
Randall E. Otto

The Solidarity of Mankind in Jonathan Edwards' Doctrine of Original Sin

Mr. Otto is doing doctoral studies at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia and is a minister in the United Church of Christ.

Christian theology has from the beginning maintained that the original sin of Adam brought corruption upon all mankind, with the result that all are born with innate depravity. History has recorded the persistent revulsion many have felt at the apparent impropriety of being divinely condemned for an occurrence prior to their birth and for which they made no conscious choice. The controversy which raged between Pelagius and Augustine in the fourth century has been renewed over and over again as, for instance, in the eighteenth century polemic of Jonathan Edwards. In his attempt to defend the union of man in Adam's fall, Edwards proposed a new perspective with his principle of personal identity. 'His explanation of the identity of the human race with its Head, founded as it is on a doctrine of personal identity which reduces it to an "arbitrary constitution" of God, binding its successive moments together, is peculiar to himself.'¹ Because of the innovative nature of his approach (and the continuing debate over the issues he raises), it is necessary to evaluate Edwards' theory of personal identity as a defence of the solidarity of mankind in the original sin.

The Imputation of Adam's Sin

In 1740, the English Unitarian Taylor wrote *The Scriptural Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* in which he renounced the idea of imputed sin, demanding that sin need be a strictly personal matter.

¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (New York, 1932), 530.

A representative of moral action is what I can by no means digest. A representative, the guilt of whose conduct shall be imputed to us, and whose sins shall corrupt and debauch our nature, is one of the greatest absurdities in all the system of corrupt religion . . . That any man without my knowledge and consent, should so represent me, that when he is guilty I am to be reputed guilty, and when he transgresses I shall be accountable and punishable for his transgression, and thereby subjected to the wrath and curse of God, nay, further, that his wickedness shall give me a sinful nature, and all this before I am born, and consequently while I am in no capacity of knowing, helping or hindering what he doth; surely anyone who dares use his understanding, must clearly see this is unreasonable, and altogether inconsistent with the truth, and goodness of God.²

The surprisingly appreciative reception Taylor's book received evinced the need for a defence of the orthodox doctrine, which Jonathan Edwards undertook in *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* some two decades later.

Edwards proposed to defend the imputation of Adam's sin to mankind by way of the analogy of the tree to its branches.

God, in every step of his proceeding with Adam, in relation to the covenant or constitution established with him, looked on his posterity as being *one with him*. And though he dealt more immediately with Adam, it yet was as the *head* of the whole body, and the *root* of the whole tree; and in his proceedings with him, he dealt with all the branches, as if they had been then existing in their root.

From which it will follow, that both guilt, or exposedness to punishment, and also depravity of heart, came upon Adam's posterity just as they came upon him, as much as if he and they had all co-existed, like a tree with many branches . . . I think, this will naturally follow on the supposition of there being a *constituted oneness* or *identity* of Adam and his posterity in this affair.³

Edwards is quick to point out the mistakenness of any idea of a derived double guilt, namely that the children of Adam are guilty of Adam's sin as well as that which arises from their own corrupt hearts. He asserts that guilt arising from the corrupt heart is 'distinct and additional' to the guilt arising from the first existence of the depraved disposition in Adam's posterity, which guilt is *not* distinct from their guilt in Adam's first sin. Thus the first evil disposition in Adam's posterity includes the first act of sin, just as

² Cited from Frank H. Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago, 1907), 82–83.

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. by Edward Hickman, vol. I: *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (Edinburgh, 1834), 200.

was the case in Adam himself. That disposition continued in Adam and his posterity as a confirmed principle, bringing additional guilt. Invoking again the tree analogy, he says:

