

Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of *Theosis**

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Amid a scholarly rediscovery of Protestant forms of *theosis*, questions of whether Jonathan Edwards developed a theotic account of redemption have received increased attention.¹ Ironically, however, interest in Edwards's doctrine of *theosis* has emphasized the philosophical rather than the theological bases in ways that seem to set him outside the boundaries of Reformed orthodoxy. Yet if we shift our attention away from the neo-Platonic explanations of Edwardsian *theosis* and place it instead where Edwards himself focused—on the communicable nature of the triune God within the economy—we see that his notions of *theosis* rest on firmly Protestant foundations and result in recognizably Reformed conclusions. But to say that attention to Edwards's trinitarian and incarnational theology reveals an orthodox form of *theosis* is not to say that his theotic soteriology lacked distinctive and even innovative elements. Unlike other theologians whose accounts of *theosis* bifurcated God's communicable nature from the creatures' relational participation among the divine persons, Edwards's theology made room for and insisted on both.²

Before we can properly assess the claim that Edwards developed a theotic soteriology that was robust, Reformed, and distinctive, we must confront the definitional challenges associated with those categories. First, in the literature there

* Oliver Crisp, Myk Habets, Ken Minkema, Kent Eilers, Jim Salladin, Donald Fairbairn, Carl Mosser, and Ty Kieser all provided helpful feedback for this article. It is significantly sharper because of their input.

¹ See Michael McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (ed. Oliver Crisp and Paul Helm; Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004) 142–55; Oliver Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 275–85; and Kyle Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of *Theosis*," *HTR* 105 (2012) 259–79.

² I appreciate the direction from the reviewer on the first portion of the essay specifically.

is a broad consensus that deification, divinization, and *theosis* are all synonyms, at least in their Christian form.³ Here, we use *theosis* as representing Christian deification in all its varied depictions. Second, there is a broad consensus that there are types of *theosis*, and that each tradition (and even each theologian) will employ unique emphases.⁴ The core that unites these distinct traditions of *theosis* is an understanding of God's communicable life—that what is Christ's by nature is made available to his people by grace.⁵ What is not stated clearly in this definition, but what has always been assumed by orthodox doctrine, is that the divine essence is incommunicable. Therefore, what is Christ's by nature that is offered in grace is not the divine essence, but the communicable divine nature. This distinction has been developed in a variety of ways, with Eastern Orthodox theologians employing the essence-energies distinction and others, like Calvin, taking the biblical language from 2 Peter 1:4 at face value, understanding the “divine nature” in such a way

³ See Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, “Introduction,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov; Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2006) 1–12. Carl Mosser is a noteworthy detractor to this view, suggesting, for the sake of clarity, that he prefers “to reserve this term [*theosis*] for reference to the Byzantine development of the patristic deification tradition and its contemporary exposition by Eastern Orthodox theologians” (“The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,” *JTS* 56 [2005] 30–74, at 31 n. 3). While it is possible that, in the future, a move like this could bring clarity, it would not currently since the literature assumes that these are synonyms.

⁴ Myk Habets, discussing one recent edited volume on *theosis*, notes that it “examines *doctrines* of *theosis* within such figures as the Cappadocians, Athanasius, Maximus the Confessor, and Ephrem the Syrian, to name but a few, and in each instance what is highlighted is the idiosyncratic doctrine of *theosis* each thinker has in contradistinction to other thinkers—and even, on occasion, the different *doctrines* of *theosis* within the same author, as for instance in Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus!” (“Theosis, Yes; Deification, No,” in *The Spirit of Truth: Reading Scripture and Constructing Theology with the Holy Spirit* [ed. Myk Habets; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010] 124–49, at 128 [italics in original]). Vladimir Kharlamov substantiates this point when he states, “As it has been already pointed out by Russell, even in modern Orthodox theology, *theosis* is far from being an univocally settled issue” (“Introduction,” in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* [ed. Vladimir Kharlamov; Princeton Theological Monograph Series 2; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011] 1–20, at 7–8).

⁵ Similarly, Mosser states, “Succinctly, *theōsis* is for believers to become by grace what the Son of God is by nature and to receive the blessings that are his by rights as undeserved gifts. Most boldly, *theōsis* is described as a transforming union of the believer with God and Christ usually, if inadequately, translated as ‘divinization’ or ‘deification’” (“The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification,” *SJT* 55 [2002] 36–57, at 36). Furthermore, Norman Russell provides a broad sketch of the three ways the early Fathers used deification language: nominally, analogically, or metaphorically. The first two do not concern us here, but the metaphorical use, as Russell outlines it, is characteristic of two approaches—the ethical and the realistic. “The ethical approach takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation.” “The realistic approach assumes that human beings are in some sense transformed by deification. Behind the latter use lies the model of *methexis*, or *participation*, in God” (*The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004] 2, 9). Particularly relevant to our study is how fluid the technical vocabulary and imagery has been in the tradition. See also Carl Mosser, “An Exotic Flower? Calvin and the Patristic Doctrine of Deification,” in *Reformation Faith: Exegesis and Theology in the Protestant Reformation* (ed. Michael Parsons; Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2014), 38–56, at 48.

that it is communicable to believers (but only as it is distinguished from the divine essence). Edwards, as we will highlight below, broadly follows the latter development. Furthermore, it should be noted that a doctrine of *theosis* speaks to the broadest features of soteriology, and is not, therefore, a certain construction of justification, sanctification, or glorification.⁶ A doctrine of *theosis* will entail various conditions (e.g., an account of union, communion and/or participation), and will also act as a foundational doctrine ordering (at least) soteriology in its entirety. Importantly, Rowan Williams highlights that the tradition spawned two strands of *theosis*, with certain writers emphasizing the communication of divine attributes and others focusing on a participation in the relationship among the divine persons.⁷ While there is much more that could be said about these two strands, for our purposes this delineation serves as a helpful framework within which to place Edwards's own discussion.⁸

In what follows, we put to work Edwards's major dogmatic material to outline his doctrine of *theosis*. This approach differs from a more philosophical emphasis on Edwards and his relation to Neo-Platonism.⁹ Michael McClymond has helpfully navigated this material, focusing on specific areas of overlap between Edwards and Eastern Orthodox developments through Gregory Palamas.¹⁰ In doing so, he highlights texts on participation and communion, and leans heavily on the language of light, the immediate presence of God, and the divine nature.¹¹ A comparison with Eastern Orthodoxy is both interesting and important, but it is not the focus of

⁶ It is not unusual for scholars to assume that *theosis* is simply a view concerning the doctrines of justification or sanctification specifically. For instance, Seng-Kong Tan argues that Edwards's doctrine of sanctification is not identical to Eastern Orthodox accounts of *theosis*. See Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014) 343. Furthermore, along similar lines, the book *Justification: Five Views*, lists *theosis* as a view of justification. See *Justification: Five Views* (ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy; Spectrum Multiview Books; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011) 219–264.

⁷ Rowan Williams, "Deification," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. Gordon S. Wakefield; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983) 106–8, at 106.

⁸ Russell makes a similar statement to Williams's when he states, "In summary, until the end of the fourth century, the metaphor of deification develops along two distinct lines: on the one hand, the transformation of humanity in principle as a consequence of the Incarnation; on the other, the ascent of the soul through the practice of virtue" (*The Doctrine of Deification*, 14). Whereas Russell's focus is a bit different than Williams's, they affirm the same inclination. Russell emphasizes the doctrinal location of the transformation itself, whereas Williams addresses how participation is understood.

⁹ Most relevant here would be McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization," 142–55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144–50.

¹¹ McClymond provides a helpful summary of the resemblances between Edwards and Palamas on *theosis*: "(1) a divine light that conforms human beings to God's character, together with optical language to describe spiritual experience; (2) an immediacy of contact and connection between God and humanity in the state of grace; (3) a concern to define the relationship between spiritual experience and the divine 'essence'; (4) a notion of unceasing spiritual development both in this life and the next; (5) an emphasis on the role of the body, and bodily affections, within the spiritual life; and (6) a teaching on divinization *per se*, that is, a human participation in the life of God" ("Salvation as Divinization," 145).

our concerns here. Our task is to ground Edwards's account within his theological reflection. This will not, in any substantial way, undermine the overall position McClymond ascribes to Edwards, but it will bolster his claims through a thoroughly doctrinal reading of *theosis* in Edwards's thought. Broadly, we are seeking to answer the question: How does Edwards's theology give birth to an account of *theosis*, and what are the distinctively Reformed features of it?¹²

McClymond's focus and ours intersects at an inquiry concerning what a Reformed account of *theosis* might look like. McClymond suggests that, "Edwards sometimes speaks in a way that seems to be at odds with traditional Calvinism," and then he maintains that there are features of Edwards's thought that exhibit a "Catholic concern."¹³ Because of this concern, McClymond posits Edwards as a bridging figure who can be utilized for ecumenical dialogue.¹⁴ Importantly, even though McClymond raises the question of whether Edwards's view is Reformed, he also claims that Edwards's doctrine indicates that "the two traditions [Reformed and Eastern Orthodox] may not be as far apart in their understanding of salvation as is commonly assumed."¹⁵ Furthermore, he avers that Edwards's view may represent a strand of Reformed theology (from Calvin to Edwards and [perhaps] Barth) that "shares the Orthodox conception of Father, Son and Spirit as abundant in goodness and overflowing toward creatures in divinizing grace."¹⁶ McClymond seems to be suggesting that the Reformed tradition has resources for a doctrine of *theosis*, but that "traditional Calvinism" has not picked up on these resources. While this raises questions far beyond the confines of this article (e.g., the nature of "Calvinism," the question of Calvin's relationship to "the Calvinists," and what suffices for necessary and sufficient conditions demarcating the Reformed and the Eastern

¹² Instead of focusing on the grammar of *theosis*, our goal here is to unveil how *theosis* forms Edwards's broad systematic construction of redemption. Importantly, Edwards does not use the terms *theosis*, divinization or deification, and it is unclear if he knew of this terminology. Nonetheless, as argued here, he clearly employs a doctrine of *theosis*. McClymond is certainly right when he states, "Edwards employed a rich vocabulary of terms and phrases such as 'communication,' 'emanation,' 'participation,' 'partaking' and 'uniting' to describe the divine-human communion from either God's side or the creature's. Edwards referred to creatures as 'of,' 'in' and 'to' God, believers as 'swallowed up' in God, the Church as the 'fullness' or 'completeness' of Christ, and the world as God 'himself diffused' or the 'remanation' that reflects back God's 'emanation' in creating" ("Salvation as Divinization," 153). Importantly, technical vocabulary tells us very little about a theologian's use of *theosis*. Carl Mosser notes, "Nearly all scholars who write on the subject [of deification] identify Irenaeus as the first Christian to formulate a doctrine of deification. But Irenaeus nowhere uses technical terminology" ("An Exotic Flower?," 48). The appendices in Normal Russell's volume are important here (see Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 321–44).

