Jonathan Edwards’ *spiritualis*

Towards a reconstruction of his theology of spirituality

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Introduction
There can be no doubt that spirituality was central to the life of Jonathan Edwards. In their recent book on Edwards, already a standard work, M.J. McClymond and G.R. McDermott call spirituality a key concept of Edwards’.

As they put it, “He was a man of intense spiritual experience, who devoted immense effort to giving spiritual instruction to others, and who has been regarded as a model and paragon of Christian piety for some two hundred and fifty years.” Edwards’ celebrated biographer George Marsden argues that for Edwards, “piety preceded intellect”. Nor is this a lightly-made claim, given that Edwards engaged his intellect his whole life long to arrive at clarity of understanding on various matters. Evidently, all this thinking of his was undertaken in a spiritual light. Or, put otherwise, Edwards’ theology cannot be decoupled from his person and his spiritual attitude.

Since this observation of McClymond, McDermott and Marsden’s is congruent with the insights of other researchers, it is compelling to undertake a further enquiry into Edwards’ spirituality. In doing so, it is vital to bear in mind that Edwards’ spirituality developed in interaction with his Puritan tradition. J.E. Smith’s study of Edwards’ sources for his *Religious Affections* demonstrates that he was familiar with Pietist writers from both the old England and New England. It is evident that his

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grandfather and clerical predecessor Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729) had a major role in his formation, not least because Edwards refers copiously to Stoddard’s works. Yet the greatest number of references made by Edwards is not to him but to Thomas Shepard (1605-1649), and in particular to his The Parable of the Ten Virgins. Jonathan Edwards also refers in Religious Affections to five works by the Puritan John Flavel (1630-1691); three by the Puritan John Preston (1587-1628); one by William Perkins (1558-1602); and once cites Cases of Conscience by William Ames (1576-1633). Edwards was familiar with John Owen’s (1616-1683) writings on the work of the Holy Spirit, and equally with The Bruised Reede and the Smoaking Flax by Richard Sibbes (1577-1635). Other Puritan writers cited by Edwards are Anthony Burgess (1600-1663) and Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661). It is remarkable that Edwards makes no more than cursory references to John Calvin (1509-1564). Smith explains this as being due to the slightness of the explicit attention that Calvin pays to spiritual experience. In this regard, it ought also to be noted that Edwards refers to the Cambridge Platonist John Smith (1618-1652), the philologist Theophilus Gale (1628-1678), the Biblical scholar Jeremiah Jones (1693-1724), the scholastic theologian François Turretin (1623-1687), and his own contemporary Philip Doddridge (1702-1751). Thus Edwards’ sources for Religious Affections alone demonstrate the breadth of his intellectual focus. The concomitant consideration that his independence of thought is widely acknowledged underlines the necessity of seeing Edwards not merely in relation to others but rather as primarily investigating his own theological framework.

While McClymond and McDermott have given us the first comprehensive overview of Edwards’ spirituality, we still lack a theology of Edwards’ spirituality. In a sense, one could argue that for Edwards, all theology was spiritual theology; on the other hand, however, spiritual theology does not amount to a theology of spirituality.

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7 Sheldrake considers the distinction between spiritual theology and a theology of spirituality in Spirituality and Theology, 83-95. As this article concentrates on research into the theological structure of, and underlying theological framework of, Edwards’
centrality of spirituality to Edwards, and given also the interest shown in spirituality in our day, we are justified in calling this a lacuna in the research on Edwards. This study aims to fill that gap by enquiring into the theology of Edwards’ spirituality and making an initial contribution to the development of this theological understanding. As Edwards himself did not leave a purpose-written account of the theological aspects of his spirituality, this present undertaking should be viewed primarily as an effort to develop a reconstruction of the theology of Edwards’ spirituality and as a piece of constructive theological-historical research.

This reconstruction has to be distinguished from two other current approaches in Edwards’ research. On the one hand the search for the theology of Edwards’ spirituality has to be distinguished from the interest in his pietism in the strict sense, which refers to the inner experience of the heart in conversion, repentance, affection and mysticism.\(^8\) This means that spirituality is more than inner experience, because it has to do with relations outside one’s self. On the other hand the search for Edwards’ spirituality cannot be identified with the current meta-research into Edwards’ spiritual theology of participation and Trinitarian theology,\(^9\)


\(^8\) A recent study in this area is D.S. Whitney, Finding God in Solitude: The Personal Piety of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and Its Influence on His Pastoral Ministry, New York 2014. A great deal of his study is dedicated to pietistic practises such as Bible reading, prayer, diary-keeping, resolutions, fasting, solitude and worship. See for this practices also the second part of K.C. Strobel, Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards, Downers Grove, Il. 2013.

although obviously there are interfaces, because spirituality is especially focused on the character of the relationship. The purpose of this article is to survey Edwards from the perspective of his spirituality as such, not only because this spirituality was important for Edwards, but also because it is an independent academic discipline with its own methodology.\(^\text{10}\)

The research underpinning this article uses some known aspects of Edwards’ spirituality, such as the Christological, participatory, pneumatological and anthropological aspects, as these are expected to be important and representative in Edwards; this is not to suggest that these aspects are all that is needed to describe Edwards’ complete theology of spirituality. The provisional design of this research leads one to the following research question: How can some known aspects of Edwards’ spirituality be used as building parts for the reconstruction of his theology of spirituality?

