

THE TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY OF JONATHAN EDWARDS: AN INVESTIGATION OF CHARGES AGAINST ITS ORTHODOXY

RICHARD M. WEBER*

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of the Trinitarian theology of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) remains significant at the outset of the twenty-first century, for it is in his Trinitarianism that one clearly observes Edwards’s affinity for philosophical speculation merging with traditional Reformed orthodoxy that he never abandoned. As Amy Plantinga-Pauw has observed, it is in Edwards’s Trinitarian thought that “his penchant for creative speculation and synthesis and the deep practical piety of his Puritan tradition come together.”¹ Additionally, while the Trinity was not the primary focus of any of Edwards’s major polemical treatises, Trinitarianism was nonetheless evident throughout both his theological and philosophical works.

The challenge facing the student at this juncture, however, is the fact that no single work of Edwards sets forth his complete doctrine of the Trinity. To be sure, there is substantial discussion of the Trinity in his “Essay on the Trinity” and in the “Treatise on Grace.” Likewise, significant material is to be found throughout his “Miscellanies” and various sermons. However, any one of these documents taken in isolation of the entire corpus of Edwards’s writings will afford a view of his Trinitarianism that is fragmentary at best.

Historically, interpreters have focused on an all-too limited selection of Edwards’s work. This selective process of interpretation has served as the basis for both accusations and defenses of Edwards’s Trinitarian orthodoxy. The lack of a single major work presenting his complete doctrine of the Trinity has led many would-be interpreters (from both sides of the theological fray) to choose those documents for analysis that best support their positions. Reading Edwards selectively, one may find Edwards to be anything from a typical, unimaginative Puritan to a closet Unitarian who concealed his heterodoxy, confining his questionable views to his private notebooks. Thus a succinct, manageable systematization of Edwards’s Trinitarianism that considers the breadth of his voluminous output is long overdue.

* Richard Weber is a Ph.D. candidate at Marquette University, P.O. Box 1881, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881.

¹ Amy Plantinga-Pauw, “The Supreme Harmony of All: Jonathan Edwards and the Trinity” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1990) 1.

It is the contention of this paper that the Trinitarian theology of Jonathan Edwards is certainly a departure from the typical Puritan and Reformed way of speaking of the divine mystery, but that it is at the same time entirely orthodox. In making this claim, I shall be following the basic position assumed by John H. Gerstner in his brief summary of Edwards's theology.² The deficiency in Gerstner's work, however, is the fact that he fails to offer a clear analysis of Edwards's Trinitarianism. The claim to Edwards's orthodoxy that Gerstner sets forth is based largely on his assumption that there is nothing aberrant in Edwards's position on the Trinity from that which is common throughout the history of the doctrine. However, Gerstner's conclusion is overly hasty in that, while the substance of Edwards's Trinitarianism is consistent with typical Reformed doctrine, his presentation is clearly not that of the standard Reformed approach. Thus, even as one may agree with Gerstner's conclusion, one must also agree with Amy Plantinga-Pauw that, despite maintaining an orthodox Trinitarianism consistent with his Reformed heritage, Jonathan Edwards was strikingly original in his presentation of it.³

This paper shall offer the brief, systematic presentation of Edwards's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity that Gerstner failed to provide. It shall present a summary of Edwards's position on the Trinity in support of the thesis that, while it is not the typical Reformed formulation of the doctrine, Edwards's Trinitarian position is thoroughly consistent with Reformed orthodoxy. The work shall begin with a brief history of the interpretation of Edwardsean Trinitarianism. Then, it shall consider Edwards's perception of the deficiencies of Covenant Theology in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity and the need for the reformulation of the doctrine so as to do justice to the entirety of the Biblical witness on the matter. From there, Edwards's own formulation of the doctrine shall be systematized, beginning with his view of the Immanent Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit. In Edwards's view, however, the Immanent Trinity cannot be considered apart from the Economic Trinity (and *vice versa*); therefore, the final section of this paper shall present Edwards's view of the Economic Trinity in light of the ontological relationships between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Particularly, this shall be a discussion of the interrelationship between the members of the Godhead in regard to their respective roles in the divine work of redemption. In the end, it shall be seen that, despite modifications to the typical Reformed presentation, Edwards remained wholly orthodox in his Trinitarian theology.

II. A TEXTUAL HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Jonathan Edwards died on March 22, 1758. Although there were several subsequent attempts to publish a definitive edition of Edwards's writings, a great many of his manuscripts remained unpublished decades after his

² John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1987) 30.

³ Plantinga-Pauw, "The Supreme Harmony of All: Jonathan Edwards and the Trinity" 15.

death. Particularly, his manuscripts on the Trinity remained unpublished for nearly one hundred fifty years. This significant delay gave rise to suspicions regarding the contents of these manuscripts, causing some to question the orthodoxy of Edwards's views.

Upon his death, Edwards's manuscripts were left in the control of his widow. Sarah, however, survived him by only six months, herself dying of dysentery on October 2, 1758. Following her death, control of the manuscripts remained with Edwards's descendants (though the manuscripts themselves were frequently left in the custody of others).

In the first fifty years after Edwards's death, two editions of *Works* were published. In 1765, Samuel Hopkins published two volumes of Edwards's writings based on the manuscripts. This was followed by the publication of four volumes, prepared by Jonathan Edwards, Jr., between 1774 and 1801. Upon Jonathan Edwards, Jr.'s death, the manuscripts were left in the control of Timothy Dwight, President of Yale College and grandson of Edwards, whose intent it was to publish a definitive edition of Edwards's writings. However, Timothy Dwight's death in 1817 put a halt to this ambitious plan. The manuscripts were then left in the custody of his son, Sereno Dwight.

To the collection of the manuscripts he received from his father, Sereno Dwight added various writings that had not been included in the family archive. These additional materials included Edwards's personal papers, letters exchanged between Edwards and his father, Timothy Edwards, during Jonathan's years at Yale College. These and other early writings of the young Jonathan Edwards had remained at the Connecticut homestead. Because this material had not been included in the main collection of Edwards's manuscripts and therefore, according to Sereno Dwight's will, was to follow a path different from the main body of writings, two different "collections" of Edwards's writings were eventually to be established. (The significance of these two collections of manuscripts shall soon become apparent.)

From 1829 to 1830, Sereno Dwight was able to publish a ten-volume edition of Edwards's *Works*. Yet even this edition was not complete. Moreover, it represented a *selective* process that was dictated by the theological opinions of the editor.⁴ Consequently, when Sereno Dwight died in 1850, a complete edition of Jonathan Edwards's writings remained unpublished. The main body of manuscripts then were passed into the custody of Tyron Edwards of New London, Connecticut, while the additional materials collected by Sereno Dwight were left in the control of Prof. William T. Dwight.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a great portion of Edwards's writings had still not been published. However, their being *unpublished* does not indicate they were entirely *unknown*. In 1851, Horace Bushnell wrote of one of these unpublished documents in the preface to his *Christ in Theology*. The alleged document, which Bushnell admits he had not himself seen, was described to him as "an *a priori* argument for the Trinity,' the 'contents of which would excite a good deal of surprise' if

⁴ Richard D. Pierce, "A Suppressed Edwards Manuscript on the Trinity," *The Crane Review* 1 (Winter 1959) 67.

communicated to the public.”⁵ As a result of this statement, a controversy quickly developed concerning Edwards’s Trinitarian orthodoxy.