¹³ McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization," 139–40.

¹⁴ This is a key component to McClymond's essay. *Ibid.*, 139–40, 153–55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

Orthodox), it highlights the need to raise questions concerning what this strand of Reformed thought might entail. In anticipation of these questions, we conclude this article by showing how a doctrine of *theosis* can be uniquely Reformed based upon Edwards's development.

This essay progresses in three movements. First, the main development of this essay will address Edwards's doctrine of *theosis* with particular emphasis on his understanding of the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. To focus these doctrines on *theosis* we highlight two key features of his thought: personhood through participation and the communicable aspect of the divine nature. Second, we show how Edwards's unique development allows him to bridge the two strands of the *theosis* tradition noted above. Here, we argue that Edwards understands the communicable divine nature within the economic activity of Son and Spirit such that a participation in the persons is synonymous with a participation in the divine nature. Last, we address whether or not Edwards departs from the Reformed tradition in his development. To do so, we assess a critique in the literature concerning the possibility of a Reformed account of *theosis* (focusing on the thought of John Calvin), and argue that it fails to adequately address both Edwards's position and the specific inclination of Reformed accounts.

■ Trinity: Personhood through Participation

Edwards's doctrine of God is widely misunderstood.¹⁷ While it is beyond the scope of this article to address the major issues that have left so many perplexed, it is, nonetheless, important to focus attention on the broad contours of Edwards's account with a specific emphasis on *theosis*. In doing so, we highlight two key features of Edwards's doctrine of God that help to locate and orient creaturely deification: first, Edwards's understanding of personhood through his use of perichoresis; and, second, Edwards's development of the nature of the triune persons.

Edwards advances his account of God's life *ad intra* through the use of a psychological analogy. Edwards categorically states, "A person [divine or human] is that which hath understanding and will."¹⁸ Furthermore, Edwards asserts, "If the three in the Godhead are persons, they doubtless each of 'em have understanding."¹⁹ These two quotes help to outline the dilemma Edwards confronts when he develops his account of the Trinity and the path he chooses to navigate the unity and tri-personhood of God. On the one hand, Edwards is clear that the three persons are

¹⁷ In light of space restrictions, the broad claims developed here build upon my detailed exposition in *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013) 23–71. The argument advanced there, in short, is that Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity has been misconstrued, and Edwards changed his doctrine of the Trinity as he wrote his infamous "Discourse on the Trinity." What follows is a reading of Edwards based on this analysis.

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 109–44, at 133.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

not three distinct centers of will and consciousness. On the other hand, Edwards states that the Son actually is God's understanding and the Spirit is God's will or love. Edwards employs the psychological analogy in his account of God, such that God the Father generates the Son eternally as the Father's self-understanding. Furthermore, as the Father and the Son gaze upon one another, so love (the Spirit) flows between them in the infinite pure act of God's love. As Edwards explains:

the Father understands because the Son, who is the divine understanding, is in him. The Father loves because the Holy Ghost is in him. So the Son loves because the Holy Spirit is in him and proceeds from him. So the Holy Ghost, or the divine essence subsisting in divine love, understands because the Son, the divine idea, is in him. Understanding may be predicated of this love, because it is the love of the understanding both objectively and subjectively.²⁰

Taking it as axiomatic that God has one understanding and one will among the three divine persons, Edwards invokes perichoresis to navigate God's oneness and threeness without erring on either side. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are persons only through their mutual interpenetration, such that God's unity and multiplicity are connected. In other words, rather than simply ground personhood in the subsistences, Edwards also employs perichoresis.²¹ In his words,

Nor is it to be looked upon as a strange and unreasonable figment that the person should be said to have an understanding or love by another person's being in 'em: for we have Scripture ground to conclude so concerning the Father's having wisdom and understanding or reason, that it is by the Son's being in him; because we are there informed that he is the wisdom and reason and truth of God. And hereby God is wise by his own wisdom being in him.²²

Personhood in the Godhead, therefore, has a twofold foundation. First, it is grounded on the divine subsistences. Second, it is established through perichoresis. In doing so, Edwards binds together the processions of Son and Spirit to the divine nature and attributes. As hinted above, the Son and the Spirit both have natures intrinsic to their identity (understanding and will, respectively), established through the use of the psychological analogy. However, they are only persons as they exist

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ This point is controversial. See my *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 23–72, for a more developed account. Furthermore, and more poignantly, see my appendix addressing the debate between Oliver Crisp and Stephen Holmes concerning the divine persons and essence (Ibid., 234–242). There, I argue for a via media between Crisp and Holmes, where the divine essence is maintained, contra Holmes, and where personhood is read through perichoresis, contra Crisp. For the key primary literature, see Oliver Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards's God: Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (ed. Bruce McCormack; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 83–103; and Stephen Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 69–71. For Oliver Crisp's revised account, see Oliver Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4 (2014) 21–41, esp. 32–39.

²² Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 134.

in perichoretic unity (because persons, to be persons, must have understanding and will).²³ In the economy, God sends forth his self-understanding to reveal himself to creatures and sends his self-love to abide in the elect.²⁴ The nature of each subsistence is carried over in their person, so that, in the economy, the Son carries with him God's self-understanding so that he can truly say, in John 14, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."²⁵ The Son actually is God's own self-understanding, image, and "face," and therefore he is particularly fit to reveal the Father (what Stephen Holmes calls a "radical extension of the doctrine of appropriation").²⁶ This lays the groundwork for Edwards's soteriology, which, as we will show below, is based on human participation in God's own self-understanding and self-love. By advancing his peculiar account of perichoresis and grounding aspects of the divine nature in the persons of Son and Spirit, Edwards orders soteriology around participation in the divine nature (which is synonymous with participation in the divine persons). Importantly, a robust and orthodox account of *theosis* will describe this participation and, at the same time, protect against participation in the divine essence (which is seen as radical divinization).²⁷ Edwards's distinction between the divine essence and the divine nature, and his appropriation of the divine nature to the economic activities of Son and Spirit, gives him the theological framework to advance a doctrine of *theosis* without succumbing to the errors of radical divinization.

To grasp Edwards's distinction between the divine essence and nature, it is necessary to analyze a letter he wrote responding to criticism that he posits a radical notion of divinization (one in which the creature participates in the essence of God). Central to Edwards's response is the distinction between the divine essence and nature. The nature of the divine persons is communicable to the creature, whereas the essence is not. He states,

I think holiness may, without absurdity, be said to be the *proper nature* of the Holy Spirit on two accounts: (1) As 'tis his peculiar beauty and glory and so may in a special manner be called *his nature*, as brightness may in a peculiar manner be said to be the nature of the sun, and [as] that which is in a peculiar manner the nature of honey is its sweetness. (2) 'Tis the proper character of the Spirit above all other things, in that office and work of his wherein we are concerned with him. This is that in his nature which he especially manifests and exercises in his office, acts, and operations towards us; and therefore this

²³ This point is often missed, but is intricately related to Edwards's development of the divine essence and the polemical background to Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity. The reason this point is often missed is that most interpreters fail to recognize that Edwards changes his view of the Trinity on this point specifically. See my *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 40–51.

²⁴ See Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 124.

²⁵ John 14:9 NASB.

²⁶ Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory*, 71. For Edwards's comments on this, see Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 120.

²⁷ For the polemical issues behind Edwards's doctrine of *theosis* and the specific way he navigates radical accounts of the doctrine, see my "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of *Theosis*."

in his nature is singled out from all other things to denote him by, as he is revealed [to] us; so his name by which he is called in Scripture is the *Holy Ghost*. And this is that *in his nature* which he communicates something of to the saints, and therefore is called by divines in general a communicable attribute; and the saints are made partakers of his holiness, as the Scripture expressly declares (Heb. 12:10), and that without imparting to them his essence.²⁸

In receiving holiness, beauty, and glory, the saints are partaking in the specific nature of the Spirit in the inner-life of God that is communicable in God's economic activity. Along similar lines, Edwards addresses the name of the Spirit as both "Holy" and "Spirit." He notes that "spirit" is not used metaphysically but refers to disposition, inclination, or temper.²⁹ He quotes Num 14:24, where Caleb is said to be of "another spirit," to highlight his point. Therefore, the "Holy" Spirit is the disposition of holiness inherent in the Godhead. As noted above, Edwards refers to this disposition or inclination as the Spirit's proper nature. Edwards, with many Patristic writers, utilizes the image of the sun to show how God can communicate his nature³⁰ (or, following Palamas, his "energies") without communicating his essence.³¹ The natures of the persons are communicable as their natures, and,

²⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Unpublished Letter on Assurance and Participation in the Divine Nature," in *Ethical Writings* (ed. Paul Ramsey; vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 639 [italics added].

²⁹ See Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 122. Often, Edwards's metaphysical language refers to "character" rather than making metaphysical claims. See my *Jonathan Edwards's Theology*, 198–202, for a description of the term "principle" along these same lines.

³⁰ Edwards uses the image of the sun giving its light and heat to illustrate God giving himself in Son and Spirit. He states, "Light and heat may in a special manner be said to be the proper nature of the sun; and yet none will say that everything to which the sun communicates a little of its light and heat has therefore communicated to it the essence of the sun, and is sunned with the sun, or becomes the same being with the sun, or becomes equal to that immense fountain of light and heat. A diamond or crystal that is held forth in the sun's beams may properly be said to have some of the sun's brightness communicated to it; for though it hasn't the same individual brightness with that which is inherent in the sun, and be immensely less in degree, yet it is something of the same nature" ("Unpublished Letter on Assurance and Participation in the Divine Nature," 640).

