

NEW EXPLORATIONS  
IN THEOLOGY



JONATHAN EDWARDS  
AND DEIFICATION

RECONCILING *THEOSIS* AND  
THE REFORMED TRADITION

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## Grace and Fullness



**O**N THE EVENING OF JULY 12, 1739, a young man walked alone and wrestled with God. He was a religious man; he knew his Puritan theology, and his soul writhed within him, at least in part, because he hated its core doctrine. God's sovereignty was central to the system that formed his tradition, and it precluded any easy means of escape. He had sought to make himself sincere in religious devotion. He had strived to pray and fast well. He had rehearsed the doctrines of grace and tried to persuade himself, perhaps even God, that he renounced any hint of merit in his efforts. Yet, in the early weeks of July he came to see that all his religion was nothing more than "self-worship."<sup>1</sup> This carried a terminal diagnosis. If his best efforts could not turn his heart to God, then there could be no cure, and he stood on the brink of eternal damnation. He was learning a lesson he had not known previously, "that there could be no way prescribed whereby a natural man could, of his own strength, obtain that which is supernatural and utterly above the utmost stretch of nature to obtain by its own strength or out of the reach of the highest angel to give."<sup>2</sup> The natural could not touch the supernatural. The path from below was blocked. But what of the path from above?

Then, as I was walking in a dark thick grove, "unspeakable glory" seemed to open to the view and apprehension of my soul. . . . It was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God, such as I never had before. . . . I stood still and wondered and admired! I knew that I had never had seen before

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<sup>1</sup>WJE 7:138.

<sup>2</sup>WJE 7:124.

anything comparable to it for excellency and beauty: it was widely different from all the conceptions that ever I had had of God, or things divine. . . . And my soul “rejoiced with joy unspeakable” to see such a God, such a glorious divine being; and I was inwardly pleased and satisfied, that he should be God over all forever and ever. . . . Thus God, I trust, brought me to a hearty disposition to exalt him and set him on the throne, and . . . to aim at his honor and glory as King of the universe.<sup>3</sup>

David Brainerd’s conversion was dramatic, but it was not unique. Puritans and those under their influence had long experienced something like it, and the years just before and just after Brainerd’s conversion were particularly filled with episodes that followed the familiar pattern. What was needed, however, was a theological explanation of it.

By the time Brainerd experienced his new “apprehension . . . of God,” Jonathan Edwards was already deeply engaged in providing just such a theological explanation. He knew the experience firsthand, and he followed his Puritan forbearers in venturing a theologized theory of how the Spirit of God affects this work.<sup>4</sup> Edwards’s approach was creative and innovative, and particularly so in how he framed the Creator-creature distinction.

The question of how God, as Creator, and humanity, as creature, related to each other was always just underneath the surface of eighteenth-century theological debate. Edwards’s Reformed heritage meant that he needed to avoid the Scylla of Arminianism, on the one hand, and the Charybdis of radical enthusiasm on the other.<sup>5</sup> Both of these views were popular, and both represented a theory of the Creator-creature distinction that threatened Edwards’s orthodoxy.

Arminianism addressed the Creator-creature distinction and relation by allowing greater autonomy to the creature. The creature’s natural endowments allow, at least in principle, for a reaching out and an embrace of its end. Arminianism was always diverse, but even considered in its broad

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<sup>3</sup>WJE 7:138-39.

<sup>4</sup>WJE 16:792-93.

<sup>5</sup>WJE 4:56. See WJE 4:4-18 for an overview of New England theology’s gradual shift from federal theology and the halfway covenant to Arminian ideas that God is obliged to save those who fulfill the demands of the covenant. Edwards’s polemical opponent Charles Chauncy accused the Great Awakening of “enthusiasm.” Edwards sought to defend it and also guard it against its own extremes. See George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 272-73, 275.

range it tended toward optimism about the creature's natural capacity to embrace what God asked. Though Brainerd would not have owned the term *Arminian* during his spiritual struggle, the natural effort to grasp one's supernatural end was his intuitive approach to religion.<sup>6</sup> Ostensibly this established a degree of distance between God and the creature, because there was scope for the creature to act on its own. Yet on the other hand, by giving the creature autonomy, in whatever degree, Arminianism attributed to creatures (at least) one attribute that the Reformed tradition reserved for the Creator, for only God could be truly autonomous. Thus the Reformed tradition could view the Arminian effort to validate the creature's natural autonomy as a thinly veiled attempt at a false self-deification, inevitably resulting in what Brainerd called self-worship.

At the same time the various radical enthusiast groups envisioned the creature's direct union with God. These groups had waxed and waned for the previous century, and they often grew out of the Puritan mainstream. In their most radical forms they spoke of being "Godded with God," so that the creature came to partake of the divine essence.<sup>7</sup> If Arminianism ostensibly respected the distinction between creature and Creator, then the radical enthusiasts ostensibly achieved an intimacy between them. Yet, once again, and with a certain irony, the assertion of essential union with God served to undermine the notion of monotheism and collapsed the supernatural into the natural. Thus the Reformed tradition could view the enthusiast effort to achieve intimacy between Creator and creature as a profound failure that resulted in the naturalization of God.

Edwards's doctrine of special grace aimed to reject both alternatives and provide a Reformed, if innovative, approach to the Creator-creature distinction. Just months before Brainerd's conversion, Edwards presented his doctrine of special grace as "a communication or a participation of God's fullness or of his own good."<sup>8</sup> The central gift of grace is the divine fullness, and Edwards uses this category to navigate his polemical Scylla and Cha-

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<sup>6</sup>WJE 7:124.

<sup>7</sup>See Paul C. H. Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13.

<sup>8</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," in *Jonathan Edwards: Spiritual Writings*, ed. Adriaan C. Neele, Kyle C. Strobel, and Kenneth P. Minkema, *Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), 354.

rybdis. The one who has this grace has “something above created nature. . . . [It is] something of God. . . . The creature that has true grace and holiness in his heart has something infinitely above himself in him.”<sup>9</sup> Divine grace is profoundly (infinitely!) discontinuous with created nature. This is aimed to undermine Arminian optimism about nature. It is intended to persuade people like David Brainerd that their natural efforts will never bring about supernatural ends.<sup>10</sup> Yet does this avoid Scylla only to fall into Charybdis? What of the danger of radical enthusiasm? Once again, Edwards’s category of divine fullness charts his course. Divine grace “is not a communication of God’s essence, but it is a communication of that which the Scripture calls God’s fullness.”<sup>11</sup> Here Edwards steers clear of essential union. When Brainerd or anyone else receives true grace, they gain something that is entirely foreign to their nature, something of God, and yet at the same time not the divine essence.

The present study is an exploration of this doctrine of grace. More specifically, it is an exploration of Edwards’s doctrine of grace as a communication and participation in the divine fullness, with particular focus on the Creator-creature distinction and relation, and in contribution to contemporary scholarly discussions around soteriological participation theology. Edwards scholars regularly note the strong themes of divine participation within his thought, and it is increasingly common for Edwards scholars to use the term *theosis* to describe these ideas. These themes of divine participation, or theosis or deification or divinization, are sometimes presented as creating a tension with Edwards’s Reformed heritage. Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott begin their chapter exploring these themes in Edwards by stating, “Scholars have long recognized that certain elements in Edwards’s theology were in tension with traditional Calvinism.” McClymond and McDermott then note at least apparent affinities between Edwards’s participation thought and that of Eastern Orthodoxy.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 354.

<sup>10</sup>WJE 7:124.

<sup>11</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 354.

<sup>12</sup>Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 410. See also McClymond, “Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory Palamas and the Theological Uses of Platonism,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Paul Helm (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 139–60. They note Jaroslav Pelikan’s comparison between Edwards’s thought and Eastern Or-

implication is that Edwards's participation thought is eccentric to his Reformed heritage.

This may reflect a larger hesitancy among some in the Reformed tradition to the whole notion of soteriological participation, and especially the category of theosis or deification.<sup>13</sup> Other voices have critiqued the Reformation tradition for not embracing a form of soteriological participation, and some within the Reformed tradition have argued that it finds a more comfortable home within a Reformed, monergistic framework than it does elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> All of this creates a context for this present study and this particular chapter. Within the wider debates concerning the Reformed tradition and soteriological participation, there are the underlying questions: To what extent may the Reformed tradition embrace soteriological participation? One may target the question more pointedly at Jonathan Edwards: To what extent is Edwards's doctrine of grace as a participation in divine fullness a departure or a development of his Reformed heritage? If his doctrine of grace is a sympathetic development of the Reformed heritage, then what resources may it provide contemporary constructive efforts toward a Reformed doctrine of soteriological participation? I will take up this last question in chapters two and three. But before I suggest ways that Edwards's doctrine of grace may provide resources for Reformed constructive work in

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thodox notions of theosis. See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 5, *Christian Doctrine and Modern Culture (Since 1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago University Press, 1989), 161, cited in McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 410n1.

<sup>13</sup>See, e.g., McCormack's critique of theosis and deification as categories, and his own alternative notion of participation. 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 (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010), 504-29; Bruce L. McCormack, "Participation in God, Yes, Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question," in *Denkwürdiges Geheimnis: Beiträge zur Gotteslehre. Festschrift für Eberhard Jüngel zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Johannes Fischer, Hans-Peter Großhans, and Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 347-74.

<sup>14</sup>See Habets and Murphy's debate concerning a Reformed appropriation of theosis. They agree that it fits well within a Reformed framework, though they disagree about the use of the essence-energies distinction from Eastern Orthodox Palamism. See Gannon Murphy, "Reformed Theosis?," *ThTo* 65, no. 2 (2008): 191-212; Myk Habets, "'Reformed Theosis?' A Response to Gannon Murphy," *ThTo* 65, no. 4 (2009): 489-98. For those who have critiqued the Reformation tradition for not embracing a form of soteriological participation, see Charles Moeller and G. Philips, *The Theology of Grace and the Oecumenical Movement*, trans. A. Wilson (London: Mowbray, 1961), 44. The critique is aimed not just at the Reformed tradition but at the entire Reformational and Protestant project.



soteriological participation, I must answer the prior questions.

This present chapter has two primary aims. First, this chapter will provide an overview of Edwards's doctrine of grace as participation in divine fullness, with particular focus on how Edwards navigated the Creator-creature distinction. Second, this chapter will argue that this is a sympathetic development of his Reformed heritage. I will argue this on the basis that his doctrine of grace was aimed to protect Reformed orthodoxy against Arminianism on the one hand and radical enthusiasm on the other. It was not aimed at denying or repudiating Reformed interests.

I now turn to the primary focus of this first chapter: an overview of Edwards's doctrine of grace as participation in divine fullness and its polemical use in a defense against Arminianism and radical enthusiasm. I will explore the doctrine and its polemical use by expositing a sermon titled "True Grace Is Divine." This will provide the basic vocabulary and grammar of Edwards's doctrine of special grace. I will then clarify its central categories by reference to his wider corpus. With this in place I will show the polemical purpose this doctrine served, which will suggest that Edwards's doctrine of grace and participation was a servant of Reformed interests, not an opponent.

