

THE SPIRIT OF GOD: A SOTERIOLOGICAL METAPHOR IN BIBLICAL HISTORY AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR US TODAY

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1. On method

This paper was prepared for a meeting of the South African Theological Society on the relation between Christ and the Holy Spirit. When it comes to inner-trinitarian relationships, Systematic Theology tends to hover off into the higher realms of metaphysical speculation. The rationale of the paper was to offer at least some biblical grounding for the ensuing discussions. On the one hand it attempts to give a bird's eye view of the biblical witness concerning the Spirit of God. On the other hand it asks some nasty methodological questions.

I have to explain the proposed method, therefore, before embarking on a lightning tour through 1000 years of biblical history. There are three related decisions to be taken in the regard. In the first place, I am opting against the reification of concepts and metaphors. Reification means that we transform a metaphor into a tangible entity in our imagination and then assume that it is part of the real world out there. But if we reify the metaphor of the "spirit" we are bound to misunderstand it.¹

Secondly I am opting against the popular approach of levelling all scriptural references to the Spirit of God, regardless of their historical contexts, and using these disparate pronouncements as building blocks for a unified doctrine.² Instead I shall try to do justice to the richness and situational relevance of the biblical witness by treating each tradition as a series of responses to concrete and changing constellations of needs.³ Because this approach is not common, the paper is based on original research into the biblical occurrences of the concept. The literature is only added to engage in some critical dialogue.

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1. "The metaphor will be misunderstood and misused if it is not recognised that the One named by the metaphor is not contained or comprehended by the noun ... Thus metaphor precludes the reification of any noun label for Yahweh." (Brueggemann 1997:230f).
 2. Not so long ago even exegetes followed the Mosaic and systematic rather than the evolutionary approaches. In Schweizer et al (1960), for instance, and again in Schweizer (1980) (though here in a more differentiated way), the different assertions about the Spirit, especially in the OT, are arranged regardless of their location in the history of traditions.
 3. Moltmann recognises the problem. "The meaning of the word is so complex, and the periods from which the relevant writings date are so widely separated, that it is impossible to find a simple semantic pattern for the word's usage, or to construct a single, unified concept for what is meant." (1992:40). So Moltmann embarks on a historical trajectory of the term through various Old Testament traditions (1992:39-57), but then he ends up with a unifying concept which also incorporates metaphors not related to the usage of the term itself, such as word, face, wisdom, covenant, etc. This is fine as long as one understands that these are alternative metaphors. Gaybba too offers a rudimentary trajectory of Old Testament pronouncements on the Spirit. In fact he traces the trajectory through the entire history of the Church up to the present (1987:3-115). However, in his passage on the New Testament Gaybba does "not attempt to trace stages in the development of beliefs about the Spirit. The New Testament period is too short" (1987:13) and "the subject is far too vast". So the systematician takes over. In Welker's otherwise outstanding book, the systematician is in control from the outset. To his credit he does not impose dogma, but paraphrases the biblical story. Yet it is a story constructed out of texts isolated from their historical trajectories and their changing situational and interpretative contexts and used like bricks in a building.

Finally I am opting for induction and against deduction. Deduction means that abstract concepts are taken as axioms from which inferences are drawn.⁴ This is the traditional method in Dogmatics, which it inherited from Greek philosophy. Induction means that the existential experiences underlying such metaphors and concepts are analysed. Because we live in a post-Enlightenment era that is, by and large, geared to an experiential criterion of truth, deduction is no longer an option and induction is no longer a luxury. Only induction leads us from metaphysics back to faith experiences - and that is what matters for the life of the community of believers.

What is experienced by believers in concrete terms, is the redemptive response of God to ever changing constellations of human need. That is what the proclamation of the “Word of God” is all about. It is not about God as such, Christ as such, the Spirit as such.⁵ The actual experience of need reveals the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be. Both what is and what ought to be are subject to human interpretation. Interpretation is derived partly from the theological tradition, partly from the impact of alternative frames of reference prevalent in the environment of the community.

As everything else in reality, human needs and patterns of interpretation emerge, evolve and disappear. So divine responses to these needs, that is, all concrete articulations of the “Word of God”, also emerge, evolve and fade away in human history. Theology is, therefore, the analysis of an evolutionary dynamic, rather than the construction of a system of propositions. An evolutionary dynamic again is bound to differentiate into various sub-streams.

This does not exclude systematic clarifications and the development of patterns of meaning derived from the historical material.⁶ Intellectual clarity is indispensable for the proclamation of the “Word of God” and its appropriation by faith. But the formulation of dogma is a consequence of the Word of God in action, not its constituent. Following ever-new constellations of experience and interpretation, it will be in constant flux. It will also move along ever-new tracks.

The hermeneutics appropriate for such a theology is to trace the trajectories of soteriological paradigms and metaphors, as they emerged and evolved in response to experienced needs during biblical times, and to extrapolate the thrust of these trajectories to the present as God's response to current human predicaments. This method has been spelt out and applied extensively in previous essays and in a forthcoming publication.⁷

2. The word ‘Spirit’ as a metaphor

The word “spirit” is a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech that uses an expression from ordinary life to describe another, often less tangible phenomenon, for instance, when a

4. An example of deduction from reified concepts is the idea that, because God is Father, Son and Spirit, the trinity is a community, and so human community becomes an image of the trinity. If that was the intention, the trinity should have been depicted as a family with father, mother and children, or as a state with social institutions. Indeed the virtual inclusion of Mary in the spirituality of some churches goes in this direction. But the concepts “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” have clear and demonstrable historical meanings that have nothing to do with a family. If one replaced “Son of God” with one of its synonyms, like “logos” or “image of God”, the argument would immediately collapse. As far as the biblical witness is concerned, the community that God has is with his people, not with himself.

5. Schweizer remarks that Jesus hardly ever spoke about the Spirit. He only spoke in the Spirit. He also hardly ever spoke about God. What he did was to proclaim and enact God's redemptive purposes (1980:47).

6. In this connection Welker's book is exemplary.

7. Nürnbergger (2002).

lover calls her beloved “honey”. To establish the intended referent of a metaphor is quite obviously of fundamental importance for the interpretation of a text.

The original meaning of spirit (Hebrew ruach, Greek pneuma) is wind or breath.⁸ Its prime metaphoric usage in both cultures is the human spirit.⁹ In the Old Testament the human spirit is again a metaphor for human power and purpose. It includes life, strength, insight, motivation, and courage. In Greek antiquity it also indicates the overarching constellations and movements in nature and history.