To respond to this research question, I first make an investigation of these four aspects of Edwards’ spirituality. This focus has implications for the methodology; namely that it uses, first and foremost, the primary Edwards sources that were previously used to conduct the original research. The basic premise of this research is that of a qualitative approach, searching key-words in Edwards’ oeuvre.\(^\text{11}\) Taking second place to primary sources are the secondary studies on Edwards, which have been used as building-blocks inserted into the inherent framework to amplify the research issue of this essay. As a third and final element, combinations of both source-methods have also been used, with interaction occurring between primary sources and secondary literature. In this way, I develop the first contours of a reconstruction of Edwards’ theology of spirituality.


\(^{11}\) Footnotes provide quantification only. To obtain data, use was made of the search engine provided at [www.edwards.yale.edu](http://www.edwards.yale.edu). It ought to be borne in mind regarding this search engine that its database also includes the texts of forewords and editorial notes. There could also be errors in the texts referred to. Moreover, apart from such formal errors, the search references might also be materially in error when nil returns were retrieved. Although this is a theoretical problem, it does highlight that the quantitative data obtained by this means cannot be sufficient grounds for drawing conclusions and can only be considered as an illustration of a qualitative argument.
The Christological dimension of Edwards’ spirituality

By placing fellowship with Christ front and centre, Edwards stands quite deliberately in the Reformed theological tradition. For Edwards, it is vital that union with Christ be the ground of the legal relationship between the sinner and God in justification. This means that ultimately, the principle regulating one’s relationship with God, or the overall principle of theology, is not justification but fellowship with Christ, without losing justification as a hermeneutical key to understand the relationship between God and human being.

As a consequence of this basic premise in Edwards’ theology, spirituality for him is not primarily focused upon the gifts of Christ but upon the person of Christ. A key concept in Edwards’ spirituality is the glory of Christ. Looking back upon the spiritual breakthrough in his own

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life, Edwards speaks expressly of the glory of the person of Christ, and sermons of his also take this as their theme.

The glory of Christ does not remain at a distance from the believer; rather, union with Christ takes place. The basis for this union between Christ and sinners is the Incarnation. Christ became a son of the church as mother, and a brother of believers. Accordingly, the Incarnation is the basis for the union of faith with Christ: a position that privileges the believer far above the position of the angels regarding Him. From this union with Christ, there blossoms a communion with Him. It is important to note that this is an experiential category that entails an intuitive assurance all of its own.

In this connection, Edwards speaks of the relationship between Bridegroom and bride. On the one hand, this relationship implies that the identity of the bride cannot be reduced to the individual believer; there is, therefore, a pronounced social aspect to Edwards’ spirituality. On the other hand, the interplay between Bridegroom and bride implies

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16 “From about that time I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him. I found no books so delightful to me, as those that treated of these subjects. Those words Cant. ii:1 used to be abundantly with me: “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys”, WJE 16:793.


18 WJE 11:111.

19 WJE 24:1140.

20 WJE 18:247; 21:158.


23 WJE 25:582, 584, 586. By the same token, in the absence of a conscious relationship with Christ, there cannot be any conscious relationship between believers either.
reciprocity: Christ is active in the relationship through His Spirit, and the relationship cannot function without the active affection of the believer.

Reflecting this emphasis upon affective engagement with Christ is the fact that faith has an affective structure. When his attention turns to the bond with Christ, faith does come to be mentioned, because it is the role of faith to act as that bond with Christ. To clarify every point of contention between Arminian theology and his own, Edwards maintains a distinction here between natural and moral fitness. While accepting the validity of natural fitness as a concept, since faith is excellently suited to forming the relationship with Christ, he rejects the notion of moral fitness, as there ought to be no suggestion that union with Christ is any kind of reward of faith.

In terms of the believer’s relationship to Christ, however, faith is secondary, so much so that it rarely becomes a subject for consideration. Consequently, works of faith, trials of faith, assurance of faith, stages of faith and assaults upon faith are not sermon topics of Edwards’. Nor does faith, as such, feature to any extent in Edwards’ well-known treatment of justification by faith. In another sermon, one in which faith is an explicit theme, the place afforded to it is immediately tempered by the consideration that faith is seen here as an effect of God’s love.

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24 WJE 21:195; 25:584. “And answerably to this relation, there is a spirit to delight in each other’s presence, and communion, and conversation; and they are wont freely to open their hearts, and reveal themselves to each other, and dwell with each other”, WJE 19:446.
27 This sermon may be found in WJE 19:143-242.
28 It takes for its theme ‘Saving Faith and Christian Obedience Arise from Godly Love’: WJE 25:494-535. Cf. WJE 8:326. The treatise ‘Concerning Faith’ seeks to demonstrate that faith is concerned with an affective relationship: The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Edinburgh 1974, 2:578-96 (N.B.: this is a different edition to the one referred to by WJE). Quantitatively, too, much more attention is paid to love than to faith. There are 8,198 references to ‘faith’ returned by searching the corpus; 19,640 to ‘love’; and a mere 508 to ‘regeneration’.

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conclude, then, that love constitutes the heart of Edwards’ conception of faith.²⁹

From the perspective of the research question, this investigation provides the insight that the spiritual union with Christ by faith cannot be dismissed in any understanding of Edwards’ theology of spirituality. Although the relationship with the person of Christ is decisive in Edwards’ spirituality and quantitatively spoken faith and justification are of less interest, qualitatively these dimensions cannot be overlooked in any overview of Edwards’ spirituality.

