell to the notions and principles of mankind. This was no pleasant fable. A crucified God and Saviour was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It was not the agreeableness of their doctrines to the dispositions of men. For nothing is more contrary to the corruptions of men than the pure doctrines of the gospel. This effect therefore can have proceeded from no other cause than the power and agency of God. And if it was the power of God that was exercised to cause the gospel to prevail, then the gospel is his word. For surely God does not use his almighty power to promote a mere imposture and delusion.

## *Appendix 2: Jonathan Edwards*

Edwards saw this as fulfilment of Christ's prophecy:

This success is agreeable to what Christ and his apostles foretold. Matthew 16:18: 'Upon this rock will I build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it'. John 12:24: 'Verily, verily I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground, and die, it abides alone: but if it die, it brings forth much fruit'. And John 12:31-32: 'Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me'. John 16:8: 'When he (the Comforter) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment – because the prince of this world is judged'. So Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:21-28 declares, how that after the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe, and that God chose the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise, and weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yes and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are. If any man foretells a thing, very likely in itself to come to pass, from causes which can be foreseen, it is no great argument of a revelation from God. But when a thing is foretold which is very unlikely ever to come to pass, is entirely contrary to the common course of things, and yet it does come to pass just agreeable to the prediction, this is a strong argument that the prediction was from God. Thus the consideration of the manner of the propagation and success of the gospel during the time which has been spoken of, affords great evidence that the Scriptures are the word of God.

In light of the weight of Scripture I have quoted in the body of this book, I find Edwards' view utterly incredible – not to say, fantastic.