The human spirit can be directed, empowered, even flooded by God's Spirit, or misled by evil spirits. Evil spirits are not independent entities floating around in the air but detrimental mindsets of living people. According to some sources an evil spirit is not the Spirit of God but a spirit from God.¹⁰ The reason for insisting that even an evil spirit must be from God is that, for the Israelite faith, nothing can exist or happen which is not derived from God, the prime Source of reality.

3. The Spirit of God

The application of the metaphor of the spirit to God concentrates on (a) God's creative, enlightening, redeeming, transforming presence in this world¹¹ and (b) the gift of insight-giving experiences of this divine action.¹² Action means that power and purpose are applied to bring about specific processes.¹³ Its earliest manifestations are:

- Life as such. Here Gen 2:7 is the root of a long tradition: God breathes the breath of life (nismath chajim) into a lump of clay making it a living soul (nephesh chajah). In Gen 6:3 this breath of life is called God's Spirit (ruach). It is wrong, therefore, to posit an unbridgeable contrast between the Spirit of God and the human spirit.¹⁴
- Military leadership and prowess. This usage is prevalent in the traditions concerning Joshua, in Judges 11-15 and in connection with the leadership of Saul in 1Sam 11:4-7. Note that the transfer of the notion from the charismatic to the institutional (David's

8. The contrast between the original Hebrew and the original Greek concepts is not as far-reaching as often assumed. “The verbal noun pneuma denotes the elementary force of nature and life which - substance and process at the same time - is active as moving air in the gusts of wind as well as in the inhalation and exhalation of breath; derived from that, it is experienced as active in a metaphorical sense ... as the inspiring, fulfilling and enthusing breath of the spirit” (Kleinknecht in Kittel 1959:333).

9. For the following, cf Wolff (1974:57ff).

10. Schmidt and most others do not recognise the difference between these two formulations (1983:99).

11. “The Spirit of God is a creative, transforming power ... and its purpose is to create a sphere of religion and morals” (Schweizer 1960:1). Well, not necessarily so. “The spirit can bring about both the unusual, the miraculous, and also 'natural' life in its daily manifestations” (Schmidt 1983:99).

12. Moltmann points to the fact that what Christians mean when they speak of the “Holy Spirit” is “much more related to the idea of the Shekinah, the descent and indwelling of God in space and time, at a particular place and a particular era of earthly beings and in their history” (1992:47). “The Shekinah is not a divine attribute. It is the presence of God himself. But it is not God in his essential omnipresence. It is his special, willed and promised presence in the world” (1992:48). But 'essential omnipresence' is an abstraction from the Israelite conviction that Yahweh is the Source of everything that exists and happens in very concrete and specific terms. Every event is due to Yahweh's “intervention”, though in our eyes some may be more spectacular and focused than others.

13. Schmidt (1983:99). Gaybba speaks about “the powerful, mysterious way in which God acts and is present to us” (1987:5). This indeed links up with the experience of “something tempestuous or violent” (1987:6), but it does not exclude extraordinary gentleness in Yahweh's presence. To meet Elijah at Mount Horeb, Yahweh was not in the storm, the earth quake, the fire, but in a dim sound (1 Kings 19:12).

14. “The creative power of God is communicated to the beings he has created in such a way that in talking about ruach we are talking about the energy of their life too” (Moltmann 1992:42). But this does not allow us to deduce an implicit usage of the term Spirit of God in all the instances that refer to the human spirit as Moltmann is inclined to do.

dynasty) signifies the domestication of the extraordinary to legitimise permanent power and privilege (1 Sam 16:13).¹⁵

- Ecstatic experiences. For instance, Saul is caught up in ecstasy when among the “prophets” (1 Sam 19:23f). This ecstatic phenomenon is, of course, not the same as the office which began as that of “seers” (1 Sam 9:9) and then became the gift of extraordinary perception of God’s intentions.
- To this more general usage is added, in time, the criterion of God’s justice and righteousness (Is 32:15ff). Not only is all “flesh” without the Spirit of God feeble and fleeting like grass, but this is the case precisely because it is sinful (Ps 78:39; Ps 90:5; Is 31:3).¹⁶

It is important to note that when specific instances of God’s “intervention” are highlighted, this does not mean to say that Yahweh is not present and active under more “normal” circumstances. God is at work in all of reality. The biblical view of the general and the specific action of God can best be expressed in a picture. In the ocean water is found wherever you go, and it is everywhere in motion. At some places (for instance between rocks) there are more powerful currents than at others, but it is the same ocean and there is a continuum between the mellow and the tempestuous regions. For the biblical faith nothing can exist or happen without the immediate creative activity of God at all times and places and in all forms of energy.

4. The metaphor of the Spirit of God is theologically not essential

For a Christian theologian it is startling to discover that the metaphor of the Spirit of God can easily be replaced with alternatives within the biblical witness. God’s “Spirit” is one metaphor among others indicating God’s creative, redemptive and transformative presence in this world.¹⁷ Other metaphors expressing the same, or similar, sentiments are God’s name, God’s face, God’s glory, God’s word, God’s kingdom, God’s arm, but also fire, storm, life, light, temple, the sacraments, and so on.

The metaphor of God’s “Spirit” is remarkably underrepresented in most of the Old Testament and much of the New Testament - in contrast to other concepts such as the Word of God, the law, the ritual, as well as human agents of God such as the people of God, the community of believers, kings, priests, prophets, teachers, healers, and so on.¹⁸ The metaphor is also very unevenly distributed. Important traditions, such as Deuteronomy, Jeremiah and the Psalms, do not use it at all.

Traditions also use the concept with different meanings attached to it. Paul’s usage of the metaphor cannot easily be reconciled with that of the book of Judges. The common denominator is God’s active presence in the world. As such it is a dynamic concept as opposed to static concepts such as law, wisdom and ritual.

15. Gaybba (1987:6). “The ancient form of fighting (a holy war) gradually fell into disuse, because the professional army of mercenaries appeared in place of the levy of the whole nation, and the permanent institution of the ruler replaced the ad hoc call of the leader of the army” (Schmidt 1983:97). This transfer from charismatics to office bearers repeated itself first in the Catholic Church, then in the Protestant main line churches, which located God’s presence in the proclaimed Word, thus by implication in the ordained ministry.