The participatory dimension of Edwards’ spirituality
Union with Christ is the foundation for participation in the reality of Christ.³⁰ This is true first and foremost of Christ’s goods. Union with Christ is not only the basis for the imputing of the righteousness of Christ but is also the grounds on which good works and their reward may be spoken of.³¹ It is because of the union with Christ that the good works of believers are of a higher order than the good works of Adam.³²

In the second place, union with Christ means participation in all Christ’s riches.³³ Believers participate in Christ’s reign over the sun and moon and angels, wear His glorious garments, and share in the victory over the devil through their relationship with Christ.³⁴ This means that every atom in space is governed for the benefit of the true saints. By taking this stance, Edwards is expressing his confession that Christ is the Mediator of the entire cosmos. What this entails for the church of Christ is that she confesses Christ in all aspects of earthly life. Yet this cosmic

³⁰ WJE 18:247; 23:196. There is ‘natural fitness’ in the believer’s sharing in Christ’s goods through union with Him: WJE 18:543; 23:196.
³³ Believers are entitled to the same blessings as Christ is: WJE 18:150. Believers share in the election, justification and glorification of Christ: WJE 18:418. A striking aspect of this is Edwards’ inclusion of the election of Christ.
³⁴ WJE 13:183; 25:236. Edwards once preached on Revelation 12:1 with the title ‘How the church of true saints by her union with Christ, is clothed in the sun […]’: from WJE 5:441.
dimension of Christ’s work does not mean that all the cosmos will ultimately share in full salvation. Indeed, in this regard, Edwards writes of the coming destruction of the earth.\(^{35}\)

It is from this union with Christ that salvific history acquires its significance. S.J. Stein notes that union with Christ implies that His children participate in His suffering and His glory.\(^{36}\) However, it is debatable whether the first of these aspects can be stated so baldly, because it is not a factor with a very explicit function in Edwards’ oeuvre. For Edwards, participation in the active obedience of Christ plays a much more explicit role.\(^{37}\) What Edwards means by this is that what Christ’s mind is set upon is also what Christians set their minds upon.

Thirdly, union with Christ brings about participation in Christ’s glory. Through faith, there is now already a union with Christ, one which increases in quality when the believer dies.\(^{38}\) What this means above all is that, at their death, the children of God participate in the glory of Christ.\(^{39}\) Because union with Christ is not impinged by death, believers may look forward to the resurrection of their bodies.\(^{40}\)

Fourthly, union with Christ through faith also has bearings upon Christ’s relationship to the Father; His sonship.\(^{41}\) To bring out the fundamental character of this reality, Edwards writes of it as the “great doctrine of Christianity”.\(^{42}\) Through union with the Son, the redeemed sinner shares in His relationship of sonship to the Father. He rejoices in Christ’s inheritance in God as Father.\(^{43}\) Moreover, this delight is mutual, so that in Christ the Father rejoices in believers as His children and His

\(^{35}\) WJE 14:532-533. For Edwards, the bodily resurrection has no direct effect upon union with Christ, but rather an indirect one: WJE 13:178-79.

\(^{36}\) S.J. Stein, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, WJE 5:52.

\(^{37}\) WJE 10:570; 14:403; 16:289; 25:231. It is not because they are made as innocent as Adam that believers are saved, but because they are made to share in the active obedience of Christ: WJE 13:174. In this regard, Edwards speaks – with some qualifications attached to the phrase – of a “kind of participation”.

\(^{38}\) WJE 25:231.


\(^{40}\) WJE 11:101.


\(^{42}\) WJE 13:174.

\(^{43}\) WJE 20:455; 25:234.
children rejoice in the love of the Father for the Son, in which they share.\textsuperscript{44} This fulness of delight is the joy of the Lord.

Edwards uses a special argument to outline the riches of this joy. In Christ as his Head, the Christian enjoys this delight in God.\textsuperscript{45} This means that the capacity for enjoying God is much greater for the believer than for those who lack this fellowship with Christ. In a certain sense, one could say that the Christian shares in the Son’s capacity to enjoy the Father.

Finally, these insights lead one to the understanding that the body of Christ not only receives the gifts of the holiness of God but also participates in the holiness of God Himself.\textsuperscript{46} In this respect, Edwards refers to John 17:13 in order to substantiate his insight that the love of the Father and the Son is fulfilled in believers through the indwelling of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{47} It is thus that there is a “kind of participation” in God Himself.\textsuperscript{48}

Within research into Edwards’ theology, a compelling discussion is ongoing regarding the extent to which Edwards is concerned with \textit{theosis}.\textsuperscript{49} This is sometimes understood as a concept rooted in the theology of the Eastern Church, which regards II Peter 1:4 as grounds for speaking of Christians being made divine. The Orientals do distinguish here between the \textit{essentia} (Greek: \textit{ousia}) of God and the \textit{energeia} of God: the Christian is said to share in the latter property of God but not in the former. This raises the question of whether, and in what way, Edwards has these views.

In the first place, we may observe that there is no direct Oriental influence upon Edwards, given that no Eastern theologians were found in his library. So, if these views are indeed present, then they must be original insights of Edwards’. Secondly, it appears that by the concept of

\textsuperscript{44} WJE 13:174, 219; 18:109, 250. The search engine at \url{www.edwards.yale.edu} yields 3,379 mentions of ‘joy’, 2,143 of ‘sweet’ and 5,390 of ‘happiness’. For the purposes of comparison, the word ‘regeneration’ yields 508 returns.