The *first being* of an evil disposition in a child of Adam, whereby he is disposed to *approve* the sin of his first father, so far as to imply a full and *perfect consent* of heart to it, I think, is not to be looked upon as a consequence of the imputation of that first sin, any more than the full consent of Adam's own heart in the act of sinning; which was not consequent on the imputation, but rather *prior* to it in the order of nature. Indeed the derivation of the evil disposition to Adam's posterity, or rather, the *co-existence* of the evil disposition, implied in *Adam's* first rebellion, in the *root* and *branches*, is a consequence of the *union* that the wise Author of the world has established between *Adam* and his posterity; but not properly a *consequence* of the *imputation* of his sin; nay, is rather *antecedent* to it, as it was in *Adam* himself. The first depravity of heart, and the imputation of that sin, are both the consequences of that established union; but yet in such order, that the evil disposition is *first*, and the charge of guilt *consequent*, as it was in the case of *Adam* himself.⁴

In an 'illustrative' footnote to the previous quote, Edwards actually explains and elaborates upon the tree analogy. Supposing that Adam and his posterity had co-existed in such a way that they were united as branches of a tree are one with the root, Edwards concludes that they would have constituted one complex person, or one moral whole, concurring in the acts of the head and participating in the consequences of those acts. Therefore, when the heart of the root, by a full disposition, committed the first sin, the hearts of the branches would have concurred, with the consequential guilt, condemnation, and permanent depravity coming upon both participants. The same evil disposition and its consequences come upon root and branch in the same order and dependence. 'Now, difference of the *time* of existence does not at all hinder things succeeding in the same order, any more than difference of *place* in a co-existence of time.'⁵

To this point Edwards has not said anything especially new or 'peculiar', but has instead essentially rehearsed the argument of realism. He has assumed the seminal headship of Adam and the consequences which must ensue for the act of mankind in Adam. Edwards summarizes his position in that same footnote:

The imputation of Adam's first sin consists in nothing else than this,

⁴ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 221n.

that his posterity are viewed as in the same place with their father, and are like him . . . God might . . . in righteous judgment impute Adam's sin to them, inasmuch as to give Adam a posterity *like himself*, and to *impute* his sin to them, is one and the same thing.⁶

It seems apparent that Edwards feels the deficiency of his argument to this point. He notes, 'the grand objection is against the *reasonableness* of such a *constitution*, by which *Adam* and his posterity should be looked upon as *one*, and dealt with accordingly, in an affair of such infinite consequence.'⁷ He is concerned with the persistent objection that, while mankind may indeed have a genetic relation to Adam, men had no conscious existence whereby they might have made a personal decision in concurrence with Adam in his rebellion. It was for the resolution of this 'grand objection' that Edwards developed his provocative principle of personal identity.

The Principle of Personal Identity

Edwards prefaces his discussion with the remark that objections which assert the impropriety and falsehood of the arbitrary constitution of mankind in Adam are based on

a false hypothesis, and wrong notion of what we call *sameness* or *oneness*, among created things; and the seeming force of the objection arises from ignorance or inconsideration of the *degree*, in which created identity or oneness with past existence, in general, depends on the sovereign constitution and law of the supreme Author and Disposer of the universe.⁸

He goes on to point out that some things are 'entirely distinct, and *very diverse*' which are nonetheless united by the Creator according to established law. For instance, the tree which has grown so great is actually one with the little sprout which came out of the ground many years ago, this despite the fact that it may not even have one atom in common with that sprout. Notwithstanding these changes in form and substance, God has, according to an established law of nature, 'in a constant succession communicated of it many of the same qualities, and most important properties, as if it were one.'⁹

This divinely established law of nature, whereby things distinct and diverse are constituted as one, also holds true for man. The

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁹ *Ibid.*

body of a man is one with the infant body which came into the world many years ago, in spite of the great changes which have occurred in that body. God's constituted oneness is also true for the soul, for 'the *body* and *soul* of a man are *one* . . . according to the sovereign pleasure of God, and the constitution he has been pleased to establish.'¹⁰

For Edwards, the personal identity of created intelligent beings consists of two elements, sameness of consciousness and sameness of substance, both of which persist by God's pleasure.

In positing the element of sameness of consciousness, Edwards draws on John Locke, who had seen this as the sole constitutive element in personal identity. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke had said:

For, since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person.¹¹

Edwards could not agree with Locke as to the exclusivity of this element personal identity, however, since he could foresee unhappy consequences. In his notes on 'The Mind', written while in his teens, he imagined it possible that God could annihilate him and create another being that would have the same ideas and apprehensions as Edwards himself had in his memory, yet Edwards felt he could have no strict relation to that hypothetical person or to his fate. Indeed, to posit the co-existence of two such beings upon his imagined annihilation is to make the picture clearer.

