

Introduction

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in Me,
and I am in you.

—*John 14:20*

In the midst of renewed interest in the theology of “America’s greatest theologian/philosopher,”¹ many attempts have been made to elucidate an overarching motif or meta-thematic center for the theology of Jonathan Edwards. Divine sovereignty, grace, metaphysical ontology, typology, piety, the covenant history of redemption, divine glory or beauty, ethics, Reformed apologetics through the appropriation of Enlightenment philosophy, and many other motifs have been touted. This range points to the rich and ambidextrous nature of his theology. One scholar has suggested that the overarching trope might be “Edwards’ reconception of the doctrine of God in the form of radical relationality, that is God as an erotic being,” which “contains within itself the structural theological trajectory that underwrites the whole history of redemption and

1. While this is a frequently used appellation for Edwards, a specific reference to it is found in the title of W. Gary Crampton’s *Meet Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America’s Greatest Theologian/Philosopher* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2004). Robert W. Jenson implies the same in *America’s Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

uncovers the teleological consummation of creation as doxological participation in and unity with the Trinity.”² This attempt remains among the most credible. Within the context of the ongoing renaissance of Edwardsian scholarship, I wish to make the modest proposal that union is a significant driving force in Edwards’s Trinitarian theology,³ if not its overarching trope, and that his theology essentially tells a “from eternity, to eternity” story of *three unions in the Spirit: the eternal union within the Trinity of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, the union in history of the human and divine natures of Christ by the Spirit, and the union of the saints with God by the Spirit*. The theme of union and especially the union last mentioned—participational union of the saints, or *theosis*—influences Edwards’s view of salvation to such an extent that it makes ecumenical dialogue possible on the matters of justification and sanctification. Furthermore, Edwards’s emphasis on union, his high pneumatology, and specifically his theology of an emphatically pneumatological union or *theosis* make him a candidate amongst Reformed theologians (even more so than John Calvin⁴) for the title “*the* theologian of the Spirit.” I will contend that a drive exists within Edwards’s theology to honor the Spirit in all three unions, a drive shaped by both theological study and pastoral experience, that draws him into his particular views of justification and

2. Michael Gibson, “The Happy Society”: The Erotic Ontology of the Doctrine of God in Jonathan Edwards. http://vanderbilt.academia.edu/MichaelGibson/Papers/1447277/The_Erotic_Ontology_of_the_Doctrine_of_God_in_Jonathan_Edwards, 2–3.

3. Brandon Withrow has confirmed the centrality of union in Edwards’s theology also, stating that union with Christ and justification by faith “dominate his ruminations as hinging doctrines.” According to Withrow, Edwards had “an understanding of union with Christ that is vibrant, incarnational, and reminiscent of many theologians before him.” See Brandon G. Withrow, *Becoming Divine: Jonathan Edwards’s Incarnational Spirituality within the Christian Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 4, 7. What “incarnational” means here and the extent to which Edwards’s *theosis* is incarnational is discussed later.

4. This popular attribution is referred to by Benjamin B. Warfield in an essay entitled *John Calvin the Theologian* (Presbyterian Board of Education, 1909). See www.graceonlinelibrary.org/biographies/john-calvin-the-theologian-by-benjamin-b-warfield/

sanctification—particularly of progressive sanctification and assurance of salvation.

In A.M. Allchin’s book *Participation with God*, Allchin states that for the Welsh Anglican hymn-writer William Williams (1719–1791), as well as for other teachers of *theosis*, “the doctrines of Trinity, incarnation and deification belong together in an indissoluble knot.”⁵ These three doctrines form an indissoluble helix in the participation theology of Jonathan Edwards, with the Holy Spirit prominent in each union. Now widely acknowledged to be Trinitarian, Edward’s theology centers on a God who, as Trinity, is the union of three persons, the supreme harmony of all reality. This God sent his only Son so that his divine nature might be brought into union with human nature by the incarnation, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of humans by bringing them into union with the triune God. Edwards’s massive theological and pastoral contribution is, as Marilyn McCord Adams says, not “fuelled by the fires of hell but enlightened by the glory of the Trinity.”⁶ His theology and moral vision are preoccupied with the psychological and social analogies of the Trinity,⁷ particularly by the role of the union of the saints with the inner life of the Trinity through the indwelling of the Spirit.⁸ Edwards is, in fact, a theologian of participation par excellence. An important motif in his theology, the theme of beauty provides an apt illustration. Edwards defines beauty in terms of God’s triune

5. A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God* (Wilton, CT: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988), 45.