### **EXPOSITION OF "TRUE GRACE IS DIVINE"**

Why begin with this sermon? Edwards published and wrote about his view of grace in many works and many sermons, and often at greater length and detail than this one sermon provides. There are four reasons for investigating this sermon at the outset. First, "True Grace Is Divine" provides a concise statement of Edwards's doctrine of grace as participation in divinity, and more specifically *divine fullness*. Edwards speaks of participation in divine fullness in many contexts, but that voluminous body of work makes distilling a systematic and concise statement difficult. In this one sermon Edwards provides a summary of his view, which can then provide a systematic lens for grasping how the doctrine of grace functions throughout the rest of his writings. Second, in this sermon Edwards outlines a view of the category of divine fullness that contrasts it from both created nature and the divine essence. That is, he addresses the Creator-creature distinction in a targeted manner, and in a way that relates divine fullness to both created nature and the divine essence within the same argument. Edwards makes a



similar contrast in other works, but here it is his particular focus. Given that it is also a particular interest of the present study, it seems a legitimate starting point. Third, the sermon shows the polemical edge of his approach to grace and participation. Last, Edwards's sermons and notes toward the end of his life indicate that his view expressed in this sermon remained constant through the rest of his life.<sup>15</sup>

Jonathan Edwards preached "True Grace Is Divine" in December 1738: a year of great preaching and growing notoriety. It had been four years since God's "surprising work" broke into the town of Northampton, and Edwards's account of the revival had been published in London one year before. Yet in spite of his growing fame, his congregation's spiritual life languished. The revival had ended abruptly and spectacularly with the suicide of Joseph Hawley Sr. in June 1735, and Edwards had become embroiled in a bitter ecclesiastical dispute regarding the alleged Arminianism of a local pastor named Robert Breck. The years following the revival were a time of disappointment and struggle for the pastor Jonathan Edwards.

Yet it was also a time of profound preaching. Was he motivated by the spiritual decline after revival, or had he matured in his theological reflections such that he was ready to display some of his most profound thinking? In any regard, he set about preaching two sermon series that would come to be remembered as some of his best. The first is now known as "Charity and Its Fruits," preached between April and October 1738.<sup>16</sup> It is an exposition of 1 Corinthians 13, and it argues that charity, or love, is the essence of all saving virtue, and that without it there can be no salvation. The second sermon series occurred in early 1739, titled "The History of the Work of Redemption."<sup>17</sup> This was Edwards's attempt to situate his Northampton parish within the macro movements and purposes of God in history. Both series aimed at a pastoral provocation: Edwards wanted to rouse his sleeping congregation to their earlier zeal. But he also had a theological agenda, one that touches a

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<sup>15</sup>For similar discussions of divine fullness later in Edwards's life see "Approaching the End of God's Grand Design" (WJE 25:113-26), preached in 1744, especially 116. See also "True Grace, Distinguished from Devils" (WJE 25:608-40), last preached in 1752, especially 639. See also the later *Miscellanies*, such as *Miscellanies* 1266(a) (WJE 23:213), *Miscellanies* 1352 (WJE 23:498), *Miscellanies* 1218 (WJE 23:152). See also Edwards's *Blank Bible* discussion of Eph 3:19 in WJE 24:1101.

<sup>16</sup>WJE 8:129-397.

<sup>17</sup>WJE 9.

central concern throughout his career. His theological concern in both series is to answer the question, What is the distinguishing center of God's work? There are many ways of framing saving virtue, but what is its center? The answer: charity. There are many ways of telling the story of history, but what is the true center? The answer: God's work of redemption.

It is this theological aim that seems to drive "True Grace Is Divine." Edwards preached this sermon in between the two great series, and like in them both, Edwards is exploring the question, What is the distinguishing center of, in this case, saving grace? His answer, strikingly, is, grace is participation in divine fullness.

Edwards followed standard Puritan preaching tradition, and therefore his sermons follow a threefold division: exposition, doctrine, and application. His text is 1 John 4:12—"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (KJV). Edwards begins by pointing out a key concern of 1 John: distinguishing the true center of God's work. "The special design of this chapter, seems to be to give some distinguishing marks, whereby the true Spirit may be distinguished from false spirits." Edwards exegetes the verse and points out that love (the sum of Christian grace) is a principle in the heart that allows (1) a saint to see God, (2) mutual indwelling between God and the saint, and (3) love to reach the effect God intends. Edwards then settles down to his doctrine statement: "True grace in the hearts of the saints, is something divine."<sup>18</sup>

The doctrine is provocative. It is provocative in part because it is abrupt. The biblical text says nothing about either grace or divinity and entirely focuses on love, yet Edwards's doctrine introduces both grace and divinity and leaves love aside.<sup>19</sup> But it is mainly provocative because of the claim itself. What does it mean that grace is divine? Edwards anticipates this question and launches into a discussion of four different possible references for the adjective *divine*.

First, *divine* may describe any work of God. Creation, humanity, and so on can all be called divine in the sense that they are works of God. Here the idea is that the adjective *divine* describes the origin, or perhaps better, the

<sup>18</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 350-52.

<sup>19</sup>The reason Edwards can move so easily between love and grace is that he views them as fundamentally one and the same (see WJE 21:166).

originator of the thing under discussion. In this way common grace may be termed divine, but this is not the way in which special grace is divine.<sup>20</sup>

Second, Edwards continues, the term *divine* can refer to something that reflects or typifies God in some manner. Here Edwards refers to creation and humanity again, to the sun and the stars, and to the human mind. Edwards is showing his interest in typology: all these things are designed to display some aspect of God and his glory. Where the first reference of the word *divine* pointed to the origin, this use of the term *divine* refers to the deeper typological meaning of a thing. An item may not be divine *in itself*, ontologically considered (see the next reference for *divine*), but it may point to God. But again, this is not the way in which special grace is divine.<sup>21</sup>

Third, the term *divine* can designate the divine essence. Thus, when one says, “God is divine,” one means to refer to the fact that God’s essence is divine. Importantly, Edward denies that grace is divine in this way. Grace is not divine in the way in which God himself is divine. This is important because it represents one of the ways that Edwards protects the Creator-creature distinction. This is always a concern when discussing divine participation—whether the Eastern theosis version or similar themes in Western iteration. Christianity’s monotheism means that creatures must remain creatures, and one of the hallmarks of orthodox treatments of divine participation is to establish this critical boundary. This is Edwards’s concern here: “Nor is it in this sense, that grace in the hearts of the saints is a divine thing. To be divine, then, is to be divine in an infinitely higher sense than any creature can be. For the creature can’t partake of the divine essence, or any part of the divine essence: for the essence of God is not divisible nor communicable.”<sup>22</sup>

I come now to the last possible meaning for divinity, and this is the meaning that applies to grace. Edwards writes, “Things are said to be divine, as they are a supernatural communication of something of that good which God himself possesses, and ’tis in this sense that grace is something divine. It is not a communication of God’s essence, but it is a communication of

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<sup>20</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 353.

<sup>21</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 353.

<sup>22</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 354.

that which the Scripture calls God's fullness."<sup>23</sup> Edwards is charting a narrow course and using very technical language to do it. He wants to say several things at the same time. He clearly wants to say that grace is divine in a way that is not true of all God's other gifts (creation, life, food, etc.).<sup>24</sup> But he also wants to guard the creature-Creator distinction. The divine essence is divine in a way that grace is not. He accomplishes both aims by employing the terms *supernatural* and *fullness*. The category "supernatural" allows him to affirm that grace is divine above "natural" gifts. The category "fullness" allows him to speak of something other than the divine essence, but nevertheless still of God in a very real way. Edwards defines *fullness* as the good that characterizes a particular thing. He derives this definition from a study of the term *fullness* in Scripture and concludes that fullness is "the good anyone possesses, either good of excellency, or beauty, or wealth, or happiness."<sup>25</sup>

With these distinctions in place, he can move to bold and positive statement regarding grace: "Grace is a communication or a participation of God's own fullness or of his good, a partaking of his riches, his own treasure, a partaking in some sort of his own bounty and happiness."<sup>26</sup> Edwards avoids ambiguity here: grace is divine participation. Yet again the subtleties are important. Clearly the words *communication* and *participation* are central, but I will leave analysis of these categories aside for the moment. At this point, it is the less obviously technical words that need comment and in particular, the term *own* and Edwards's use of the possessive *his*. Notice how the small word *own* comes up three times in one sentence. Grace, Edwards labors to say, is not merely a participation in *some* good but in *someone's* good. It is not merely a participation in *some* sort of fullness but in a fullness that properly belongs to a person, namely, God. It is God's *own* fullness that is the object of communication and participation. I will explore Edwards's notion of fullness in short order, but for now it is important to see how closely Edwards joins this category to God himself. To share in the divine fullness is to share in direct proximity to God.

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<sup>23</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 354.

<sup>24</sup>He will state this explicitly in short order.

<sup>25</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 354.

<sup>26</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 355.

At this point Edwards has asserted the main aspects of his argument and now turns to two further sections that clarify what he means. He clarifies first by considering creatureliness and then by considering divinity. I continue to follow Edwards's argument very closely here because he introduces distinctions that are important throughout the rest of this book.

Edwards argues three ways a creature may have an attribute. There are some attributes that are part of the creature's nature or essence. These are those things without which the creature ceases to be what it is. There are other things that are not part of the creature's essence but may be added to an individual creature by some sort of natural development. A person's rationality is of the essence of being human, but discretion is a development from essential rationality. Rationality illustrates the first way a creature may have an attribute (part of its essence), and discretion illustrates the second. The key thought in this second way of gaining an attribute is that it is a natural development of something latent in the essence. Discretion is a development of rationality, which is essential to being human. Edwards characterizes both as natural and not supernatural.<sup>27</sup>

The third way a creature may gain an attribute, however, fits into neither of these two options. "There is another kind of things in some creatures, that do neither belong to their nature and essence, nor the result of those things that are: and these things are called supernatural or divine." These are two important assertions for Edwards's doctrine of grace and divine participation. The first assertion is that a creature may gain an attribute (let us designate it "attribute X") without it being already resident in principle in the creature's essence. This opens the door to the implied idea that a creature may gain attribute X, which is foreign to its nature or essence, without attribute X undermining the creature's fundamental ontology. That is, the creature remains the same *sort of creature*, but with the addition of something entirely new. Edwards has not stated this as such, but it is the strong implication of this thinking. However, if this first assertion opens a door, the second assertion closes a door. The second assertion is that attribute X, which is not resident in principle within the nature or essence of the creature, is also not something that the creature may acquire by exercising the

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<sup>27</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 355-56.

resources latent in it. That is, while attribute X is compatible with creaturely ontology, so that it is possible for the creature to have attribute X, it remains outside the reach of the creature to acquire it, at least on its own. What then is an example of attribute X? The answer is “true grace or holiness.”<sup>28</sup>

What is Edwards’s aim in this line of argument? His aim is twofold. First, he wants to lay the groundwork for a notion of immediacy and differentiation between Creator and creature. Is it possible to bridge the Creator-creature ontological chasm? Can a creature receive an attribute that is discontinuous with its own essential ontology? If so, does the creature cease to be a creature? Edwards is preparing the reader (or listener) to accept the possibility of immediate closeness between God and creature, without undermining their differentiation. His second aim is to ensure that this immediacy between God and creature runs from God and toward the creature. This is important because it protects gratuity. Grace cannot be taken or achieved. This is not merely because the creature cannot earn it—that is not Edwards’s point—it is because the creature lacks the ontological capability to achieve it in any manner. Instead, the direction of travel must run the other way: God must *give* it, and the creature must *receive* it. “[True grace or holiness is] something entirely of a different kind from any thing that is human or angelical and something entirely above both. For ’tis something immediately from God and of God, a participation of that fullness that is in God and so is something supernatural and divine.”<sup>29</sup> Note both the immediate communication from God and the fact that the creature remains creature. Humans or angels who receive grace are still humans and angels, yet they receive something that is essentially different from their own ontology. The Creator-creature distinction is protected, but the chasm is also bridged in a particular grammar of gratuity.