16. Wolff (1974:49-56).

17. Brueggemann warns not only against reification but also against reductionism (1997:231) and speaks of the “sheer multiplicity and polyvocality of the nouns that are necessary in order to speak Yahweh fully and faithfully” (1997:262). The images are “fluid and porous” and there always “fresh images”.

18. It is indicative of this fact that Brueggemann enumerates the following mediators or the presence of Yahweh: torah, king, prophet, cult, and sage. The Spirit is missing. One could argue that Yahweh’s Spirit is implied in all mediation, but the Old Testament authors did not find it important to spell that out to any degree of consistency.

These findings force us to rethink the theology of the Spirit. Ruach is, in most cases, better translated as “life force” or “authority” than as “spirit”.¹⁹ Moreover, if “Spirit of God” is one metaphor among others, it is inappropriate to reify it and imagine that it refers to some concrete reality of its own out there. It is, therefore, also a mistake to conceptualise the Spirit as a hypostasis distinct from Yahweh, the God of Israel (or from the ‘Father’ and the ‘Son’). The Spirit is not a separate entity in heaven alongside God, or within God, but God’s creative, redemptive and transformative presence in human life and the world as a whole, culminating in, but not restricted to, the Christ event.

It is also wrong to postulate a contrast between divine and human spirit.²⁰ The Spirit is the life-giving, empowering, authorising, sanctifying, enlightening, transforming power of God which God gives and humans receive - in contrast either to the loss of power (death), or a wrong direction of life (flesh; error; sin; evil spirit).²¹ God’s Spirit does not compete with the human spirit, but creates, empowers and directs it. Note the parallel between the ancient mythological usage of the term in Gen 2, which says that without God’s breath of life we are all dust (creation), and the Pauline tradition, which says that without God’s Spirit we are all flesh and destined to die in sin (recreation).

5. The wider soteriological framework is foundational for the concept

This insight has a methodological implication. If we want to understand what the “Spirit of God” is meant to express in the biblical witness, we first have to analyse the wide variety of soteriologies found in the biblical witness as a whole, whether the metaphor of the Spirit is utilised in each case or not. Where it is not used, another metaphor will be found in its place. This fact prevents us from reifying and absolutising a particular concept.

Depending on the constellation of needs, its interpretation and the interests of the believers concerned, the response of faith to these needs can go in four directions: either stability or change, either authority or insight. This again leads us to four distinct conceptualisations of what ought to be. Kindly note that this scheme will be used consistently in subsequent paradigms: the central field represents experienced reality, the other four fields represent what reality ought to be:

- Top: a celestial realm (space) to which we have to look up. Let us coin a new concept for this approach, namely ‘ouranology’ (from Greek ouranos = heaven).
- Right: a wholesome future to which we have to move (eschatology).
- Left: a wholesome past to which we have to return (protology).
- Bottom: the hidden essence of things that we have to uncover (ontology).

In the biblical witness authentic reality is characterised by God’s power and purpose working in and through his creatures.²² Unauthentic reality is characterised by a rupture in this relationship, so that the human being is seen as merely created, autonomous, rebellious, drawn by desires, enslaved by autonomous cosmic powers, placed under the law of God, judged, condemned and cursed by God. But the human being is only the centre of the

19. Wolff (1974:62, 78).

20. Probably under the spell of Barth’s theology, Schweizer constantly refers to the Spirit as an “irruption” or a “breaking in” of an “alien power” (e.g. 1980:57f, 66, 117). That is hardly appropriate. There is indeed a conflict between God’s redemptive purposes and human sin. But the Spirit is only strange to the human being who is estranged from God.

21. Wolff (1974:60ff).

22. Brueggemann speaks of some instances of Yahweh’s unmediated presence (1997:568), but closer inspection reveals that there is no such thing. Whatever can be seen, heard, smelt, or felt - whether a cloud, a fire, a burning bush, a visitor, an ecstatic experience - refers to inner-worldly occurrences or objects.

created world as a whole which, in later traditions, is out of step with God's intentions and due to be transformed.

Salvation means a restoration of God's relation with the universe in general, and with human beings in particular. The goal is the comprehensive well-being of all humans in the context of the comprehensive well-being of their entire social and natural contexts (shalom, kingdom of God). The implication is that any deficiency in well-being in any dimension of life is a manifestation of the rupture between Creator and creature and thus the target of God's redemptive concern.

6. Two foundational traditions

There are at least two foundational soteriological tradition found in the Old Testament. The first, and more ancient, is the Old Israelite (Ephraimite - or Northern) assumption that Yahweh has made a covenant with a clan head, a group of tribes, and eventually a nation. Israel was chosen from all nations to be Yahweh's people. This implies that Yahweh would look after Israel and Israel would bear witness to Yahweh by manifesting and making known his redemptive intentions, concretely formulated in the Torah. The Spirit of God does not figure prominently in this paradigm. Because things did not always go as well as could be expected, two further conclusions were arrived at:

- Yahweh moves from promise to fulfilment. Both promise and fulfilment are perceived to be located within human history.
- Predicaments (patriarchal problems, Egyptian enslavement, desert experiences, foreign oppression, economic hardships) are due to Yahweh's punishment for Israel's sin. Repentance will put the original intentions of God back on track. God acts to liberate, settle and prosper his people.

The second foundational tradition found in the Old Testament is the Judaic (originally Egyptian) assumption that the Deity channels his will, his blessing and his judgment through the king as his representative and plenipotentiary on earth. The following package of assumptions belongs to this paradigm:

- God has created a well functioning universe, the cosmic order. This includes the moral, social and natural dimensions of life.
- When something goes wrong, the cosmic order must have been violated. Moral trespasses can, therefore, lead to defeat in battle, diseases or natural disasters.
- To restore the order, one has to submit to the authority God has instituted and find one's place in the established order.

The royal ideology is imperialistic and totalitarian (Psalm 2). The Israelite king is entitled to subjugate and dominate the entire world. Being the people of God, the Israelites are entitled to the special privileges of a ruling elite.

In this paradigm the Spirit is granted to the designated king (David) by the prophetic word and the ritual of anointment (1 Sam 16:13). The Spirit of God can be taken away and replaced with an evil spirit from God as in the case of Saul (1 Sam 16:14). But even in this paradigm the role of the Spirit is neither dominant nor prominent. Psalm 2, the locus classicus of the paradigm, can do without it altogether, as can its more elaborate version in Psalm 89. The adoption of the king as "Son", that is, as his representative and plenipotentiary on earth, takes the place of his inspiration by the Spirit.

