

The Eschatology of Ephrata

ABSTRACT

About the time that Jonathan Edwards and George Wesley were ministering in colonial America, a religious community in Pennsylvania called Ephrata was eagerly awaiting the Second Coming of Christ, holding “watch meetings” every night continuously for ten years. Exploring why those meetings discontinued, this article demonstrates that a theological shift from an apocalyptic eschatology to a more realized eschatology took place, especially after the appearance of comets in the sky in 1742 and 1743. Drawing parallels with contemporary apocalyptic fervor, Ephrata represents both the difficulty that some faith communities find in balancing the “now” and “not-yet” aspects of Christian eschatology and the potential effects, both positive and negative, of replacing apocalyptic anticipation with kingdom-now theology.