³¹ Roger Olson argues that constructive accounts of deification (or *theosis*) must necessarily utilize the essence/energies distinction. Roger Olson, "Deification in Contemporary Theology," *Theology Today* 64 (2007) 186–200, especially 199–200. This seems overstated. Rather, one must outline an account that allows for participation with God that does not somehow blur the Creator/creature distinction. The Palamite essence/energies distinction is one way to do that, but by no means the only way to do so. Edwards scholars have noted the interesting overlap of Edwards with Palamas (and other Eastern Orthodox figures, both ancient and modern). Most importantly, see McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization," 139–60; and Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 416–19. McClymond is right to point out the overlap between Edwards and Palamas on this point, and there seems to be no doubt that Edwards's use of the phrase "divine light" (among other terms) is doing the same work, so to speak, that Palamas is doing with the divine energies. That said, it is not unimportant that Edwards refuses to allow for a participation in the divine nature outside of the economic activity of the divine persons. This seems essential to a distinctively Protestant account of *theosis*. See McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization," 146–47.

as I highlight below, as the elect receive the Son and Spirit in redemption, they participate in these natures as well.³² In redeeming humankind, God gives himself to the believer so that they can participate in his own self-understanding and self-love.

■ Incarnation: Unity in the Spirit

Traditionally, the incarnation has provided the necessary dogmatic architecture to construct an account of deification.³³ In a broadly similar sense, Edwards's doctrine of the incarnation offers the theological blueprint upon which he builds his account of *theosis*.³⁴ Prior to expositing Edwards's view of the incarnation specifically, it is fruitful to sketch an overview of its purpose. There are several instances in Edwards's thought that highlight this broad movement, but few are as explicit as the following two examples. First, in his sermon on Canticles 1:3, he claims, "We shall in a sort be partakers of his [Christ's] relation to the Father or his communion with him in his Sonship. We shall not only be the sons of God by regeneration but a kind of participation of the Sonship of the eternal Son."³⁵ Secondly, and along similar lines, Edwards states,

This was the design of Christ, to bring it to pass, that he, and his Father, and his people, might all be united in one. . . that those that the Father has given him, should be brought into the household of God; that he, and his Father, and his people, should be as it were one society, one family; that the church should be as it were admitted into the society of the blessed Trinity.³⁶

³² Edwards's analysis allows for a participation in the nature of God, following 2 Pet 1:4. By doing so, he removes the need to create another aspect of God's life that is communicable (i.e., the divine energies) and can utilize the biblical material more fruitfully. Palamas's distinction protects against a participation in the divine essence, but does so by positing an extra-biblical distinction that Edwards would have found unnecessary.

³³ The standard example is Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54.

³⁴ There seems to be a growing consensus (broadly speaking) on Edwards's doctrine of the incarnation (and maybe more specifically, the nature of his Spirit-Christology). For the most helpful analyses, see Robert W. Caldwell, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Studies in Evangelical History and Thought; Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006) 74–97; Robert W. Jenson, "Christology" in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Sang Hyun Lee; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 72–86; McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 244–61; Seng-Kong Tan, "Trinitarian Action in the Incarnation" in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary* (ed. Don Schweitzer; New York: Peter Lang, 2010) 127–50; and Brandon G. Withrow, *Becoming Divine: Jonathan Edwards's Incarnational Spirituality within the Christian Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011) 126–35.

³⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *The Blessing of God: Previously Unpublished Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Michael D. McMullen; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003) 177. Furthermore, Edwards states, "For there is doubtless an infinite intimacy between the Father and the Son. . . And saints being in him, shall, in their measure and manner, partake with him in it, and the blessedness of it" ("The Excellency of Christ," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738* [ed. M. X. Lesser; vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001] 560–94, at 593).

³⁶ Edwards, "The Excellency of Christ," 593.

In these two instances we see the broad picture of Edwards's doctrine of *theosis*. Saints are children of God not merely by regeneration, but by a true participation in the Sonship of the Son. We will see this more clearly in Edwards's soteriology, but for now it helps to orient our discussion of the incarnation. Turning to Edwards's account of the incarnation specifically, it is important to attend to this doctrine within the telos noted above. How do believers, in other words, come to partake in God's own life?

■ Edwards's Spirit-Christology

Edwards, following John Owen, held to a Spirit-Christology such that the Holy Spirit was the bond of union between the divine and human natures of Christ.³⁷ In an early and (slightly) convoluted *Miscellanies* entry, Edwards states,

The man Christ is united to the Logos these two ways: first, by the respect which God hath to this human nature. God hath respect to this man and loveth him as his own Son; this man hath communion with the Logos, in the love which the Father hath to him as his only begotten Son. Now the love of God is the Holy Ghost. And secondly, by what is inherent in this man, whereby he becomes one person; which is only by the communion of understanding and communion of will, inclination, spirit or temper.³⁸

First, Edwards notes that God the Father respects the man Jesus as his only begotten Son. Further, the man Jesus has communion with the Logos within the very love of God, which is the Holy Spirit. Just as God the Father and God the Son are bound together in the inner-life of God by the Spirit of love, so too the man Jesus knows this communion through the Spirit. Edwards explains that, "He [Christ] has the same spirit or disposition towards the Father; not as believers have a filial spirit . . . but he has the Spirit of the only begotten of the Father."³⁹ The Logos and Christ share in a specific relation to the Father, a relation known in the Holy Spirit of God, and a relation which is *sui generis* and personal. Second, Jesus Christ somehow has a communion of understanding, will, and disposition with the Logos.⁴⁰ Edwards claims that, "The man Jesus becomes one person by a communion of knowledge and will," and also, "'tis by the Spirit that divine knowledge and consciousness is

³⁷ One of the potential links between Edwards's Christology and Patristic Christology is Didymus of Alexandria as interpreted by John Owen. This is an interesting link between Edwards and Patristic material that may help to account for his robust doctrine of *theosis*. See Withrow, *Becoming Divine*, 126–34. Oliver Crisp has a helpful overview and critical appropriation of Owen's Spirit-Christology in his *Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2011) 168–98.

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies 487," in *The "Miscellanies": A–500* (ed. Thomas A. Schafer; vol. 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 528–31, at 529.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ It is beyond the scope of this article to address the many questions which concern this view. Seng-Kong Tan has addressed these in detail in his "Trinitarian Action in the Incarnation," 127–39.

given to the man Jesus.”⁴¹ The Spirit serves to unite the two natures in one person. In taking this line, Edwards realizes that he is open to some obvious criticism. If the Spirit is the agent that takes on the flesh of humanity to unite it to the Godhead (and Logos specifically), why is the Son incarnate and not the Spirit?⁴² Edwards responds,

this objection is without substance, for the union we speak of is not an union of contact or influence, but a personal union. Christ may be by the indwelling and influence of the Holy Ghost personally united to the Son of God, and yet not be personally united to the Holy Ghost, through whose indwelling and influence it is.⁴³

The Spirit personally unites the Logos and the human nature of Christ in one person, and yet it is not the person of the Spirit, but the Son who is incarnate. Therefore, utilizing this line of logic, Edwards can baldly state, “In Jesus who dwelt here upon earth, there was immediately *only these two things*: there was flesh, or the human nature; and there was the Spirit of holiness, or the eternal Spirit, by which he was united to the Logos.”⁴⁴ What we see in the immanent life of God we see in the economic: the Spirit of God is the binding love between the Father and his Son. This union, as a personal union by the Spirit, is *sui generis*. On the other hand, as an economic act of the Spirit it has an analogous parallel in creaturely redemption. The redemption of the elect follows the pattern found in the incarnation of the Son. In an early *Miscellanies* entry, Edwards states, “There is a likeness in the manner of God’s dwelling in the man Christ, and in believers.”⁴⁵ Robert Caldwell provides a summary of Edwards’s development of these parallel unions in his book-length analysis of Edwards’s pneumatology:

The relative union whereby human beings harmonize in community, the mystical union believers have with Christ, the essential union that is enjoyed by the members of the Trinity, and hypostatic union of Christ’s two natures all share one common denominator: the Holy Spirit’s immediate and personal activity as the bond of union among distinct persons.⁴⁶

■ Incarnation: Ordering *Theosis*

The Son of God “takes on flesh” and dwells among creatures through the action of the Spirit. The redemptive parallel to this action is Christ sending his Spirit to unite with human persons for participation in his Sonship before the Father. Edwards ties the incarnation and the work of *theosis* together when he states, “inasmuch as he was a divine person, he brought down divinity with him to us. So

⁴¹ Edwards, “*Miscellanies* 487,” 530.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 531.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 532.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* [italics added].

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 528.