6. Taken from her back page endorsement of the monograph, William J. Danaher, *The Trinitarian Ethics of Jonathan Edwards*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), hereafter referred to as Danaher, 2004a.

7. A summation of Danaher’s monograph, Danaher, 2004a.

8. The role of the Spirit in Edwards’s *theosis* has been expounded at length by Robert W. Caldwell III, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought Series (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006), hereafter referred to as Caldwell, 2006a. This was also a primary focus in my doctoral dissertation, “Giving Honour to the Spirit: A Critical Analysis and Evaluation of Pneumatological Union in the Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards in Dialogue with Karl Barth,” PhD diss., University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 2004.

harmony, in which the saints and creation participate. Inherent in the harmony of the communion of the Divine persons in the immanent Trinity, beauty is communicated to creation in God's free creative act and by his redemptive work.

As noted above, what is most distinctive about Edwards's understanding of all three of these great unions is his special emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in them. In Edwards's thought, the Spirit is the nexus or communion of the Godhead, the facilitator of the divine-human (hypostatic) union in Christ, and the agent of the union of the saints with God. In effect, Edwards's theology is a pneumatology. Whether in his doctrine of God (theology proper), his understanding of the incarnate Son of God (Christology), his doctrine of humanity (anthropology), his doctrine of salvation (soteriology), or his doctrine of future things (eschatology), he posits the Spirit as the union of all reality (the means of communion within God) in the incarnate God-Man as well as between God and the people of God and, therefore, between God and creation.

One could argue that doxology, glory or God's self-glorification (some have said self-expansion), rather than union, is the primary motif in Edwards's theology. However, the glory that is undoubtedly the end of God's being and doing is inextricably linked to and a consequence of his love, which is manifest in the harmony or union of divine persons, the human-divine natures of the Son, and of humans and creation in God. God's self-glorification has been addressed in both academic and popular treatments of Jonathan Edwards's theology, but it has not always been linked to the Trinitarian and participational (or union-based) understanding of the self-glorifying God. By centering on the three unions, this book will confirm the profoundly Trinitarian nature of Edwards's work, a theme that dominates the renaissance of research in the past twenty-five years. One could also argue, as Kyle Strobel does,⁹ for the beatific

vision as the central core of Edwardsian theology, which is certainly compatible with the union theme, providing the dynamic by which union occurs. Likewise, it is consonant with the theme of the prominence of the Spirit in Edwards's theology because the Spirit is the happiness, harmony, and love that accompanies the mutual vision of the Father and the Son in the Trinity; it is the Spirit who effects the new beatifying illumination—the new “sense of things”—in converts and continues that transformation-through-contemplation dynamic that beatifies the saints now and throughout eternity.

The case for the importance of union (harmony and consent) as a motif of Edwardsian theology is strengthened by the fact that the three unions are profoundly interrelated in his theology. These unions guide its vast narrative sweep from the emanation of grace and glory that results from the union of the three persons in the one Godhead in eternity past, in creation and the redemption of fallen humanity and creation through the incarnate Son, all the way to the remanation of glory and grace back to him in redeemed, beatified humanity in union with Christ and restored creation. The essential concepts in each of the three unions tie them together, as does the commonality of the agency of the Spirit in each: the union of the Father and the Son in the communion (or Love) of the Holy Spirit. That is, the immanent Trinity gives rise to the acts of the persons of the economic Trinity in undivided union by the Spirit in such a manner that the missions of the revealed Trinity correspond with the processions in the eternal Trinity, with

9. Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), hereafter referred to as Strobel, 2013a. Strobel elsewhere affirms that “glory can be understood, without exaggeration, to be the central defining feature of Edwards's thought.” However, in the same context, he states that “Edwards's conception of glory finds its source deep in his Trinitarian theology and is woven through his thought as a whole.” See Kyle Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of Theosis,” *Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 3 (July 2012): 259–79. The glory or beauty of God arises from the harmonious union of the three divine persons, thereby making the case that union comes first.

the ultimate end of enhancing his own supreme glory. Crucial to the enhancement of the glory of God through the creation and redemption of creation is the incarnation of the Son, which involves the union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Son by means of the Holy Spirit (Edwards's is a Spirit Christology rather than a perichoretic one¹⁰). The Son is suited for the creation of the cosmos by his orientation in eternity past towards becoming incarnate (or as Barth says, *incarnandus*, oriented towards union with humanity); his role in bringing about its redemption is enabled by his actually becoming human in time, again, by the mediating agency of the Spirit. However, the redemption of the creation and the resultant glorification of God is contingent upon the union of redeemed human beings with the Son, by the Spirit. In Edwards, the role of the Spirit is not only to apply the atonement that Christ accomplished but also to be the Gift, which is the goal of the saving advent of Christ. By giving that Gift to the people of God, they are brought—by the Spirit's infusion into them and their incorporation into the Bride of Christ—into immediate union with the immanent Trinity. When the church is glorified at the end of history, God will have glorified himself because the church is glorified in the glorified Son, and all will be glorious harmony in the cosmos. The glorious union of the saints with God, in Christ, by the Spirit, will be eternal; at the same time, however, it will be eternally progressive, always moving towards complete likeness to Christ but never arriving (in mathematical terms, asymptotic) at identity as Christ. In the *eschatos* (last) Adam, the church will reign over a cosmos that eternally reflects God's own harmonious and beautiful Trinitarian union, which, having emanated from him, now remanates back to him in an even more glorious state, having been redeemed in Christ.

10. That is, the divine and human natures of Christ are brought into union by means of the Spirit's mediation rather than by a coinherence of each nature in the other.

The emphasis Edwards lays on the person and work of the Spirit in each union signals his greatest contribution to the subject of union in the Reformed heritage. However, I will argue that this great pneumatological emphasis will eclipse his Christology and, specifically, a more incarnational approach to soteriology and its *telos* – that of restoring humans to be fully human, and thus become also his greatest liability. This book stands in a series of recent works on the theme of union or participation in other Reformed theologians—including Julie Canlis on Calvin (*Calvin's Ladder*) and Adam Neder on Barth (*Union with Christ in the Theology of Karl Barth*)—and will interact with them on these matters.

I will seek also to build on the work of the recent authors contributing to the resurgence of Edwardsian studies in the last decade: Sang Hyun Lee, Steve Holmes, Steve Studebaker, Amy Plantinga Pauw, Oliver Crisp, Michael McClymond, Gerry McDermott, Robert Caldwell, William Danaher, Michael Gibson, and Kyle Strobel. The works most relevant to the subject matter of this book include Amy Plantinga Pauw's beautifully written *The Supreme Harmony of All*;¹¹ William Danaher, Jr.'s work toward the clarification of Edwards's view of the Trinity and his Trinitarian ethics;¹² Robert Caldwell III's writings on the Spirit as the bond of union within and beyond the Trinity;¹³ the work of Michael McClymond,¹⁴ as well as the *Theology* written with Gerald McDermott;¹⁵ the writings of Kyle Strobel, which offer further clarity on the Trinity and a theological (rather than philosophical) and

11. Amy Plantinga Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), hereafter referred to as Plantinga Pauw, 2002a.

12. Danaher, 2004a.

13. Caldwell, 2006a.

14. Michael J. McClymond, *Encounters with God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), hereafter referred to as McClymond, 1998a; McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory of Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, eds. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003).

profoundly Trinitarian reinterpretation of Edwards’s theology;¹⁶ and finally, an outstanding essay on the incarnation by Seng-Kong Tan.¹⁷ The questions that I will consider surrounding Edwards’s Trinitarian participation include: Which model of the Trinity (the first “union”) did Edwards’s spouse, “Western” or “Eastern”? If Western, was it Augustinian or an advance on Augustine employing philosophical idealism under the influence of Locke and Malebranche (Paul Helm and Danaher)? How different is Augustine’s model compared to that of the Cappadocians? Did Edwards adopt a dispositional ontology? Was he monist or panentheist? Was his soteriology influenced by Roman Catholic thought, given his reference to the infusion of the Spirit (Anri Morimoto¹⁸ and Ray Yeo¹⁹)?