In response to Bushnell’s statements in the preface of *Christ in Theology*, Rev. Edward W. Hooker of East Windsor (a great-grandson of Edwards) wrote to his cousin William T. Dwight, who had been entrusted with the documents that Sereno Dwight had collected from the Edwards homestead in Connecticut. Hooker requested that Dwight publish the document in question and thereby vindicate Edwards’s name and reputation for Reformed orthodoxy.⁶ In a second letter sent to Dwight, Hooker assumed that, while fully believing the doctrine of the Trinity and maintaining orthodoxy, Edwards (like Tertullian, Origen, and others) had simply been tempted to speculate beyond what is revealed in Scripture regarding the Triune Godhead existing in unity. This apparent dismissal of concern taken by Hooker, however, was not to satisfy the public curiosity surrounding Edwards’s Trinitarianism.

In the midst of the controversy, the two collections of manuscripts were to change hands once again. The materials in the possession of William T. Dwight were left in the custody of Prof. Egbert C. Smyth of Andover Theological Seminary upon Dwight’s death in 1865. Likewise, when Tyron Edwards failed to publish additional manuscripts to meet the growing demand, the main collection of manuscripts were passed to Prof. Edwards A. Park, also at Andover (who had married Jonathan Edwards’s great-granddaughter). Although Park thoroughly mastered the manuscripts himself, his hesitancy to publish prematurely left the manuscripts out of public view. Thus the controversy continued.

In a July issue of *International Review*, Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that he had been informed on “unquestionable authority” of an unpublished manuscript, written by Jonathan Edwards, which was, at the very least, a clear departure from his usual commitment to Reformed orthodoxy, and quite possibly evidence of Arianism, Sabellianism, or Unitarianism.⁷ Holmes accused the editors of Edwards’s published works of suppressing this material in an attempt to protect their theological patriarch. However, Pierce suggests that Holmes’s accusations stemmed from his own desire to justify his theological heterodoxy. Holmes had turned away from the Trinitarian Calvinism of his father, Rev. Abiel Holmes of Cambridge. Like many in nineteenth-century New England, the younger Holmes adopted a Unitarian theology and, Pierce asserts, was left with a nagging unease at having “betrayed” the faith of his father. While holding to his own Unitarianism, Holmes (along with his Unitarian contemporaries) sought any opportunity to reveal some degree of heterodoxy in the Reformed faith of their forebears, thus feeling assured that they could “rest serenely in their larger faith.”⁸

⁵ Horace Bushnell, *Christ in Theology* (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1851; reprint, New York: Garland, 1987) vi (page citations are to the reprint edition).

⁶ Pierce, “Suppressed Manuscript” 74.

⁷ Plantinga-Pauw, “The Supreme Harmony of All: Jonathan Edwards and the Trinity” 16. See also Pierce, “Suppressed Manuscript” 69.

⁸ Pierce, “Suppressed Manuscript” 78.

Holmes, Pierce concludes, supposed that if Jonathan Edwards himself could be shown to be an early pioneer of the new Unitarian doctrine, then even Holmes's own heterodoxy might, indeed, pass for orthodoxy.

The new wave of accusations surrounding Holmes's assertions incited several replies of varying effectiveness. In July 1880, Tyron Edwards, who had held the main body of manuscripts from 1850 until around 1870, published an article in *The Evangelist* declaring that he knew nothing of any material "omitted" or "suppressed" in the published editions that would call Jonathan Edwards's Calvinist theology into question. As one might have expected, this attempt to merely dismiss the controversy failed. Later that summer, Prof. Egbert Smyth published what was rumored to be the manuscript in question under the title *Observations Concerning the Scripture (Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption)*. However, this document, which was nothing more than Miscellany 1062, was not the manuscript that gave rise to Bushnell's and Holmes's concerns. Consequently, this attempt to calm the storm of debate likewise failed.

When these replies to Holmes's article failed to put the matter to rest, the *Boston Transcript* published an editorial that repeated the accusation that Edwards had written an unpublished manuscript that contained a departure from the Reformed position on the Trinity, and that the published editions of Edwards's writings had been edited in such a way as to mask Edwards's meaning and to force them to conform to certain doctrinal presuppositions.⁹ The editorial then called for Prof. Edwards A. Park, the current custodian of the main body of Edwards's writings, to publish the rumored manuscript.

Park addressed this latest round of accusations in an article published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*.¹⁰ While admitting that Edwards's editors had withheld certain writings that were considered "unworthy of him" and which "did not coincide with his known course of thought,"¹¹ Park defended Edwards, insisting that his views on the Trinity were intended strictly for his own private use, and it was unjust to consider such preliminary, personal reflections to be representative of his ultimate beliefs. In the article, Park expressed a willingness to publish the manuscript in question, but he reported that it had been "mislaidd and can not yet be found."¹² Apparently, the document had fallen behind a built-in bookcase in Park's study and required the work of a carpenter to retrieve it.¹³ Thus, the manuscript remained yet unpublished upon Park's death in 1900.

Following the death of Park, the main body of manuscripts that were in his possession were sent to Yale University, where they currently reside in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The papers collected from

⁹ *Ibid.* 69.

¹⁰ Edwards A. Park, "Remarks of Jonathan Edwards on the Trinity." *BSac* XXXVII (Jan 1881) 147-87.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 157.

¹² *Ibid.* 187.

¹³ Pierce, "Suppressed Manuscript" 76-77.

the Edwards's homestead in Connecticut by Sereno Dwight that were in the custody of Egbert Smyth remained at Andover upon Smyth's death in 1904.

With the new public availability of Edwards's manuscripts in the library archives (as well as the skill of the carpenter required to extract the "offensive" manuscript from Park's study), Edwards's elusive "Essay on the Trinity" was finally published in 1903 by George P. Fisher. With the "questionable" manuscript now readily accessible, the discussion has continued to the present day with manifold voices accusing or defending Edwards. However, Smyth's publication of Miscellany 1062 and Park's defense of Edwards in *Bibliotheca Sacra* are somewhat representative of a trend and deficiency in the debate. As Smyth's response amounted to the mere publication of a single "Miscellany," some who would defend Edwards tend to restrict their handling of his writing to a few select documents, thereby truncating his vision of the immanent and economic Trinity.¹⁴ However, any attempt to present Edwards's Trinitarian theology from the perspective of but a few documents is little better than to adopt the selective process of publication used by Edwards's early editors, suppressing certain portions and denying a true representation of his thought. Other would-be defenders follow the approach of Park, whose defense amounted to a distinction between what he called Edwards's "tentative statements" and his "full and final belief."¹⁵ In other words, Park's article was not so much a defense and a clarification of Edwards's Trinitarianism. Rather, it was an attempt to *excuse* Edwards for statements that Park believed were not intended for the public eye and for which Edwards cannot be held responsible. Despite the insufficiency of this tactic, modern scholarship has followed Park and attempted to excuse Edwards for his allegedly unorthodox speculation on the basis that it was done in the privacy of the personal notebooks of an "amateur metaphysician."¹⁶