⁴⁶ Caldwell, *Communion in the Spirit*, 87.

he brought God down to man, and then he ascended to God. Inasmuch as he was in the human nature, he carried up humanity with him to God."⁴⁷ Later, Edwards builds on this descending and ascending motif but draws out the parallels more fully: "he came into this world and brought God or divinity down with him to us; and then he ascended to God and carried up humanity or man with him to God. And from heaven he sent down the Holy Spirit, whereby he gives God to man, and hereby he draws them to give up themselves to God."⁴⁸ Edwards recognizes a parallel movement in the incarnation and the sending of the Spirit. Furthermore, there is another parallel between the ascension of Christ to the Father and the saints' ascension to God in Christ. Therefore, to trace this parallel, just as the Son knows the Father in communion and love, so glorified believers come to ascend within that very relationship: "The saints shall enjoy God as partaking with Christ *of his* enjoyment of God."⁴⁹ The saints' access to God is through the person of Christ alone: "They being in Christ shall partake of the love God the Father [has] to Christ, and as the Son knows the Father so they shall partake with him in his sight of God, as being as it were parts of him as he is in the bosom of the Father."⁵⁰ Furthermore, as we will see more fully below, this provides a specific teleology for Edwards's soteriology. He claims,

As the new nature is from God, so it tends to God as its center; and as that which tends to its center is not quiet and at rest, till it has got quite to the very center, so the new nature that is in the saints never will it be at rest, till there is a perfect union with God and conformity to him, and so no separation, or alienation, or enmity remaining. The holy nature in the saints tends to the fountain whence it proceeds, and never will be at rest, till the soul is fully brought to that fountain, and all swallowed up in it.⁵¹

The centripetal force of God's love will draw the saints into a full union with himself, a union that will increase eternally. God's own life is an infinite fountain of knowledge and love, what Edwards refers to as the "communicative" nature of God's eternal life. It is the receiving of this knowledge and love—as a participation in the very nature of God's life—that awaits the saints in glory. Human persons partake of the life of God, and are therefore fully actualized in the overflow of God's

⁴⁷ Edwards, *The Blessing of God*, 322–23. See also Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies 772," in *The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 501–832* (ed. Ava Chamberlain; vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 422.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Jonathan Edwards, Romans 2:10 (Unpublished Sermon), Jonathan Edwards Center Transcriptions #373 [L.44v] [italics added]; hereafter Romans 2:10 with leaf number.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, [L.44v-L.45r].

⁵¹ Jonathan Edwards, "Striving After Perfection," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734-1738* (ed. M. X. Lesser; vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 683-703, at 692.

love and knowledge. Far from being static, eternity is inherently dynamic—an interplay of persons uniting in love, knowledge, and participation in one another.⁵² This eternal union and conformity to God is, quite simply, the necessary direction of theotic soteriologies.⁵³ In different but equally bold terminology, Edwards states,

Thus they shall eat and drink abundantly, and swim in the ocean of love, and be eternally swallowed up in the infinitely bright, and infinitely mild and sweet beams of divine love; eternally receiving that light, eternally full of it, and eternally compassed round with it, and everlastingly reflecting it back again to the fountain of it.⁵⁴

In this sense, in regeneration, the Spirit's infusion renews the image of God, so that "man is raised to the heavenly life, so that he is enabled to live to God and to perform those actions that are for God's glory and for his own true happiness."⁵⁵ The regenerate are now partaking in this fountain of life, so that the soul becomes like God: "But the soul of a saint receives light from the Sun of Righteousness, in such a manner, that its nature is changed, and it becomes properly a luminous thing: not only does the sun shine in the saints, but they also become little suns, partaking of the nature of the fountain of their light."⁵⁶ In eternity, what was given in part in regeneration is known robustly in glorification: "the soul which only had a little spark of divine love in it in this world shall be, as it were, wholly turned into love; and be like the sun, not having a spot in it, but being wholly a bright, ardent flame."⁵⁷ In this sense Edwards notes that as God's life is pure act, by analogy, glorified creatures are now perpetually active: "They [the saints] shall *perpetually* behold God's glory and *perpetually* enjoy his love. But they shall not remain in a state of inactivity, merely receiving from God; but they return to him and shall enjoy him in a way of serving and glorifying him."⁵⁸ Religious affections mark out the

⁵² "The soul shall not be an inactive spectator but shall be most active, shall be in the most ardent exercise of love towards the object seen. The soul shall be, as it were, all eye to behold, and yet all act to love." Edwards, Romans 2:10 [L.45v].

⁵³ Pseudo-Dionysius' declaration that "divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God" is a helpful parallel here. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works* (trans. Paul Rorem; *Classics of Western Spirituality*; New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 193–260, at 198.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "True Saints, When Absent from the Body, Are Present with the Lord," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1743–1758* (ed. Wilson H. Kimnach; vol. 25 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006) 222–56, at 233.

⁵⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "Honey from the Rock," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 123–38, at 136.

⁵⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (ed. John E. Smith; vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959) 91–462, at 343.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (ed. Paul Ramsey; vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 129–397, at 374–75.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Edwards, "Serving God in Heaven," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 253–61, at 259 [italics added].

believer's life after regeneration, and religious affections entail a true participation in God's self-understanding and self-love given over in Son and Spirit. God's life is utterly captivating to the believer who now has eyes to see and ears to hear.

The Christian life, for Edwards, is a life of religious affection. Religious affection highlights how God pours forth as an infinite fountain and how creatures receive and flow back to God according to their finite capacities. God's own attributes of understanding and love—personal attributes of Son and Spirit—are known, and participated in, through the dark glass of faith here and now, but in eternity the saints share in the pouring forth and pouring back of the Spirit of love that is God's eternal existence:

All shall stand about the God of glory, the fountain of love, as it were opening their bosoms to be filled with those effusions of love which are poured forth from thence, as the flowers on the earth in a pleasant spring day open their bosoms to the sun to be filled with his warmth and light, and to flourish in beauty and fragrancy by his rays. Every saint is as a flower in the garden of God, and holy love is the fragrancy and sweet odor which they all send forth, and with which they fill that paradise. Every saint there is as a note in a concert of music which sweetly harmonizes with every other note, and all together employed wholly in praising God and the Lamb; and so all helping one another to their utmost to express their love of the whole society to the glorious Father and Head of it, and [to pour back] love into the fountain of love, whence they are supplied and filled with love and with glory.⁵⁹

In receiving the communicative overflow of God's life, believers are partaking in the divine nature carried over in the Son and the Spirit, and as such, are partaking in God's life. Therefore, Edwards says, in his most explicit use of deification language, "the saints are exalted to glorious dignity, even to union and fellowship with God him[self], to be in some respects *divine* in glory and happiness."⁶⁰ Glory and happiness are terms that describe God's communicable life, and the saints can be considered divine in this way (with the important qualifier of "in some respects"). He expands this qualification by noting, "yet care is taken that it should not be in themselves, but in a person that is God; and they must be as it were emptied of themselves in order to it."⁶¹ God is all, and as the creature is emptied of himself or herself, they are filled in the ocean of God (without ever losing their individual, personal identity). The picture of life Edwards develops, therefore, is one where the creature finds all goodness, beauty and love within God, and not themselves. Edwards states, "The design of God in thus ordering things is to teach and show that he is all, and the creature nothing."⁶² This "nothing" means that the creature has no

⁵⁹ Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 386.

⁶⁰ Edwards, "Miscellanies 681," 241 [italics added].

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 241–42.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 241.

goodness in autonomy, but as a creature made in the image of God, human persons are capable of partaking in the fullness that is God's life (i.e., *theosis*). In fact, it is through this participation in the life of God that the creature is fully actualized.⁶³

■ Soteriology: Salvation through Pneumatological-Participation

We have already mentioned what might be called the meta-narrative of Edwards's soteriology—that believers come to partake in the Son's relationship to the Father.⁶⁴ Likewise, we have highlighted Edwards's Spirit-Christology and shown how the Spirit's work to unite the human nature of Christ to the life of God is the archetype upon which the ectype of redemption is etched. The pneumatological structure of Edwards's Christology orients his doctrine of *theosis*, and central to this account is the connection between the persons of God in the economy and the attributes they communicate to the creature. Furthermore, since the Spirit's nature is holiness, love, beauty, and grace, receiving the Spirit is receiving God's own holiness, love, beauty, and grace, and is, therefore, a communion in the life of God.⁶⁵

In the remaining space of this section, we provide a narrative of redemption with an eye on *theosis* as a structural schema. First, as noted above, the focal point of God's economic activity is the Son and Spirit offering union and communion with God, and the centerpiece of this redemption is Christ's death on the cross. While Edwards's doctrine of atonement is hard to reconstruct, one aspect is clear: Christ's life and ministry purchases the Spirit for believers.⁶⁶ Importantly, as I have emphasized, to have the Spirit is to have God's own love and will such that

⁶³ Gannon Murphy's exposition of a Reformed doctrine of *theosis* is helpful in this regard: "Thus, my understanding of the doctrine acknowledges that God's elect do literally share or become 'partakers' in the divine, but their creaturely status and individual personality are not distorted or erased. On the contrary, the theotic aspect of *Christus in nobis* and *unio mystica* does not entail the erasure of the human person but the *actualization* of it. Our entire person—mind, body, soul—is designed to be in communion with the Trinity, to be totally embraced by God and enveloped by the glory of the Lord." Gannon Murphy, "Reformed *Theosis*?" *ThTo* 65 (2008) 191–212, at 200 [italics in original].

⁶⁴ I am following the broad argument laid out in *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (ed. Josh Moody; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), and more specifically my chapter, "By Word and Spirit: Jonathan Edwards on Redemption, Justification, and Regeneration," 45–69. This view is, furthermore, in broad agreement with John Bombaro and Jeffrey Waddington. See John J. Bombaro, "Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Salvation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003) 45–67; and Jeffrey C. Waddington, "Jonathan Edwards's 'Ambiguous and Somewhat Precarious' Doctrine of Justification," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004) 357–372. For an alternative view, see Gerald McDermott, "Jonathan Edwards on Justification by Faith—More Protestant or Catholic?" *Pro Ecclesia* 27 (2008) 92–111.

⁶⁵ When Russell articulates the emphasis on participation in the tradition, he narrates what partaking in holiness entailed: "To say that the holy person 'participates' in holiness conveys a relationship which is (a) substantial, not just a matter of appearance, and (b) asymmetrical, not a relationship between equals." Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 2. This is exactly what we see in Edwards.