Now Edwards focuses in on this gratuitous bridge. If Edwards’s concern in the previous paragraphs has been to distinguish grace from anything in creaturely ontology, he now turns to show how grace is intimately related to God himself. Grace is divine and supernatural, argues Edwards, in at least two ways.

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<sup>28</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 356. Note that Edwards regularly equates true and grace and holiness.

<sup>29</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 356.

The first way grace is divine and supernatural is that it is immediately *from* God. The key concept here is immediacy. Immediacy is an important concept in Edwards's thought, and here he explains what he means: "not by the intervention of natural causes." God gives many lesser gifts by enhancing natural causes and natural processes. This is how he acts in common grace, but it is not the case with special grace. True grace is his immediate action on the creature. Just in case there was doubt whether grace may rely on any other processes besides God, Edwards adds that grace is "according to his arbitrary pleasure."<sup>30</sup>

But grace is divine by virtue of an even more close relationship to God. Not only is grace immediately *from* God, it is a participation *of* God. Here Edwards struggles for the right words. He speaks of grace being *produced* immediately by God, but then abandons production words and prefers communication language: "'Tis not only divine because of the way it is produced, but also from the nature of the thing produced, in that *it is rather a communication than a production*.' 'Tis a participation of God, for where grace dwells, there God dwells."<sup>31</sup>

The shift in language from production to communication is significant, because it personalizes Edwards's view of grace. If grace is divine simply because it is produced immediately by God, then grace may well be a *something*—an impersonal product. The doctrine of creation traditionally speaks of God creating *ex nihilo*, which means that God created *something* that was not God, and did so immediately, because there was nothing else to use beside himself. Thus, had the sermon ended with the idea that grace is divine by its immediate production, one might conclude that this is nothing other than a sort of created grace.<sup>32</sup> Yet Edwards has already committed himself to say more than this alone. He has already said that some things are called divine simply because they are created by God—for example, creation itself—and that this is not the way grace is divine. So when Edwards

<sup>30</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 356-57.

<sup>31</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 357, emphasis added.

<sup>32</sup>Anri Morimoto argues, I believe wrongly, that Edwards's theology of grace includes both created- and uncreated-grace perspectives. See Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 7-8, 42-44. John J. Bombaro has refuted Morimoto on this point. See Bombaro, *Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Reality: The Relationship of God to the World, Redemption History, and the Reprobate* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 240-44.



turns from the origin of grace to the nature of grace itself, production language does not sit well. The gift given is not simply a *product* but rather a new sort of relatedness, and Edwards chooses words that can support personal relation between ontologically diverse beings: *communication* and *participation*. Both words can mean different things in different contexts and philosophical systems, but they have the capacity to indicate a relational union in which difference is maintained but intimacy achieved.<sup>33</sup> Note how Edwards's thought ends. Grace is a participation of God, because grace indicates God's dwelling in the saint and the saint's dwelling in God. Gracious participation, then, is a union between persons.<sup>34</sup> This explains why Edwards's rhetoric at this point in the sermon begins to soar in the way his theology of grace stretches the Creator-creature boundary without breaking it:

[Grace or holiness] is super human or super angelical. It is something above all created nature. 'Tis natural to none but God. 'Tis something higher than the whole universe, yea higher than heaven itself. It is both super[-terrestr]ial and supercelestial, being something divine, something of God who is infinitely above both heaven and earth.

The creature that has true grace and holiness in his heart has something infinitely above himself in him. He is gloriously honored and dignified by it, for he dwells in God, and God in him.<sup>35</sup>

There is nothing timid about this doctrine. It is a bold statement of intimacy between God and creature. The two are united in a bond of union in which the creature gains what is not its own. The reason Edwards can state this so strongly is that he has set careful boundaries to protect the Creator-creature distinction, and yet he has also established categories that facilitate the bridging of that distinction.

<sup>33</sup>For a similar idea in Calvin, see Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 13.

<sup>34</sup>As we will see, this union between persons (God and the saint) is a finite repetition of the union found within the Trinity. For studies that go into detail on this, see 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 (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006). See also Kyle Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, T&T Clark Studies in Systematic Theology (London: T&T Clark, 2013); Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics of Theosis," *HTR* 105, no. 3 (2012): 2 259-79; Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of Theosis," *HTR* 109, no. 3 (2016): 371-99.

<sup>35</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 359.

It is helpful to summarize the contours of Edwards's thought in several assertions before focusing more narrowly on two decisive categories: fullness and participation. Edwards's doctrine of grace follows these contours:

1. Special or true grace is a communication and participation in divine fullness.
2. Divine fullness is not latent within created nature's ontology.
3. Created nature has no native capacity to acquire divine fullness.
4. Divine fullness is something of God's own good and something of God himself.
5. Divine fullness is not the divine essence.
6. Divine fullness is given immediately to the creature by God.
7. Special or true grace, or the communication and participation in divine fullness, achieves mutual indwelling between God and creature.

These assertions will provide a succinct point of reference as I continue exploring Edwards's doctrine. However, I now must turn to Edwards's wider corpus to answer two critical questions. First, Edwards's concept of the divine fullness remains murky: What, more specifically, does he mean by it? Second, Edwards relies on the notions of communication and participation a great deal: What, more specifically, does he mean by them?

### **DIVINE FULLNESS IN WIDER FRAME**

Edwards's concept of divine fullness functions like a great road junction, or perhaps better as a great roundabout where multiple roads conjoin with one another. The roundabout provides entrance to each road and in that sense *is* each road, or at least is an extension of each road. Yet the roundabout also functions to unite each road with all the other roads. That is a bit of how Edwards uses the category of divine fullness. It may be equated with several other categories, yet it also unites each of these categories to the others. In this way divine fullness fulfills the job of a technical category within a theory. Theories are designed to provide a simple explanation for the complex data under consideration. That is what divine fullness does in Edwards's thought. Edwards does not provide a systematic exploration of the notion of divine fullness. That is, it is rarely the object of study or analysis. When it is the

object of study, it is generally a rehearsal of the biblical uses of the term as a way of justifying Edwards's use in a particular context. But even here he explores divine fullness only on the way to something else.

However, one can explore the richness of this roundabout category by following the argument of Edwards's *Treatise on Grace*.<sup>36</sup> As the title suggests, *Treatise* unpacks the doctrine of grace, and does so in ways that corroborate the line of thinking discussed above in "True Grace Is Divine." In the course of the argument Edwards arrives at the notion of divine fullness and, in so doing, fills out the picture of the concept in far greater detail. I will provide a brief sketch of the argument in order to demonstrate the richness of this roundabout category.

*Treatise on Grace* is divided into three chapters, and each chapter penetrates more deeply into the nature of divine grace. Chapter one is primarily concerned to show that special grace is not resident within created nature. It is a larger elaboration of the point that has already been made from the exposition of "True Grace Is Divine" above. Chapter two turns to a deeper consideration of what grace is in itself. Edwards recognizes that there are many virtues and characteristics that are often called graces. However, Edwards argues that this can be misleading. It is not so much that there are many graces or many sorts of grace that differ from each other in a fundamental way. Rather, argues Edwards, all grace resolves to one single virtue: love. The remainder of the chapter is a compelling argument that underscores and confirms this thesis.

For our purposes I note that Edwards's argument in the *Treatise* brings a question and also suggests a solution to it. "True Grace Is Divine" resolves grace to a participation in divine fullness. Is Edwards contradicting himself when he reduces grace to love in the *Treatise*? Recall that "True Grace Is Divine" is based off 1 John 4:12, which itself is entirely about love. I noted with interest how Edwards's exposition section of the sermon deals with the category of love, but then that category fades to the background in the doctrine section. There the category of divine fullness takes over. This suggests a strong relation between divine love and divine fullness, and we will discover that divine love is one of the roads that leads in and out of the roundabout of divine fullness.

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<sup>36</sup>WJE 21:153-97.

With grace firmly grounded on divine love, chapter three then asks the question, “How does saving grace partake of the nature of that Spirit?”<sup>37</sup> Edwards keeps the conclusion of chapter two in clear view—grace is summarily love. The question in chapter three is, How does grace relate to the Holy Spirit, given that both can be identified with love? This is where the argument becomes precise and very important for every aspect of Edwards’s notion of special grace. Edwards begins by uniting the Holy Spirit and divine love. That is, he argues that the Bible sees a particular connection between the Spirit and love. Just as the eternal Son may be called the Logos, so the Spirit may be designated as Agapē.<sup>38</sup> Then Edwards gets more specific and places the entire discussion in the context of his trinitarianism. The Holy Spirit is not only divine love, but more specifically the love, delight, happiness that binds together the Father and the Son *ad intra*.

God’s love is primarily to himself, and his infinite delight is in himself, in the Father and the Son loving and delighting in each other. We often read of the Father loving the Son, and being well-pleased in the Son, and of the Son loving the Father. In the infinite love and delight that is between these two persons consists the infinite happiness of God. . . . The Holy Spirit proceeds from, or is breathed forth from, the Father and the Son in some way or other infinitely above all our conceptions, as the divine essence entirely flows out and is breathed forth in infinitely pure love and sweet delight from the Father and the Son.<sup>39</sup>

At this point Edwards’s discussion has moved from grace, a soteriological category, to the heights of trinitarian theology proper, for his assertion that the Spirit is divine love shared between the Father and the Son refers to their relations *ad intra*. Yet from this height, he turns back toward soteriology and argues that this divine love between the Father and the Son, which issues forth as a third person, coessential with the Father and the Son, is also the gift given to the creature in grace. Speaking of the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son, Edwards writes, “[It is this] person that is poured forth into the hearts of angels and saints.”<sup>40</sup> This is the crucial piece

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<sup>37</sup>WJE 21:180.

<sup>38</sup>WJE 21:183.

<sup>39</sup>WJE 21:184.

<sup>40</sup>WJE 21:186.

of the puzzle, and although Edwards has not introduced the category of divine fullness, it is this notion that the Holy Spirit, as bond of love between the Father and the Son, is the love given in divine grace that allows us to see the various roads approaching each other in the roundabout. As we draw nearer to the metaphorical junction, Edwards points out that the Spirit, who is love, is also both the holiness of God and the happiness of God. These are not separate realities but the same reality viewed from differing angles.<sup>41</sup>

With that in place, I arrive at the roundabout itself. Note the introduction of the term *fullness*:

From what has been said, it follows that the Holy Spirit is the sum of all good. 'Tis the *fullness of God*. The holiness and happiness of the Godhead consists in it; and in the communion or partaking of it consists all the true loveliness and happiness of the creature. All the grace and comfort that persons have here, and all their holiness and happiness hereafter, consists in the love of the Spirit.<sup>42</sup>

This passage in itself falls short of the category of divine fullness as a roundabout where various categories join together. Taken on its own, this one reference to divine fullness could just be a description of the Holy Spirit rather than a technical category that it clearly is in “True Grace Is Divine.” However, Edwards does employ *fullness* in a technical way in the *Treatise*, and in a way that functions to unite various other categories together. Consider the following. First, Edwards dubs the Spirit as God’s fullness, and then he defines fullness in reference to the Scriptures, before uniting trinitarian processions, grace to the saints, and christological mediation all around the category of fullness.