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the importance of Edwards's Trinitarian theology had been seen. Egbert Smyth had written that Edwards's unpublished reflections on the Trinity "rank with the best that has been said from Augustine to Dorner."¹⁷ As history has shown, no single

¹⁴ For example, on p. 21 of the introduction to *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings*, Paul Helm accuses Edwards of certain dubious distinctions regarding the generation of the Son. However, Helm ignores specific entries in the "Miscellanies" in which Edwards offers explanations for these distinctions. Likewise, in her article "Heaven is a World of Love: Edwards on Heaven and the Trinity," Amy Plantinga-Pauw, while citing several of Edwards's "Miscellanies," restricts the remainder of her references to one sermon manuscript, one citation from Edwards's "Essay on the Trinity," and a few citations from other works of Edwards, while overlooking the importance of his "Treatise on Grace," his extensive corpus of sermons, and his philosophical writings on the nature and excellency of God (*Calvin Theological Journal* 30 [1995] 392–401).

¹⁵ Park, "Remarks" 150.

¹⁶ After speaking of the dubious nature of Edwards's position of the generation of the second person of the Trinity, Helm proceeds to excuse Edwards's "errors" on the basis that the Northampton divine admitted his own limitations in both language and understanding. While he feels that Edwards's position on the Son as the Idea of God has inherent problems and approaches Tritheism, he offers Edwards's appeal to "mystery" and the fact that he was *not* a rationalist as a panacea to all who would otherwise condemn him as unorthodox.

¹⁷ Egbert Smyth, "Jonathan Edwards's Idealism," *AJT* I (October 1897) 961.

document can be used to effectively establish Edwards's Trinitarian theology. Likewise, to overlook Edwards's views as personal musings not intended for public consideration is to do an injustice to Edwards himself and to degrade tragically the importance of Edwards's private notebooks in his theological development. As Plantinga-Pauw has noted, "Edwards's trinitarian thought is rich and original, and deserves more attention than it has received in other treatments of his theology."¹⁸ Thus, the following systematization of the Trinitarian theology of Jonathan Edwards shall consider the breadth of Edwards's thought as expressed in his major treatises, shorter theological works, sermons, and private notebooks. In the end, Edwards's Trinitarian orthodoxy shall be maintained, while at the same time being found to have been presented in a manner strikingly different from the typical Reformed statement.

III. TRINITARIANISM AND COVENANT THEOLOGY

Jonathan Edwards lived and wrote in the environment of Covenant Theology. His theological development was shaped by the Reformed and Calvinistic theological writings of William Ames, Thomas Shepard, John Preston, and William Perkins. In his seminal biography of Edwards, Perry Miller asserts that the Northampton divine abandoned the Covenant Theology of his forbears.¹⁹ Conrad Cherry, on the other hand, effectively counters Miller, defending the position that Edwards remained firmly within the Puritan camp of Covenant Theology.²⁰ While this paper shall not attempt to defend Cherry's accurate refutation of Miller on this matter, it is important to note that, in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity, Edwards himself noted deficiencies in the formulation proposed by Covenant Theology.

The typical position of Covenant Theology distinguished between the so-called "Covenant of Redemption" and "Covenant of Grace." It taught that the Father, from eternity, had covenanted with the Son to redeem the elect. This covenant with the Son was known as the "Covenant of Redemption." The Son, in turn, established a covenant with the Church (of whom he was the head and representative). This covenant, the "Covenant of Grace," assures that the Church will be redeemed by means of the Son's propitiatory sacrifice. Redemption having been obtained by Christ's sacrifice, it is then applied to the elect by the Spirit.

Edwards felt that this formulation of the Trinity's role in the work of redemption improperly truncated the Biblical witness. He felt that the view of grace espoused by Covenant Theology as being the benefit purchased by Christ and then applied by the Spirit did not adequately represent the Biblical witness regarding the nature of grace. Likewise, the view that the Spirit is merely the agent of application of a benefit purchased by the

¹⁸ Plantinga-Pauw, "The Supreme Harmony of All: Jonathan Edwards and the Trinity" 19.

¹⁹ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (American Men of Letters Series; ed. Joseph Wood Krutch, et al.; New York: William Sloane, 1949) 77.

²⁰ Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, with an introduction by Stephen J. Stein (2nd ed.; Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990) 114.

sacrifice of Christ unnecessarily limited the Spirit's role in the work of redemption. Finally, Covenant Theology's position regarding the role of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the work of redemption improperly withheld glory from the Spirit equal to that given to the Father and the Son. In an effort to resolve these perceived difficulties with Covenant Theology's formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, Jonathan Edwards developed a view that sought to remain consistent with the Biblical witness.²¹

IV. THE IMMANENT TRINITY

The following discussion shall set forth Jonathan Edwards's ontological and metaphysical position regarding the Triune God. The direct existence of the Father, the generation of the Son, and the breathing forth of the Holy Spirit shall each be considered in turn. The result will be a summary of Edwards's understanding of the Trinity that is consistent with his orthodox Reformed background, presenting the one God as a unity of three distinct persons.

1. *The Father: Deity in direct existence.* Edwards begins with a notion of God the Father as the "Deity subsisting in the Prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner."²² The Father is the direct existence of prime, infinite excellency of being. Indeed, excellency is, for Edwards, of chief concern in any discussion of God, for God is infinitely excellent, and all that is good and excellent comes from him.

In the essay on "The Mind," Edwards speculates on what it is that makes one being or object "excellent," while another is considered "evil." What is it, Edwards asks, that makes one consider an object "beautiful," while another object is considered "deformed?" The answer, he posits, is found in the notion of equality.²³ The degree of symmetry—of likeness, identity, or agreeableness—possessed by an object corresponds to the degree of excellence recognized in the object. Through a series of geometrical diagrams, Edwards demonstrates that an object possessing symmetry, equality of proportion, and orderly arrangement—notions that he sums up with the word "consent"—is more pleasing and agreeable to the beholder, and is therefore possessive of a greater degree of excellence.²⁴ Equality and proportion are pleasing to the mind, says Edwards, while inequality displeases the mind, for disproportion itself is contrary to being.²⁵ When one being is inconsistent

²¹ Thomas A. Schafer, introduction to *The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)* by Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 29.

²² Jonathan Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity," in *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published Writings* (ed. Paul Helm; Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 1971) 118.

²³ Jonathan Edwards, "The Mind," in *Scientific and Philosophical Writings* (ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Vol. 6 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980) 332.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 334.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 336.

with or disproportionate with another, being itself is contradicted. However, the agreeableness, or consent, of one being to another is most pleasing, and is determinant of the degree of excellence in a object.

God the Father is infinite being. He is, says Edwards, infinite, universal, and all-comprehending existence. Thus, he concludes, it is impossible for God to be anything other than excellent. Being himself infinite and universal being, God is infinitely consenting.²⁶ God is, for Edwards, infinitely excellent.