Can any one deny, that it is possible, after my annihilation, to create two beings in the Universe, both of them having my ideas communicated to them, with such a notion of their having had them before, after the manner of memory, and yet be ignorant one of another; and, in such case, will any one say, that both these are one and the same person, as they must be, if they are both the same person with me.¹²

Insofar as such an hypothesis is against the established order of nature, it is likely that a second consideration was of more

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Cited by C. Samuel Storms, *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Lanham, MD, 1983), 237–238.

¹² Jonathan Edwards, *Works*, vol. I: *Remarks in Mental Philosophy: The Mind*, ccxxii.

concern to Edwards. He did not want to ground identity on the evanescence of memory, 'lest an opponent argue that he had no memory of Adam's sin and therefore could reckon himself guiltless.'¹³

Besides sameness of consciousness, Edwards also sees sameness of substance as necessary to personal identity. He demonstrates the dependence of substance upon divine power by going beyond Newtonian causation principle to Being itself.

That God does, by his immediate power, *uphold* every created substance in being, will be manifest, if we consider that their present existence is a *dependent* existence, and therefore is an *effect* and must have some *cause*; and the cause must be one of these two; either the *antecedent existence* of the same substance, or else the *power* of the *Creator*. But it cannot be the *antecedent existence* of the same substance. . . . For not only was what existed the last moment, no active cause, but wholly a passive thing; but this also is to be considered, that no cause can produce effects in a *time and place* in which itself is *not*.¹⁴

Having disallowed the ultimacy of all antecedent causation, Edwards concludes that the existence of created substance in each successive moment owes to the immediate creative power of God, to continual creation *ex nihilo*. 'God's *preserving* of created things in being, is perfectly equivalent to a *continued creation*, or to his creating those things out of nothing at *each moment* of their existence.'¹⁵

The importance of these considerations now becomes apparent as Edwards makes his application to the problem of the solidarity of mankind in Adam. He notes that, 'if we consider matters strictly, there is no such thing as any identity or oneness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends on *God's sovereign constitution*.'¹⁶ The 'grand objection' to the solidarity of man in Adam is thus based on a false hypothesis which 'supposes, there is, oneness in created beings, whence qualities and relations are derived down from past existence, *distinct* from, and *prior* to, any oneness that can be supposed to be founded on *divine constitution*.'¹⁷ Hence, 'all oneness, by virtue whereof *pollution* and *guilt* from *past* wickedness are derived, depends entirely on a *divine establishment*.'¹⁸

¹³ Clyde Holbrook, Editor's Introduction to Yale ed. of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 55, cited by Storms, *Tragedy in Eden*, 239.

¹⁴ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 223.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

Seeking to draw an analogy from the constituted nature of all reality, Edwards has sought to demonstrate that mankind is actually a divinely constituted whole. Being of one moral state, it is therefore reasonable to assert that all mankind sinned in and with Adam in his first transgression.

From what has been observed it may appear, there is no sure ground to conclude, that it must be an absurd and impossible thing, for the race of mankind truly to partake of the *sin* of the first apostacy, so as that this, in reality and propriety, shall become *their sin*; by virtue of a real *union* between the root and branches of mankind . . . established by the author of the whole system of the universe; to whose establishments are owing all propriety and reality of *union*, in any part of that system; and by virtue of the full *consent* of the hearts of Adam's posterity to that first apostacy. And therefore the sin of the apostacy is not theirs, merely because God *imputes* it to them; but it is *truly* and *properly* theirs, and on that *ground* God imputes it to them.¹⁹

Analysis of Edwards' View of Solidarity

Edwards' doctrine of personal identity is impressive, both for its originality and its breadth. Instead of merely reiterating the traditional arguments involved in this difficult subject, Edwards sought to interact with the relevant aspects of philosophy, physics, and psychology in his apology. According to Foster, Edwards demonstrates that he 'understands how to conserve the old, how to learn from even erroneous proposals, how to study the spirit of his age, how to change old forms as new light breaks upon him.'²⁰ Edwards' innovative approach to the problem of the solidarity of the race is 'the most profound moment in his philosophy.'²¹

Despite the bold and comprehensive scope of Edwards' work, issue must be taken as to his realist position in general and his principle of personal identity in particular.