\textsuperscript{45} WJE 20:455.

\textsuperscript{46} WJE 21:195. Edwards also remarks that Christians participate in the divine and human qualities of Christ: WJE 8:730.

\textsuperscript{47} See also WJE 21:195.

\textsuperscript{48} WJE 2:208; 13:174; 17:208. The careful way in which Edwards speaks about participation is a reminder for current undertakings to construct a meta-concept of Edwards’ theology as referred to in footnote 9.

participation in the nature of God, Edwards sometimes means nothing more than the existence of a relationship with the Father and the Son.\textsuperscript{50} Thirdly, Edwards maintains a distinction comparable to that of the Eastern Church: he calls the idea that redeemed sinners participate in the essence of God blasphemous,\textsuperscript{51} explaining that what Christians participate in is not the essence of God but His fulness, beauty and blessedness.\textsuperscript{52} They are a temple of God’s Spirit and dwell in God. Fourthly, it can therefore be said that God communicates His own moral excellence with those who are in Christ.\textsuperscript{53} The boldest step of Edwards is to state that God regards believers as ‘part’ of Himself.\textsuperscript{54}

This is how Edwards seeks to do justice to II Peter 1:4, a text that he cites with some frequency.\textsuperscript{55} It is a text that underscores the qualitative distinction between un-regenerated and regenerated man.\textsuperscript{56} He who is not born again, though he might possess many gifts of the Spirit, lacks the gift of the Spirit Himself.\textsuperscript{57} It seems that for Edwards, participation in the nature of God occurs pneumatologically; namely, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{58}

This research makes clear that union with Christ is not a purpose in itself in Edwards’ spirituality, but that mystical union is directed to participation in the life of Christ and so in the life of the triune God. At the same time it became clear that participation cannot be understood in a

\textsuperscript{50} WJE 21:129.
\textsuperscript{53} WJE 2:208; 17:208; 25:639.
\textsuperscript{54} WJE 14:403.
\textsuperscript{55} There are 24 explicit references to this text in Edwards’ works. For Edwards, the text is paralleled by John 1:16, Eph. 3:18-19, Heb. 12:10, I John 1:3 and I John 4:16: WJE 25:639.
\textsuperscript{56} WJE 21:156. Cf. Smith, WJE 2:25.
\textsuperscript{57} WJE 8:158. Cf. Ramsey, WJE 8:67, 80.
massive essential way, because Edwards carefully qualifies his concept of participation; one has to understand it pneumatologically.

The pneumatological dimension of Edwards’ spirituality

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is a key concept for Edwards; it unlocks to us his theology and spirituality. Naturally, this statement needs to be qualified, for sins and unbelief persist in a Christian heart. Nevertheless, it is for Edwards essential to do theology from the premise of the Holy Spirit’s residing in the heart. Various aspects of his theology are illuminated by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

In the first place, it is important that by the emphasising of indwelling, the spiritual life of the individual sinner is placed within the framework of God’s great salvific plan. Edwards located the whole of theology within the great historical perspective of the acts of the triune God. In this historical drama, the Son and the Spirit each perform their own works, and the importance accorded to history allows for plenty of attention to be paid to the work of the Spirit, since He applies salvation within time.


61 S.H. Lee speaks of a “spatio-temporal extension of his innertrinitarian self-communication”, in which the incarnation of the Son and the indwelling of the Spirit recapitulate their own intra-Trinitarian relations: WJE 21:99. Given the theological implications of this claim, further substantiation would be necessary for it to be accepted as proven.

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We have already seen how union with Christ was basic for Edwards. In this section, it can be added that his entire perception of union with Christ is based on the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{62}\) This can be stipulated in three ways. First, the Spirit works faith in Christ; second, the disposition to believe comes prior to union with Christ and to the imputing of the righteousness of Christ,\(^\text{63}\) so that it is the Spirit in the sinner that works towards Christ; third, the work of the Spirit is characterised by its immediacy.\(^\text{64}\)

Edwards appears to go yet one more step. For him, the importance of acts of the Spirit in the drama of history is bound up with the importance of the personhood of the Holy Spirit. When he makes clear that the Spirit is not merely a \textit{principium} but “voluntary agent”,\(^\text{65}\) he is being congruent with the broader contours of his theology. Unlike many other Reformed theologians, Edwards’ doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not subsumed by His salvific work,\(^\text{66}\) but rather he regards His work as opening up His personhood. The Spirit shows us in the drama of history who He is.\(^\text{67}\)

In the second place, this historical nature of the work of the Spirit is bound up with the eschatological character of His work.\(^\text{68}\) The