Hence we learn that God’s fullness does consist in the Holy Spirit. By “fullness,” as the term is used in Scripture, as may easily be seen by looking over the texts that mention it, is intended the good that anyone possesses. Now the good that God possesses does most immediately consist in his joy and complacency that he has in himself. It does objectively, indeed, consist in the Father and the Son; but it doth most immediately consist in the complacency in these elements. Nevertheless the fullness of God consists in the holiness and happiness of the Deity. Hence persons, by being made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

<sup>41</sup>WJE 21:186-87.

<sup>42</sup>WJE 21:188, emphasis added.

or having it dwelling in them, are said to be “partakers of the fullness of God,” or Christ. Christ’s fullness as mediator consists in his having the Spirit given him “not by measure” (John 3:34); and so it is that he is said to have “the fullness of the Godhead,” is said “to dwell in him bodily” (Colossians 2:9); and so we, by receiving the Holy Spirit from Christ and being made partakers of his Spirit, are said to receive “of his fullness, and grace for grace” [Jn 1:16]. And because this Spirit, which is the fullness of God, consists in the love of God and Christ; therefore we, by knowing the love of Christ, are said “to be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:19)<sup>43</sup>

I venture this long quotation because it (1) provides a technical definition of fullness in the abstract: “the good that anyone possesses”; (2) provides a technical definition of the fullness of God in the concrete: “his joy and complacency that he has in himself”; (3) attributes this same concrete fullness as the gift given in soteriological participation, or grace: “persons, by being made partakers of the Holy Spirit, or having it dwelling in them, are said to be ‘partakers of the fullness of God’”; and finally (4) indicates that the category of divine fullness relates to other areas of Edwards’s theology, especially Christology: “Christ’s fullness as mediator consists in his having the Spirit given him ‘not by measure.’” This passage gives us a tour around the roundabout. Divine fullness, the central gift of special grace, is the Holy Spirit, which in turn is the love between the Father and the Son *ad intra*, poured out *ad extra*, through christological mediation, to the saints. All of this content is nested in the little category, fullness.

This account of Edwards’s notion of divine fullness needs to withstand an objection. Edwards appears to give a different definition in *The End for Which God Created the World*. I will address this now before proceeding further.

Edwards’s *The End for Which God Created the World* is a masterpiece of material distilled from his entire intellectual career, and the category of divine fullness is central to its entire thesis.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the dissertation Edwards argues that the end of creation is God’s glory (traditional Reformed line), but that this glory is achieved in the communication (or “emanation”) of divine fullness.<sup>45</sup> I will explore this idea in chapter four. Yet for now the

<sup>43</sup>WJE 21:187-88.

<sup>44</sup>WJE 8:405-536.

<sup>45</sup>For instance, see WJE 8:527-28.

important thing is Edwards's definition of divine fullness. Does he equate it with the Holy Spirit as he does in *Treatise on Grace*? Not precisely. Here, God's fullness consists in three things: God's knowledge, his holiness, and his happiness. Yet these can reduce to two: holiness and happiness are both particularly grounded in the divine will because both are expressions of love. Thus, God's fullness consists in God's knowledge or understanding, and God's love or will. This fullness is communicable: the communication of God's knowledge is designated "truth," and the communication of God's love is designated "grace."<sup>46</sup> Does this then indicate a contradictory view of divine fullness? Did Edwards change his mind over time on this question? Taken within the context of Edwards's trinitarian theology, there is no reason to conclude this.

Edwards's trinitarian theology allows one to see Edwards's two definitions of divine fullness as being fundamentally continuous. Edwards's trinitarianism is the animating center of his thinking, and I will not venture a full exposition here.<sup>47</sup> Rather, I will simply point out how it provides a larger context for understanding divine fullness. When Edwards speaks of God's knowledge and God's love, or God's understanding and God's will, he is referring to trinitarian persons. Edwards understood God's knowledge to refer to God's Son, and God's will or love to refer to God's Spirit. This is clear earlier in *Treatise on Grace* when Edwards speaks of the Son as the Logos and the Spirit as Agapē.<sup>48</sup> *Discourse on the Trinity* details how the inner-trinitarian processions function. The Father, as the fountainhead of the Godhead, considers himself in self-reflection.<sup>49</sup> This mental self-idea is the Father's understanding, and because it is a perfect consideration of himself, it issues forth in a second person of the Trinity, the Logos or Son. The Father and the Son then (with no temporal implication) unite in a bond of delight and love as they contemplate each other. This delight and love is pure act, and thereby issues forth in a third person, the Holy Spirit.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup>WJE 8:441-43, 528-30.

<sup>47</sup>Chapter three will go into far greater depth on Edwards's trinitarianism.

<sup>48</sup>WJE 21:183.

<sup>49</sup>WJE 21:113-44.

<sup>50</sup>See Strobel's analysis of the unity and personhood of the Trinity, along with the question of "real attributes" in Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 40-64. For a view that both appreciates and critiques Strobel's work, and especially critiques Strobel's account of the real attributes, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards Among the Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 36-59.



With this in mind we can return to Edwards's two definitions of divine fullness and reconcile them. In *End of Creation*, Edwards describes divine fullness as, functionally, the Son and the Spirit together. In *Treatise on Grace*, he restricts divine fullness to the Spirit alone. However, the difference between these two is simply one of elaboration and abbreviation. The Spirit's procession *ad intra* between the Father and the Son, and the Spirit's communication *ad extra* to the saints, are both mediated by the Son. That is, within the Trinity *ad intra*, the Spirit only proceeds by virtue of the Father's contemplation of the Son, and therefore the Spirit is logically dependent on the Son. The Spirit "proceeds from the Father mediately by the Son, viz. by the Father's beholding himself in the Son."<sup>51</sup> Given this fact, there can be no divine fullness without God's knowledge, because God's will is dependent on it. A similar dynamic happens in the gracious communication of the divine fullness. The communication of the Spirit to the saint (special grace) is always mediated by Christ, who is the divine knowledge incarnate.<sup>52</sup> Thus, sometimes Edwards can identify the divine fullness with the Spirit alone, and other times he can identify the divine fullness with the Spirit and the Son. He is not contradicting himself. Rather, when he mentions the divine fullness as the Spirit, Christ (the divine understanding) is always implied. The gift of grace is the Spirit, mediated by Christ, such that the divine will is shared through the divine understanding. There is one gift, with two aspects.<sup>53</sup>

Kyle Strobel has recently provided further clarity on this question through what he calls God's "communicative natures."<sup>54</sup> Strobel points out that within Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity, God's understanding (the Son) and God's will or love (the Spirit) are perichoretically shared between the three persons of the Godhead, such that the Son is the Father's and the Spirit's understanding, and the Spirit is the Father's and the Son's will or love. This means that within the Godhead, God's natures of understanding and will are shared between the three persons, and Strobel argues that this sets the stage for a

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<sup>51</sup>WJE 21:143.

<sup>52</sup>See Christ's mediation of divine fullness in WJE 21:187-88. See also Jonathan Edwards, "Sermon 180. John 1:16," in *Sermons, Series II, 1729-1731*, WJE Online vol. 45.

<sup>53</sup>"Knowledge of God . . . is always mediated *Christologically* through a *pneumatologically* achieved union" (Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 169).

<sup>54</sup>Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine." See also Strobel, *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*, 177-207 (especially 202-5).

similar dynamic in the economy. That is, in a way that echoes perichoresis within the Trinity, God shares his natures of understanding and will (the Son and the Spirit) to the saint. Importantly, God shares the nature of his Spirit (divine love) in a manner that binds the saint to Christ (God's self-understanding), in a way that echoes the trinitarian processions and perichoretic communion.

What Strobel terms God's "communicable natures" is a helpful way of describing the internal dynamic within the divine fullness. Strobel's account of the communicable natures is strengthened if one categorizes it under the larger category of the divine fullness. This is the case, first, because it is what Edwards does (as is most obvious in *End of Creation*), and second, because the category of divine fullness points out that the gift of grace is one gift. If one speaks only in terms of God's two communicable natures, then it might sound as if there are two gifts or two graces. In fact, there is one gift, with two aspects: the Spirit uniting the saint to Christ, or, the divine love binding the saint to God's self-understanding. Grace is the divine fullness, which, if opened up, includes two aspects, which map to Strobel's communicable natures. This explains why Strobel's account and mine are mutually informative and complementary, and it also explains why Edwards can move between speaking of God's nature communicated and God's fullness communicated with such ease.

All this means that when Edwards describes divine fullness as consisting in the Holy Spirit or divine love, Christ is always implied. Because Christ is implied, divine knowledge is also in play. Thus the definition of divine fullness in *Treatise* is not materially different from the definition in *End of Creation*. In this study I will tend to use the shorthand version.<sup>55</sup> However, the importance of christological mediation must not be forgotten.

This section functions as a short ride around the roundabout of Edwards's notion of divine fullness. Roundabouts are important for organizing traffic patterns, and familiarity with them is important for anyone wanting to navigate effectively. The same is true in Edwards's doctrine of grace as participation in divine fullness. Divine fullness is central. It touches every other

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<sup>55</sup>Recall that even in *End of Creation* Edwards uses the word *grace* to designate the communication of the Spirit (see WJE 8:529-30). It therefore follows that when divine fullness is used in the context of special grace that the Spirit will be the particular focus of attention.

category in Edwards's system of grace, and it regulates how they interact. Just as a roundabout may be considered on its own, yet still is joined to the various roads entering it and exiting it, and yet further *is* each of those roads in a very real way, so divine fullness operates. Divine fullness touches or relates directly to the doctrine of the Trinity (especially the Holy Spirit), Christology, soteriology, and many other areas of doctrine, and often functions to relate them to each other. But divine fullness not only relates to various other categories; it is also simply the extension, or even the synonym for many of them. The divine fullness, given in grace, *is* the Holy Spirit; it *is* divine love; it *is* the gift of salvation; it *is* that which unites the human and divine natures in Christ; it *is* the bond between the saint and Christ. It is the *ad extra* expression of the love between the Father and the Son *ad intra*. Changing the image, it is a theoretical category, describing a wide array of theological notions. This complexity, nested in a single category, will be important throughout the remainder of this study.

### COMMUNICATION, PARTICIPATION, AND COMMUNION IN WIDER FRAME

Edwards's definition of true grace falls into two basic halves: it is a communication and participation in divine fullness. We have gained some clarity on divine fullness, but we need now to explore what Edwards means by saying that grace is a *communication and participation* in divine fullness. What does he mean by the categories of communication and participation, and how do they affect his vision of saving grace? Together with the related category of communion, these concepts permeate Edwards's discussions of special grace, and given that they can mean different things in different philosophical and theological traditions, one needs to clarify their meaning within Edwards in order to understand his vision of special grace. The present discussion will be preliminary and limited in scope. My aim at the moment is merely to give an initial analysis of how these concepts are used in the context of Edwards's discussion of special grace and the Creator-creature distinction.

The definitions of these terms are not difficult. The three terms share a semantic range, so they can become almost synonyms. Their meanings converge around the idea of sharing something between parties. Yet around this

convergence each term has the capacity to emphasize ideas that the other two generally do not. *Communication* can hold several meanings but has the capacity to emphasize the act of giving, so that “to communicate” is to give something that is to be shared between parties. Similarly, *participation* can hold several meanings but has the capacity to emphasize the act of receiving the thing shared. Communion, again, can mean several things but has the ability to emphasize the mutual act of sharing between parties.