Realism

The evaluation of Edwards' position on the union involved in the imputation of Adam's sin is made somewhat difficult because Edwards appears at times to espouse different positions. David Weddle, for instance, denies that Edwards saw Adam as the representative of the race, as in federal theology, or that Adam was the one in whom the essence of mankind was present, as in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Foster, *Genetic History of New England Theology*, 90.

²¹ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Amherst, 1981 rep.), 278.

realism. Rather, he interprets Edwards' position as an 'historical' view of unity.

It seems consistent with his intention to speak of this moral whole (i.e., Adam and his posterity) as one continuous life in which Adam's existence is the first moment. That is, the 'natural' unity of the race is 'historical', established in a context of shared action, rather than 'physical' in the Augustinian sense.²²

The apparent plausibility of Weddle's 'historical' interpretation of Edwards' view of unity is undermined, however, by a number of considerations. Weddle has evidently ignored such Edwardsean statements as 'the threatening and sentence were delivered to Adam as the *public head* and representative of his posterity.'²³

Weddle also overlooks the organic connection between Adam and the race which Edwards repeats over and again in the analogy of the tree. Characteristic is the following:

Particularly, if it had been the case, that Adam's posterity had actually, according to the law of nature, some how *grown out of him*, and yet remained *contiguous* and literally *united to him*, as the branches to a tree, or the members of the body to the head; and had all, before the fall, existed together at the *same time*, though in *different places*, as the head and members are in different places: in this case who can determine, that the Author of nature might not, if it had pleased him, have established such an *union* between the root and branches of this complex being, as that all should constitute *one* moral whole; so that by the law of union, there should be a communion in each *moral alteration*, and that the heart of every *branch* should at the same moment participate with the heart of the *root*, be conformed to it and concurring with it in all its affections and acts, and so jointly partaking in its state, as a *part of the same thing*?²⁴

Finally, Weddle's interpretation would appear to make Edwards teach Pelagianism. If man has no organic relation to Adam, then each man thereafter becomes another 'Adam' under probation who by similiar disobedience shares in the same 'context of action' as the first Adam, this personal sin providing the only basis for guilt. Such notions are wholly foreign to Edwards' Calvinism.

As Hodge points out, Edwards argues on the basis of the federal headship of Adam throughout much of his treatise. When,

²² David Weddle, 'Jonathan Edwards on Men and Trees, and the Problem of Solidarity', *Harvard Theological Review* 67(1974):165.

²³ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 183.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

however, Edwards comes to the chief objection to original sin and thus to the main reason for his writing, he reverts to realism.

It is only when in answer to the objection that it is unjust that we should be punished for the sin of Adam, that he enters on an abstruse metaphysical discussion on the nature of oneness or identity, and tries to prove that Adam and his posterity are one, and not distinct agents. It is, therefore, after all, realism . . . that Edwards for the time adopted.²⁵

Federalism and realism differ in a fundamental element, namely the wilful and actual sin of humanity in Adam's first transgression. Federalism denies the active participation of humanity in Adam's first sin.

It boldly repudiates every sense in which we really or actually sinned in Adam, and admits no other than merely the representative sense of a positive covenant. It says that the guilt of Adam's first sin, which was personally nobody's but Adam's own, is sovereignly imputed to his posterity. Depravity of nature is a part of the penalty of death, due to Adam's sin, and is visited on Adam's children purely as the penal consequence of the putative guilt they bear.²⁶

Realism, on the other hand, affirms the active participation of mankind in Adam's first sin.