\(^\text{64}\) WJE 19:681.
\(^\text{65}\) WJE 18:529.
\(^\text{66}\) It is therefore without justification that J.H. Gerstner in his edition of Edwards’ theology, while he does address the \textit{ordo salutis}, does not make an issue at all of fellowship with Christ: \textit{The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards}, Orlando, Fla. 1992, vol. 3. While the Westminster Confession gives extensive consideration to the terms ‘effectual calling’, ‘adoption’, ‘sanctification’, ‘repentance’ and ‘faith’, these are far less of a concern for Edwards. For a comparison between the Westminster Confession and Edwards regarding the structures of sanctification, see A.J. Beck and W. van Vlastuin, ‘Sanctification between Westminster and Northampton’, in: \textit{Jonathan Edwards Studies}, 2 (2012), 3-27. The term ‘calling’ (including the instances in which it means ‘naming’) occurs 1,078 times in returns from the search engine at \url{www.edwards.yale.edu}; ‘adoption’ 157 times; ‘sanctification’ 281 times; ‘regeneration’ 508 times; ‘repentance’ 1,545 times; and ‘faith’ 8,198 times. For the purposes of comparison, the word ‘heart’ occurs 11,300 times.
\(^\text{67}\) This can be worked up into personal characteristics of His work such as chastising, rewarding and answering: WJE 18:529.
commonality is found in the concepts of ‘firstfruits’ and ‘earnest’ (pledge). Edwards sees the Holy Spirit’s activity in history as the first instalment of the achievement of God’s redemptive work that, through the thousand-year reign, will end in eternal fulfilment. Since the indwelling of the Spirit forms the central plank of Christian spirituality, one can say that spiritual life is a first stirring of heavenly life, and vice versa. While there is a difference in gradation between the spiritual life enjoyed presently and the heavenly future, the nature of them both is the same. There is, then, a distinction in degree but no distinction in principle between the Christian now and the Christian in the world to come.

What does this imply for the nature of the present and the coming spiritual life? Here, it is a material consideration that the Holy Spirit Himself is the sum of all blessings.\(^{69}\) Christ suffered in order to obtain the Spirit for His people. Therefore, the Spirit is not only the One who applies salvation, but He is the salvation secured by Christ.\(^ {70}\) In receiving the Spirit, we receive the fulness of God’s beauty and the joy of Christ, for the Spirit – being Himself the fellowship between the Father and the Son – imparts Himself to us.\(^ {71}\) This is a propensity of salvation; it concerns fellowship with God and participation in God.

The notion of participation in the nature of God adds a third propensity to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, namely the quality of spiritual life. Participation in the nature of God means that Christians share in the disposition of God.\(^ {72}\) God’s dispositions are expressed primarily in His love.\(^ {73}\) Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the saints take on in their own hearts God’s predisposition to love, such that they think and act as God does.\(^ {74}\)

The love of God in the heart is the secret of the Christian life. Here lies the theological reason why Edwards’ spirituality is informed by the positive process of the quickening of the new man much more than it is

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\(^{71}\) WJE 2:201.
\(^{72}\) WJE 13:462. Because of his ‘conformity’ to God, a Christian may be called ‘divine’: WJE 21:194.
\(^{73}\) WJE 21:122. Rom. 5:5 is a key verse in this connection: WJE 8:133.
\(^{74}\) WJE 14:242.
by the negative aspect of the dying of the old man.\textsuperscript{75} It is on the basis of the positive presence of the Spirit that battle is joined with the old nature and that a transformation takes place in the sinner.\textsuperscript{76} Accordingly, this concept of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit provides a theological framework for discussing Christian virtues. These virtues, after all, are not attained through logical arguments but through the power of the indwelling Spirit.\textsuperscript{77}

It is because the Christian life is formed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that it becomes conceivable that this is a life that is indestructible. Trials and demonic antagonists may arise, but after any period of decline, recovery will always follow for the Christian, and the perseverance of the saints is guaranteed.\textsuperscript{78} Yet this doctrine does not preclude man’s responsibility, a responsibility which the believer chiefly meets through self-discipline and, in a certain sense, asceticism.\textsuperscript{79}

This paragraph leads one to conclude that Edwards’ spirituality is, to an important extent, determined by his doctrine of the Spirit, including its eschatological dimension. The concept of the indwelling of the Spirit is the interpretative key for understanding spiritual life and the benefits of Christ. Moreover, this concept puts the Christian life firmly in the communion of the triune God.

\textbf{The anthropological dimension of Edwards’ spirituality}

In Edwards’ approach, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit prompts the question of how this ought to be thought of as it relates to the human spirit, not least bearing in mind the background of the question of \textit{theosis}. Well aware of this conundrum, Edwards emphasised that while it was not the case that the Christian acquired new “faculties”, his existing capacities received a new “principle” or a new “foundation”.\textsuperscript{80} What he means by

\textsuperscript{75} Mortification of sin is much more of a theme for divines such as John Owen: cf. Van Vlastuin, \textit{De Geest van opwekking}, 88. It is an exception rather than the rule when Edwards remarks that God’s glory implies sorrow: WJE 14:105.

\textsuperscript{76} WJE 19:681. Cf. Smith, WJE 2:43.

\textsuperscript{77} N. Pettit, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, WJE 7:13. P. Ramsey writes of “infused righteousness”: WJE 8:739.

\textsuperscript{78} WJE 10:526; 18:529.


\textsuperscript{80} WJE 17:192. The Spirit unites Himself with “the faculties of the soul, that he becomes a principle or spring of new nature and life”: WJE 2:200. The Spirit acts as an “indwelling
this is that the Holy Spirit uses the capacities of the human soul as His instrument, and that in this process, while the believers’ humanity is respected, nevertheless the power of the Holy Spirit is brought to bear.⁸¹

Seen this way, it is clear that participation in the divine nature does not imply any annihilation of human nature, but that on the contrary it brings about a restoration and fulfilment of the human. Nor did Edwards’ opposition to Arminianism lead him to lose all anthropological interests.