In fact, reference to the Spirit in this paradigm seems to be a spill-over from another paradigm, namely the authorisation of a charismatic military leader, as found in the Book of Judges. The first king, Saul, was not much different from these charismatics.

It may be mentioned at this stage that the metaphor of God's Spirit plays no role in the Psalms at all. This is surprising because this is the part of the tradition where the hearts of Israelite-Jewish believers speak to their God and where it would be expected most. Having put in place a basic framework, let us now go into the different traditions.

7. Yahwist and Elohist

For quite some time Old Testament scholarship believed that the Yahwist is the oldest of the sources of the Pentateuch. To me this assumption is still more plausible than an exilic dating. One of the outstanding contentions of the Yahwist is that all nations will be blessed through Israel.²³ Without doubt the creation narrative used by the Yahwist as an introduction to his account of sinful human history (Gen 2:4ff) is very ancient.²⁴ Its contention that Yahweh forms the human being out of the dust of the ground and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7) has become the seed of a long and varied tradition. Already in Gen 6:3 the ancient text is transformed: "breath of life" becomes "Yahweh's Spirit" and "dust of the ground" becomes "flesh".

In the Elohist we find the following typical formulations:²⁵

- The "Spirit of God" (*ruach elohim*). This spirit is the gift of the special ability or nobility that occurs in a gifted person.²⁶
- The prophetic strain that interprets "spirit" as the spirit of prophecy.²⁷
- The "God of the spirits of all flesh". This phrase wants to say that God knows all humans in and out.²⁸

8. Deuteronomy and pre-exilic prophecy

During the period of the two kingdoms, the Israelite tradition was dominant in the North, while the Judaic tradition was dominant in the South. With the demise of the Northern Kingdom in 721 BCE, the Northern tradition came to Jerusalem in the form of the Deuteronomic tradition. Its powerful argument combines the covenant-law paradigm with the exodus-conquest paradigm: obey God's law and be blessed; disobey and be cursed

23. For the older interpretation, which locates the Yahwist in the Solomonic era, see Wolff in Brueggemann & Wolff (1982:41ff).

24. Note its consistently mythological or metaphorical character: God moulds the male out of clay and the female out of the rib of the man, plants a garden, takes a walk in the cool of the evening, does not find Adam. There is a tree of life and another tree to reveal good and evil; a snake symbolises temptation; nakedness symbolises guilt; mythological figures (Cherubim) and a self-propelled sword of flames guard the access to the garden. Later traditions, such as the election of Israel, covenant and law, exodus and conquest, king and empire, priests and sacrifices, are not even alluded to. Nor is there any trace of Babylonian, Persian or Hellenistic patterns of thought.

25. For the older interpretation of the message of the Elohist see Wolff in Brueggemann and Wolff (1982:67ff).

26. Examples are Joseph as the interpreter of dreams (Gen 41:38); Bezalel as the gifted craftsman (Ex 31:3); Moses and his assistants (Nu 11:16-17; 24-25a); Caleb who has "a different spirit" because he follows Yahweh; Joshua as the competent leader of the conquest. Note how Nu 27:20 ("give him some of your authority") is linked to Nu 27:18 ("in whom is the spirit").

27. Nu 11:25b and 26-29 seem to be the interpolation of an ecstatic school. Nu 11:29, which interprets "some of the spirit of Moses" as "Spirit of Yahweh" may not belong to the original. Nu 11:25c is a priestly correction or refutation of the ecstatic school. According to Nu 24:2ff the Spirit of God comes upon Balaam and he has to bless Israel.

28. In Nu 16:22 the implication is: God knows the kind of spirit that is in all flesh and should be forgiving. In Nu 27:16-18 the implication is: God knows the spirits of all people and thus who would be the most competent new leader.

(Deut 30:15)! The royal paradigm is reconceptualised and incorporated in the context of the law. The concept of God's Spirit does not appear in Deuteronomy at all.

Due to the injustices, idolatry and oppression perpetrated by the kings, the prophets projected the royal-imperial paradigm into the future. Not the present incumbent of the throne but the "real" king, who will be sent by God in the not too distant future, will bring God's vision to fulfilment. The expectation of a genuine king developed into messianism. Apart from the messianic paradigm, prophecy followed the covenant-law (or sin-repentance) paradigm. As the political and economic situation deteriorated, the emphasis on the law became increasingly powerful.

The Spirit plays a surprisingly insignificant role in pre-exilic prophecy.²⁹ Amos and Hosea have nothing to say on God's Spirit. The Prince of Peace in Is 9 is not associated with the Spirit, but the Spirit of Yahweh rests on the shoot of Jesse in Is 11:2. This refers to the royal tradition. Is 32:15 speaks of "a spirit from on high" which will bring about new life, prosperity, justice and peace.³⁰ Jeremiah took Deuteronomy as his frame of reference. So the Spirit plays no role in Jeremiah. Micah is an exception: he associates the Spirit of Yahweh with patience for those who walk uprightly and with the prophetic authority to proclaim Israel's transgressions (Mic 2:7; 3:8). In general, the prophets claimed to receive the Word of Yahweh (*dabar*) directly from God. This is an alternative metaphor to that of the gift of the Spirit.³¹

9. Deuteronomistic orthodoxy

With the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE and the exile, the prophetic-deuteronomistic interpretation of the demise of Israel and Judah (= Yahweh's punishment for Israel's sin) became Jewish orthodoxy. The message is clearly: only through repentance can the history of salvation continue.³² As is typical for theologies based on the moral law, this tradition has no use for the Spirit of God. There are hardly any references to the Spirit of God in deuteronomistic history, except where the authors utilised older material. Let us look at the detail.

There is no mention made in Joshua of the Spirit, although here, of all places, it could have been expected. In Judges an older tradition is utilised prolifically which uses the Spirit of Yahweh as the gift of military prowess and leadership (Judg 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14; cf 1Sam 11:6ff in respect of Saul) or of physical strength (Samson Judg 14:6; 15:14), or of the gift of direction and determination as opposed to uncertainty and anxiety.³³

The gift of the Spirit is used by the deuteronomist historian as an alternative to a king being anointed (1Sam 10:1); or a prophet being called into the ministry. There is an ecstatic streak that is not taken too seriously. In 1Sam 10:12 Saul is overcome by the ecstasy of a band of prophets and becomes a laughing stock as a result.