Richardson has observed that the God of Jonathan Edwards, being himself infinitely excellent, is thus infinitely happy. He states that “[h]appiness is the principle of being, and all being is resolved into happiness.”²⁷ Edwards’s God, being infinitely excellent from eternity, is also infinitely happy from eternity. The infinite excellence of God results in his infinitely enjoying himself and thus being infinitely happy in his own direct existence. It is this concept of God’s enjoyment of himself that shall occupy the focus of discussion in the next section.

2. *The Son: Deity generated.* “God is infinitely happy in the enjoyment of Himself.”²⁸ This happiness, according to Edwards, arises from God perfectly beholding and infinitely rejoicing in his own excellent essence and perfection. Edwards states that God’s knowledge, like human knowledge, is based in ideas. Ideas are images of things—they represent things to the mind.²⁹ Indeed, Edwards considers nothing else an image of a thing but that which is produced upon the mind. All that is commonly referred to as “images”—pictures, photographs, statues—are but physical representations that stimulate the formation of an image upon the mind. All “images” outside the mind are but secondary; the idea in the mind’s view is itself the proper image.

Unlike human ideas, however, God’s ideas are not merely shadows of things. Human ideas, being imperfect and incomplete, are mere likenesses of things upon the mind. God’s ideas, on the other hand, being perfect and complete in knowledge, *are* the things themselves. “An absolutely perfect idea of a thing is the very thing, for it wants nothing that is in the thing, substance nor nothing else. . . . God’s idea, being a perfect idea, is really the thing itself.”³⁰ The idea that God has of himself is so clear and perfect that God is said to have before him at all times an exact representation or perfect image of himself, lacking nothing which is in God himself—substance nor otherwise. God’s idea of himself must, therefore, be the very essence of God, having the same perfection and same substance as God the Father, the deity in direct existence. By the Father’s reflecting on himself and having in

²⁶ Ibid. 381.

²⁷ Herbert Warren Richardson, “The Glory of God in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Study in the Doctrine of the Trinity” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1962) 257.

²⁸ Edwards, “An Essay on the Trinity” 99.

²⁹ Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. *a-z*, *aa-zz*, 1–500), 368 (Entry No. 260).

³⁰ Ibid. 258 (Entry No. 94).

view a perfect idea of himself, the deity is generated—"there is a substantial image of God begotten."³¹

This perfect view or knowledge which the Father has of himself must, however, be distinguished from the Father's own direct existence. Although the image itself is the divine essence again, it must be understood as distinct. For God to view himself so as to have delight and joy in himself, he must become his own *object*.³² The object in view must be distinct from the viewing subject. Thus, in Edwards's understanding of the situation, there must be a duplicity involved. First, God the Father exists, the deity in direct existence. Second, the idea of God exists, the deity generated, or begotten, in the Father's perfect idea of himself.

This concept that Edwards presents is no simple matter. Why should one assume that the *idea* of the deity results in the actual and substantial *existence* of the deity? Edwards explains this seemingly absurd statement by suggesting in the "Essay on the Trinity" that the idea of love is itself an instance of love.³³ Helm finds this explanation rather dubious, suggesting that it is not necessary for one to be frightened in order to have an idea of fear.³⁴ However, by restricting his view to the "Essay on the Trinity," Helm has missed Edwards's further explanation offered in "Miscellany" No. 238.³⁵ In this reflection from his private notebook, Edwards states that ideas are acts of the mind. They are not properly understood as *representations* of things; rather, they are *repetitions* of things. He states that the true idea of love is, indeed, an act of love. According to his explanation, if I have an idea of a man's love for a woman for whom I care nothing about, I do not have a true idea of love; rather, I have an idea of the effects of love on that man. However, if I have an idea of my own love for my wife, the love itself is experienced. In this case, the idea of love is an instance of love, and thus a true idea of love. God's ideas, being perfect in knowledge and conception, are altogether true. Thus, if the Father thinks of himself and understands himself with a perfect clearness and fullness, the ideas he has of himself are absolutely himself again. His perfect idea of his own essence and nature is his own essence and nature again.³⁶ Therefore, Edwards concludes, by God's thinking of himself, the deity itself is generated in distinct subsistence and is described in Scripture as the "Word of God." Edwards thus identifies this "Deity generated by God's understanding" to be the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity.³⁷

Edwards placed great importance on the apostle John's statement that "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Love, being the perfection and happiness of a being, is essential and necessary to the deity. Being himself wholly perfect and infinitely happy, God has infinite love.³⁸ However, this love of God

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 100.

³³ *Ibid.* 101.

³⁴ Helm, *Treatise* 21.

³⁵ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) 353.

³⁶ Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 103.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 118.

³⁸ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) 283-84 (Entry No. 117).

must, according to Edwards, be more than mere self-love. He notes that even the devils have self-love, as is evidenced by their desire for their own pleasure and their aversion to pain.³⁹ God's love, therefore, must be more than self-love; God's love, according to Edwards, demands another—a Beloved.

Likewise, Edwards notes that God's infinite excellency demands another, for, he writes, "one alone cannot be excellent, inasmuch as, in such case, there can be no consent. Therefore, if God is excellent, there must be a plurality in God; otherwise, there can be no consent in Him."⁴⁰ Having rooted God's excellency in the notion of consent, Edwards insists that there exists another with whom God is infinitely consenting, else God is denied this aspect of infinite consent and excellency. Likewise, Edwards requires that the object of God's infinite love be infinitely agreeable to him (i.e. infinitely consenting). Were this not the case, and were the object loved by the Father not infinitely agreeable, the Father's love toward the object could not be infinite in its degree, for there would be that which is imperfect and therefore displeasing. The object must be infinitely consenting with God's perfection and must, therefore, be God's own perfection again. Thus, the object of God's infinite love is none other than God's own essence again, generated in the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God.

Edwards finds that the Son of God in Scripture is described as being the "light and refulgency of the Father."⁴¹ The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes the Son as the brightness of God's glory (Heb 1:3). John states that the Son is the wisdom, understanding, and *Logos* of the Father (John 1:1). In his first epistle, he writes that God is "light" (1 John 1:5). At the same time, he tells his readers that Jesus is the "light of the world" (John 8:12). From this, Edwards concludes that, while the Father is the infinite fountain of light, the Son is the communication of that light to the world.⁴² Recognizing that Jesus is, indeed, the light of the world, Edwards states that it is "the property of light to make manifest; that is, to cause things to appear and be seen; without light, nothing can be seen; all things lie hid; nothing can be discerned by the most perceiving without some light. But when light comes, then things are made to appear . . ." ⁴³ The Son is truly the light of the world, for it is through him alone that the true wisdom and knowledge of God are imparted to the human mind.⁴⁴ The Son—the second person of the Trinity, the deity generated—is that light that makes known the brightness of God's glory—the wisdom and reason of the Father.

³⁹ Edwards, "The Mind" 337.

⁴⁰ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500), 284 (Entry No. 117). See also the parallel discussion in Edwards, "The Mind" 337.

⁴¹ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) 299 (Entry No. 144).

⁴² Jonathan Edwards, "Christ, the Light of the World," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720-1723* (ed. Wilson H. Kinnach; Vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 538.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; Vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 201.