Thus, our interest in the anthropological dimension is determined by pneumatological and theological issues. Fellowship with Christ is seen from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit⁸² and, given that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit manifests itself in His activities, Edwards’ doctrine of the Holy Spirit prompts us to study what it is that occurs in the human soul when the Spirit comes.⁸³

We note the presence of the Holy Spirit above all in Religious Affections. It is in this study that Edwards makes clear that no true religion can exist without affections, for affection is decisive in one’s relationship with God.⁸⁴ This means, in turn, that the degree of affection that a believer has will determine the power of the Spirit in his heart.⁸⁵ We see this clearly in David Brainerd’s diary, where he painstakingly records the extent to which he was moved by the causes of the Kingdom of God⁸⁶ and by the needs of his fellow men.⁸⁷ For him, affection in the congregation


⁸² WJE 18:233.

⁸³ Smith, WJE 2:24. The word ‘heart’ is returned 11,300 times by the search engine at www.edwards.yale.edu; the word ‘soul’ 9,550 times. For the purposes of comparison, the word ‘regeneration’ occurs 580 times.

⁸⁴ A hard heart is a heart without affection: WJE 1:468. Words descriptive of experience are profuse in Edwards’ oeuvre: ‘sweet’ delivers 2,143 hits; ‘joy’ 3,379; ‘affection(s)’ 3,826; ‘happiness’ 5,390; ‘sense’ 7,671; ‘love’ 19,640; as against 508 mentions of ‘regeneration’.

⁸⁵ WJE 2:107, 112-14.

⁸⁶ WJE 7:181, 260, 348, 375, 434.

as an effect of preaching is an indication of the power of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{88}

For through the Spirit, believers have “a new sense”, a “taste” of the reality of God.\textsuperscript{89}

This means that spiritual affection is a participation in God’s affection. Since the fullness of God dwells in the Holy Spirit\textsuperscript{90}, and the Spirit resides in believers’ hearts, this means that these human hearts come to share in the love and the joy that is in God.\textsuperscript{91} A certain direct, immediate knowledge of God\textsuperscript{92} arises, making the soul open up to Him as a flower and to rejoice in Him. One of the consequences is that the heart is filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory because of God.

And so it is that experience belongs to the essence of the Christian religion. This is bound up with a major anthropological insight of Edwards. In contrast to the Puritan tradition before him, Edwards places the understanding, will and affections not in hierarchical relation to each other but rather in such a way as to bring out the intrinsic unity of these capacities.\textsuperscript{93} Where the Spirit has taken up residence in the soul, the understanding is enlightened, and the will – including the affective dimension of the soul – has its love for God set in motion.\textsuperscript{94} Affection is the willing and delighted loving of something or someone.\textsuperscript{95} If it is only

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\textsuperscript{88} WJE 7:191, 243, 302.
\textsuperscript{89} McClymond addresses the issue of to what extent the ‘new sense’ is a kind of sixth sense: \textit{Encounters with God}, 9-10. He also underlines that Edwards’ emphasis on the palpable presence of God cuts clean across the deism of his own day: 108, 110.
\textsuperscript{91} WJE 13:299, 462. It is revealing to consider this view of Edwards’ in the context of Article 2.1 of the Westminster Confession, which denies that God is subject to ‘passions’.
\textsuperscript{94} Affection implies the focusing of the will: WJE 1:160; 4:299, 331. We exercise will insofar as we are ‘affected’: WJE 2:97.
\textsuperscript{95} WJE 2:97.
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the understanding that is enlightened, it must be that the person in question is not indwelt by the Spirit.\textsuperscript{96} The same conclusion applies to a person whose heart is deeply moved but whose spiritual knowledge is conspicuous by its absence.\textsuperscript{97} Emotion, then, is not the be-all and end-all of religion. Rather, religion consists in a “reasonable affection”, whereby one knows what and whom one loves.\textsuperscript{98} In perceiving this, Edwards developed a theological-anthropological tool for speaking in a balanced manner about Christian spirituality and also for denoting the boundaries of Christian spirituality.

The content of Christian spirituality is replenished with affections, largely shaped by God’s “beauty” and “excellency”, which in their turn are both determined by the holiness of God, His most important characteristic.\textsuperscript{99} The following personal testimony of Edwards’ is a striking illustration of his own views and is also key to describing his spirituality theologically:

The first instance, that I remember, of that sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things, that I have lived much in since, was on reading those words, 1 Tim. 1:17: Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being: a new sense, quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of Scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was, and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be rapt up to him in heaven; and be as it were swallowed up in him forever! I kept saying, and as it were singing, over these words of Scripture to myself; and went to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do, with a new sort

\textsuperscript{96} This is true of dogmatic knowledge not involving the heart: WJE 2:104. This was where Edwards’ front lay against the revival criticism of Charles Chauncy, who, invoking the reasonableness of the Puritans, opposed the Great Awakening for its emphasis on the affective aspect of faith: C. Chauncy, \textit{Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England}, Boston 1742, 2-3.


\textsuperscript{98} WJE 2:107.

\textsuperscript{99} Affection is a “grasp of the beauty of holiness”: Smith, WJE 2:30. ‘Beauty’ has 2,480 hits; ‘excellency’ 3,319; ‘light’ 9,240; ‘grace’ 11,634; glory’ 12,011; ‘life’ 13,202; ‘holy’ or ‘holiness’ 13,997; as against 508 for ‘regeneration.’
of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was anything spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.\textsuperscript{100}

Some key words are striking in this document. Edwards reports that he had a “sweet delight” in God. There is “a sense of the glory of the Divine Being, a new sense”. God has become “excellent” to him and he longs to “enjoy” Him. The corollary of this worship of God is the humility in the heart of the believer.