Robert Caldwell confirms that these emphases reflect Edwards’s typical usage. Discussing their function with Edwards’s trinitarianism, he writes:

Thus we have a triad of concepts that are used to describe the relationality of the immanent Trinity. The term “communion” (or fellowship, the terms are virtually synonymous in Edwards’s writings) describes the common good that the Father and the Son partake of in their eternal love for each other. . . . “Communication” references the active transfer of divine riches from one member to another. “Participation” by contrast is the reception of good that is communicated from another and the common enjoyment of good with another.<sup>56</sup>

These definitions are helpful because they show the three concepts to be three distinct roles in the same dynamic, and I will refer to these dynamics and roles throughout the study.<sup>57</sup> However, they do not exhaust the question: What, more specifically, does Jonathan Edwards mean when he says that grace is a *communication and participation* in divine fullness?

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<sup>56</sup>Caldwell, *Communion in the Spirit*, 55. Claghorn and Tan equate the three terms. They are correct that they all together describe the same dynamic, but in making a simple equation, they miss the action of giving (communication), receiving and returning (participation), and sharing (communion) that is important to Edwards’s use of the terms (see WJE 8:631). Also see Seng-Kong Tan, *Fullness Received and Returned: Trinity and Participation in Jonathan Edwards* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 293.

<sup>57</sup>In this study I will follow custom and use the term *participation* when referring to the entire dynamic, without having a particular role in view. However, at other times, when I am focusing on a particular aspect of the participatory dynamic, I will use *communication* to refer to the act of giving, *participation* to refer to the act of receiving and returning the thing shared, and *communion* to refer to the mutual act of sharing. In Edwards’s theology of grace—in general—God is the subject of the verb *communicate*, whereas creatures are generally the subject of the verb *participate* or *partake*, and both are often the subjects of the notion of communion. Context will make clear when I am using *participation* in the more general sense and when I am using it in the more restricted, specific sense of creaturely receiving and returning. In subsequent chapters we will see that these three concepts are rooted in trinitarian relations, and in that context, the persons of the Trinity become the subjects of all three concepts. But this will wait for chapter three.

Aid in answering this question comes from contemporary participation scholarship's work on distinguishing different types of participation thought.<sup>58</sup> Recent scholarship justifies distinguishing at least two broad approaches to the concept. Julie Canlis, in her recent study of John Calvin, argues that Western Christian theology produced (at least) two lineages of participation thought. The first grew out of Christian engagement with Platonism and is propounded today by movements such as Radical Orthodoxy.<sup>59</sup> The primary concern in this lineage is with how created reality gains quiddity, substantiality, and being.<sup>60</sup> That is: How does creation derive *being* from "eternal realities"?<sup>61</sup> However, Canlis argues that Christian theology also gave rise to a more relational tradition of participation thinking. Here, the concern is with "intimacy and differentiation, not consubstantiality"; that is, the focus in this type of participation is not on quiddity per se but rather on union between parties, such that their distinction remains.<sup>62</sup> In Christian context, it often refers to a relational sharing between distinct persons, based on the Trinity. Canlis locates Irenaeus and Calvin in this camp. W. Ross Hastings follows Canlis and refers to the first variety of participation with the term *methexis*, and the second, more relational iteration with the term *koinōnia*.<sup>63</sup> Both *methexis* and *koinōnia* may be translated into English as "participation," but they can serve the current discussion as labels for the two iterations of participation thought.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup>This paragraph draws from James Salladin, "Nature and Grace: Two Participations in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards," *IJST* 18, no. 3 (2016): 290-303.

<sup>59</sup>Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 18.

<sup>60</sup>Andrew Davison notes rightly that any discussion of creaturely substantiality must be understood to refer to a "derived substantiality." This is the point of common participation. See Davison, *Participation in God: A Study in Christian Doctrine and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 296n54.

<sup>61</sup>T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 184.

<sup>62</sup>Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder*, 13. See George Hunsinger's characterization of *koinōnia* as "unity-in-distinction." Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology of Forgiveness," *IJST* 2, no. 3 (2000): 248-49.

<sup>63</sup>W. Ross Hastings, *Jonathan Edwards and the Life of God: Toward an Evangelical Theology of Participation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 56-58; see also 39-40, 102, 441-42, 444.

<sup>64</sup>T. F. Torrance also employed the *methexis-koinōnia* in this way. See Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 184-85. Seng-Kong Tan uses the term *koinōnia* for relational participation (*Fullness Received and Returned*, 118). Similarly, James K. A. Smith uses the term *methexis* to describe Radical Orthodoxy's approach to participation. See Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-secular Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 74-75, 98-99. For an account of theosis based on *methexis*, see Daniel Haynes, "The Metaphysics of Christian Ethics: Radical Orthodoxy and Theosis," *Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011): 659-71.

This dissection of participation thought allows for analysis of Edwards's meaning of *communication*, *participation*, and *communion*, within the context of special grace, as a species of *koinōnia*. I will demonstrate it as a species of *koinōnia* by highlighting several items I observed in "True Grace Is Divine" and *Treatise on Grace*, and then relate these observations to George Hunsinger's description of *koinōnia* participation. With this in place I will note an important question that will require deeper exploration in chapters two and three.

"True Grace Is Divine" and *Treatise on Grace* provide several clues indicating that Edwards's idea of participation, within the context of special grace, is not aimed at ontological participation that undergirds quiddity, but rather a relational participation that achieves unity while protecting personal differentiation. Recall the seven contours of Edwards's doctrine of special grace identified earlier.

1. Special or true grace is a communication and participation in divine fullness.
2. Divine fullness is not latent within created nature's ontology.
3. Created nature has no native capacity to acquire divine fullness.
4. Divine fullness is something of God's own good and something of God himself.
5. Divine fullness is not the divine essence.
6. Divine fullness is given immediately to the creature by God.
7. Special or true grace, or the communication and participation in divine fullness, achieves mutual indwelling between God and creature.

The first three points above indicate that whatever Edwards means by *participation*, at least in the context of special grace, he does not mean a participation by which a thing gains its quiddity. *Participation* can often signify a sharing in an ontological fundamental such as essence or substance. This is what I called *methexis* above. Indeed, I should point out that even in "True Grace Is Divine" Edwards can describe God as partaking of the divine essence.<sup>65</sup> He is quick to deny that special grace is this sort of participation but illustrates that the concept of participation, within Edwards's thought as

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<sup>65</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 353.

beyond it, can carry heavy ontological weight. However, when Edwards describes special grace and participating in divine fullness, he clearly denies that this participation is the sort that gives the creature quiddity. Point two above makes that clear: divine fullness is not latent within the created nature's ontology. That is, a creature can be a fully ontologically stable creature without any partaking in the divine fullness. Point three stresses this by saying that even if the creature developed all the endowments implied in its essence, the creature could still never acquire divine fullness. Both sides of the creature's ontology are out of bounds: participation in divine fullness does not ground the creature's quiddity, and it is out of reach of the creature's ontological capacity to achieve it on its own. Point five above puts participation in divine fullness even further from fundamental ontology by denying that it is the divine essence. Participation in divine fullness does not ground the creature's fundamental ontology, and it does not ground the deity's fundamental ontology either. Edwards is laboring to place this sort of participation in another field of discourse besides quiddity.

This denial that participation in divine fullness establishes quiddity also provides an important positive clue in uncovering what sort of participation Edwards intends. Whatever this participation means, it will necessarily preserve ontological differentiation. If participation in divine fullness does not impinge on creaturely quiddity or the essence of God, then it will follow that the creature's quiddity and God's quiddity remain intact in this participation. If the creature is an ontologically real creature before partaking in the divine fullness, and if by participating in the divine fullness the creature does not share in the divine essence, then one would expect that in participation in divine fullness the creature remains a creature of the same ontological species. If that is the case, then the creature remains creature, and God remains God. They remain distinct and differentiated.

All of this suggests a large ontological barrier between God and the creature, but that would be misleading. Point six above bridges this chasm in a bold statement of intimacy. Divine fullness is given immediately by God. Immediacy here means that grace is given "not by the intervention of natural causes."<sup>66</sup> That is, in this type of participation, there is no third entity. It is not the creature plus some supercreature or intermediary between God and

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<sup>66</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 356.



the creature. The divine and the natural relate without mediation other than God himself. This brings up many questions, but it serves to heighten the closeness, the intimacy, between God and the creature without melding them or betraying differentiation. This point is confirmed and pressed further by point seven. The participation in divine fullness culminates in mutual indwelling between God and the creature. This is profound intimacy while preserving differentiation. It is the culmination of Edwards's theory of special grace.

This pattern of participation thought in Edwards fits with what Hunsinger calls the "Chalcedonian pattern" of *koinōnia* relations. Hunsinger writes:

Formally and paradigmatically, a *koinonia*-relation is a relation of mutual indwelling between two terms (e.g. between Christ and the church). Term *a* dwells in term *b*, even as *b* dwells in *a*, with the result that they coexist in a unity-in-distinction. In such a relation neither *a* nor *b* loses its identity, but rather the distinctive identity of each is sustained, fulfilled and enhanced. The two terms are thus related without separation or division (unity) and without confusion or change (distinction).<sup>67</sup>

Edwards's description of participation in divine fullness follows this description closely. The culmination of special grace is mutual indwelling. God and the creature represent the two terms, and each dwells within the other. Yet this mutual indwelling is not such that God and creature stop being distinctly God and distinctly creature. In *Treatise on Grace* Edwards describes this dynamic in unmistakably relational, even social terms: "To have communion or fellowship with another, is to partake with them of their good in their fullness, in union and society with them."<sup>68</sup> This language follows his Reformed forebearer John Owen quite closely. Owen defined communion as "the mutual communication of such good things as wherein the persons holding that communion are delighted, bottomed upon some union between them."<sup>69</sup> In both Edwards and Owen, the notion of union is personal, social, and relational, which in turn emphasizes the differentiation

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<sup>67</sup>Hunsinger, "Baptism and the Soteriology," 248.

<sup>68</sup>WJE 21:188.

<sup>69</sup>John Owen, *Communion with God: Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, each person distinctly, in love, grace, and consolation; or, The saints' fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost unfolded* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2017), 1.1, p. 8.

that remains. When Edwards speaks of special grace as a communication and participation in divine fullness, he is describing a species of *koinōnia*, marked by “unity-in-distinction.”

This fact is confirmed further when one recalls the particular direction of travel that operates in Edwards’s doctrine of grace. The divine fullness is communicated, or given, immediately by God. It is not achieved by the creature but received by the creature. Once this fullness is given (communicated) and received (partaken of), God and the creature share (communion) in mutual indwelling. Hunsinger points out that this sort of dynamic, or grammar, as he calls it, is typical of *koinōnia* relations.

Very often (though not always) in Christian soteriology a third formal element is also involved. This element may be called the principle of asymmetry. The asymmetrical ordering principle obtains in those cases where *a* is logically prior and *b* logically subsequent, so that *a* can be defined without reference to *b*, but *b* cannot be defined without reference to *a*. . . . I have described this formal or grammatical paradigm, involving an asymmetrical unity-in-distinction, as “the Chalcedonian pattern.”<sup>70</sup>

Edwards’s doctrine of special grace retains this asymmetry in the giving (communicating) and receiving (partaking) of divine fullness. The divine fullness obtains in God due to trinitarian relations. In the economy, on the basis of the incarnation and ministry of Christ, God communicates the Spirit (his divine fullness) to creatures. Their reception and return of divine fullness (mutual indwelling) is always entirely dependent on the ongoing communication of God. Edwards follows the Chalcedonian pattern of asymmetrical unity-in-distinction that is characteristic of *koinōnia* relations.