It is my hope that this study will increase awareness of the theological and philosophical brilliance of Edwards, specifically his somewhat surprising contribution to the theme of union or participation in the life of God. Recognizing that others have written on similar themes, I will offer my own reflections to clarify some of the knots in Edwards’s theology by critically examining his work. I

15. Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

16. Strobel, 2013a.

17. Seng-Kong Tan, “Trinitarian Action in the Incarnation,” chap. 8 in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honour of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 127–50.

18. Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1995).

19. Ray Yeo, “Contemporising Jonathan Edwards’s Theory of Spiritual Perception: Towards an Analytic Theological Psychology of Transforming Grace with Special Reference to Robert Roberts,” PhD diss., King’s College, London, Spring 2013. This thesis is “an attempt to revisit Jonathan Edwards’s theory of spiritual perception from the perspective of Robert Roberts’s work in the philosophy of emotions and other related philosophical sub-disciplines with the purpose of providing a contemporary account of spiritual perception and, by extension, a theological psychology of transforming grace. The contemporisation effort focuses on three main aspects of Edwards’s theory: the infusion of grace, the content of Scripture and spiritual delight. The weaknesses and limitations of Edwards’s original account in these three aspects were examined and a proposal to revise, update and deepen his theory in five major ways was provided in light of the issues raised” (ibid., 4).

do not wish to luxuriate in Edwards but rather to bring his thought into the scrutiny of the participation theology of patristic and Reformed theologians before and after him. In this way, I hope to move beyond Edwards toward a satisfactory, evangelical theology of participation that is true to the gospel.

My primary conversation partners will be the Cappadocian Fathers, Calvin, modern Trinitarian theologians (especially Karl Barth), and others who have made corrective contributions regarding Edwards's work. Though Edwards was ahead of his time in many ways, he was nevertheless a product of his own age with its particular limitations. Specifically, Edwards was a New England Puritan, keenly aware of those theological roots while seeking to move beyond them by contextualizing the gospel in light of the newly dawned age of Reason. His influences included continental scholastic Reformed theologians Frances Turretin (1623–1687) and Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706) as well as Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and Nicholas Malebranche. Though Edwards always sought to think under the final authority of Scripture, he undoubtedly shows a commitment to the use of reason in ways that led him to be unafraid to make exploratory journeys beyond what had been said in the Tradition, especially with regard to the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology. In significant ways, he has blessed all who follow him with insights that enrich our contemplation of God and the Christian life. In dialogue with other theologians, I will seek to offer perspectives that may enrich, and possibly correct, his theology. Having lived after Edwards, these theologians benefit from a longer tradition. At times, I will access the Tradition in order to offer ideas from theologians that Edwards may not have fully engaged or perhaps did not engage at all, for reasons unknown.

For all Edwards teaches us concerning the importance of the Trinity in Christian theology, as well as the consonance between

who God is in Godself with who he is in the economy of salvation, the model he borrowed and refined is problematic in many ways; certain theologians, such as Oliver Crisp, even argue that it is untenable. Instead of working primarily from what is seen in the historical revelation of the Son and the Spirit as recorded in Scripture, Edwards relies too heavily on the psychological analogy of the Trinity (to the extent that the psychological analogy borrowed from Augustine and the Western tradition becomes a psychological account in Edwards's work, according to Holmes and Danaher), embellished by a philosophical Idealism borrowed from Locke and Malebranche. In doing so, he fails to express the fullness and freedom of the perichoretic personhood (as opposed to a *perichoresis* of attributes) of the persons-in-relation of the Trinity in appropriate ways that might have been corrected had he relied more fully on the insights of the Cappadocians concerning this issue. Certainly, the work of theologians like Jürgen Moltmann, T. F. and James Torrance, Colin Gunton, and Miroslav Volf can help us to journey beyond Edwards in this regard. Much is at stake in the theology of personhood—Divine and human—including an avoidance of the confusion of human and divine persons in *theosis*, a problem Edwards did not escape.