It holds that God imputes the sin of Adam immediately to all his posterity, in virtue of that organic unity of mankind by which the whole race at the time of Adam's transgression existed, not individually, but seminally, in him as its head. . . . In Adam's free act, the will of the race revolted from God and the nature of the race corrupted itself.²⁷

With this distinction in mind, it becomes apparent that Hodge is correct in designating Edwards a realist. A review of the concluding paragraph of Edwards' discussion of imputation can only affirm this view. There he asserts that the original sin of Adam was committed with 'the full *consent* of the hearts of Adam's posterity to that first apostacy.'²⁸ Therefore, the guilt of the first sin is not posterity's merely because God imputes it to them, as in federalism, but guilt is imputed because the sin was truly posterity's sin, as in realism.

Over the course of this perennial debate, the arguments against realism have become fairly standardized. Certainly a major

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1981 rep.), II, 208.

²⁶ Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh, 1981 rep.), 341.

²⁷ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, N.J., 1907), 619.

²⁸ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 225.

objection to the position is how the individual members of the race can bear the guilt of a sin in which they themselves, as individuals, did not personally and voluntarily participate. Mankind in Adam was mere unindividualized human nature. Participation requires will, and will requires soul, of which there was only one in Adam. It is utterly ludicrous to assert that which has no existence, or only potential existence, can make a personal choice.

A second argument against realism is that it fails the analogy of Paul in Romans 5:12–19. Simply put, there is no realistic union between Christ and the justified. That is, there is no human nature specifically and numerically one in Christ which is individualized to those who receive Christ's righteousness. The parallelism between Adam and Christ having failed at this key point, it seems evident that realism has introduced into the analogy an incongruity which finds no justification in Paul.

Furthermore, the realist assumption that there is an 'elementary invisible substance' called human nature construed as specifically and numerically one in Adam is devoid of biblical support. It betokens the traducianist's embarrassing predicament of how to explain a divisible soul, as well as the question of why every man living today is not guilty of all the sins of his forebears as well as the sin of Adam, insofar as his soul and guilt are derived from them.

Edwards does not betray concern over any but the first of the aforementioned objections. It will be recalled that John Taylor had renounced the legitimacy of what John Murray terms 'vicarious sin'. For Taylor, sin must be voluntary to be justly imputed: 'A representative, the guilt of whose conduct shall be imputed to us, and whose sins shall corrupt and debauch our nature, is one of the greatest absurdities in all the system of corrupt religion.' It seems apparent that Edwards felt the force of Taylor's objection and was compelled to modify his understanding of the orthodox doctrine. The guilt imputed to mankind must be for that which all have chosen. As Foster says, Edwards

cannot accept the common view that men are charged with something which they have not done, any more than Taylor. Sin is imputed, he therefore says, but not in order to make it the sin of all men. It is imputed because it is the sin of all men, for they have committed it in Adam. Thus he extends his doctrine, excludes every sin but voluntary sin, and so gives fully to New England theology its first great distinguishing doctrine, that all sin consists in choice.²⁹

²⁹ Foster, *Genetic History of New England Theology*, 87.

Edwards thus attempted to provide for this key element of choice by means of his principle of personal identity.

Personal Identity

While discussing Weddle's 'historical' view of personal identity earlier, it was admitted that there is at least apparent plausibility to such a notion, for it alone can really provide the missing pieces to Edwards' puzzle. That is, it is only in terms of existing individuals living subsequent to Adam that true choice can be made in consent to Adam's first transgression. Shedd must dismiss Edwards' support of his own realism for just this reason.

Edwards argues that a *coexistence* of the posterity with the first parents, if conceded, would relieve the difficulties connected with the imputation of their sin. For this implies coagency, and this implies common responsibility.³⁰

After having surveyed Edwards' position, however, Shedd declares it 'defective, in that Edwards supposes a unity composed of *individual* persons aggregated together, instead of a single specific nature not yet individualized by propagation.'³¹

Under Weddle's interpretation, 'the relation between Adam and his descendents is . . . mediated through memory, rather than through biological processes.'³² This unity cannot owe to man's memory, since no one can admit a recollection of Adam. 'Ultimately, it is through the memory of God that all men are "recollected" as a unity.'³³ While this certainly admits of 'arbitrariness', without Adam as a representative or seminal head, man is regarded as a sinner simply because he is man. Under such a 'historical' view, 'Adam' is essentially generic man, or a type of the rebel each subsequently is in his own probation in history. Although this idea certainly does provide for the element of choice so important to Edwards, it circumvents the fact that Edwards never even intimates that Adam is generic man; rather, Adam is the personal root of the tree of mankind. Mankind cannot be said to have sinned in Adam unless Adam is generic man, which for Edwards he is not.