29. Gaybba attributes this to the fact that these prophets "clearly wished to avoid being confused with the ecstatic prophets of old" (1987:8). Yes, but they also claimed to receive direct and clear messages straight from Yahweh.

30. Gaybba (1987:7).

31. Moltmann (1992:44).

32. For the message of the deuteronomist see Wolff in Brueggemann (1982:83ff).

33. For Saul, see Gerstenberger (2001:107f).

The “Spirit of Yahweh” stands in marked contrast to an “evil spirit from God”.³⁴ The departure of Yahweh's Spirit is a parallel to having a depression, leadership uncertainty, or losing battles, all of which amount to falling out of Yahweh's favour. In one instance the “Spirit of Yahweh” is understood as the impartation of truth. In David's last words, “the Spirit of Yahweh speaks through me” (2Sam 23:2). Here it is a parallel to the “Word of God”, also to be exalted by God or being his anointed (23:1). The content of the divine utterance is that God blesses a just ruler.

There is almost no reference to the Spirit of God in connection with the classical prophets Elijah and Elisha, except implicitly (the Spirit will carry you elsewhere 1Kgs 19:12; 2 Kgs 2:16) - which is more an act of power than a gift of discernment. But the metaphor of the spirit as an expression of competence is found where Elisha asks for a “double share of your spirit” from Elijah (2Kgs 2:9). What is interesting in this usage is that, while Yahweh himself came down and took some of the spirit of Moses and gave it to the elders in Num 11:17ff - Elohists), Elijah here is understood to have the power to give of his spirit.

10. Reactions against deuteronomic orthodoxy

Deuteronomic theology proclaimed a hopeless message: Israel has to suffer the punishment of God for its sin. In time, counter-interpretations of the fate of Israel emerged. There are two kinds of this reaction, one dynamic, one static. The dynamic (future oriented) versions include: the creative power of God in Deutero-Isaiah, the idea of a new heart in Ezekiel and the divine master plan in Apocalyptic writings.

The static versions include the cosmic purity system in the Priestly Source, the law-righteousness paradigm of the rabbinic school, the concern for existential authenticity in Wisdom literature and the incomprehensibility of God in Job. Let us look at some of these instances in greater detail.

11. Exilic and post-exilic prophecy

Deutero-Isaiah uses the metaphor to show that God can do new things: the Spirit of Yahweh is sovereign and creative (Is 40:13). Cyrus, the Persian king, is anointed and endowed with the Spirit and used to fulfil God's purposes (Is 42:1; 45:1; 44:28; 48:14). This again is coupled with the expectation that he would bring justice to the nations. Note that the metaphor of the Spirit is used only once in connection with Cyrus (42:1). But the Spirit is also given to the prophet to make his announcements (Is 48:16) and promised to the people for their general upliftment (Is 44:3).

In Ezekiel the Spirit figures very prominently. Here it is mainly the Spirit that grants prophetic visions. Note the phrases “the Spirit set me upon my feet” (2:2; 3:24) or “lifted me up” (3:12, 14; 8:3 11:1, 24; 43:5). But there is also the promise that the Spirit will be poured out over the whole people of Israel, replacing a heart of stone with a heart of flesh, with the result that they will keep the law (Ez 36:27); or the promise that life will be restored to dry bones (37:14); or that Israel would be brought back into his presence in their own land (39:29). Note the free change of metaphors.

34. In Judges 9:23 God sends an evil spirit between Abimelech and Shechem - with the redemptive intentions of saving Israel! In 1Sam 16:14 the Spirit of Yahweh departs from Saul (not referring to the prophetic gift but to the military leadership and an evil spirit from Yahweh pesters him. Again God ostensibly has redemptive intentions, namely that David might ascend to the throne. In 1Kgs 22:21-24) Yahweh's spirit has departed from the false prophet Zedekiah and he has received a “lying spirit from God”. In 2Kgs 19:7 King Hezekiah is comforted: Yahweh puts a spirit of rumour into the king of Assyria and he returns to his land.

In Trito-Is (Is 61:1) the Spirit is given to the prophet to proclaim good news to the poor - the famous text quoted in Luke 4:18). In Is 63:10-14 it is also claimed that God gave early Israel Yahweh's "holy ~Spirit" and that the "Spirit of Yahweh" gave them rest, but subsequently the Israelites rebelled and grieved it.

A seminal pronouncement is found in Joel 2:28f, namely that Yahweh will "pour out his Spirit upon all flesh", eradicating all privileges and distinctions based on office, seniority or class.³⁵ It echoes the expectation of Jeremiah that, when Yahweh establishes a new covenant with Israel, all Israel, from the least to the greatest, will know him and nobody will have to be taught (Jer 31:33f).

12. The priestly source

The most powerful post-exilic traditions are those of the Priestly Source (P), rabbinic piety and apocalyptic expectations. The Priestly Source is the manifesto of the restoration in Jerusalem under Persian rule. It reflects a situation in which a religious satrapy is allowed to establish itself under Persian hegemony. We note the following characteristics of this soteriology.³⁶

The paradigm of the ruler presiding over the cosmic order provided the basic model, but the king was replaced by a high priest. As soon as political circumstances allowed, the priesthood changed into royalty. The stability of the system had to rely on internalised assumptions and norms rather than political power. Not David but Moses - the great law giver - became the prototype of authentic leadership. The trouble Moses had with a rebellious people in the desert became the paradigm for the dissatisfaction of the common people. The promise of the land, autonomy and abundant blessing is given to those who obey.

Since stability, not change, was in the interests of the elite, eschatology changed into protology. The sacred order in Jerusalem was declared to be a reflection of the cosmic order pre-existent in heaven and established in creation. Because income and control of the priesthood had to rely on sacrifices rather than tributes or taxes, the emphasis shifted from moral righteousness to ritual purity. A massive exploitative system evolved.

According to P, the act of creation entails the construction of the cosmic order that underpins the cult. P mentions the Spirit of God as a latent presence brooding over the abyss in its protology (Gen 1:2), but it plays no role in creation nor in the cult for that matter. The metaphor preferred by P for God's creative activity is the performative decree of an ANE emperor: God commands something to happen and it happens (Gen 1).³⁷ Not surprisingly, however, the Spirit manifests itself in the artistic ingenuity of those who manufacture sacred utensils (Ex 31:3; 35:31).