3. *The Spirit: Deity breathed forth.* Edwards states that the love with which the Father loves the Son is an infinite, holy, sacred love. If he held (as we have seen) that love is the perfection and happiness of a being, and if, as he also held, God is infinitely happy, then God infinitely loves.⁴⁵ This infinite love, not being merely self-love, is directed at the second person of the Trinity, generated from God's clear and perfect understanding of himself. However, Edwards states, this love is not merely shed forth upon the second person; it is also returned.

"If love be not mutual, it is a torment and not a pleasure; . . ." ⁴⁶ Certainly, Edwards insists, the Father's love for the Son is a mutual love—an infinite love shed forth upon the Son and infinitely returned to the Father, and therefore an infinite love and delight in each other.⁴⁷ Drawing once again upon the Johannine statement that "God is love," Edwards uses the notion of this mutual act of infinite and perfect love to assert that God himself *is* this act of infinite love, breathing forth his own divine essence in love, joy, and delight upon the Son, and likewise receiving the same from the Son. Through this perfect love—this breathing forth of God's essence in an infinite act of mutual love between Father and Son—yet another manner of subsistence stands forth, namely the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ The Spirit is, for Edwards, the divine essence, flowing out in the Father's infinite delight in and perfect love for the Beloved.⁴⁹ It is an *ad extra* expression of an *ad intra* inclination of the Father and Christ to communicate in mutual love.⁵⁰

Yet, Edwards reasons, this third subsistence of the divine essence is distinct from the Father and Son. He argues that the delight and energy that results in humans from their own ideas is distinct from the ideas themselves. In the same manner, the delight and energy that is communicated between God and the idea of God is distinct from the idea itself. It must be a third, distinct subsistence.

Edwards supports his conclusion that the Spirit is the love of God Scripturally, particularly from the Johannine corpus. He points out that just as the apostle says that the *Logos* is said to be God in John 1:1, he also says that love is said to be God (1 John 4:12–13). While God's love is said to dwell

⁴⁵ Jonathan Edwards, "Fragment: Application on Love To Christ," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723* (ed. Wilson H. Kimnach; Vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 614.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 617.

⁴⁷ Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 108. Edwards cites Prov 8:30 as Biblical evidence that the Father and Son share this mutual love for and delight in each other.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Edwards furthers this notion of the Spirit being the act of mutual love on p. 379, where he states that the Spirit is "the Deity subsisting in act." Helm errs in his statement that the Spirit is "the personal love of God the Father" (Helm, *Treatise* 12). Rather than being just the love of the Father, Edwards describes the Spirit as the *mutual* love between both the Father and the Son. The "personal love of the Father" is returned by the Son. It is this that Edwards states is the Spirit, not merely the love of the Father alone.

⁴⁹ See Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500) 260 (Entry No. 94).

⁵⁰ Bruce M. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in American Protestant Thought, 1750–1850* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1992) 2.

in believers in 1 John 4:12, God's Spirit is said to dwell in believers in verse 13. The apostle seems to make *love* dwelling in believers the same thing as the *Spirit* dwelling in us—a notion he sums up in verse 18 by saying that we know that God abides in us by the Spirit he has given us, who is the Spirit of love.

Further Johannine support for Edwards's view is gleaned from seemingly parallel statements in the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 22, the "river of water of life" is said to be the river of God's good pleasure. However, in John 7:38–39, the rivers of living water (i.e. waters of life) are representative of the Holy Spirit. Thus, Edwards concludes that the Spirit is God's good pleasure and infinite delight.⁵¹

The support Edwards points to is not exclusive to Johannine writings, however. He finds the notion that the Spirit is the love of God in Paul's statements in Acts 2:32–33 and Titus 3:5–6. There, the Apostle says that the Spirit is poured out and shed forth on believers. In Rom 5:5, however, Paul writes that it is God's love that is shed abroad in the hearts of believers.⁵² Likewise, Paul speaks of the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Spirit in 2 Cor 3:14. Edwards does not understand the apostle to be speaking of three different things in this verse. Rather, he interprets Paul to be suggesting that the grace of Christ *is* the love of God, which is none other than the communion of the Spirit.

Edwards finds great support for his view of the Holy Spirit in the Bible's representation of the Spirit by a dove. A dove, Edwards states, is a representation of love. It is a dove that brought Noah God's message of peace and love after so dreadful a manifestation of divine wrath. The dove is often the symbol of love in the Song of Solomon (1:15; 5:2, 12). Perhaps most importantly for Edwards, however, is the Spirit's presence represented by the dove that reportedly descended and alighted on Jesus at the time of his baptism. The love represented by the dove, Edwards notes, coincides with what is proclaimed—"This is my beloved Son . . ." (Matt 3:16–17; Mark 1:10–11; Luke 3:22; John 1:32–33). The three things here spoken of—the Spirit, the dove, and the proclamation—all represent the same thing, namely, the divine love.⁵³

The Spirit is thus seen by Edwards to be the mutual love between the Father and Son. Being himself the love of God, then, the Spirit is not understood by Edwards to be the agent who applies God's love for the regenerate. Rather, the Spirit himself *is* God's love for the regenerate. It is for this reason, Edwards states, that we nowhere in Scripture read of the Son loving the Spirit, nor of the Spirit's love for human beings, nor of fellowship with the Spirit.⁵⁴ We read of the Father's love for the Son and the Son's love for the Father, but never do we read of the Spirit's love for the Father and

⁵¹ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500), 411 (Entry No. 334).

⁵² *Ibid.* 412 (Entry No. 336).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Jonathan Edwards, "Treatise on Grace," in *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published* (ed. and with an introduction by Paul Helm; Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 1971) 62. See also Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 116.

Son, for, in Edwards's view, the Spirit *is* the love of the Father and Son. We read of the Father's and the Son's love for human beings, but never of the Spirit's love for human beings, for the Spirit *is* the love of the Father and Son poured out upon the saints.⁵⁵

The Spirit, for Jonathan Edwards, proceeds from *both the Father and the Son*. The whole divine essence is substantially poured out in the mutual, infinite love and delight between the Father and the Son. Richardson mistakenly holds that Edwards differed from the traditional Western understanding of the *filioque* clause. He describes Edwards as holding to a notion of the Father as the original subject of love and the Son as the original object of love. The Spirit, being this love, is therefore, in Richardson's interpretation, originated in one subject—the Father. While Richardson states that this is closer to the Eastern position than is common in the West, he does in the end state that Edwards maintained an understanding of the *filioque* to the effect that there could be no love in the Father were it not for the exclusive object of that infinite love. However, Richardson argues, one is left with at best a modified understanding of the *filioque* clause.