The term *koinōnia* is particularly appropriate for Edwards’s participation in divine fullness because he grounds his understanding of communion in the Spirit, in an important way, on an exegesis of 2 Corinthians 13:14. This is the famous grace benediction in which Paul invokes the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” The word translated “fellowship” or “communion” is the Greek word *koinōnia*. This is also the word used in 2 Peter 1:4, another key passage for Edwards’s theology of grace. Edwards conveniently describes what he

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<sup>70</sup>Hunsinger, “Baptism and the Soteriology,” 248-49.

means by the term *communion* and grounds it in 2 Corinthians 13:14 when he states:

Persons are said to have communion with each other, when they partake with each other in some common good; but anyone is said to have communion of anything, with respect to that thing they partake of, in common with others. Hence, in the apostolical benediction, he wishes the “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion” (or partaking) “of the Holy Ghost” [2 Cor 13:14]. The blessing wished is but one, viz. the Holy Spirit. To partake of the Holy Ghost is to have that love of the Father and the grace of the Son.<sup>71</sup>

This sort of communion and participation differs from ontological participation or *methexis*. Here Edwards’s focus is relationality and sharing between persons in a common good. He references his understanding of communion and partaking to the *koinōnia* of the Spirit. All this validates distinguishing this approach to participation from the more Platonic lineage of thought. Yet, here a caution is in order. It is true that when Edwards describes special grace, he intends a version of participation thought that one should rightly designate as a form of *koinōnia*. However, he also engages questions of ontology and quiddity in significant detail. In these situations he carries notions that approximate *methexis*-participation. Therefore, while one can be confident that Edwards’s doctrine of special grace is a participation in the sense of *koinōnia*—unity-in-distinction—one must expect him to also have a theory of *methexis*-participation. These two participations will be important aspects of this study in chapters two and three. They are not competitive with each other but fill complementary roles in his thinking. Their interaction with each other in Edwards’s thought will clarify how he distinguishes Creator and creature, and so how he relates them together in special grace.

## GRACE AS DIVINE FULLNESS WITHIN REFORMED POLEMICAL CONTEXT

I now return to a question raised at the beginning of the chapter. In its most basic sense the question is this: To what extent may this doctrine of grace as

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<sup>71</sup>WJE 21:188.

participation in divine fullness be considered Reformed? There are at least two reasons why this is an important question. The first is that Edwards scholars sometimes frame Edwards's emphasis on trinitarian participation in a way that views it as more or less eccentric from his Reformed tradition.<sup>72</sup> Is this the right way to think of these themes? Second, the wider Reformed theological community is increasingly interested in participation theology, and there is debate as to how well it fits within the Reformed tradition. Some scholars argue strongly that Reformed theology is well suited to soteriological participation, even framing it in terms of theosis, divinization, or deification.<sup>73</sup> Other Reformed theologians show significant caution.<sup>74</sup> This wider conversation suggests that if Edwards's doctrine of grace represents a sympathetic development of his Reformed heritage, then it may provide resources for contemporary constructive work in Reformed efforts to appropriate participation thought. It is therefore an important question both within Edwards studies as well as within the wider Reformed conversation around participation theology.

However, the question of whether Edwards's doctrine of grace is Reformed is not easy to address. This is at least because the Reformed tradition has always struggled with its own identity.<sup>75</sup> One of the characteristics of Reformed tradition is that it is dynamic, it is *ecclesia reformata et semper reformanda* (church reformed and ever being reformed), and therefore it has regularly returned to the Word of God in order to repent in the light of contemporary challenges.<sup>76</sup> This has resulted in a movement that is diverse

<sup>72</sup>See especially McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization"; Michael J. McClymond, "Hearing the Symphony: A Critique of Some Critics of Sang Lee's and Amy Pauw's Accounts of Jonathan Edwards' View of God," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary: Essays in Honor of Sang Hyun Lee*, ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 67-92; Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, "The Theme of Divinization," in McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 410-23. These works do not argue that Edwards's emphasis on trinitarian participation betrays his Reformed heritage, but rather they strongly imply that they are themes that are distinguishable from and in some sense stand alongside his Reformed heritage. The point is that McClymond and McDermott do not appear to believe that the soteriological and trinitarian participation themes are an organic outgrowth of Edwards's Reformed tradition.

<sup>73</sup>Habets, "Reformed Theosis? A Response"; Murphy, "Reformed Theosis?"

<sup>74</sup>McCormack, "Union with Christ in Calvin's Theology"; McCormack, "Participation in God, Yes." See also John Webster, *Holiness* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 57, 62.

<sup>75</sup>Eberhard Busch, "Reformed Strength in Its Denominational Weakness," in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, ed. Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 20.

<sup>76</sup>Alston and Welker, *Reformed Theology*, x-xi.

and difficult to define in absolute terms. However, it is also a movement that, while challenging to define according to precise criteria, does exhibit recognizable commonalities.<sup>77</sup> That is, there is a family resemblance within the Reformed tradition that can help one locate Edwards's thought.

The Reformed tradition, in its pursuit to reform unto the Word of God, developed a particular polemical, confessional, and intellectual heritage. It was birthed in polemics against both Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologies, and then later over against Anabaptist thought on the Continent and (with qualifications) over against the Church of England in Britain.<sup>78</sup> This English Puritan form gave rise to the established churches of the New England colonies. During its early years the tradition developed further through its traumatic internal polemics, especially against the rise of Arminianism. All of this polemical strife drove the development of dogmatic precision and the resulting symbolic confessions.<sup>79</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession and Catechism stand out among many others.<sup>80</sup> No one of these confessions defines the entire movement, nor do they do so collectively. Still, the polemical arguments and the resulting dogmatic confessions serve to shape the character of the tradition. The tradition was further shaped by the creative and dynamic thought of influential theologians and their works. Huldrych Zwingli, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, William Ames, William Perkins, John Owen, Richard Baxter, Peter Van Mastricht, Francis Turretin,

<sup>77</sup>On contemporary Reformed theologians' capacity to recognize and understand each other in spite of plurality, see Alston and Welker, *Reformed Theology*, xii. Muller notes both continuity and change within the Reformed Orthodox movement. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 41, 44-46.

<sup>78</sup>These divisions were still porous at times. John Owen, for instance, could invoke Anglican Richard Hooker to defend his own view. See John Owen, *A Vindication of some Passages in a Discourse concerning Communion with God* (London, 1674), 13-24.

<sup>79</sup>Jan Rohls notes that Karl Barth resisted the idea of a pan-Reformed confession, but in the context of polemical crisis in Germany, supported the Barmen Declaration. See Jan Rohls, "Reformed Theology—Past and Present," in Alston and Welker, *Reformed Theology*, 36-37.

<sup>80</sup>In Edwards's case the specifically relevant confession was the Savoy Declaration, as received by the Boston Synod of 1680. "A Confession of Faith; owned, and consented to by the Elders and Messengers of the Churches, Assembled at Boston in New-England, May 12. 1680. Being the Second Session of that Synod," in *Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The Ecclesiastical History of New-England from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, Unto the Year of our Lord, 1698. In Seven Books*, ed. Cotton Mather (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, at the Bible and Crown in Cheapside, 1702).

and many others all have their place in this group. Whether or not their works ever became official church doctrine, they shaped the minds and thinking of generations of pastors and congregants. These thinkers often disagreed, sometimes with each other explicitly, but still there remain recognizable themes that unite them.<sup>81</sup>

This polemical, confessional, and intellectual heritage can help locate where Edwards's doctrine of grace might (or might not) fit within it. I believe Edwards's doctrine of grace is a self-conscious modification of his received tradition. I will show this over the course of this work, and especially in chapter four. However, this modification alone is not sufficient cause to conclude that Edwards's view stands over against his Reformed heritage. The opposite conclusion might be as easily argued. Reformed tradition has always been self-critical, and therefore dynamic and diverse. That is, it is a *characteristic* of Reformed thought to critically engage, and at times rework, received wisdom. The polemical and confessional aspects of Reformed heritage provide helpful tools for evaluating Edwards's thought. That is, one may ask a polemical question: *How did Edwards's doctrine of grace relate to the polemical arguments that shaped the Reformed tradition?* And one may ask a confessional question: *How did Edwards's doctrine of grace comply or not comply with received Reformed confessions?* If one asks these questions and finds that Edwards's doctrine of grace is aimed at defending key Reformed polemical positions, and also that his view complies with Reformed confessions, then one will have good reason to view his doctrine as operating within the Reformed tradition. If, on the other hand, one finds either that his doctrine of grace has little to do with the polemical battles of the Reformed tradition or that his view contradicts important confessions, then one would have reason to question his Reformed credentials further. This second result would not be conclusive in itself; it would simply demand further inquiry.

I will now take up the polemical question above: How did Edwards's doctrine of grace relate to the polemical arguments that shape the Reformed

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<sup>81</sup>See Letham's description of principle themes in Reformed theology in R. W. A. Letham, "Reformed Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Tim Grass Martin Davie, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, and T. A. Noble (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 747-50.

tradition? I will show that Edwards utilized his doctrine of grace in order to combat two traditional polemical foes: Arminianism, on the one hand, and enthusiasm, on the other. More specifically, Edwards's Creator-creature distinction was aimed to disallow both an Arminian approach to nature and grace, and an enthusiast approach to union with God. This point will give good reason, if provisional, for viewing Edwards's doctrine of grace as a sympathetic development of Reformed thought. I will wait on addressing the confession question mentioned above until chapter four. There I will show that Edwards's key modification was aimed at demonstrating the harmony and synchronization of three key Reformed doctrines: the Trinity, the doctrine of grace, and creation's end. All three of these doctrines feature prominently in the Reformed confessions and catechisms, and Edwards, far from denying the teaching of these confessions, sought to demonstrate their inner coherence. However, for the moment I turn to the polemical use of Edwards's doctrine of grace.

***Edwards's doctrine of grace and polemics: Arminianism.*** Arminianism is the Reformed tradition's old foe. It is not the only foe. Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and various forms of enthusiasm are all notorious opponents. But Arminianism always represented a particular threat because it grew from within the Reformed movement. In that way it seemed something of a Trojan horse. One could identify Roman Catholics and Lutherans because they were tribally distinct. Arminians were different. Jacob Arminius himself was from within the fold, and those whom the Reformed Orthodox dubbed with his name did not necessarily learn their views from the original Arminius. Rather, they often developed their views by a gradual departure from standard Reformed thought. Robert Jenson states:

[Arminianism] was not necessarily advocacy of the particular principles of the Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius, but rather a religious and theological mood of which Arminius had been the most notorious instance in Puritan memory. Broadly, "Arminianism" was New England's name for a kind of religion that appears in all times and places of the church, and has other times been known as "semi-Pelagianism," "synergism," etc."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Robert W. Jenson, *American's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 53.



The danger of Arminianism was seared on English-speaking Puritan minds because of their history with the Church of England. The rise of Arminianism in the Church of England contributed a great deal to the eventual split between the Anglicans and the nonconformists. The Church of England's Articles of Religion, though broadly Reformed in content, were unable to stem the rise of Arminian thought. If it happened once, it could happen again. This was the fear in Edwards's day. The same theological mood was growing, and it was deeply alarming to him. In 1735 Edwards joined in opposing the ordination of a minister named Robert Breck on account of his alleged Arminian tendencies.<sup>83</sup> Edwards considered it a real threat, and it was a threat precisely because it touched an identifiable boundary of his own Reformed tradition. Edwards employed his doctrine of grace as participation in divine fullness to combat it, including in his sermon "True Grace Is Divine."