For all Edwards's attention to the theme of God as love (according to his triune nature), he retains a view of particularistic election that limits the benefits of the love of God to relatively few humans within the countless masses of humanity. I hope to move beyond that perspective by giving consideration to Karl Barth's view that election—God's election to be *for* humanity, leading to the vicarious participation of Christ in and for humanity—becomes the best news of the gospel.

For all Edwards's attention to detail with regard to the union of the Divine and human natures of Christ in the incarnation, his

emphasis on the Spirit leads him to describe a Christ who can appear ahistorical²⁰ and unconnected to the humanity he came to redeem. By interacting with John Calvin and John Owen as well as Karl Barth, we will move beyond Edwardsian Christology to discover a Christ who did not live merely to die but whose assumption of humanity led him into a vicarious life, death, and resurrection by which he becomes the hope for humanity and creation.

Even for all Edwards conveys concerning the union of the saints with God by the Spirit—evoking a lively understanding and expectation of conversion—his version of union can appear to be isolated from the reality and vicarious nature of the first great union of God the Son with humanity, for humanity. Bringing Christology and pneumatology together in soteriology is important, most of all because the Father, as Irenaeus was wont to say, has “two hands”—those of the Spirit and those of the Son. As I will show, this approach is important for pastoral reasons as well.

For all the ways in which Edwards’s refreshingly aesthetic approach to theology complements his rationality—and for all the ways in which his pneumatological view of participation leads to the expectation of great joy in the Christian life—I will contend that his spirituality takes an unfortunate inward turn. His overly pneumatic and therefore surprisingly anthropocentric orientation, with respect to signs of salvation, leads to great uncertainty in the lives of the saints claiming to be in union. In certain sectors of the evangelical heritage, the saints have suffered greatly from this Edwardsian influence. Karl Barth, in his more Christocentric approach, helps us move toward a more joyful assurance of salvation. Helpful though Edwards’s surprising emphasis on the Christian life as *theosis* is, his heavy emphasis on sanctification by the Spirit over justification in Christ

20. Plantinga Pauw, 2002a, 147.

contributes to this lack of assurance. Other theologians in the Reformed tradition, such as John Calvin and Karl Barth, will assist us in moving beyond Edwards to discover a balanced theology and spirituality of participation in Christ, by the Spirit. I am especially interested in bringing Edwards into critical dialogue with Karl Barth on the theme of participation, especially since—as a champion of christological participation—Barth acts as a counterbalance for Edwards. Barth’s more incarnational grounding for union is an ideal foil for assessing the legitimacy of Edwards’s particularly pneumatic version of participation, given that Edwards grounds his view of human participation by the Spirit on the hypostatic union or participation of the Son in humanity, which, as noted above, has been criticized for its ahistorical tendencies.

The relationship between justification and sanctification, as well as the actual dynamics and limits of progressive sanctification within human experience, have proved to be thorny issues with widely varying schools of thought. Through this study, I hope to shed some light on the pathway of pilgrims as we struggle with what salvation—particularly the idea of sanctification in the Christian life—looks like. To put it another way, I wish to explore and seek to clarify *what it means to be human*. No doctrine seems more mired with ambiguity in the Protestant tradition than the when, how, and how much of sanctification, and none causes more angst. Perhaps input from Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian of the Spirit and student of human subjectivity—along with Karl Barth, the great theologian of the Son and champion of contemplative Christocentricity—may together assist in clarifying this doctrine by bringing together, to once more reference Irenaeus’s analogy, the “two arms of the Father” in the work of redemption.