In addition, a certain paradox is encountered regarding the believer’s self. Edwards speaks, without further qualification, of “disinterested love”.\textsuperscript{101} What he means by this is that spiritual affection does not assert self-interest, is not focused upon personal salvation, is neither interested in spiritual processes within the believer’s own heart nor concentrates upon his own experience,\textsuperscript{102} but is entirely moulded by the glory of God. Thus, spiritual affection is extraverted, trained upon God. Still, however, participation in the joy of God also means that the believer experiences the most sublime happiness.\textsuperscript{103}

This means that the distinction between true and false religion can be very subtle. Powerful emotions may arise that are nevertheless not sanctified. Typically, these are emotions that busy themselves with the person’s own interest, lacking a concern for the glory of God.\textsuperscript{104} People tend to make much of their own experience, whereas spiritual affection is characterised by an insatiable thirst for deeper knowledge of God’s glory.\textsuperscript{105} The character of spiritual affections also implies that they are not “private”, but rather focused upon “being in general”.\textsuperscript{106} This notion opens up to us a panoramic perspective on life in society and a great esteem for Creation.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{100} WJE 16:792-793. Cf. also the second hallmark of genuine affections: WJE 2:240-53.
\textsuperscript{101} WJE 3:144.
\textsuperscript{102} Cf. WJE 7:399.
\textsuperscript{104} WJE 2:136, 149, 220, 242, 291; 8:264.
\textsuperscript{105} WJE 2:317, 397.
\textsuperscript{106} WJE 8:554, 556-57.
Affections are also effective in transforming human life. This is not easily noticed, as affection is an act of will. Edwards emphasises the unity of the various aspects of regeneration. At its most profound, Christian regeneration is expressed as love; meekness, gratitude and love for one’s neighbour are the concrete forms taken by the love in the believer’s heart.

If we relate this paragraph to the research question, we can conclude that spirituality implies the fulfilment of the human life, because the deepest longings of the human heart are satisfied in participating in the triune God by the union with Christ and the indwelling of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit qualifies the Christian life as a life of love in which human beings are involved in a holistic way.

Evaluation
This exploration of some of the theological structures of Edwards’ spirituality leads one to the following conclusions and considerations.

First, this exploration enables us to confirm that the four aspects of Edwards’ spirituality can be understood as four dimensions of his spirituality, namely the Christological, participatory, pneumatological and anthropological. We can conclude that Edwards’ theology of spirituality is union-based, participatory-oriented, Spirit-filled and anthropologically characterized. It is evident that spiritual union with Christ is essential to any conception of Christian spirituality. This means that there is a distinction in very principle between spirituality as a general notion and Christian spirituality.

The foregoing research has also laid out how the sequence of spiritual union with Christ leading to participation in God in Christ cannot be reversed. What this entails is that only in union with Christ through faith is the glory of God beheld, and that only from union with Christ can one in a certain sense share in God’s glory.

It has also become evident in the above that the participatory and the anthropological character of Edwards’ spirituality do not constitute two mutually exclusive realms but rather reinforce each other. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the link between them because, for believers, the glory of God becomes a spiritual reality in the soul by the indwelling
of the Holy Spirit. In the Christian’s soul, God and man come together, as it were. Expressed another way: from the soul, union with the Holy Spirit is practised and thus union with the triune God is practised too. One cannot, therefore, speak of an anthropological spirituality, as if spirituality were somehow determined by humans or revolved around human experience. What emerges in the human soul through the presence of the Holy Spirit is precisely an orientation towards the glory of God that is without us. However, one may ask whether one can speak of an anthroposensitive spirituality. Because what Edwards is concerned about is emphatically the in nobis (in us) of Christianity, I have elected to speak of an anthropological dimension to Edwards’ spirituality. This goes a step beyond a spirituality in which the believer is sensitive to God only. The inclusion of the anthropological dimension emphasises that Christian spirituality is about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Having established this, we get a second major insight into the mutual coherence of the four characteristics outlined in this article. It is already clear that union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit are part of the framework of Edwards’ spirituality, aspects from which the glory of God flourishes and in which the saint, to his own happiness, participates. Union with Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit constitute the path that brings us to participation in God and along which the believer experiences God. We cannot speak of an absolute centre here, but rather of nexuses in relations, or nodes of density in networks.

In the introduction to this article the sequential order of Christology, participation, pneumatology and anthropology was followed. Quite apart from the theological significance of this order, we ought to give due consideration to the aspect that union with Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and participation in God move within one and the same dimension. Edwards writes that union with Christ is theologically anterior in this order, although in his spirituality it is more the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that he brings to the fore. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is qualified by participation in God. It is this participation in God in which the soul finds rest, is brought to worship and remains eager for a deeper satisfaction in God. From the participatory dimension, the anthropological dimension opens up fruitfully to us. This dimension moves in a different plane than the others, since in the Christological, participatory and

pneumatological dimensions the believer is caught up in transcendence in God. It is God’s transcendence in which man finds the most profound satisfaction for his soul, yet without him ever experiencing that he has enough of God.