The dilemma is clear. Choice requires will, and will requires individual existence. The individual existence of all of mankind cannot be in one man. Given the terms of the argument, the

³⁰ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, (Minneapolis, 1979 rep.), IIA, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² Weddle, 'Jonathan Edwards on Men and Trees', 165.

³³ *Ibid.*

dilemma seems inescapable. Edwards can only resolve the conundrum by resorting to what might be termed a 'divinely decreed dialectic', or, in Edwardsean terminology, the juxtaposition of 'arbitrary divine constitution' and 'personal identity'.

As Hodge notes, 'the whole theory (of personal identity) resolves itself into the doctrine that preservation is continued creation.'³⁴ Edwards' doctrine of continual creation *ex nihilo*, so pivotal to his position, cannot be sustained, however, under careful scrutiny. First of all, the doctrine of continual creation defies the Reformed distinction between creation and preservation. Reformed theology has always reserved the idea of creation out of nothing for God's initial act of creation, and has insisted that since creation there can be no more nothingness. Continual creation *ex nihilo*, however, says that the world is perpetually falling out of existence into nothingness and being called back into existence again by momentary acts of divine creation. Berkouwer rebuts such a notion:

We must turn to the positive statements of Scripture in which we read of a creation out of nothing 'in the beginning', of the 'foundation' of the world, because of which 'nothingness' lies forever behind us. Through Divine sustenance the possibility of a nothingness into which the world could fall, be it for an atom of an instant, is absolutely excluded.³⁵

Continual creation out of nothing, then, confuses the basic Reformed distinction between creation and preservation.

Continual creation *ex nihilo* also denies the existence of substance. Nothing endures and nothing changes, despite the illusion to the contrary.³⁶ Being and nothingness thus become

³⁴ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 218.

³⁵ G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids, 1952), 61. A. A. Hodge (*Outlines of Theology* [New York, 1875], 205) defines preservation as 'that continued exercise of the divine energy whereby the Creator upholds all his creatures in being, and in the possession of all their inherent properties and qualities with which he has endowed them at their creation, or which they have subsequently acquired by habit or development' (emphasis added). This definition encapsulates the Reformed distinction between creation and providence (preservation) found in its most prominent confessional statements (cf., e.g., The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters IV and V).

³⁶ Modern physics has propounded this view, which is actually an ancient Buddhist notion. Martin Gardner (*The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* [New York, 1983], 318) writes: 'Maybe the points of space-time form a regular lattice, as Werner Heisenberg proposed; maybe they form a complex, spongy "foam", as John Wheeler suggests. In any case, when an object goes from here to there, when we go from here to there, the motion is an illusion, like the movements produced by flashing bulbs in an advertising sign, like the

indiscernible. Accordingly, 'God is the only substance in the universe. Everything out of God is a series of new effects; there is nothing which has continuous existence, and therefore there is no substance.'³⁷

It necessarily follows that if God is the only substance, he is the only agent in the universe. Since all things derive from nothing into something momentarily by the creative act of God, all is resolved into modes of God's efficiency. If God creates the soul anew each moment, so he must create its various states, thoughts, feelings, and volitions each moment. There is therefore no free agency, sin, or responsibility. The universe becomes a mere self-manifestation of God. Continual creation *ex nihilo* is thus essentially pantheistic.