As was common among Puritan preachers, Edwards concluded this sermon with an explicit section titled "Application." Given the doctrine that Edwards has expounded and the way his rhetoric soars at end of the doctrine section, one might expect his application to be a call to seek this grace. It is such a high gift, "something above all created nature . . . something divine . . . infinitely above [human nature]."<sup>84</sup> Surely this demands pursuit, but this is not where Edwards goes in his application. Alternatively, given that the biblical text is itself an exhortation for the Christian community to love each other as God loved them in Christ, one might expect some sort of exhortation to renewed affection for each other. Yet again, Edwards defies expectations at this point. Edward applies this doctrine in three points that defend Calvinism and undermine Arminianism. His first two points of application deal with his view of the creature, and his last has to do with the Creator.

Edwards begins his application by arguing that his doctrine statement ("True grace in the heart of the saint is something divine") demands the conclusion that God is the creature's only good. "The creature has nothing that is truly good but it is something of God. They have nothing—no beauty

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<sup>83</sup>WJE 12:4-17. A decade later Edwards feared "the utmost danger that the younger generations will be carried away with Arminianism, as with a flood" (WJE 16:354).

<sup>84</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 359.

and no happiness—contained in their own nature simply considered, nothing of themselves but all infinitely above themselves, all in God.”<sup>85</sup> The important point here is to observe something of Edwards’s doctrine of creation. He does not want to give creation any good outside God (note his use of the word *truly*—he leaves open the possibility of apparent goods for the creature outside God). Nature has no independent or autonomous end in itself. It is not that God is a *better* option or even the *best* option for creation; it is the creature’s only option for happiness and excellence. Any notion of a creaturely happiness with a coherent reality without God—whether espoused by deists or Pelagians or any of Edwards’s opponents whom he liked to call “Arminians”—is ruled out. This is true regardless of the fall. Creatureliness is an inherently *empty* thing. Consider Edwards’s language here, and note in particular the language of emptiness: “Every creature, every man and angel, is wholly empty in himself, or in his own nature, not only fallen man but unfallen man and unfallen angels. And their emptiness can be filled no other way but by partaking of the fullness of God that has been spoken of.”<sup>86</sup>

Edwards believed that creation, taken in itself and without respect to the fall, is in need of special grace, in particular divine fullness. That is, *emptiness* and need for divine fullness is a built-in part of God’s original design. Arminians are sometimes accused of having an underdeveloped notion of sin’s corrupting effect on the human will. Here Edwards’s critique is aimed elsewhere. It is not so much that Arminians have an underdeveloped view of sin’s effect, but rather that they have an exaggerated understanding of creaturely capacity from the very beginning. Creatures, according to Edwards, were designed from the very beginning to be empty and to be filled with divine fullness. This need, from the very beginning, was only ever going to be given through the work of Christ. “Christ fills the capacity of the angels as well as men. He fills all things in heaven as well as on earth. For this end he descended to the earth that he might fill our emptiness here.”<sup>87</sup> The need for divine fullness is not down to corruption, but rather it is down to creatureliness itself.

However, while creaturely need for divine fullness does not derive from fallen corruption, it does explain why corruption occurs. This is Edwards’s

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<sup>85</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 359.

<sup>86</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 360.

<sup>87</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 360.

second point in the application. Given that participation in divine fullness (grace) is the creature's only good, creatures without this grace will be thoroughly corrupt. Edwards argues that unfallen humanity (Adam and Eve) existed in grace; that is; they participated in God in the way Edwards has argued is true of the redeemed saint. When they fell, this participation in God ceased, and they were left only with natural capacities for love.<sup>88</sup> This meant an inward turning toward self-love, and all corruption derives from this.<sup>89</sup> Depravity is creatureliness without divine participation; it is not "a positive cause but only human nature left to itself."<sup>90</sup> Here Edwards promotes one line of Reformed hamartiology. Janice Knights writes, "For Cotton, Sibbes, Preston, Davenport, and Norton, human sin is often presented as a lack, as an absence of good rather than an active principle of evil. . . . This is not to say that they abandoned the reformed conviction of man's sinfulness, but that faith in God's diffusive goodness guaranteed their assurance of salvation."<sup>91</sup> This captures Edwards's thought well. His polemical aim is not to magnify the power of sinfulness, but rather to heighten the creature's natural need for God. This undermines even the theoretical possibility that a creature could own a natural goodness in itself, and it sets the stage for Edwards to emphasize "God's diffusive goodness."

Edwards's application finale comes by arguing that this view of creaturely need and emptiness reinforces "the reasonableness of the doctrine of immediate efficacious and arbitrary infusion of special grace."<sup>92</sup> His first two points of application deal with the creature, and this last point deals with the nature of God's gift. If the first two points sketch the negative space of

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<sup>88</sup>See Crisp's more detailed analysis and reconstruction of Adam's fall in Oliver D. Crisp, *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 32-33.

<sup>89</sup>While outside the scope of this book, this logic may help account for Edwards's doctrine of hell. If created nature has no good outside God, and if this good (happiness) is only gained through grace (divine participation), then when this divine participation is withheld, the result will be total nonhappiness and nongood: hell. This may go some distance toward bridging the concepts of divine participation and Edwards's notions of final judgment.

<sup>90</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 361.

<sup>91</sup>Janice Knight, *Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 86. See Knight's discussion of the trope of *emptiness* on 113. See also S. Mark Hamilton's discussion of corruption in Reformed thought as *privation* and/or *acquisition* in "Jonathan Edwards, Hypostasis, Impeccability, and Immaterialism," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 58, no. 1 (2016): 220-21.

<sup>92</sup>Edwards, "True Grace Is Divine (1738)," 361.

his portrait, his main polemical subject now comes into view. He calls his “Arminian” opponents by name and argues that his view of grace undermines their entire system and upholds God’s gratuity in a way the Arminian system cannot. The words *immediate*, *efficacious*, and *arbitrary* are tribal makers of his Reformed heritage and their attempt to refute Arminianism. Edwards’s doctrine of grace, with all its soteriological-participation content, is aimed at reaffirming the tradition summarized in the Savoy Declaration’s statement on effectual calling. “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.”<sup>93</sup> Edwards’s doctrine of divine participation seeks to explain and defend Savoy’s assertion that grace is “not from any thing at all foreseen in man,” and it seeks to do so against the traditional old Arminian opponent.

***Edwards’s doctrine of grace and polemics: Enthusiasm.*** I now turn to Edwards’s defense of another boundary of Reformed thought. In addition to contrasting divine fullness with created nature, Edwards also contrasts divine fullness over against the divine essence. Grace in the saint is not the divine essence: “For the creature can’t partake of the divine essence, or any part of the divine essence: for the essence of God is not divisible nor communicable. . . . It is not a communication of God’s essence, but it is a communication of that which the Scripture calls God’s fullness.”<sup>94</sup> This fullness-essence distinction is one that is critical in Edwards’s thought. A few years later, in *The Religious Affections*, Edwards elaborates this distinction more fully: “Not that the saints 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.”<sup>95</sup> This is a telling passage, because it indicates the polemical opponents Edwards had in view. Edwards’s strong denial that the saints participates in the divine essence, combined with the phrase “‘Godded’ with God, and ‘Christed’ with Christ,” indicates that Edwards was taking a specific side in a polemical battle

<sup>93</sup>“Confession of Faith; owned,” chap. 10, p. 10.

<sup>94</sup>Edwards, “True Grace Is Divine (1738),” 354.

<sup>95</sup>WJE 2:203.

that was already nearly a century old. Edwards was siding with the orthodox Puritan party, and distinguishing his view of participation from the radical enthusiast sect called the Familists and the thought of Henry Nicolas.<sup>96</sup>

By Edwards's time the Puritan movement in both Old England and New England had experienced a century of polemical struggle around the doctrine of God. The Puritan movement was never without controversy, but the middle of the seventeenth century saw a sort of double-sided attack on the classical doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>97</sup> On the one hand, some from within the Puritan fold broke ranks and began to deny the Trinity along Socinian lines. Some rejected the classical doctrine of the Trinity precisely because they held to a Puritan doctrine of Scripture and did not believe it could be proven from the Bible.<sup>98</sup> Others rejected it as a remnant of Roman Catholic or even Platonic thought.<sup>99</sup> Yet this was not the only attack on the classical doctrine of God. If this first side of the attack emphasized an intellectual assault, the second side of the attack was more mystical and experiential. During the 1640s and 1650s especially, groups such as the Ranters and the Familists asserted mystical and essential union with God. The Ranters employed the category of "fullness," and the Familists used the phrase "Godded with God," and while the Familists did not formally deny the Trinity, Paul Lim argues that they functionally dissolved classical monotheism by fusing the Creator-creature distinction.<sup>100</sup> This was a real problem for the Puritan movement. The Puritan spiritual tradition had long emphasized both a robust intellectual engagement with doctrine and a close experimental intimacy with Christ. If the Socinian or Unitarian movement attacked the first characteristic, the enthusiasts posed a threat to the second. Could Puritanism rebuff the enthusiast error without losing its own spiritual vitality?

The response was a swift and energetic rebuttal, and it followed two broad movements. The first was to reaffirm the ontological chasm between Creator and creature, and the fact that this chasm could never close. In 1648 Samuel Rutherford published a scathing account of various sects and heresies that had risen since the Reformation, and he gave focused attention to the

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<sup>96</sup>Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics," 265-66.

<sup>97</sup>Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 73-75.

<sup>98</sup>For instance, John Biddle. See Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 50.

<sup>99</sup>Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 67-68.

<sup>100</sup>Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 86, 95, 104.

Familists and their “Godded with God” slogan.<sup>101</sup> He points out that these sects assert that the saints partake of not only the divine nature but also the divine *being*.<sup>102</sup> The idea of participating in the divine *nature* was not the cause of great concern—it is a quote from 2 Peter 1:4. It was the idea of participating in the *being* of God that was considered heresy. The words *nature* and *being* can both carry strong ontological weight, but *nature* is more ambiguous because it has many meanings.<sup>103</sup> *Being*, on the other hand, was understood to imply participation in the essence of God. By 1653 John Owen, with others, drafted policy documents for Parliament designed to restrain heresy and promote Puritan orthodoxy. In this document he takes aim at the enthusiasts by insisting “that this God who is the Creator, is eternally distinct from all the creature in his *being* and blessedness.”<sup>104</sup> This statement comes at an interesting location in the document. Owen is outlining doctrine that should be enforced by the state because it is necessary to salvation. He begins with an article on the authority of Scripture, and then a second article on the existence of God. The Creator-creature distinction then comes in third place, before the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. Clearly, this was an important point, and it demanded a privileged location in the order of saving doctrine that required protection.

Yet the defense needed more than just a denial of essential union and an affirmation of the Creator-creature distinction. The second movement in orthodox defense against the enthusiasts came in the form of reaffirming historic Christian accounts of grace and even deification. The word *deification* was used by a number of authors in this period, and many of them took a dim view of it. It appears that it was generally associated with

<sup>101</sup>Samuel Rutherford, *A Survey of the Spiritual AntiChrist* (London: J. D. & R. for Andrew Cooke, 1648). See Lim’s analysis: *Mystery Unveiled*, 97-98.

<sup>102</sup>Strobel, “Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics,” 266.

<sup>103</sup>See, e.g., Edwards’s famous “Unpublished Letter on Assurance and Participation in the Divine Nature,” where Edwards responds to a critic who thought that he espoused essential union. Edwards points out the word *nature* need not imply *essence*, but has many possible meanings (WJE 8:638-39).