In the third place it has to be remarked that using the mystical union with Christ as the key for understanding spiritual life has several implications. It implies that spirituality is qualified by justification as the entrance to, and ongoing characteristic of, participating in God’s reality. This means that sensitivity to the reality of justification and the forgiveness of sin has to be an essential dimension in every design of Edwards’ spirituality; it can also be used as a (critical) theological instrument for qualifying the designs of Edwards’ spirituality. At the same time it became clear that Edwards’ spirituality cannot be reduced to the duality of sin and grace, which implies that the precise relationship between soteriology and participation in Edwards’ approach demands further research. In this context one could ask: what exactly the relationship between justification, sanctification and satisfaction is. By extension the issue about the exact relationship between the believer and Christ on his cross and the resurrection is also raised. Another question concerns the consequences of the eschatological dimension of Edwards’ spirituality: to what extent is his spirituality characterized by the ‘already’ of the kingdom and ‘realized eschatology’?

Fourth, the key-function of the mystical union with Christ also implies a certain level of exclusiveness of Christian spirituality in Edwards’ approach. This raises questions about what place other aspects of reality have in Edwards’ spirituality. Therefore, Edwards’ spirituality has also to be investigated from other perspectives, such as creation, religions, public life, culture, science, techniques, politics, history, psychology, sociology, being in general, philosophy, etc. This implies that the research completed in this work is only one of the first steps made in an investigation into the structures underpinning Edwards’ spirituality; structures which all have concomitant implications impacting on his theology of spirituality.

Fifth, it falls outside the scope of the research question of this article to determine the extent to which Edwards derived the theological structure of his spirituality from the Puritan and Pietist tradition. What we can do is give voice to an impression that the Puritans had the greatest degree of influence upon Edwards, most particularly regarding immediate
affection. Authors that come to mind here include John Owen, Richard Sibbes, Thomas Goodwin and Thomas Shepard.\textsuperscript{110}

Against this background, one is struck by the slight position commanded by justification, as compared with the high importance for Edwards of the participatory and ontological transformative aspects. There are researchers who believe that one can speak of traces of Roman Catholicism in Edwards,\textsuperscript{111} or who posit that Edwards could serve to bridge the gap between Roman and Protestant convictions.\textsuperscript{112} For the purposes of this research, it suffices to assert that Edwards understood himself as a Calvinistic theologian,\textsuperscript{113} that he strongly emphasises the gracious character of fellowship with Christ,\textsuperscript{114} that it is far from unique to Roman Catholic theology to emphasise the infusion of grace and the transformative qualities that this brings,\textsuperscript{115} that Edwards always taught the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ,\textsuperscript{116} and that he did afford a role to justification in preaching about personal regeneration.\textsuperscript{117}

In future research into Edwards’ spirituality, one of the compelling issues considered ought to be whether or not his emphasis on affective spirituality derives from the spirituality of the early church, especially as a gulf has opened up between theology and spirituality since the Middle


\textsuperscript{112} McClymond and McDermott, \textit{The Theology of Jonathan Edwards}, 695-705.

\textsuperscript{113} “Yet I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction’s sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin”, WJE 1:131.

\textsuperscript{114} Cf. A. Morimoto, \textit{Jonathan Edwards}, 162. Edwards also powerfully enunciated this in his preaching, such as in his sermon on justification: WJE 19:336-76.

\textsuperscript{115} Morimoto, \textit{Jonathan Edwards}, 159.

\textsuperscript{116} Cf. P. Ramsey, ‘Infused Virtues in Edwardsean and Calvinistic Context’, WJE 8:739-50. Ramsey defends on substantive grounds the stance that for Edwards, as for Calvin, there is a concept of \textit{duplex gratia}. This is also the research finding of S.H. Lee: WJE 21:72-75, 85.

\textsuperscript{117} Cf. Van Vlastuin, \textit{De Geest van opwekking}, 198-201, 211-12. He speaks of an effective-forensic doctrine of justification, with the adjective ‘effective’ deliberately placed foremost.
Ages, which the Enlightenment only served to exacerbate. The objective Aristotelian concept of knowledge has increasingly come to dominate theology, causing the disappearance from theology of spiritual knowledge as sapientia (wisdom) and as relationship. It would be worth researching whether Edwards’ efforts to return affection to the heart of theology and spirituality harks back in some way to the early church. Research into the sources of Edwards’ affective spirituality could also investigate whether an influence upon him by the nascent Romanticism of his own day can be ascertained.

Summary
M.J. Mc Clymond and G.R. McDermott made Edwards’ spirituality a special theme in their recent The Theology of Jonathan Edwards (2012). This first investigation of Edwards’ spirituality is a fertile ground from which more research into Edwards’ spirituality may be conducted. In the present article, Edwards’ theology of spirituality is considered and is mapped out in four theological categories which serve as a provisional framework for the understanding of Edwards’ spirituality. First, Edwards’ spirituality is to be understood in the framework of spiritual union with Christ as the basis for all the blessings in the life of a Christian. Second, spiritual union with Christ is the construct through which we may speak of a certain participation in God in Edwards’ spirituality. Third, Edwards’ spirituality appears to be pneumatocentric. Finally, it is due to the theocentric and pneumatocentric structure of his theology that Edwards is able to develop the anthropocentric aspects of spirituality.

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118 “In summary, the High Middle Ages in the West were characterized by growing divisions within theology and the gradual separation of spirituality from theology […] . It was, at heart, a division between the affective side of Faith (or participation) and conceptual knowledge”, Sheldrake, Spirituality and Theology, 43. Compare H. Boersma, Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry, Grand Rapids 2011, 52-83.