Negatively, we note that the Spirit is not attached to prophecy (that is abandoned) nor to the law (that is given by Moses and administered by the priest). Moses is given tablets of stone, where the law is engraved once and for all, not the Spirit of God so as to discern the truth for himself. According to the law-inspired sources (Deuteronomy and P) God speaks directly to the prophets as he had spoken to Moses. Here the Word is an alternative to the Spirit.

35. According to Moltmann "all flesh" includes "the whole breadth of creation" (1992:57).

36. For the message of P see Brueggemann in Brueggemann & Wolff (1982:101ff).

37. Green remarks that in the Old Testament the Spirit "is hardly ever connected with creation", apart from its life-giving function (1975:28f). But even the latter is not true for P. As Green correctly states, in Ps 33:6 the "breath of his mouth" refers to the Word of God. Unfortunately Green does not distinguish between different traditions. Nor do Schweizer et al.

13. Other postexilic traditions

Ezra says nothing about the Spirit. Nehemia says that God gave his people his good Spirit to instruct them (9:20) and warn them through the prophets (9:30). Chronicles mentions the Spirit three times in the form: “the Spirit of God came upon him” to pronounce an insight (truth, prophesy or law).

Wisdom literature praises the use of observation and reason rather than inspiration. Wisdom is personified as the protological means of creation, similar to the Word of God in the Priestly Source. This double tradition is later utilised in the prologue to John's Gospel. Wisdom literature and poetry fall back on the idea that the Spirit gives life and understanding (Job 27:3; 32:8, 18; 33:4 34:14; Ps 51:11; 104:3; 139:7; 143:10; Wisd 9:17; Sir 39:6). Wisdom of Solomon picks up the motif that God created and filled the world with his Spirit. The Spirit that holds everything together knows what sinners say and there is no escape (Wisd 1:7; cf Ps 139:7). Some traditions such as Qohelet omit the paradigm.

We come to the main theologies of the inter-testamentary period. Under Persian influence the Israelite promise-fulfilment paradigm changed into the historical dualism of Apocalypticism. It concentrates on eschatology. The world is headed for cosmic transformation. This age will pass away, the age to come is imminent. The community of the enlightened prefigure the age to come in their community. The Spirit plays no explicit role in this transformation.

This is in stark contrast to the Hellenistic matter-spirit dualism that influenced much of Judaism with the onset of Macedonian rule, especially in the diaspora. Hellenism is interested in timeless essence, 'eternity' in contrast to history, 'spirit' in contrast to 'matter'. Its extreme development is found in Gnosticism.³⁸ Here the metaphor of the Spirit assumes an entirely new meaning, namely authenticity versus inauthenticity. This can be combined with the Hebrew motifs that humans are flesh and God is spirit. We shall come back to that below.

The Rabbinic school concentrated on a meticulous interpretation and observance of the moral and the ritual law in full view of a celestial court. In this respect it is the heir of deuteronomic and priestly schools. Where it moves into eschatology, however, the key assumption is the last judgement, rather than the restoration of Israel, or the transformation of the world. The last judgement will bring the individual moral agent to book. This will happen not in the eschatological future, but after death. Both reward and punishment have become timeless, thus eternal. There is thus an affinity between the rabbinic and the Hellenistic schools of thought.

As in all soteriologies based on the law, the Spirit does not seem to play a prominent soteriological function in this school. However, the Spirit is the author of the canonical writings. As such it has since departed from Israel. It would have been the reward for a life in obedience, but Israel forfeited this gift. So it will be a possession of the coming Messiah and the ransomed righteous. It is often personified, without therefore becoming a hypostasis of its own - which is an idea foreign to Jewish thought.³⁹

14. The soteriology of early Christianity

Under Roman rule the political and economic situation of the Jews gradually deteriorated, sparking off a mood of rebellion against oppression and exploitation. This mood expressed

38. See Schweizer et al (1960:18ff).

39. Schweizer et al (1960:7ff). For a more detailed overview of “Intertestamental Judaism”, and especially the impact of Greek thought on Jewish thought, see Schweizer (1980:29ff).

itself in messianic-eschatological expectations. There are essentially two versions. On the one hand, there was the Prince-of-Peace tradition that was followed by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers. This is borne out by the unarmed but jubilant entry of Jesus and his followers into Jerusalem and the subsequent cleansing of the temple. On the other hand there was the military version that led to the Jewish revolt and the Jewish war.

The Jesus movement ended up in the crucifixion of Jesus. Early Christianity is a response to the crisis sparked off by this traumatic experience. The ancient messianic expectations had been revitalised by the ministry of Jesus, but dismally disappointed through the execution of this promising leader. Whatever the historical experiences that lie behind the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ, they had the effect of rekindling these expectations. In his resurrection God had confirmed his messiahship. All titles accorded to Jesus by the early church are royal-messianic titles. The death of Christ now became an intermediate episode of highest soteriological significance: following Is 53, his death was understood as a death “for us”. Where sacrificial imagery was applied to this death, it became a death “for our sins”.

To proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, early Christians utilised the old tradition of the authorisation and empowerment of the king as God’s representative on earth (Ps 2). There are a number of versions:

- (a) The gift of the Spirit happened at his baptism. Here it underscores the adoption of Jesus by God as his “Son” (utilising the motif found in Ps 2:7).
- (b) The same motif appears in the narrative of the transfiguration, but without reference to the Spirit (Mk 9:2ff par). Instead there is a vision of ancient figures representing the Torah and prophecy, a light, a cloud, a voice - all ancient elements of the tradition.
- (c) Following the LXX reading of Is 7:14, the wording of Ps 2:7 (the king is the “begotten” Son of God) is transferred from the ritual of enthronisation to the conception of Christ by a virgin. The conception is attributed to the creative power of the Spirit of God (Mt 1:18ff; Lk 1:35).⁴⁰
- (d) Jesus is heir to the throne because he is the legitimate descendent of David, the heir of the messianic promise. This is expressed in the two genealogies of Matthew and Luke. Here the Spirit plays no role.
- (e) Jesus was son of David according to the flesh and designated Son of God (= cosmic ruler) according to the Spirit. The latter only happened at his resurrection (Rom 1:3f).