Concerning the relationship between justification and sanctification, the Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions often

tend to conflate the two, making justification not so much about a declaration of righteousness as the infusion of righteousness and any sense of ultimate justification conditional upon sanctification (Vatican II and the work of *Nouvelle Theologie* has brought some change in this regard). In reaction to the Catholicism of his day, Luther stresses the immediate and declarative nature of justification for those who believe, at times neglecting the importance of sanctification as a twin grace that serves to validate claims of justification by people professing to believe in Christ. Calvin offers a corrective to Luther's approach by dealing with sanctification before justification in his Institutes and especially by emphasizing that both of the twin graces (*duplex gratia*) are a logical consequence of the filial category of union with Christ (*unio Christi*). In a nutshell, Calvin's view contends that saving faith unites the sinner with Christ—a belief that is grounded in the prior uniting of Christ with sinful humanity by the incarnation such that being in Christ, the believer receives the twin graces of being accredited righteous (justification) and being inaugurated on the transformation journey (sanctification) through union and communion with Christ. In this way, justification and sanctification are seen to be distinct but inseparable gifts of grace to the believing sinner. How can a person be in Christ, and Christ in that person, without transformation? In Calvin, transformation is centered on living into union with Christ—in his death through Spirit-enabled mortification and in his resurrection and ascension through Spirit-empowered vivification. The Christian life is seen as a journey of growth in character virtues, patterned after Christ as the image of God towards the recovery of humans as fully human. Although Barth follows Calvin with respect to understanding the twin graces as participation in Christ (adding to that the third grace of vocation), like Luther he makes more of justification than realized sanctification and views Christian life as an “again and again” crisis

encounter with Christ. Relying on a motif that is more contemplative than introspective, Barth's understanding of the Christian life looks away from the self to Christ as the One who stands in our place and possesses all virtue for us in his vicarious incarnation and ascension. He is not enamoured with the idea of *habitus* or the belief that humans might develop virtue on their own; he sees the essence of Christian life as prayer and ethics.

On the matter of sanctification in its progressive or experiential aspect, controversy abounds. Even within Protestantism, multiple views exist concerning how and when it happens, as well as what roles divine and human action play in it. These include a kind of pessimist suppressionism, Augustinian activism or realism, Wesleyan perfectionism, Keswick and various other passivist versions birthed out of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements that involve various forms of post-conversion crisis, along with a multiplicity of triumphalist expectations. Regrettably, sanctification is often isolated from the question of the humanity of humans. Many of these ways of understanding sanctification focus heavily on overcoming sin and sinful lifestyles ("sin management") with very little attention to what it means to live life in all its richness as a human being made in the image of God. Deeply pietistic, they are not world-affirming spiritualities, which has led to a significant weakness within evangelical spirituality and preaching. The gospel is preached as if humans are disembodied souls needing to avoid hell or prepare for a heaven isolated from earthliness.

Just what does Jonathan Edwards add to these discussions? For one thing, Edwards demonstrates what it means to be a sensual being, responding with warm and rich affections to the beauty of creation in ways that make us human. His general depiction of a human being living in a series of unions is both holistic and glorious. It begins with an intimate, holy, and harmonious union with God who

indwells us by the Spirit; for Edwards, the Spirit is the bond of communion in God. The human being in union with God is thereby in union with other people in union with God in the church, in ways that are characterized by harmony. These humans, being in the last Adam, will have eyes to see the beauty of creation in its harmonious relationship with God. Responsibly exercising their stewardship of creation, they will seek to bring about the *shalom* God intends for it in harmony with all fellow humans, who will see their work as participation with the work of God in the world, bringing in the new creation.

And, for all the help and wonder Edwards's conception of God evokes, it also creates questions that expose the need for "moving beyond" his work. For example, the Neoplatonic way in which Edwards constructs this theology leads us to the question: Was Edwards panentheistic (see Crisp)? The question may also arise concerning the clarity of the divine-human distinction in Edwards's version of deification or *theosis*. Arising as it does from within a psychological model of the Trinity, the improper articulation of personhood creates this problem, and the eschatological vision of the saints being glorified in asymptotic fashion perpetuates it. In the end, Edwards's way of making the divine-human distinction entails the gradual beatification of the saints in heaven; while they draw ever nearer to the likeness of Christ, they never quite achieving this, remaining human rather than divine. Our way beyond this conundrum requires a clarification of what it means to be human and a discussion of personhood human and divine, in which we shall be accompanied by the Trinitarian theologians mentioned above. We will also be aided by biblical scholarship, which through its attention to the historical narrative and intentions of God, helps us discover a more earthy view of heaven and resurrected saints.