Richardson's error, however, arises from his oversight in regard to the fact that nowhere does Edwards posit a temporal distinction between the original "subject" and "object" of love. Rather, the love between Father and Son is always understood by Edwards to be *mutual*. Certainly there is a logical *taxis* to be considered in Edwards's Trinitarian theology. The Father subsists in himself, being neither begotten nor proceeding. The Son proceeds from the Father. The Spirit proceeds from both the Son and the Father. Thus, Edwards holds, "there is such a thing as prior and latter in order."⁵⁶ However, this does not indicate a temporal distinction between the Lover and the Beloved. The love and delight that the Father has for the Son has, from eternity, been returned in the love of the Son for the Father. Were this not the case, there would be no eternally consenting perfection in the Godhead. Nor does such a *taxis* suggest any notion of inferiority in the Godhead. While Edwards *does* maintain a logical order in the Godhead of Father, Son, and Spirit, this order in no way implies any such things as varying degrees of dignity or excellency, for each person of the Trinity is equally the same God. All three persons share the same substance—the same divine essence. All the perfection, dignity, and excellency of the Godhead belongs equally to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Thus, says Edwards, "[t]hough one proceeds from another, yet one is not inferior to another."⁵⁷ Likewise, Edwards insists that the Spirit is "breathed forth

⁵⁵ In further discussion of this notion, Edwards points to the fact that Paul wishes for the grace and peace (or grace, peace, and mercy) from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to the saints no less than fourteen times. However, never does the apostle mention the Spirit in these statements. This, Edwards posits in "miscellany" 341, is to be explained by the fact that the Spirit himself *is* the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* [Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500] 415).

⁵⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1723–1729* (ed. Kenneth P. Minkema; Vol. 14 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) 379.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

both from the Father and Son,"⁵⁸ and "proceeds both from the Father and the Son equally."⁵⁹ Clearly, then, Edwards maintained a traditional Western position in regard to the *filioque* clause, defending the equality of persons among the immanent Trinity.

While describing the Spirit as the love of God, Edwards concurrently insists that the Spirit is a distinct *personal* agent. In Scripture, he notes, the Spirit is revealed under personal characters and in personal acts. The Spirit is both the subject and object of personal acts throughout Scripture. Thus, Edwards concludes, "Scripture plainly ascribes every thing to Him that properly denotes a distinct person; . . ." ⁶⁰ In solid orthodox manner, Edwards affirms the Eternal Three—Father, Son, and Spirit—as "one God, but three persons."⁶¹

As it was the function of the Son—the *Logos* and understanding of the Father—to communicate the knowledge of God to creatures, so it is the function of the Spirit—the mutual love between the Father and Son—to communicate the divine love to creatures. The same divine love that is shared in infinite perfection between Father and Son is poured out upon the saints to the extent that the creature is able to bear it. This pouring out of divine love is the Spirit, the deity breathed forth.

Thus, for Edwards, the Trinity is a consenting unity of happiness, knowledge, and love. The Father, supreme in excellency, is infinitely happy. This happiness arises from the infinite delight he has in the knowledge and contemplation of his own perfection, subsisting in the Son. The Father and Son, being infinitely consenting and agreeable to one another (for indeed, they share the same perfection), mutually love each other, breathing forth this love substantially in the Holy Spirit. For Edwards, "God is these three irreducible hypostases, or persons."⁶² Edwards summarizes his thought on this issue:

It may thus be expressed: the Son is the Deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of himself; the Holy Ghost is the divine essence flowing out, or breathed forth, in infinite love and delight. Or, which is the same, the Son is God's idea of himself, and the Spirit is God's love to and delight in himself.⁶³

V. THE ECONOMIC TRINITY

Above it was stated that Edwards felt that the traditional formulation of the Trinity offered by Covenant Theology improperly truncated the Biblical witness. He felt that, in this system, the Spirit was denied honor equal to that given to the Father and the Son in the work of redemption. For Covenant Theology, the Spirit was understood to be the agent who applies the

⁵⁸ Edwards, "Treatise on Grace" 62–63.

⁵⁹ Edwards, "The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost" 379.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 57.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Richardson, "Glory of God" 258.

⁶³ Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500)* 468 (Entry No. 405).

benefits purchased for the redeemed through the death of the Son. However, Edwards felt that merely being understood as the agent of application of that which is purchased by another is to necessarily be subordinate to the purchaser of the benefit. To resolve the perceived problem within Covenant Theology, Edwards maintained his insistence on the equality of excellency and the absence of any notion of subordination within the *taxis* of the Immanent Trinity, while, at the same time, asserting that there *is* a subordination observable in the Economic Trinity—namely, in the divine work of redemption.

Edwards insisted that each person of the Trinity be acknowledged as equally concerned in the work of redemption. Each is equally involved with the redemptive recreation of fallen humanity, just as each was concerned in the original creation.⁶⁴ Thus, each person, according to Edwards, is to be recognized as having an equal involvement in the work.⁶⁵ However, each person occupies a distinct position in the affair. The alienation from God experienced by humanity as a result of the Fall demanded the intervention of a mediator. According to Edwards, the “business of a mediator is as a middle person between two parties, at a distance and at variance, to make peace between them.”⁶⁶ The necessary mediator, Edwards says, could not be the Father, for the Father sustains the rights of the Godhead and is the offended party whom the mediator is to appease. Nor could the mediator be the Spirit, for in mediating between God and sinful humanity, the mediator also mediates between the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit, according to Edwards, is the principle of holiness and life dwelling in the fallen creature that makes him or her regenerate.⁶⁷ Thus, in reconciling the fallen creature to God, the mediator must mediate between the Father, who is the offended party, and the Spirit, who is the abiding principle of holiness in the creature. The logical outcome of this leaves the Son as the only possible mediator between God and humanity. Furthermore, Edwards insists that the Son is the only person of the Godhead *fit* to be the mediator. Being the middle person between the Father and the Spirit in the *taxis* of the Immanent Trinity, the Son is thus fit to mediate between God and sinners in the divine economy.⁶⁸

While occupying this distinct position in the work of redemption, and acknowledging that the Son is, indeed, the only person of the Trinity fit to be the mediator between God and sinful humanity, Edwards nonetheless insists that the persons of the Trinity are co-equal in the work of redemption, and that each is to be afforded an equality of honor. The glory of redemption belongs equally to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.⁶⁹ Glory belongs to the Father, for, in Edwards’s formulation of the economic Trinity,

⁶⁴ Edwards, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost” 378.

⁶⁵ See Edwards, “Treatise on Grace” 66.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 501–832) (ed. Ava Chamberlain; Vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) 419 (Entry No. 772).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 146 (Entry No. 614). In “miscellany” 733, Edwards states that it is “the Spirit of God in the saints that is that by which they are saints” (*ibid.* 359).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 419 (Entry No. 772).

⁶⁹ Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. a–z, aa–zz, 1–500) 466 (Entry No. 402).

the Father loved the world enough to give his only Son, who was the object of his infinite delight. Glory belongs equally to the Son, for he loved the world enough to give himself, laying down his life as the price required for the benefit offered in redemption. Finally, a glory equal to that of the Father and the Son belongs to the Spirit, Edwards says, for the Spirit *is* the benefit offered in redemption, the love of God the Father and Christ, poured out upon the saints. In responding to the perceived problem with Covenant Theology's traditional presentation of the doctrine of the Trinity (which, one will recall, Edwards believed diminished the role of the Spirit as being merely the means of application for benefits purchased by the Son), Edwards presents the Spirit as the very benefit purchased by Christ, thus protecting the significance of the Spirit's role in the salvation of fallen humanity and maintaining an co-equality between Father, Son, and Spirit in the work of redemption.