⁶⁶ "The Holy Spirit is the great purchase of Christ. God the Father is the person of whom the purchase is made; God the Son is the person who makes the purchase, and the Holy Spirit is the gift purchased." Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 353.

believers truly partake of God. Furthermore, as love, the Spirit unites. Just as the Spirit unites the two natures of Christ in the love of the Father (the Father loving Christ as Son), so too the Spirit (given over by the Son), unites believers to God. The elect are united to God in Christ as a bride is united to her groom in marriage—they are truly one flesh (and even one spirit, 1 Cor 6:17). The giving over of the Spirit is parallel to God sending the Spirit to unite a human nature to the Logos. Just as Christ's human nature was sanctified in the incarnation, so too by being united to the incarnate One are the elect made new.⁶⁷

The sending of the Spirit brings about regeneration, justification, sanctification, and ultimately glorification. In regeneration, “habits of true virtue and holiness” are obtained and believers “come to have the character of true Christians.”⁶⁸ The “habit” and “character” is nothing less than the habit and character of God's own life—the “Holy” Spirit—or holiness itself dwelling in them.⁶⁹ Christ loves the elect to such a degree, that his act of loving unites them to his own life of holiness. This parallels the Father sending the Spirit of love to incarnate the Logos as the man Jesus, who is only truly the Son of the Father because the Father sees him as such. Upon his ascension Jesus sends the Spirit to unite believers to himself, so that the Father looks upon believers as one with Christ, and therefore truly his own children. The Spirit's vivifying activity turns the believer to Christ so that the believer receives him. This act of receiving, on the believer's part, is faith. Therefore faith is based upon the real work of the Spirit in the life of a believer, and yet righteousness remains alien because only Christ is truly righteous.⁷⁰

In explaining his account of justification, Edwards asserts that “God neither will nor can justify a person without a righteousness . . . if a person should be justified without a righteousness, the judgment would not be according to truth,” claiming that “the sentence of justification would be a false sentence, unless there be a righteousness performed that is by the judge properly looked upon as his.”⁷¹ Justification is, according to Edwards's account, truly legal, and therefore necessitates a right pronouncement by a judge. For the judge to be honorable and righteous, the believer must be actually righteous to be declared so. It is in this vein

⁶⁷ Edwards states, “And thus the Father sanctified him when he sent him into the world, and sanctified him in sending him into the world; *incarnated him by sanctification.*” Jonathan Edwards, “*Miscellanies* 709,” in *The “Miscellanies”*: Entry Nos. 501–832, 333–35, at 334 [italics added].

⁶⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin* (ed. Clyde A. Holbrook; vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970) 363.

⁶⁹ “God's Spirit, or his love, doth but as it were come and dwell in our hearts and act there as a vital principle, and we become the living temples of the Holy Ghost; and when men are regenerated and sanctified, God pours forth of his Spirit upon them, and they have fellowship or, which is the same thing, are made partakers with the Father and Son of their good, i.e. of their love, joy and beauty.” Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” 124.

⁷⁰ See my “By Word and Spirit,” 54–59.

⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738* (ed. M. X. Lesser; vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 147–242, at 188.

that Edwards states, “what is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal; that is, it is something really in them, and between them, uniting them, that is the ground of the suitability of their being accounted as one by the Judge.”⁷² Christ, as the fulfiller of the law, is the only person justified before God on his own account. The elect are not justified separate from Christ’s justification, but instead, are justified as they are one with Christ who is justified in himself.⁷³ Edwards claims that in Christ’s “justification all who believe in him, and whose surety he is, are virtually justified.”⁷⁴ God the Judge justifies Christ by raising him from the dead, and, Edwards continues to emphasize, “the justification of a believer *is not other* than his being admitted to communion in, or participation of the justification of this head and surety of all believers.”⁷⁵

In the incarnation God opens his life through his Son, and at Pentecost God sends his love to unite believers to his own life. In Christ the Father is known, and by the Spirit, Christ is illumined. Edwards’s account of justification posits a participation in the life of the faithful One so that his faithfulness is counted for the elect. In Edwards’s understanding, this is not suspect book-keeping on God’s part, nor is it a “legal fiction,” but it is grounded on the reality that the elect are truly one with the Son through communion with his Spirit. Therefore, Edwards can state, “it is in our partaking of the same Holy Spirit that our communion with God consists. . . . In partaking with the Father and the Son of the Holy Ghost, we possess and enjoy the love and grace of the Father and the Son: for the Holy Ghost is that love and grace.”⁷⁶ To partake in the life of God is not simply to enter a life extrinsic to oneself, but to receive and embrace that life internally. To explain this reality, Edwards turns to an infusion of the Holy Spirit that creates communion with

⁷² Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” 158.

⁷³ See my “By Word and Spirit,” 45–69.

⁷⁴ Edwards, “Justification by Faith Alone,” 150.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 151 [italics added]. In Edwards’s words, “therefore saving, justifying faith in Christ, don’t consist merely in the assent of the understanding, nor only in the consent of the will; but ’tis harmonizing of the whole soul with Jesus Christ, as he is revealed and held forth in the gospel. . . . Faith is no other than that harmony in the soul towards Christ that has been spoken of in its most direct act. And it may be defined [as] the soul’s entirely uniting and closing with Christ for his Savior, acquiescing in his reality and goodness as a Savior, as the gospel reveals him. And hence it is that by faith that we are justified, not as commending us to God by its excellency as a qualification in us, but as uniting us to Christ” (“The Sweet Harmony of Christ,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1734–1738* [ed. M. X. Lesser; vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001] 437–50, at 448). It is at this point that McClymond argues that Edwards’s theology shares an affinity with Catholic and Eastern Orthodox accounts, claiming, “The stress on actual union rather than legal imputation, the relative de-emphasis on faith *per se*, and the presentation of love and obedience as intrinsic to faith, establish an affinity between Edwards’s teaching on justification and what is generally found in Roman Catholic and Orthodox theologies” (“Salvation and Divinization,” 140). This claim is no longer taken for granted. Edwards’s account of justification, while unique, is well within the bounds of what one would find in Reformed High Orthodox accounts of justification. See *Jonathan Edwards and Justification* (ed. Moody), and more specifically my chapter, “By Word and Spirit,” 45–69.

⁷⁶ Edwards, “Discourse on the Trinity,” 130.

God through regeneration. This is a physical act.⁷⁷ The Spirit renews and sanctifies, such that, “those things are wrought in the soul that are above nature and they are caused to exist in the soul habitually, and according to such a stated constitution of law, that lays such a foundation for exercises in a continued course, as is called a principle of nature.”⁷⁸ The work of the Spirit on the regenerate is to unite himself to them and exert “his own nature in the exercise of their faculties.”⁷⁹ Only God is holy, and therefore the “Holy” Spirit communicates his own nature of holiness to the creature directly. Note that Edwards does not back away from language and texts utilized in traditional accounts of *theosis*:

There is no work so high and excellent; for there is no work wherein God does so much communicate himself, and wherein the mere creature hath, in so high a sense, a participation of God; so that it is expressed in Scripture by the saints being made “partakers of the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4), and having God dwelling in them, and they in God (I John 4:12, 15-16, and ch. 3:21), and having Christ in them (John 17:21; Rom. 8:10), being the temples of the living God (II Cor. 6:16), living by Christ’s life (Gal. 2:20), being made partakers of God’s holiness (Heb. 12:10), having Christ’s love dwelling in them (John 17:26), having his joy fulfilled in them (John 17:13), seeing light in God’s light, and being made to drink of the river of God’s pleasures (Ps. 36:8-9), having fellowship with God, or communicating and partaking with him (as the word signifies) (I John 1:3). Not that we are made partakers of the essence of God, and so are “Godded” with God, and ‘Christed’ with Christ, according to the abominable and blasphemous language and notions of some heretics; but, to use the Scripture phrase, they are made partakers of God’s fullness (Eph. 3:17–19; John 1:16), that is, of God’s beauty and happiness . . . for so it is evident the word “fullness” signifies in Scripture language.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ For more on infusion and a physical act of the Spirit in regeneration, see Jonathan Edwards, “Born Again,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733* (ed. Mark R. Valeri; vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 186-95, at 187; Edwards, “Treatise on Grace,” 165; and Edwards, “Efficacious Grace, Book I,” 202, 207-208. In utilizing this language Edwards is simply following the standard terminology in the “High Orthodox” period of Reformed theology. See Peter van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002) 17; and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger; 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992) 2: 524.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark R. Valeri; vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 408-26, at 411.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 203. For more on the language of this passage, particularly Edwards’s concern that believers are not “Godded with God” nor “Christed with Christ,” see my, “Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of *Theosis*,” 259–79.

The believer is given holiness as the Holy Spirit of God to indwell her being. This indwelling does not remain external, but is infused.⁸¹ Believers are caught up in the economic work of Son and Spirit drawing them into God's own life—to be “partakers of the divine nature” and to be “brought into the household of God” as we have already seen. This is a “participation of God,” Edwards notes, and while this is not a participation in God's essence (partaking in God's life in the same manner that he does), Edwards argues forcefully that this is a true participation in God himself.

The focus of Edwards's soteriology is undeniably the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit-filled Son is the justified One, and the Spirit-overflowing Son sends his Spirit to unite the elect to his own life. Through the Son, believers are united to God's life, and in glorification they come to see according to their finite capacity.⁸² Sanctification, therefore, is the work of the Spirit in the hearts of the saints to mortify the flesh and vivify their spirits. Just like justification, sanctification is a participation in the Son—a participation in his holiness. This participation is the engine of mortification and vivification and continues the work of transformation begun in regeneration. Edwards's soteriology does not rotate around a singular locus (e.g., justification), but finds its orbit in the person and work of Christ and the person and work of the Spirit. *Theosis* is not simply a category of glorification (or union, justification, sanctification, etc.), but is the structural category of soteriology as such. *Theosis*, and its grammar of participation, forms Edwards's soteriology and orients it to its ultimate goal—an increasing union, communion, and participation with God in Christ for eternity. This theocentric vision follows along the same contours and concerns as the Fathers and Eastern Orthodox, and therefore it is not surprising that Edwards's soteriology as a whole follows with similar emphases.⁸³

⁸¹ Pastorally, Edwards often called his people to live in such a way as to anticipate God's gift of infusion: “Practicing according to the light we have, has a natural tendency to prepare the mind for the infusion of spiritual knowledge.” Edwards, “A Spiritual Understanding,” 94. Or, in terms of the means of grace, “The means of grace, such as the Word and sacraments, supply the mind with notions, or speculative ideas, of the things of religion, and thus give an opportunity for grace to act in the soul; for hereby the soul is supplied with matter for grace to act upon, *when God shall be pleased to infuse it.*” Edwards, “*Miscellanies* 539,” 85 [italics added].