What is the purpose of this book? To travel with Edwards on a journey of discovery concerning the three unions of his theology. To invite a pilgrimage into contemplation of the very life and love of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit; to move into wonder at the emanation of the Father's love expressed in the gift of the Son and the sending of the Spirit in order that we, as regenerated humanity in union with God by the Spirit, might be participants in the remanation of the love and glory of God back to him through our pilgrimage to heaven and towards ever-increasing likeness to God. Kyle Strobel speaks of Edwards's broad vision of the Christian life as a pilgrimage to heaven,²¹ and I wish to invite contemplation of the sweep of the journey in which our pilgrimage takes place—the “from eternity to eternity” journey of the triune God in which redeemed humanity is engaged. That is, the love-inspired pilgrimage of God from heaven to earth, in order that our pilgrimage towards heaven may be conformed to that divine pilgrimage in Christ and by the Spirit.

In taking this pilgrimage with Edwards, readers may discover the following benefits:

1. A fresh understanding of the Christian *God as the triune God*—the God who is love and who, in the harmony of his triune being and in his action in the cosmos he created, reflects primal beauty and magnifies his own iridescent glory; the God who is personal and relational; the God who is in his inner life what he is in the economy of creation and salvation as revealed by the Scripture; the God whose revelation of himself is reliable, such that there is no God “back of” the God who Jesus has by the Spirit revealed him to be—no “quaternity” where we expected

21. See Kyle Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013).

Trinity, no shady despot lurking behind what might somehow, in the end, turn out to be a persona or façade, that who God is in the economic Trinity is who he is in his inmost being; the God who may certainly be more than has been revealed in his immanent being but who cannot be other than the triune God revealed in Son and Spirit or less than what he has been revealed to be in the gospel of Jesus Christ; the God who is for humanity. In other words, I hope that readers will develop a fresh appreciation that the doctrine of the Trinity is not an optional or even necessary but subsidiary aspect of the Christian faith but rather its center, circumference, architectonic, and, in fact, the hermeneutical matrix for viewing theology—and therefore, all reality.

2. A fresh understanding of the *gospel* (the *euaggelion*) of the God who is, by the revelation of the economic Trinity, the God who is *for us*—that is, for all humanity, the God who in his Son has assumed fallen humanity, healed it, acted on its behalf, and taken it into the triune Godhead; the gospel that is filial rather than forensic in its first intent.
3. A fresh awareness that the heart of Christianity is *participation* in the life of God, not performance—an awareness that emphasizes both the strengths and the weaknesses of Edwards’s particular understanding of this participation, especially the incarnational participation of God the Son in humanity and the participation of humans in God by the Spirit, for a balanced understanding of salvation.
4. A fresh understanding of the *human self*—that human persons, like Christ, are persons-in-relation, not individuals; that human beings brought into union with Christ by the Spirit are thereby brought into the church to become ecclesial persons in relation with God and neighbour; that the *telos* of sanctification is the

- recovery of the image of God and to become fully human, even if, in the end, divinely human.
5. A fresh understanding of the *Christian life*—that assurance of salvation is grounded principally in who Christ is for us and only secondarily in who we are in Christ and the signs of conversion; that in Christian formation both ethics and internal affections matter for persons who are in Christ by the Spirit.
 6. A fresh understanding of *creation and our work in the world*—that creation matters to God and that it should matter to the saints in union with God, both now and in the future new creation; that humans, being image-bearers, can participate in God's work in the world.
 7. A fresh understanding of *heaven*—that heaven is a wonderful world of love, but that it is also earthy in character; that humans will remain human in the world to come; that humans will be morally like Christ but will not become Christ metaphysically or be swallowed up into Christ or nothingness but rather will always be distinct as humans and not God—distinct as persons, albeit persons-in-relation to Christ, to other Christians, and to the cosmos.