

Book Review

Salladin, James R. *Jonathan Edwards and Deification: Reconciling Theosis and the Reformed Tradition*. New Explorations in Theology series. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. Pp. xii+268 pp. Hardcover.

Theosis (*to make divine*) is a peculiar notion, especially for those unfamiliar with Eastern Orthodoxy. James Salladin, author of *Jonathan Edwards and Deification: Reconciling Theosis and the Reformed Tradition*, believes that although the language of theosis may be foreign to Protestants, the concept is not, a claim he verifies through the theology of Jonathan Edwards, America's greatest Protestant theologian. Salladin's purpose is to follow Edwards' work in describing the great gift of grace (1-2). God's gift of grace inextricably binds the believer to the trinitarian God. The believer graciously experiences theosis by participating in the fullness of God and thereby fulfilling the end of creation, God's glory. Simply put, Salladin seeks to explain Edwards' answer to the question: What is the distinction between the impartation to the believer of *divine fullness* versus *divine essence*? Salladin defines deification, theosis, and divinization as the work of the Son and the Spirit, whereby the believer shares in the divine fullness without abolishing their humanity, yet reaching God's desired result (3).

The "Introduction" is extremely helpful, offering an outline, an overview of the author's approach, and vital terminological definitions. The book then unfolds in five sections. Chapter one ("Grace and Fullness") "provide[s] a broad overview of Edwards's doctrine of special grace, with particular focus on clarifying the category of divine fullness, as well as the meaning of the notions of *communication*, *participation*, and *communion*" (16). Salladin affirms that divine fullness and God's communicated grace is, in fact, the Spirit (16, 63). This provides relational *koinōnia*-participation without violating human essence. Edwards masterfully employed grace as participation within the Reformed tradition, as well as a potent polemic against both Arminian and enthusiast error (63-65).

"Grace and Nature," the next section, explores Edwards's thoughts on created ontology. Salladin asks: What is the relationship between divine fullness and created nature, or does everything by virtue of its being partake in divinity (65)? Consequently, there is a discussion between common participation (68-77) and special participation (90-94). Edwards sees nature and its foundational common participation as empty and corrupt without divine grace (91). In the end, special participation (grace) differs from common participation (nature) in three ways (i) content, as special participation is creaturely communion in trinitarian love; (ii) quality, as special participation is more relational; and (iii) aim, as, at least partially, common participation establishes a clear distinction between Creator and creature (16, 92-94).

"Grace and God," the third chapter, surveys the other side of the Creator-creature distinction, examining Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity as well as his Christology, pneumatology, and soteriology. Salladin reveals that "Edwards consistently distinguishes a relational union in divine fullness from an ontological union in the divine essence" (17).

Essentially, Salladin asks: Can Edwards’s soteriology provide sufficient intimacy between God and the believer to achieve divine participation while still maintaining the Creator-creature distinction? Salladin articulates that distinction between God’s *essence* and God’s *fullness* (96-97). *Essence* is built on the participation or sharing of substance (*methexis*) while *fullness* is built on the participation or sharing of relationship (*koinōnia*). Both ‘participations’ operate within the Trinity as well as Edwards’s Christology, and in the graced saint (101). Thus, Edwards confirms intimacy in the Creator-creature bond without fusing them, such that God gives himself in grace without nullifying the saint’s created essence (144).

In chapter four (“Grace and Creation”) Salladin points out that though there is a distinction between grace and created nature, they still relate positively (145). Edwards’ genius shines in his modified special grace that harmonizes the Reformed doctrines of the Trinity, special grace, and creation theology (17-18). Theology Proper, specifically the Trinity, is framed in terms of a transcendent God who nevertheless achieves a Creator-creature *relation* (145). Thus Salladin writes: “Edwards modified the doctrine of the Trinity, *in order to show its soteriological import*; Edwards modified the doctrine of grace, *in order to show its trinitarian foundation*; Edwards modified the doctrine of creation’s end, *in order to show the centrality of the first two doctrines*” (182).

The closing chapter highlights “Grace and Fulfillment,” in particular, the fulfilled humanities of Christ (via hypostatic union) and the saints (via grace), as well as cosmic fulfillment in the divine fullness concerning creation, history, and the saints. Finally, Salladin supplies six takeaways: (i) a Reformed theosis, confirming how Edwards’s doctrine of grace is grounded in Reformed interest; (ii) complementary participations, participation theology that allows him to maintain the Creator-creature distinction all the while bridging it in intimate relational union; (iii) the Trinity’s gift, through the Spirit we understand that God is God’s best gift; (iv) Christological creation, as Edwards calls the church to see the beauty of Christ in and through this world; (v) theosis of the “narrow way,” ontologies of participation and theologies of theosis that fail to account for evil/sin and risk ringing hollow; and (vi) that lamenting unto repentance—as Edwards is an enigma with deep theology and still deeper sin, for he was a slaveholder—should inform all believers that repentance must be part of theosis (239-247).

Upon initial engagement with the book one might be tempted to label the book as *dense*. If so, this is by necessity, for theosis is complex. As Salladin rightly points out, “Theosis scholarship is often abstract and obscure, even speculative” (247). Still, this in no way detracts from the rich content of the book. For a broader historical and theological perspective on theosis from eight various theological traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, Baptist, Wesleyan, et al.), one might read *With All the Fullness of God: Deification in Christian Tradition* (Fortress Academic, 2021), edited by Jared Ortiz. Though there are numerous streams of thought on deification, Salladin’s work brings understanding to the misunderstood, shedding light on what it means to “be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19) and to “share in the divine nature” (II Pet. 1:4). Although Edwards may have been privy to Platonic and Palamite thought, Salladin makes a compelling case for his theosis arising from his Reformed underpinnings. This work will prove useful for followers of Edwards, various doctrinal studies, historical theology, and church historians.

Often works on notable people are nothing more than hagiography, and while Edwards's brilliance shines forth, like George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, Salladin affirms Edwards's Achilles heel of human-chattel. Searching for more on deification? Two offerings not included in Salladin's bibliography—Dmytro Bintsarovskiyi *Hidden and Revealed: The Doctrine of God in the Reformed and Eastern Orthodox Traditions* (Lexham, 2021) and Ben Blackwell *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Eerdmans, 2016). Salladin sums up his engaging effort by inviting believers to the sweetness of theosis. It truly is a *partaking*, a *participation*—“taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8) (248-249).

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