As in the above discussion of the Immanent Trinity, I shall proceed to discuss the respective roles of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the divine economy—specifically in terms of the work of redemption. In each case, I shall show the particular aspect of the work that is the exclusive operation of each person. In so doing, I shall continue to systematize the thought of Edwards, drawing from various treatises, sermons, and “miscellanies.” However, before proceeding with the discussion, the importance of one particular sermon should be highlighted.

“God Glorified in Man's Dependence” was Edwards's first published work. Originally delivered to his own congregation in Northampton in the fall of 1730, the sermon was preached again on July 8, 1731, before a meeting of clergy in Boston. His purpose in this sermon is to demonstrate the total dependence of human beings upon the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the work of redemption. In this polemic against Arminianism emphasizing the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone, Edwards includes a great deal of material expressing his understanding of each person of the Trinity in regard to their work in redemption.⁷⁰ While much of this material is likewise available in “Miscellany” No. 1062, its use in this sermon allows the student to see Edwards's Trinitarian theology in practice. Additionally, its presence in the very public format of a twice-preached sermon that was to become his first public work brings Edwards's Trinitarianism out of his private notebooks and into the forefront of his public theological dialogue.

In the following sections, I shall continue to consult a variety of Edwards's writings in order to understand his Trinitarian theology in its full breadth. However, the reader will note that references to this sermon will frequent the footnotes. The wealth of Trinitarian content in this sermon warrants its own study. However, for the purposes of this paper, it shall serve to establish and reinforce Edwards's doctrine of the economic Trinity in harmony with his other writings.

⁷⁰ See Mark Valeri's introduction to this sermon in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* (ed. Mark Valeri; Vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) 196–99.

1. *The Father: The giver of benefit.* In the ontological, immanent existence of the Trinity, the Father is understood to be the lawgiver and judge of all things. The theology of Jonathan Edwards firmly holds the Father also to be the first source of redemption. The Father is, he states, the “first mover and beginner in the affair of our redemption.”⁷¹ It is the Father who freely determines both to allow for redemption as well as for whom this redemption will be. He chooses, approves, and provides the Redeemer, and he invests the Redeemer with the authority and office to do so. In “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” Edwards states that it is for this reason that human beings are entirely dependent upon the Father for redemption, for “it is God [the Father] that has given us Christ, that we might have these benefits . . .”⁷² Furthermore, he states that

it is God that has provided a Saviour for us. Jesus Christ is not only of God in his person, as he is the only begotten Son of God, but he is from God, as we are concerned in him, and in his office of Mediator; he is the gift of God to us; God chose and anointed him, appointed him his work, and sent him into the world.⁷³

Having chosen the Redeemer and appointed him to the work of redemption, the Father likewise accepts the sacrifice of the Redeemer as the price of the good which he wishes to bestow upon the saints. He not only gives the Redeemer; he also accepts the Redeemer as sufficient price of the benefits purchased. “And as it is God [the Father] that gives, so it is God [the Father] that accepts the Saviour. As it is God [the Father] that provides and gives the Redeemer to buy salvation for us, so it is of God [the Father] that salvation is bought; he gives the purchaser, and he affords the thing purchased.”⁷⁴ Edwards states that the Father so loves the Son that, for the sake of the Son, he “was ready to quit His own; yea, and receive into favour those that deserved infinitely ill at His hands.”⁷⁵ Thus, being sovereign in the work from the very determination to allow for redemption to the acceptance of the sacrifice of the Redeemer and the bestowal of the benefits purchased by this sacrifice, the Father, according to Edwards, is truly the Alpha and the Omega in this work.⁷⁶ The work of redemption, properly belonging to the Father as lawgiver and judge, is thereby committed to the Son, who is the Father’s representative.

2. *The Son: The purchaser of benefit.* Being the natural, perfect representation of the Father, the Son is also the natural representative of the Father in the work of redemption.⁷⁷ The Father chose to provide a savior; the Son *is* the savior. The natural, eternally begotten Son—himself a divine

⁷¹ Jonathan Edwards, “Observations Concerning the Scripture (Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption),” in *Treatise on Grace and Other Posthumously Published* (ed. and with an introduction by Paul Helm; Cambridge, U.K.: James Clarke & Co., 1971) 84.

⁷² Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” 201.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 48. See also Edwards’s, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost” 378.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Edwards, “Treatise on Grace” 67.

⁷⁶ Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. *a-z*, *aa-zz*, 1–500) 466 (Entry No. 402).

⁷⁷ Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 501–832) 373 (Entry No. 742).

person—took on human nature and descended the infinite distance between God and fallen humanity, in order that the elect, being in Christ, might converse with God. “God not only gives us the Mediator, and accepts his mediation, and of his power and grace bestows the things purchased by the Mediator, but he is the Mediator. . . . God gives the purchaser, and not only so, but God is the purchaser. Yea, God is both the purchaser and the price.”⁷⁸ God the Father provides the Redeemer and price for the benefits he wishes to bestow upon the elect. God the Son *is* the Redeemer and price for these benefits. The Son is the Redeemer approved by the Father, and has his authority and office solely from the Father alone.⁷⁹ He is the price offered for the purchase of the benefits of redemption. Through his sacrifice, the redeemed receive the good bestowed by the Father. Being the spouse of the Son, the saints are therefore daughters of God, and all have communion with God by the same spirit, the Holy Ghost.⁸⁰

It was stated that the Father so loved the Son that he was willing to receive into fellowship those who, because of sin, were deserving of infinite punishment. Concurrently, the Son so prized the Father’s honor and glory that, in his desire to save sinners, “He came infinitely low, rather than man’s salvation should be the injury of that honor and glory.”⁸¹ Rather than compromise the justice of the Father, the Son humbled himself, suffered, and died in the interest of fallen humanity’s redemption.

3. *The Spirit: The benefit purchased.* God is the purchaser and God is the price. For Edwards, God is also the good purchased. He states that God himself is that great good which is bestowed upon and enjoyed by the saints in the work of redemption.⁸² Citing Gal 3:13–14, Edwards proposes that the Spirit is the sum of all that was purchased for the saints.⁸³ The Spirit, again, is not merely the agent of application; he is what is actually given in the work of redemption.⁸⁴ The gift of reconciliation with the Father is not only caused by the Spirit; the gift *is* the Spirit, dwelling in the believer.

It is for this reason that Edwards affords equal glory to the Spirit in the work of redemption as that which is given to the Father and the Son. He further justifies his position in this regard in his statements in the “Essay on the Trinity.”

To be the wonderful love of God, is as much as for the Father and the Son to exercise wonderful love; and to be the thing purchased, is as much as to be the price that purchases it. The price, and the thing bought with that price,

⁷⁸ Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” 207.

⁷⁹ Edwards, “Observations Concerning the Scripture (Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption)” 81.

⁸⁰ Edwards, *The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 501–832) 110 (Entry No. 571).

⁸¹ Edwards, “Treatise on Grace” 67.

⁸² Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” 208.