These occurrences are alternative expressions of the same motif, namely Christ as “Son of God”, that is, the true messianic representative and plenipotentiary of God. While they cannot be harmonised with each other, they refer to the same content. An alternative tradition, derived from Daniel 7:13ff and used profusely in the Synoptic Gospels, is the motif of the “Son of Man” who comes with the clouds and is authorised by God to rule over the universe. The metaphors “Son of God”, “Son of David” and “Son of Man” have exactly the same meaning. None of them is inextricably linked with the Spirit. This shows that neither in the Old nor in the New Testament the metaphor of the Spirit is an indispensable part of the messianic tradition.

Jesus is proclaimed as the Messiah who will soon come in glory to establish the universal kingdom of Israel. However, the scope of the latter is widened. Not Jews as such but believers in Christ are now considered to be the true people of God. Whether Jews,

40. Understanding the virgin birth in biological terms leads to biological nonsense and theological heresy (Nürnberg 1975:350ff). According to Schweizer and others the virgin birth of great men was a common pagan motif at the time and is not very apt in clarifying the true meaning of the Spirit in Christ (1980:53ff).

Gentiles, priests, ascetics, slaves or women, they are all “saints”.⁴¹ For the period between the resurrection and the second coming of Christ the early church followed a soteriology of discipleship. Christ is the prototype of a Christian life. The disciples live authentic lives in following Christ and this assures them of survival in the expected last judgment.

As time went on, three trends made themselves felt in the nascent Christian tradition. The first was depoliticisation. This is due to the crisis of the crucifixion, the horrors of the Jewish revolt and recurring persecutions. Apparently God did not want to bring about his new world through violent means. The first manifestation of this trend is the claim that Jesus was innocent in terms of his court case, that his condemnation was due to Jewish denunciation and that the Romans were guilty of a miscarriage of justice. Its other manifestations are: eschatologisation (Paul), communalisation (Paul, Luke), spiritualisation (Dt-Paulines); ritualisation (Hebr); existentialisation (John).

The second trend was de-eschatologisation. The transfer of the scene from time to space, thus from the future to the present, is due to the delay of the second coming of Jesus as the expected Messiah. His reign shifts from an eschatological future to a celestial space, from transformation to authority. The beginning of this shift can already be observed within the Pauline corpus (from 1 Thess to Phil) and comes into full fruition in the Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Letters. Luke shifts the emphasis to the mission of the church, Hebrews to the ritual, John to existential decision.

The third trend was a shift towards protology. Here the scene moves from the end to the beginning. Wherever the point of reference is a primeval structure which was supposed to be “very good”, the leading interest is stability, consolidation and reassurance of the foundations of life. Applied to Christ it is found in Colossians, Ephesians (where it is also applied to the believers), Hebrews, the prologue to John's Gospel and 1 John. All these sources are late.

15. Paul

For Paul the basic framework is the contrast between flesh and spirit, which is the anthropological dimension of the (apocalyptic) difference between this age and the age to come. Both signify power spheres, the existing world and the transformed world. The age to come will be one in which God's creative and salutary activity permeates the whole of reality granting life, justice and fulfilment. While eschatology is emphasised, there is also a celestial dimension in his soteriology. According to Paul, Christ was sent into the flesh; died to the flesh and rose into the celestial sphere, or the new age, or “the new creation”. All of this is called the “Spirit”. Cross and resurrection mark the great turning point between the ages, the inception of what ought to be in the eyes of God.⁴²

The historical Jesus, that is, the Jesus of the flesh, is irrelevant except for the fact that he overpowered the flesh through his death and resurrection (2 Cor 5:16f). According to an early formulation used by Paul, it is through resurrection that Christ was declared to be the Son of God, that is, the plenipotentiary of God (Rom 1:3; 2 Cor 13:4; cf 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18). Here the motif of the “Son of David”, which originally had the same meaning as the motif of the adopted “Son of God”, is relegated to the flesh, probably because the new community was no longer to be built up on royal genealogies and ethnic privileges but on faith.

41. “The Spirit becomes the power which bestows status and takes the place of genealogical descent ... This procreation through the Spirit interrupts the genealogy (of Jesus) ... all Christians owe their status as ‘sons of God’ ... to the Spirit” (Theissen 1999:109f).

42. Schweizer et al (1960:57).

Of particular interest in this connection is Paul's contrast between the first Adam, who became a "living soul" when God "breathed the breath of life into his nostrils", and Christ, the "second Adam", who became a "life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:45). In Rom 5:12-21 this juxtaposition is specified again as the contrast between sin and righteousness.

Salvation comes about when believers, whoever they may be, identify with the death of Jesus (and participate in it by mortifying fleshly motives), identify with the new life of the risen Christ (by serving righteousness rather than sin) and anticipate the eschatological transformation and the coming glory (Rom 6:11; 8:11). This identification is a constant struggle to reject the claim of the flesh and yield to the claim of the Spirit (Rom 6:12ff), a struggle that will only come to an end when we die physically and rise as Christ has risen (Phil 3:12-14; Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5).

The Spirit must, therefore, be seen not as a permanent possession, but as a provisional gift in anticipation of the eschatological future that will be reached only through death and resurrection (Rom 8:23).⁴³ This is also why the risen Christ is depicted by Paul as the "coming Lord", while the Spirit is already here as a first instalment. The new age is still to come; at present we only taste its reality in faith and hope, that is in anticipation (1 Cor 13:8-13).

It would be a mistake to deduce from this eschatological proviso that the risen Christ and the Spirit are two separate entities.⁴⁴ The Spirit is the new life of the risen Christ manifesting himself in the community of believers. In fact, it is the Spirit of Christ redemptively active in the Body of Christ. Therefore Paul can say that "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17ff; cf 1 Cor 15:45), that the Spirit-driven community is "the Christ" (1 Cor 12:12), that we are "in Christ", or "Christ in us", which is synonymous with being "in the Spirit", or being "driven by the Spirit", that who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to him (Rom 8:9).⁴⁵

Paul can also speak, in the same breath, of the Spirit of "him who has raised Christ from the dead" (Rom 8:11), of the Spirit of Christ, of the Spirit of the Son (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6), of the Spirit of faith (2 Cor 4:13) and of the love of God which has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). These statements all refer to the same thing: God's redemptive presence in Christ among those who share in the new life of the risen Christ (Rom 7:6), whom the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).⁴⁶

The manifestation of the reality of the new life of Christ in the Spirit is the concrete evidence of the righteousness of Christ in the community. The Spirit is active in the desire to build up the community in love (1 Cor 12-14; Rom 11:19). Paul believes that the Torah cannot bring about the renewal of human motivations.⁴⁷ Note that while the flesh produces works - humans are on their own in their sin - the Spirit produces fruit, like a good tree (Gal 5:19, 22).⁴⁸ The Spirit allocates different tasks and empowers people to fulfil these tasks. These are called "gifts of the Spirit" (*charismata*). In this connection old traditions are retrieved: ecstasy (speaking in tongues is allowed but discouraged in public because it does

43. Schweizer et al (1960:64).

44. Kümmel (1972:149).

45. The identification of Christ with the Spirit in 1 Cor 15:45 is by no means unique, as Moltmann assumes (1992:67). And certainly there are no "two personalities" here as Schweizer et al formulate it (1960:60).