It is evident that Edwards' doctrine of personal identity, based as it is on the erroneous doctrine of continual creation *ex nihilo*, ultimately becomes no identity at all. Moreover, the invocation of 'arbitrary divine constitution' does not improve the argument. Despite the fact that there can be no sameness of consciousness in an idea of continual creation *ex nihilo*, he has asserted that there is sameness of consciousness. Despite the fact that there can be no sameness of substance in continual creation *ex nihilo*, he has asserted that there is sameness of substance. The same can be said regarding all the other elements of the orthodox doctrine Edwards sought to defend, including sin, guilt, and responsibility. There is no

changes in color of cells on a television screen, or the movement of "life-forms" in John Conway's cellular automata game of Life. Nothing really goes from here to there, because between the points of space-time nothing exists. Every micro-second the moving object is being repeatedly created and destroyed. Our identity is nothing more than the preservation of a pattern as the points of space-time fluctuate in their states. In his essay "A New Refutation of Time", Jorge Luis Borges refers to an old Buddhist text which says that the entire universe, like the rapid succession of still pictures on a movie screen, annihilates itself and reappears, slightly altered to give the illusion of continuous change, 6.5 billion times a day.³

The relativity involved in process theism also founders on this Buddhist view of illusory reality. This discovery was pivotal in Royce Gruenler's abandonment of process thought. 'Process metaphysics denies that there is any substantial self underlying the process of ever-emerging occasions and, like Buddhism, affirms that the only reality is processing relativity' (Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God* [Grand Rapids, 1983], 18). 'A continuous series of substantially unrelated "I's" constitute the "person", with no enduring substantial self to remember the past or anticipate the future' (*Ibid.*, 19-20; see also 45-74). It is, therefore, not unexpected that Weddle should say, 'It is appropriate to relate EDWARDS' metaphysics of the "system of being" to WHITEHEAD'S cosmology of "actual occasions"' (Jonathan Edwards on Men and Trees', 157n.).

³⁷ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 219.

basic for guilt and pollution in the individual soul, because there is only an apparent and not a real connection between the present soul and that of a moment ago. As Hodge rightly says, 'this doctrine subverts all our ideas' and 'affords no satisfactory solution of the facts which it is intended to explain.'³⁸

When one stands back from the intricacies of Edwards' metaphysical argumentation, he finds that, in its simplest summation, Edwards' argument for the union of mankind is based on arbitrary divine constitution; that is, it is so because God so decreed. Edwards knew, of course, that an inquiring mind could not be satisfied with such a simplistic answer, so he tried to provide a more rational basis for why it is so. In so doing, however, he involved himself in a web of difficulties which only further complicated the matter and provided more material for objection. Even Edwards should have seen that appeal to arbitrary constitution cannot extricate one from faulty premises.

In working through the question, Edwards should have realized that the premise that mankind existed unindividualized in Adam could not be reconciled with the premise that sin and its imputation must be voluntary. Such an argument was destined for failure from the outset, despite Edwards' magnificent philosophical skill and despite appeal to divine fiat.

The watershed in Edwards' argument is really his acquiescence to Taylor's objection that the justice of the imputation of Adam's sin to mankind is contingent upon the participation of all in that sin. In other words, while Edwards did play lipservice to the idea of the federal headship of Adam, he for all intents and purposes relinquished that idea in his argumentation. It seems clear that he could not tolerate the concept of representative sin any more than his antagonist Taylor.

The representative principle is, however, critical to the argument and cannot be neglected. The principle runs throughout the Scriptures. When Abraham entered into covenant with God, involuntarily included in the arrangement was his posterity. His children were bound by the stipulations of the covenant, and shared in its promises and blessings. Disobedience must issue forth in judgments of famine, pestilence, or war upon adult and children alike. This is the case with the other covenants made throughout redemptive history. Jesus Christ is the representative of his people, and it is on that basis that his righteousness is imputed to them.

Realists admit that it is only in the case of Adam and his posterity that their postulate of specific unity holds true.³⁹ Edward says just this:

³⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II, 220.

'By reason of the established *union* between Adam and his posterity, the case is far otherwise between him and them, than it is between distinct parts or individuals of Adam's race; betwixt whom is no such constituted union.'³⁹ Nonetheless, it is incontrovertible that solidaric relationship exists in other institutions where the specific unity spoken of regarding Adam is not present at all. It is also irrefragable that responsibility inheres in such relationships upon all involved, regardless of whether that involvement is voluntary.