⁸² See my, “Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision,” in *Jonathan Edwards and Scotland* (ed. Ken Minkema, Adriaan Neale and Kelly van Anel; Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2011) 237–65.

⁸³ Panayiotis Nellas, summarizing the teaching of the Fathers, states, “Having been made in the image of God, man has a theological structure. And to be a true man he must at every moment exist and live theocentrically. When he denies God he denies himself and destroys himself. When he lives theocentrically he realizes himself by reaching out into infinity; he attains his true fulfilment by extending into eternity” (Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987) 42.

■ Uniting the Strands of *Theosis*

Edwards's account of the Trinity offers a way to talk about personhood through participation and God's communicable nature without succumbing to some form of radical divinization where creatures partake in God's essence. This is an interesting point in light of Rowan Williams's assertion, noted above, that what divides the two strands of *theosis* in the tradition is the differing accounts of participation and communion. According to one strand, *theosis* is primarily a communication of the divine attributes, whereas on the other, *theosis* is a participation in the relationship of the divine persons. In Edwards's account it is impossible to pull these two notions apart. The Son and the Spirit, as persons, are also attributes (i.e., "natures") that are communicated in the economy to the elect. To partake in the divine attributes simply is to partake in the relationship of the divine persons.⁸⁴ Edwards unites these two within the immanent life of God and refuses to separate them in the economy. Furthermore, by utilizing the term "nature" in this way, Edwards can refer to the classic text on *theosis*, 2 Peter 1:4, where Peter claims that believers can be partakers of the divine nature, without having to employ an extra-biblical term like "energies" as with Eastern Orthodox accounts. For Edwards, there is no "energy" or attribute communicable from God to the creature outside of the economic movement of Son and Spirit. God's self-giving is exactly that, giving over himself in the Son and the Spirit; there cannot be, on his view, another way of partaking in God's life than in the Son by the Spirit.⁸⁵ In this sense, we can say that Edwards did not simply unite the two strands of the *theosis* tradition, but that he constructed a unique account of the relational emphasis and developed it in such a way as to interpret the communication of attributes relationally. Edwards's psychological analogy and reworking of the divine attributes around personhood serve as the foundation for such an account.

■ A Reformed Account?

We have seen that Edwards's exposition of *theosis* is able to bridge two ancient strands of thought. Furthermore, Edwards follows Calvin in his use of the "divine nature" to signify a communicable feature of God's life, but does so through his unique development of the Trinity and divine attributes. Now we can raise

⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that this move is possible because Edwards reworks the divine attributes in a trinitarian (and personal) manner, linking the attributes to the Son and Spirit. For further discussion of this move, and some of the polemical intent behind it, see my *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 40–65; 234–42.

⁸⁵ It is instructive to attend to Edwards's language concerning the nature of partaking. In certain instances he will speak to the believers partaking "of" God's holiness (e.g., Edwards, "Unpublished Letter on Assurance, 639) or partaking "of" Christ's relation to the Father (e.g., Edwards, *The Blessing of God*, 177), and in other instance he says that believers partake "with" Christ (e.g., Edwards, Rom 2:10, [L.44v]). When Edwards is focusing on an aspect of God's communicable nature, he uses "of", and when he is focusing on the relational aspect of his account he uses "with."

the question noted at the beginning of this essay: Is this account Reformed? Furthermore, and along similar lines, it is important to ask if it is even possible for a Reformed theologian to posit an intellectually viable account of *theosis* in light of other essential commitments.⁸⁶

While it is widely argued in the secondary literature that the Reformed did develop doctrines of *theosis*, there is still the question of whether this is doctrinally possible.⁸⁷ To address this question, we turn to Bruce McCormack's critique of recent expositions of Calvin's doctrine of *theosis*.⁸⁸ Using McCormack's engagement with Calvin studies, we can advance a potential criticism of any Reformed doctrine of *theosis*. This criticism can be succinctly formulated as follows: A Reformed doctrine of *theosis* is impossible because it would necessitate a rejection of the Reformed view of the *communicatio idiomatum*. If this criticism stands, it would serve to drive a wedge between Edwards's thought on this point in relation to his

⁸⁶ One of the themes found in the literature is that a Reformed theological system undermines a doctrine of *theosis* because the doctrine of depravity makes this kind of trajectory impossible. See, for instance, D. Stephen Long, *Christian Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 66. But this critique assumes that *theosis* entails a synergistic account of salvation. In contrast, Edwards's doctrine of *theosis*, utilizing his Reformed theological system, focuses on God as all in all. *Theosis*, as a doctrine, does not depend on specific notions of creatively freedom and ascetical activity, even though these are often included. Gannon Murphy argues similarly, stating, "A Reformed understanding must ground *theosis* and its fruits in the unilateral operation of God in the believer in both ends and means. As such, *theosis* is certainly in a sense 'acquired' through praxis, but never autonomously. It is rather the processive product of God working in, through, and for the believer to his own eternal glory" (Murphy, "Reformed *Theosis*?", 200). By focusing on God's activity and self-giving, there is nothing contrary to total depravity. The creature does not earn *theosis*, but receives it as grace.

⁸⁷ Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *SJT* 55 (2002) 36–57; Murphy, "Reformed *Theosis*?", 191–212; J. Todd Billings, "John Calvin: United to God through Christ," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 200–18; idem, "United to God through Christ: Assessing Calvin on the Question of Deification," *HTR* 98:3 (2005) 315–334; Myk Habets, "Reforming Theosis," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov; Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2006) 146–67; idem, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance* (Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series; Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009); idem, "*Theosis, Yes; Deification, No*," 124–149; Yang-Ho Lee, "Calvin on Deification: A Reply to Carl Mosser and Jonathan Slater," *SJT* 63 (2010) 272–84.

⁸⁸ McCormack develops his critique in conversation with several key Calvin scholars, such as Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing;" Billings, "John Calvin: United to God through Christ;" and Julie Canlis, "Calvin, Osiander and Participation in God," *IJST* 6 (2004) 169–184. While McCormack addresses other scholars, these three are the focus of his critique of *theosis* and the assumptions surrounding such a view. While it is beyond the scope of this article to assess McCormack's claims or the accuracy of his interpretation of these sources, we will call into question some of his assumptions concerning necessary features of *theosis*. Specifically, we argue that McCormack's critique only works against one strand of the *theosis* tradition, and that the Reformed followed the relational strand instead.

standing within the Reformed tradition.⁸⁹ We will conclude that Edwards's view is able to navigate this potential critique through his unique development of the communicable nature of God as a participation in the life of the divine persons, allowing him to affirm the Reformed position on the *communicatio idiomatum* as well as posit a robust doctrine of *theosis*.

■ Communication of Attributes and a Reformed Christology

In our exposition of Edwards's Spirit-Christology, we discovered a Reformed Christology with a particular emphasis on the work of the Spirit. In his development, the divine and human natures were both upheld in the Spirit, and both communicated their natures to the person within the Spirit. But if this is the case, if the human nature is not ultimately deified by the divine, can real *theosis* take place? This is

⁸⁹ In the secondary literature one sometimes runs across the notion that a Reformed doctrine of *theosis* is impossible because it is assumed that a doctrine of *theosis* can only be developed within Eastern Orthodox doctrinal systems. This is an unusual claim. For instance, Gösta Hallonsten states, "A real *doctrine of theosis*, however, is to be found only in the East" ("*Theosis* in Recent Research," 292 n.43). Likewise, Andrew Louth has said, "It [*theosis*] is no longer part of the pattern of either contemporary Catholic or Protestant theology; Western attempts to understand it have consequently assimilated it to an alien framework, and not surprisingly, it fits very awkwardly" ("The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* [eds. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007] 32–46, at 33). There are two important points here. First, when it comes to doctrine, it is unclear to me what it would take to argue this claim. In other words, even if the Eastern Orthodox were the only group ever to talk about *theosis*, that says nothing about whether the doctrine could exist within other theological systems. Western developments would, no doubt, be unique compared to Eastern accounts, but that does not raise into question if a Western account is possible. Second, a doctrine of *theosis* has always been found in the West. Carl Mosser is helpful in this regard, narrating the development of modern assumptions that *theosis* is an Eastern doctrine. See Mosser, "An Exotic Flower?," 38–56. The assumption that *theosis* uniquely resides within Eastern Orthodoxy is unfounded, and, importantly, widely rejected among Eastern Orthodox scholars themselves. For instance, Norman Russell includes an appendix on Latin and Syriac traditions of *theosis* in his major work on the history of the doctrine of deification (Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*," 321–32). Furthermore, Russell, in another work on *theosis*, states, "The recovery of the notion of *theosis* has spread even beyond the bounds of the Orthodox communion. One of the most remarkable of these developments is the claim made by some Finnish Lutheran theologians that Luther himself accepted the idea of the deification of the Christian. Under this influence work has been done recently in the United States on various aspects of *theosis* in order to illuminate Protestant teaching on salvation" (*Fellow Workers With God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009] 18–19). The idea that *theosis* is somehow an "Eastern doctrine" cannot be assumed, but would entail robust argumentation (but again, it is unclear what kind of argumentation it would take to even make this kind of argument). When this assumption is asserted, what is really suggested is that an Eastern Orthodox doctrine of *theosis* is not found outside Eastern Orthodoxy. This is surely correct, but it does not say anything about other accounts. See, for instance, Andrew Louth, "The Place of *Theosis* in Orthodox Theology," 33. It is noteworthy that Louth's chapter focuses on the place of *theosis* within Eastern Orthodox theology and uses that development to argue against Western accounts. Assuming his argument is accurate, all Louth can argue for in his chapter is that Eastern doctrines of *theosis* have developed differently than Western ones.

at the heart of Bruce McCormack's critique of scholars arguing for a doctrine of deification in Calvin. McCormack notes, "Calvin has retained the later orthodox idea of a 'compound person' and the later orthodox treatment of the communication of attributes. *But he has dispensed completely with that which made divinization theories possible: the idea of an interpenetration of the natures.*"⁹⁰ For McCormack, this undermines the possibility of a real participation in the divine. He continues, "And since there can be no interpenetration of the natures in Christ, participation in the human nature of Christ cannot result in a participation in the divine nature. The end result is that you simply cannot find the ontological ground needed for a divinization theory in Calvin's Christology. If there is no interpenetration of the natures, there can be no divinization."⁹¹