⁸³ Edwards states that the Spirit is the inheritance purchased by Christ for his Church (“Observations Concerning the Scripture (Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption)” 88). See also Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” 208–9.

⁸⁴ Edwards states that all that is given to the redeemed consists in the gift of the Holy Ghost (Edwards, “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence” 208).

answers each other in value; and to be the excellent benefit offered is as much as to offer such an excellent benefit.⁸⁵

It has been seen that, for Jonathan Edwards, the Holy Spirit is the mutual love between the Father and the Son that is likewise shed forth upon the saints. In the work of redemption, then, grace is not to be understood merely as being *from* the Spirit. Rather, grace, the unconditional love of God for the saints, *is* the Spirit, dwelling in the hearts of the redeemed as a “vital principle”—the foundation of new life.⁸⁶ Human beings become “living temples of the Holy Ghost,”⁸⁷ thus being regenerated and sanctified. By pouring forth his Spirit on the saints, the Father has opened the possibility for fellowship between the creature and the Creator. The creature is thereby made partaker *with* the Father and the Son *of* their love,⁸⁸ and it is the Spirit who makes the creature a partaker in this sense. While Edwards insists that the Spirit indeed *is* the benefit purchased by Christ, he also acknowledges that it is the Spirit who makes application of the benefits of Christ.⁸⁹ He states, “Whatsoever Christ has done, yet if men were not brought to repentance, faith [and] union with God and Christ, all would be to no purpose, *and ’tis the work of the Holy Ghost to bring this to pass.*”⁹⁰ Thus, while Edwards defends the co-equality of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the work of redemption by viewing the Spirit as the actual benefit purchased by Christ, he at the same time *does* recognize a subordination within the divine economy. However, this subordination is merely in the manner in which each person acts in the work of redemption, not in the respective involvement of each. In the work of redemption, the Spirit *is* subordinated to the Son, “that Christ might [have] the whole work of salvation in his hands.”⁹¹ However, this subordination does not imply an inequality. Just as there is a logical order (*taxis*) in the Immanent Trinity in regard to the undervived Father, the Son (begotten of the Father), and the Spirit (proceeding from both the Father and the Son) *without* a notion of inequality in excellency between the three persons, so also is there a logical manner of

⁸⁵ Edwards, “Treatise on Grace” 67–68.

⁸⁶ Edwards, “An Essay on the Trinity” 111. Elsewhere, Edwards states that the Spirit “acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling, vital principle. . . . [H]e unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new supernatural principle of life and action” (“A Divine and Supernatural Light,” in *Sermons and Discourses, 1730–1733* [ed. Mark Valeri; Vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999] 411). Furthermore, in *Religious Affections*, Edwards states that the Spirit is “given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit, not only as moving, and occasionally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his temple, his proper abode, and everlasting dwelling place (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; John 14:16–17). And he is represented as being there so united to the faculties of the soul, that he becomes there a principle or spring of new nature and life” (*Religious Affections* [ed. John E. Smith; Vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959] 200).

⁸⁷ Edwards, “An Essay on the Trinity” 111.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Edwards, “The Threefold Work of the Holy Ghost” 377.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 377–78 (emphasis mine).

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 381.

acting in the divine economy in which the Father determines the work to be done, the Son acts in obedience to the Father as representative, and the Spirit acts in subordination to the Son in applying the benefits purchased; yet any notion of inequality in involvement or honor is absent in Edwards's theology.

VI. CONCLUSION

Jonathan Edwards did not presume to grasp fully the mysteries of the Triune God. Indeed, he readily admitted his own limitations of both language and understanding. In his "Essay on the Trinity," he wrote, "I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it is the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything that I have said or conceived about it. I don't intend to explain the Trinity."⁹² Nonetheless, Edwards makes clear statements regarding the Trinity from which one can clearly recognize an orthodox Trinitarianism without resorting (as did Park) to an "excusing" of Edwards's "private musings" which were not intended for public sight.

Through a broad consideration of his writings on the Trinity, one is able to discern Edwards's orthodoxy clearly. He posits a God who must be three—one begotten by another, one proceeding from both alike, and one neither begotten nor proceeding. The divine essence—the Godhead—consists in the deity in direct existence, the deity generated in the divine Idea, and the deity breathed forth in mutual love. Each of these subsistences, says Edwards, "are properly distinct Persons."⁹³ Each of these, "God, and the Idea of God, and the inclination, affection, and love of God, must be conceived as really distinct. . . . So that our natural reason is sufficient to tell us that there are these three in God, and we can think of no more."⁹⁴ Yet the three exist in perfect union. They exist in "an ineffable and inconceivable manner, one in another."⁹⁵

To summarize and illustrate his Trinitarian theology, Edwards appealed to the sun. The sun itself he likened to the Father. The light of the sun he likened to the Son, who is the brightness and glory of the Father. The Spirit, then, is the warmth derived from the sun, providing heat and being a continually emitted influence upon the world, warming, enlivening, and comforting.⁹⁶ Each is distinct, yet they are one.

In the work of redemption, human beings are dependent on each person in the Trinity for all our good. We are dependent on Christ the Son of God, as he is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. We are dependent

⁹² Ibid. See also Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) 393 (Entry No. 308). "But I would not be understood to pretend to give a full explication of the Trinity, for I think it still remains an incomprehensible mystery, the greatest and the most glorious of all mysteries."

⁹³ Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 118. Cf. Edwards, "Treatise on Grace" 57.

⁹⁴ Edwards, "An Essay on the Trinity" 119.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 120.

⁹⁶ Edwards appeals to this illustration in Edwards, *The "Miscellanies"* (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500) 434-35 (Entry No. 362). He then repeats the illustration on p. 441 (Entry No. 370). Likewise, it is found in his sermon, "Christ, the Light of the World" (p. 535).

on the Father, who has given us Christ, and has made him to be these things for us. We are dependent on the Holy Ghost, for it is of him that we are in Christ Jesus; 'tis the Spirit of God that gives faith in him, whereby we receive him, and close with him.⁹⁷

God the Father provided the Redeemer to purchase the benefit he wished to bestow. God the Son is the Redeemer, the price of the benefit. God the Spirit is the benefit itself. "So that all that we have is of God, and through him, and in him."⁹⁸ Each person of the Trinity is to be equally glorified in this work, for the creature is absolutely dependent upon each for the entire benefit. "[A]ll is of the Father, all through the Son, and all in the Holy Ghost. Thus God appears in the work of redemption as all in all. It is fit that he that is, and there is none else, should be the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the all, and the only, in this work."⁹⁹

The Edwardsean God is characterized by infinite excellency. This excellency demands a consenting relationship between God and the perfect idea of God, the two being joined in a mutual relationship of infinite love—a love that is likewise shed forth upon the saints. "God has made us actually to glorify, to behold his excellencies and to admire them, and to be made forever happy in the enjoyment of them."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Edwards, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence" 201.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 210.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 212.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Edwards, "God's Excellencies," in *Sermons and Discourses, 1720–1723* (ed. Wilson H. Kinnach; Vol. 10 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*; ed. Perry Miller, et al.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) 427.