Moral responsibility devolves upon the members of a corporate entity by virtue of the actions of the representatives of the representative of that entity. Consequently the denial of the imputation of vicarious sin runs counter to the way in which the principle of solidarity operates in other spheres. And it is not valid to insist that vicarious sin can be imputed only when there is the *voluntary* engagement to undertake such imputation. Corporate relationship exists by divine institution and the corporate responsibilities exist and come to effect apart altogether from voluntary engagement on the part of the persons concerned to assume these responsibilities.⁴⁰

It is generally true that no man feels personal guilt or responsibility for the sin of Adam. Nonetheless, he is regarded by God as guilty. If Edwards wanted to designate this an 'arbitrary divine constitution', there can be no objection. Such a divine constitution is based, however, on the fundamental principle of representation, not realism, personal identity, the memory of God, or anything else. Just as Christ was a vicarious representative for the imputation of righteousness, so Adam was a vicarious representative for the imputation of sin, and this by divine, not human, analogy (Rom. 5:12-19). No other scheme can fit the facts.

It will be recalled that John Taylor had fulminated against just such an idea of vicarious sin as has here been presented. It is quite certain that a delineation of the scriptural principle of representation would not have dissuaded him from his antagonistic stance. Of course, it is not the responsibility of theology to convince men of the truth, but only to arrange the scriptural evidence in a systematic fashion. Notwithstanding, Edwards' apology would have been abetted had he remained consistent with the key principle of representation, and had he examined the presuppositions of Taylor.

It is apparent that Taylor had a rationalistic conception of God,

³⁹ Edwards, *Original Sin*, 225.

⁴⁰ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids, 1959), 35-6.

a perspective that required God to act according to human dictates. Edwards should have unveiled this critical error. It is not God's responsibility to answer to man, but man's to answer to God. God need not act in a way that condescends to man's understanding. In point of fact, however, the principle of representation operates throughout both general and redemptive history. History provides abundant evidence of the impact of the decisions of representative leaders or federal heads (not by any means all democratically elected) upon those represented. The fact is that Taylor wanted the benefits accruing from Christ's representation without assuming any of the obligation accruing from Adam's lapse.

Dabney suggests another fruitful line of thought which would have aided Edwards in his defence. Taylor's objection to the justice of punishing one for the sin of another presupposed the innocent existence of that other. The scenario is imagined in which a citizen keeps all the laws of his country and yet is, by some flaw in justice, convicted for the crime of another, thereby divesting him of his earned righteous standing and immunity. The imagined scenario is not parallel to the case of Adam, however, for the sinner fallen in Adam cannot approach the question as if he had been robbed of a righteous standing since *the sinner in Adam did not exist*.

For, previous to his condemnation in Adam, he has no personal, innocent existence, not for one moment, not even in any correct order of thought; for he has had no actual existence at all. He enters existence depraved, as he enters it guilty; he enters it guilty as he enters it depraved. This is the amount of his federal union with Adam; that the offspring shall have, *ab initio*, the same legal *status* and moral nature, which his head determined for himself, by his acts while under probation.⁴¹

This being wholly in accord with Scripture, the sinner is left without any pretext to complain that he has been stripped of his righteous standing or personal immunity by a flaw of justice.

Conclusion

Jonathan Edwards, in his defence of the orthodox doctrine of original sin, maintained the unity of man in Adam through arbitrary divine constitution of personal identity. Because he based his position on some conflicting and unscriptural premises, his innovative argument was a failure. Even a man of Edwards'

⁴¹ Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 350.

metaphysical acumen could not resolve the dilemma posed by pitting choice as a requirement for sin with the realistic position. A responsible choice in consent with Adam's rebellion is a manifest impossibility for unindividualized mankind in Adam. Edwards should not have acquiesced to the rationalistic presuppositions of Taylor, but instead should have maintained the biblical doctrine of representation, which alone can satisfy the scriptural evidence, to the ultimate chagrin of reason.