If we take McCormack's critique concerning interpretations of Calvin on *theosis* and apply that to Edwards, we have a way to assess, doctrinally, if it is even possible to claim that Edwards has a Reformed doctrine of *theosis*. There is no question that Edwards's Spirit-Christology entails a different approach than Calvin's, but it also seems clear that Edwards uses it to make the same theological claims. In other words, like Owen before him, Edwards's use of pneumatology is to secure the Reformed view that there is not a communication between the natures such that the human nature is divinized by the divine. But even this critique still leaves the issues somewhat abstract. McCormack, helpfully, focuses in on the key questions:

What is finally meant by the well-worn phrase *participation in the life of God*? The phrase is ambiguous on the face of it. Does it mean 'participation in the life that is God's own, the life that is proper to him as God, that life that is his *essentially*?' If so, how is it possible to participate in it without participating in the divine essence? . . . To put a finer point on it: is the 'life of God' in which we are said to participate *uncreated* life or *created* life?⁹²

These are the right questions to pose to Edwards's doctrine as well as Calvin's. This is exactly where we see Edwards's idiosyncratic understanding of the communicable natures (i.e., attributes) of God guide his thought. Furthermore, it is at this point where we can see how Edwards pulls together the two strands of the tradition into one singular account, and how this allows him to maintain a Reformed Christology without losing the ability to talk about a participation in God's uncreated life, all without allowing for the believer to somehow partake in God's essence. In response to McCormack's question concerning Calvin's theology, we bring together several threads in Edwards's view that highlights how his account of *theosis* is still distinctively Reformed. Central to this argument is Edwards's understanding of divine attributes and what participation in God's life entails.

⁹⁰ Bruce L. McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology: Grounds for a Divinization Theory?," in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary* (ed. David W. Hall; The Calvin 500 Series; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010) 504–529, at 516 [italics in original].

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 505 [italics in original].

For Edwards, participation in the divine life is a relational reality that entails a participation in God's attributes. As we have seen, Edwards is able to pull together the two strands of the *theosis* tradition by linking the creatures' participation in the divine nature with relational participation with the divine persons. In his "Discourse on the Trinity," Edwards says this about the divine attributes:

It is a maxim amongst divines that everything that is in God is God, which must be understood of real attributes and not of mere modalities. If a man should tell me that the immutability of God is God, or that the omnipresence of God and authority of God [is God], I should not be able to think of any rational meaning of what he said. It hardly sounds to me proper to say that God's being without change is God, or that God's being everywhere is God, or that God's having a right of government over creatures is God. But if it be meant that the real attributes of God, viz. his understanding and love, are God, then what we have said may in some measure explain how it is so: for Deity subsists in them distinctly, so they are distinct divine persons.⁹³

On Edwards's understanding of real attributes, what is intrinsic to God's life and nature are features of personhood. All other attributes, therefore, are extrinsic and do not constitute God's nature (even though they are still true of God).⁹⁴ Edwards names these extrinsic attributes "relational attributes," or, as in the quote above, "modalities." Understanding and will, which are God's attributes, are also understood to be God's nature. Within understanding and will, it is important to note, Edwards includes synonyms like wisdom and image for understanding, and love, peace, beauty, and glory for will.⁹⁵ To partake in God's nature, therefore, on Edwards's understanding, is to partake in God's self-understanding and self-willing. This is how Edwards defines religious affection. God's life is religious affection in pure act, and creatures come to partake of this life through the giving of the Son (understanding and image) and the Spirit (will and love). To have understanding without love would be mere speculative knowledge, and therefore could not be a participation in God's self-knowing (which is affectionate self-knowledge).⁹⁶ The Son and Spirit in the economy carry within themselves the features of God's life

⁹³ Edwards, "Discourse on the Trinity," 132.

⁹⁴ This point is not without detractors. Oliver Crisp argues differently, suggesting that these are not extrinsic attributes but attributes in the divine essence (and not "real," in the sense that they call out one of the divine persons). For this debate, see my *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 234–242; Oliver D. Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards's God: *Trinity, Individuation, and Divine Simplicity* (ed. Bruce L. McCormack; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008) 83–103; and Oliver Crisp, "Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4 (2014) 21–41. The argument developed here should, indirectly, add further justification to my argument. This is indirect because it does not undermine Crisp's position, but it shows further continuity with what I have argued concerning the divine attributes.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118–131.

⁹⁶ For Edwards on speculative knowledge, see Jonathan Edwards "The Pure in Heart Blessed," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 59–86, at 63.

that they embody in the eternal processions of the godhead. By partaking of God's own understanding and will, believers are partakers of the divine nature. This is why Edwards can use partaking and fellowship interchangeably. To participate in the divine attributes is what it means to have fellowship with God.⁹⁷

Importantly, partaking in God's life entails the self-giving of God in Son (understanding) and Spirit (will/love), and is, therefore, partaking in the uncreated life of God. But this does not entail a participation in the divine essence. The divine essence calls out God's own participation in his life, as deity.⁹⁸ God's participation is unique as infinite, uncreated, and eternal, but the uncreated life of God is communicable to finite, created, and temporal creatures.⁹⁹ God's participation is immediate within his divine essence, and creatures can share in this life as human persons in the mediated immediacy of God's self-giving.¹⁰⁰ This partaking is mediated in that it is always in and through Christ, but it is immediate in that the divine life is not communicated through means external to God's life, but through a communion and participation in the Son and Spirit. For Edwards, this partaking is described as the beatific vision, which is an immediate sight of God the Father, mediated by Christ in the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ Just as the Father gazes upon the Son (i.e., the divine understanding) in the infinite actuality of the Spirit of love, the creaturely parallel is the regenerate gazing upon Christ (i.e., the divine understanding) through the illuminating work of the Spirit of love.¹⁰² In glory, this sight is a real participation in the uncreated life of God, but it is mediated through Christ in the Spirit.¹⁰³ In

⁹⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 132.

⁹⁹ Gannon Murphy makes a similar claim about Reformed *theosis* in general, stating, "Moreover, the 'glory' that God's elect are to reflect in the eschaton is always theologically centered and, in this sense, not autonomously generated phenomenon but a *finite* reflection and enjoyment of *infinite* glory" (Murphy, "Reformed *Theosis*?", 200 [italics in original]).

¹⁰⁰ Edwards explains how he utilizes immediate and mediate: "When it is said that this light is given immediately by God, and not obtained by natural means, hereby is intended, that 'tis given by God without making use of any means that operate by their own power, or a natural force. God makes use of means; but 'tis not as mediate causes to produce this effect." Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," 416. Edwards notes the problem if a creature was able to have an immediate sight of God: "Therefore, there is no creature can thus have an immediate sight of God, but only Jesus Christ, who is in the bosom of God: for no creature can have such an immediate view of another created spirit, for if they could they could search the heart and try the reins. But to see and SEARCH THE HEART is often spoken of as GOD'S PREROGATIVE, and as one thing [where] God's divinity and infinite exaltation above all creatures appears." Edwards, "Miscellanies 777," in *The "Miscellanies": Entry Nos. 501–832, 427–434*, at 428.

¹⁰¹ Edwards has different "eras" of the beatific vision, so the vision I describe here is the final vision of Glory.

¹⁰² Edwards, Romans 2:10 [Ll. 39r., 41r.].

¹⁰³ Because Edwards addresses the beatific vision in different eras of heaven's history, it is important to delineate which era he is speaking about. Furthermore, because the sight of God, and necessarily parallel to that, the saints' participation in God's life, is a mediated immediacy, Edwards can sound contradictory. For instance, in 1747 Edwards preached a funeral sermon for David Brainerd looking at 2 Cor 5:8. There, he states: "None sees God the Father immediately, who is 'the King

this sense, the eternal life of the saints is an eternal increase into the life of God in Christ by the Spirit. Along these lines, Edwards states, “The way in which the saints will come to an intimate full enjoyment of the Father is not by the Father’s majesty . . . but by their ascending to him by their union with Christ’s person.”¹⁰⁴ Likewise, “it seems by this to have been God’s design to admit man as it were to the inmost fellowship with the deity,” and Edwards claims there is “an eternal society or family in the Godhead in the Trinity of persons.”¹⁰⁵

On Edwards’s understanding of *theosis*, the question is not: How is the human “nature” divinized? but is instead, how is the human person ushered into the life of God? The saints ascend in the person of Christ, and the union and communion they share with God entails a partaking in his personal attributes of understanding and will (i.e., the divine nature). The saints share in the same beatific gazing that defines the inner-life (uncreated-life) of God. Importantly, the saints do not share in this life as God, but as human creatures, and therefore this sharing is perfect, but not comprehensive.¹⁰⁶ What the saints experience is a finite participation in the life of an infinite God.¹⁰⁷ They do not cease to be human, but they do become, in a sense, infinitely united with God as they ascend in the person of Christ (keeping in mind the important qualification, “in a sense”).¹⁰⁸ As already noted above, Edwards links this union of mind with Christ with the spiritual union that God knows even in his own life, saying,

eternal, immortal, invisible’: Christ is the ‘image of that invisible God,’ by which he is seen by all elect creatures. ‘The only begotten Son that is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,’ and manifested him. ‘None has ever immediately seen the Father, but the Son’; and none else sees the Father any other way, than by ‘the Son’s revealing him.’” Edwards, “True Saints, When Absent from the Body,” 230. Compare that with the statement, “their [saints in heaven] souls will see the spiritual nature of God itself immediately. They shall behold his attributes and disposition towards them more immediately” (Edwards “The Pure in Heart Blessed,” 66). Likewise, “But to see God is this: it is to have an immediate and certain understanding of God’s glorious excellency and love” (Ibid., 64). This sight is immediate, Edwards explains, “to distinguish from a mere acknowledging that God is glorious and excellent by ratiocination, which is a more indirect and mediate way of apprehending things than intuitive knowledge” (Ibid).