<sup>104</sup>John Owen et al., *Proposals for the furtherance and propagation of the Gospel in this Nation. As the same were humbly presented to the Honourable Committee of Parliament by divers Ministers of the Gospel, and others, as also, Some Principles of Christian Religion, without the believe of which, the Scriptures doe plainly and clearly affirme, Salvation is not to be obtained, Which were also presented in the explanation of one of the said Proposals* (London: R. Ibbitson, 1653), article 3, p. 8, emphasis added. See also Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 45-46.

ontological and essential union, and therefore it was a code word for heresy. John Turner, for instance, states:

’Tis enough for us to that we believe the Person of Christ, and the Persons of Believers to remain distinct after all the Union that intercedes between them: Let us be thankful for the Influences of his Grace, and for the In-dwellings of his Holy Spirit; but let us detest those swelling Words of Pride and Ignorance, of being Christed and Deify’d; for whatsoever be the nature and kind of the Union between Christ and Christians, that the same should be Hypostatical, cannot without Blasphemy be imagined.<sup>105</sup>

Notice how Turner dismisses the Familist slogan “Christed” and also the word *Deify’d*, while at the same time returning to the notion of grace as a union between the believer and Christ such that distinction remains. This is a reaffirmation of the traditional lines of Puritan and Reformed doctrine of the mystical union, the ground of Puritan spirituality and experiential tradition. The polemic is not only to deny something but to point to the real sort of union that Puritanism always supported. There were other thinkers who rebuffed the enthusiast essential-union thesis by noting the existence of an orthodox version of either deification or at least robust soteriological participation. Henry More was not a Puritan—he was famously a Cambridge Platonist—but he was known and read by Jonathan Edwards. He published a refutation of enthusiasm, and in it he affirms his own account of “deification” (his word), based on the Scriptures, the church fathers, and the *Theologia Germanica*.<sup>106</sup>

Even from within the Puritan world, Edward Leigh recognized that the church fathers could speak of *theopoiesis* and other theosis categories in an orthodox way. Still, he warns that it is easy to abuse these statements from the Fathers. He includes Martin Luther in a list of orthodox thinkers whose thought could be mistakenly read to include essential union. Part of the problem is that the orthodox (Fathers along with Luther) were given to hyperbole: “The Fathers hyperboles this way, followed by Luther.” Like

<sup>105</sup>John Turner, *A Phisico-Theological Discourse* (London: Printed by F.C. for Timothy Childe at the White Hart at the West End of St. Paul’s Church-yard, 1698), 221. See also Lim’s discussion and quotation in *Mystery Unveiled*, 96.

<sup>106</sup>Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, or, a Discourse of the Nature, Causes, Kinds, and Cure of Enthusiasme* (London, 1656), 298–300.

Turner, he refutes the error by restating his understanding of the real nature of union with Christ. Interestingly, given the present discussion of Edwards's approach to participation as a form of *koinōnia*, Leigh warns against confusing essential union with communion between distinct persons. "We must not apply that to Union which is proper to Communion, Communion is the common union of all the members with Christ. It is folly to apply that to one part which is proper to the whole body."<sup>107</sup> In the context he argues that to posit essential union is to assert a sort of union that exceeds even the christological union, for even there the divine and human natures remain distinct. Rather, in grace the believer is united to the body of Christ, but the believer is never more than a portion of the body. That is, the believer cannot be said to become identical with the body of Christ. Distinction remains.

All of this is to show that Puritan and Reformed polemics, or in the case of Henry More even Anglican Platonic polemics, followed the pattern of maintaining the Creator-creature distinction, denying essential union, and then reaffirming an orthodox understanding of union or communion in which personal distinction remains.

Nearly one hundred years later, this controversy was still relevant to Jonathan Edwards. He gained entrance to the debates at least through Samuel Rutherford's *Display of the Spiritual Antichrist*.<sup>108</sup> The controversy hit closer to home when Charles Chauncey, one of Edwards's greatest opponents, suggested a connection between the enthusiasts such as the Familists and the revivalists defended by Edwards.<sup>109</sup> Chauncey's attacks came in the early 1740s, a few years after Edwards preached "True Grace Is Divine."<sup>110</sup> However, Chauncey's attacks arrived before the publication of *The Religious Affections*. This may help explain why in the sermon Edwards simply denies essential union and moves on, whereas in the *Affections* he issues a stronger statement and explicitly includes the enthusiast slogan "Godded with God and Christed with Christ" as the position he rejects. Edwards responded by creating a sharp break with the entire idea of

<sup>107</sup>Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* (London: Printed by A.M. for William Lee at the Signe of the Turks-head in Fleet Street over against Fetter-lane, 1662), 673-74.

<sup>108</sup>WJE 2:287. See also Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics," 265.

<sup>109</sup>Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the Polemics," 267-68.

<sup>110</sup>"True Grace Is Divine" was preached in 1738. Chauncey's attacks came in 1742. See Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards and the polemics of Theosis," 267.



participating in the divine essence or of any idea of a mingling with God's *being per se*. It is the divine fullness that is given, but this is not the divine essence. That distinction makes all the difference, but it is not where Edwards stopped. He followed the pattern of his forbears in the Reformed Puritan tradition by denying essential union, reaffirming the Creator-creature distinction, and then also presenting an approach to special grace and union marked by communion between distinct parties. This is not to say that Edwards's theology of divine grace followed convention at every turn.<sup>111</sup> But it does mean that Edwards deployed his doctrine of grace to defend Puritan polemical interests, and that he did so in a way that signaled his loyalty to the Reformed orthodoxy of the previous century.

Yet I must say something more. It would be wrong to suggest that Edwards incorporated enthusiast interests; but it would be right to say that he refused to surrender a robust vision of intimacy between God and believer. That is, while he maintained the Creator-creature distinction, his ultimate aim was not that the two remain separate but rather that he account for their relational union. Throughout Edwards's corpus he is captivated by the way special grace *bridges* the ontological chasm without undermining it. His first *Miscellanies* entry states that holiness is "almost too high a beauty for any creatures to be adorned with; it makes the soul a little, sweet and delightful image of the blessed Jehovah."<sup>112</sup> This beauty still captivated him at the end of his life. Speaking of the union that results from the communication of divine fullness, Edwards writes:

The union will become more and more strict and perfect; nearer and more like to that between God the Father and the Son; who are so united, that their

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<sup>111</sup>For instance, Edwards Leigh asserted that believers partake of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), but not the divine fullness. He had in view the christological fullness of Col 2:6. Edwards, as we have seen, strongly asserted Christ's communication of divine fullness and viewed the divine nature of 2 Pet 1:4 as a near synonym. John Cotton denied that grace in the heart of the saint was the Holy Spirit, but rather the created effect of the Holy Spirit (created grace). Edwards, on the other hand, viewed the divine fullness in grace to be the Holy Spirit poured out into the saint (uncreated grace). These are merely two examples of how Edwards's solutions could differ from others in the Puritan world. However, the larger point is that the polemical boundaries that helped form the identity of the Reformed movement were held in common. See Leigh, *Systeme or Body*, 674. See also John Cotton, *The covenant of Gods free grace, most sweetly unfolded and comfortably applied to a disquieted soul. Whereunto is added, A profession of faith, made by J. Davenport*, ed. Thomas A. Schafer (London: John Hancock, 1645), 30-31.

<sup>112</sup>WJE 13:163.

interest is perfectly one. If the happiness of the creature be considered as it will be, in the whole of the creature's eternal duration, with all the infinity of its progress, and infinite increase of nearness and union to God; in this view, the creature must be looked upon as united to God in an infinite strictness.<sup>113</sup>

This is not essential union, but it is a union of profound intimacy. It is *koinōnia*, a communion between distinct persons, united in the bond of love that unites the Father and the Son, economically poured out. Edwards held the Reformed line against the enthusiasts, but he also pressed forward a vision of participation that shows itself creative and compelling.

## CONCLUSION

David Brainerd was a changed man when he went to sleep the night of July 12, 1739. His experience was in many ways traditional and perhaps even conventional. Many lives had been changed in a similar way before him, and his own conversion took place on the eve of one of the greatest religious awakenings in American history. Perhaps for that very reason, precisely because it was not all that unique, it was an experience that demanded explanation. What was it that had happened to him?

Jonathan Edwards published Brainerd's conversion story and the account of his life because he thought it vividly displayed the nature of true and special grace.<sup>114</sup> In particular, Edwards points to "what passed in his [Brainerd's] own heart, the wonderful change that he experienced in his mind and disposition, the manner in which that change was brought to pass, how it continued."<sup>115</sup> It was this change within Brainerd that captivated Edwards, and he sought to provide his own theological explanation for what it was that had happened in the soul of the future missionary and all those who share in the same experience. What was Edwards's explanation? Brainerd, and all other true saints, had received a communication of divine fullness, immediately, effectually, and arbitrarily communicated by God.

This divine fullness was nothing latent within Brainerd, nor in any other would-be convert. It was this fact, that supernatural grace (divine fullness)

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<sup>113</sup>WJE 8:533-34.

<sup>114</sup>WJE 6:89-91. Edwards does not use the word *grace*, but he clearly presents Brainerd as an example of what true religion looks like.

<sup>115</sup>WJE 6:91.

was infinitely above created nature, that meant Brainerd could never achieve it from below; it could only be received from above. The very sovereignty that so dominated his Puritan tradition, and so provoked him to despair, was also the basis for how grace could eventually break in and change him. Grace, argued Edwards, was a communication of God himself. But in what way was it something of God himself?

It was something of God because it was a finite communication of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, for Edwards, is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. Their mutual good is their fullness, which in turn is their mutual love and delight and joy. This is the fullness that was communicated economically to Brainerd, and in and through his faculties returned to God himself.<sup>116</sup> This is why Brainerd's experience was a new "view and apprehension." It was not that he saw something with his eyes; it was that his soul was suddenly captivated with a spiritual sight of God's divine beauty. "It appeared to be divine glory that I then beheld. And my soul 'rejoiced with joy unspeakable,' to see such a God, such a glorious divine being."<sup>117</sup> This is the same bond of union enjoyed by the Father and the Son in the Spirit, finitely communicated to the young Brainerd. Brainerd's enjoyment of it was his participation in divine fullness.

This communication and participation remained constant, not in degree but in kind, throughout the rest of Brainerd's life. In this ongoing communion, Brainerd remained Brainerd, ontologically nothing more than creature; and the Holy Trinity remained the Holy Trinity, ontology nothing less than Creator. Yet Creator and creature were eternally bound in a *koinōnia* that when viewed from eternity, "must be looked upon as . . . [a union of] . . . infinite strictness."<sup>118</sup>

This first chapter has aimed to provide an overview of Edwards's doctrine of grace as participation in divine fullness and to argue that it functioned polemically to defend two key Reformed boundaries. It resisted both Arminian and enthusiast errors. This polemical use of Edwards's doctrine of

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<sup>116</sup>"So that true saving grace is no other than that very love of God; that is, God, in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting himself to the soul of a creature as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting himself by the faculties of the soul of man, in his own proper nature, after the manner of a principle of nature" (WJE 21:194).

<sup>117</sup>WJE 6:138-39.

<sup>118</sup>WJE 8:534.

grace should justify at least a provisional conclusion that it operates within the Reformed sphere of thought. On this basis, I now turn to two chapters that explore the Creator-creature distinction in greater detail, with the aim of contributing insight to contemporary conversations in soteriological participation theology. Behind these next two chapters is an underlying question: Given that Reformed theology is exploring participation thought, what insights might Edwards's approach to grace, and particularly his understanding of the Creator-creature distinction, give to this pursuit?

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