¹⁰⁴ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies 742,” in *The “Miscellanies”: Entry Nos. 501–832*, 373–376, at 375.

¹⁰⁵ Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies 741,” in *The “Miscellanies”: Entry Nos. 501–832*, 366–373, at 367.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, Romans 2:10 Ibid., [L.43r–L.43v].

¹⁰⁷ Edwards states, “For there is doubtless an infinite intimacy between the Father and the Son. . . . And saints being in him, shall, in their measure and manner, partake with him in it, and the blessedness of it.” Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” 593. The key words here are “measure” and “manner.”

¹⁰⁸ “As the creature’s good was viewed in this manner when God made the world for it, viz. with respect to the whole of the eternal duration of it, and the eternally progressive union and communion with him; so the creature must be viewed as in infinite strict union with himself. In this view it appears that God’s respect to the creature, in the whole, unites with his respect to himself. Both regards are like two lines which seem at the beginning to be separate, but aim finally to meet in one, both being directed to the same center. And as to the good of the creature itself, if viewed in its whole duration, and infinite progression, it must be viewed as infinite; and so not only being

What insight I have of the nature of minds, I am convinced that there is no guessing what kind of union and mixtion, by consciousness or otherwise, there may be between them. So that all difficulty is removed in believing what the Scripture declares about spiritual unions — of the persons of the Trinity, of the two natures of Christ, of Christ and the minds of saints.¹⁰⁹

As mind uniting with mind, Edwards's understanding of *theosis* functions in the register of persons rather than essence. This is not to separate the two, but to highlight that one can be united to a divine person and their nature without merging with the divine essence; creatures can become "little suns" without becoming the Sun. This follows similar contours to the Eastern Orthodox use of the essence-energies distinction, but it is now an essence-persons, or essence-nature distinction. Importantly, distinguishing essence and nature is done by Calvin himself, and, a straight-forward interpretation of 2 Peter 1:4, which claims that believers can partake in the divine nature.¹¹⁰

What Edwards provides is a unique way to develop a Reformed account of *theosis*. The ascent of creatures within the divine life is an ascent within the person of the Son, and therefore does not entail a divinization of the human nature.¹¹¹ This may offer us the key feature of a distinctively Reformed doctrine of *theosis*: A

some communication of God's glory, but as coming nearer and nearer to the same thing in its infinite fullness. The nearer anything comes to infinite, the nearer it comes to an identity with God. And if any good, as viewed by God, is beheld as infinite, it can't be viewed as a distinct thing from God's own infinite glory." Jonathan Edwards, *Dissertation 1: Concerning the End for Which God Created the World in Ethical Writings* (ed. Paul Ramsey; vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 459.

¹⁰⁹Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies 184," in *The "Miscellanies": A-500*, 330.

¹¹⁰John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (ed. and trans. John Owen; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993) 371.

¹¹¹There is an important parallel to my point here in Julie Canlis's work on Calvin's theology of ascent. In a comparison of Irenaeus and Calvin, she notes, "But in disciplining ascent specifically to the Son, both Irenaeus and Calvin preserve the Creator-creature distinction vital to their conceptions of participation. Ascent is into *sonship*, but never as *the Son*." She continues by noting, "Yet it is clear that for neither theologian is this adoptive ascent something that has to do with some abstract divinization of nature; rather, it is ascent into deeper *koinōnia* with God and his benefits. Everything depends on their theology of the Spirit, as both the one who preserves the contingency of creation and the one who ensures that this is the personal activity of God on and within humanity." Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010) 237–238 [italics in original]. Similarly, in a comment that could easily be made about Edwards as well, Canlis claims, "In subtly shifting Aquinas's *exitus-reditus* scheme from anthropology to Christ, Calvin challenges Aquinas's attempt at theocentrism as not going far enough. It is not Christ who fits into the procrustean bed of anthropology but we who are fitted to Christ and his ascent. In him and by his Spirit, we ascend to the Father" (Ibid., 44). Canlis's discussion gives further weight to our claims here concerning a "Reformed" account of *theosis*. Helpfully, she notes, "The mystical ascent is this deeper and deeper burrowing into Christ (always pneumatologically conceived), not our effort to do so. His ascent is our path and goal. His narrative has become our own" (Ibid., 51).

Reformed doctrine of *theosis* works within the relational strand of the tradition.¹¹² McCormack's critique only works against one strand of the *theosis* tradition, the tradition that argues for a communication of attributes as the primary mode of divinization. Based on a Reformed Christology, the emphasis will always be upon a relational self-giving of God, that is, nonetheless, a real partaking in his life. This is exactly what Edwards does, but he goes one step further by arguing for the primacy of the relational without losing the communication of attributes. Through his unique development of the communicable divine nature, Edwards is able to maintain the Reformed emphasis while also allowing for something more. This "something more" is what McClymond and others have recognized as so unique to Edwards's view, but it does not entail a rejection of the Reformed tradition (however unique his contribution).

■ Conclusion

In Edwards we find every essential aspect of a real doctrine of *theosis*: it is grounded in trinitarian participation, modeled and made available through the incarnation, entails a real participation through the economic work of Son and Spirit, and is oriented by a teleology of union and conformity to God. We might call these features the broad contours of a doctrine of *theosis*. With Edwards's account, and

¹¹² The secondary literature on Reformed doctrines of *theosis* reinforce my conclusions. This is not to say that there is a uniform theological framework or clear-cut Reformed position of *theosis*, but only that Reformed accounts function within the relational strand of the tradition. Along these lines, it is not irrelevant that Gannon Murphy ends his essay developing a Reformed doctrine of *theosis* with a section called "The Means of Theotic Relationality." Furthermore, as noted above, he claims, "Our entire person—mind, body, soul—is designed to be in communion with the Trinity, to be totally embraced by God and enveloped by the glory of the Lord." Murphy, "Reformed *Theosis*?", 200. The focus on communion and being embraced by God follows this relational strand I am articulating here. Similarly, in explaining Calvin's account of participation, Todd Billings claims that Calvin "uses strong, extra-biblical language to emphasize the reality of the oneness that believers share with God through participation in Christ by the Spirit; yet Calvin never suggests that humanity is assimilated into the divine. Calvin is willing to speak of the way in which believers are deified in redemption; yet this hyperbolic language does not imply, for Calvin, that distinctively divine attributes overwhelm human attributes in glorified believers" (*Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007] 65–66). Likewise, in his affirmation and response to Gannon Murphy, Myk Habets outlines a Reformed account of *theosis* where "we enter into the triune communion of God's intra-trinitarian life" ("Reformed *Theosis*?", 491). Furthermore, Habets goes on to state explicitly, "Working within a Reformed understanding of *theosis*, we may say that humans can participate in the divine nature, but this is a thoroughly personal and relational experiencing of the triune relations" (*Ibid.*, 494). Carl Mosser, outlining Calvin's doctrine of *theosis*, claims, "Christ unites believers with himself in order that they may participate, as members of his body, in the inner life and love of the Trinity which he has eternally known" ("The Greatest Possible Blessing," 46). Julie Canlis's work on Calvin follows these lines as well, focusing on a relational view of ascent, participation and communion that buttress the claims made here (Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*). As these works affirm, the focus on participating in the life of God is the distinctively relational feature of a Reformed account. While each Reformed thinker will address what that participation and union entail, the overall contours of the account land on the side of the relational tradition.

the many variations of *theosis* found in the tradition, once the broad criteria are met, the question is not if this is a doctrine of *theosis*, but what kind?¹¹³ In Edwards, we find a thinker who draws together the two divergent emphases in the tradition, and does so within a Reformed theological system that argues for a monergistic account of salvation.¹¹⁴ According to Gannon Murphy: “A classical Reformed doctrine of *theosis* must also be consistent with a monergistic soteriology. It is this that distinguishes a uniquely Reformed *theosis* from others in which the engagement of autonomous praxis is often thought to be necessary in order to appropriate or attain *theosis* as a kind of reward for holy behavior.”¹¹⁵ Adding to Murphy’s point, we can say that the Reformed utilize a monergistic account of salvation to establish the contours of a relational notion of participation. This kind of account leans heavily on the notion that God is all in all, and focuses on creaturely participation in the communicable fullness of God’s life. This is not a denial of *theosis*, but it is a unique contribution that thrives within a distinctively Reformed theological structure. What Edwards uniquely offers is a theological system that allows him to unite the bifurcated tradition with a relational emphasis. While Edwards’s theological structure is somewhat idiosyncratic (particularly his move to ground the divine nature within the Son and Spirit as communicable features of God’s life), his contribution can serve as an example of how the Reformed tradition can construct a doctrine of *theosis* with real ecumenical import.

¹¹³ There are, of course, further questions that need to be addressed that are beyond the scope of this essay. Norman Russell, for instance, in narrating the two strands of the *theosis* tradition, argues that one of the strands depends upon an ascent of the soul through an ascetic lifestyle. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 14. One might ask if Edwards’s view requires or depends upon such an account. This is particularly interesting in light of Edwards’s own ascetic lifestyle and his explication of the “means of grace.” “Ascent,” in this kind of account, is a relational giving over of one’s life through means of communion. Discipline cannot lead to holiness, because holiness is only properly an attribute of God; spiritual discipline provides the opportunity to commune in that holiness. To explore a Reformed spirituality of *theosis* based on this account could lead to some interesting comparisons and contrasts with the patristic and Eastern Orthodox counterparts. This is precisely where McClymond’s essay is so helpful.

¹¹⁴ It is noteworthy that Edwards’s form of monergism does not undermine creaturely *willing* (and, according to his view, freedom). In a discussion on efficacious grace Edwards argues that “God does all and we do all. God produces all and we act all.” (“Efficacious Grace. Book III,” in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith* [ed. Sang Hyun Lee; vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003]) 239–290, at 251). Nonetheless, based on Edwards’s anthropology and his understanding of freedom, our action is bound up within God’s action in such a way as to radicalize the standard Reformed view and push to an account of determinism, and within that, monergism. See Richard Muller, “Jonathan Edwards and the Absence of Free Choice,” <http://jcteds.org/resources/media/>

¹¹⁵ Murphy, “Reformed *Theosis*?,” 200.