46. Once one has understood this, the questions whether the Spirit emanates from God or from Christ, and whether it is understood in dynamistic or in animistic terms (Conzelmann 1967:55) become irrelevant.

47. The Torah cannot bring about this internalisation of the divine will; only the Spirit can" (Theissen 1999:167).

48. This is not only a difference between legal precepts and the motivation of love (Conzelmann 1967:305, but see also 311), but a difference between human frailty and divine empowerment.

not serve the community); prophecy (which is the gift of actualising the Word of God); healing; good governance; wisdom; etc.⁴⁹

But ecstatic phenomena were so common in the pagan world of the time that Paul had to establish a criterion for the Spirit, namely the confession of Jesus as Lord (1 Cor 12:1-3), who empowers the community as his Body (12:4ff).⁵⁰ But Jesus is only to be known as the crucified (1 Cor 2:2). The cross of Christ is, therefore, the ultimate criterion for the true power of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:1-8).⁵¹ And the prime criterion of an authentic gift of the Spirit is that it serves the common good (1 Cor 12:7); that it is an expression of love (1 Cor 13:1ff); that it builds up the community; that it does not scandalise fellow believers (1 Cor 3:9ff; 8:1; 14:2-12, 14:16-19, 26).⁵²

Speaking in tongues is considered by certain denominations as the pivotal sign of being “filled with the Spirit”. The texts hardly justify this contention.⁵³ Speaking in tongues seems to have been restricted to the congregation at Corinth.⁵⁴ While Paul does not discourage it, he has grave reservations. The gift is not mentioned in other texts where Paul speaks of his spiritual life (e.g. 2 Cor 12:1ff), nor does it appear in the further trajectory of the notion of spiritual gifts in Rom 12:4ff, Eph 4:11ff and 1 Peter 4:10f. Where Paul enumerates the gifts in 1 Cor 12, speaking in tongues is mentioned last and adds the condition that it be interpreted (12:10,28; 14:13f,27).⁵⁵ The reason is that, on its own, it does not serve to build up the community.

Moreover, it is counterproductive in terms of the mission of the church. In contrast to prophecy, it sows confusion rather than understanding among visiting outsiders (1 Cor 14:18-25). It is focused on the private upliftment of the individual (1 Cor 14:2-4). If used in a selfish way, that is, without love, any gift of the Spirit is entirely useless (1 Cor 13:1-3).⁵⁶ It must be noted in this connection that the gift of languages described in Acts 2 is a different phenomenon altogether, if only because it facilitates the proclamation of the gospel by transcending all language barriers; it does not obscure the message by casting it into utterances which others are unable to follow. It must not be forgotten in this regard that Luke is the theologian of universal mission.⁵⁷

49. I do not think that life “in the Spirit” as a description of the Christian faith generated by the proclamation of the gospel should be called “ecstasy” (Lull 1980:53ff).

50. Schweizer et al (1960:65). Conzelmann (1967:285).

51. Cf Conzelmann (1967:283f).

52. Conzelmann (1967:57).

53. Welker analyses this denominational preference for the phenomenon as a response to a set of needs. This is in line with my approach. He highlights the abstraction found in mainline churches and the “polyconcrete individualism” of modernity (1994:268f).

54. The only other biblical references are found in Mk 16:17 (the late and apocryphal ending of the Gospel) and in Acts (10:46; 19:6) where the motif is used as a sign of the advent of the Spirit. As mentioned above, Acts 2 refers to a different phenomenon.

55. In contrast with Paul, Green begins his chapter on the Spirit's Gifts with the gift of tongues (“First, the gift of tongues”) and then lovingly spells out all the great spiritual benefits of this gift (1975:161ff). Having done that, he also looks at the critique of Paul: “If tongues is of no value for the edification of the church unless it is interpreted, it is even more useless in evangelism” (164). What he does not discern, is that Paul is eager to accommodate and reconcile a faction in Corinth with other such factions. In his own theology of the Spirit, the gift of tongues plays no role whatsoever. Typical for Evangelicals, Green also restricts the gifts of the Spirit to those mentioned in 1 Cor 12-14. But on the basis of his criterion (whatever builds up the community) Paul himself is entirely flexible: good governance, generous giving, pastoral counselling, etc.

56. Gaybba (1987:26ff).

57. Moltmann (1992:185) and many others do not recognise the difference! Even the exegete Schweizer wonders what might actually have happened (1980:60ff). But it should be clear that this is not history but theology in narrative form. In my view, Luke's intention was to depict neither babbling, nor ecstatic prophecy (Gaybba 1987:14), but the opening up of the world for the message. “The miracle ... lies not in what is difficult to

16. A representative Pauline argument

Because of the importance of Paul's theology, let us look at a representative text, namely Rom 8:3-17. What the law could not achieve, God did by sending his Son into the flesh to overcome our fleshly (sinful) existence and create spiritual (righteous) existence for us by his death and resurrection. Note that flesh = having fleshly intentions (phronousin) = deadly intentions = enmity against God = inability to be subject to God's will (law) = inability to please God. Spirit = having spiritual intentions = intentions aiming at life and peace.

Paul says tells his readers: you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, provided the Spirit of God (= the Spirit of Christ) dwells in you. If not, you do not belong to Christ. If Christ (= the Spirit of God = the Spirit of Christ) is in you, the (fleshly) body is dead in sin, the (spiritual) Spirit is alive through righteousness. But because this is the (spiritual) Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead, he will also raise your mortal (fleshly) bodies through this Spirit that is in you.

From this follows the abrogation of all duties over against the flesh. The task is to forsake a life according to the (sinful) flesh (thus heading for death), thus to mortify the practices of the (sinful) flesh through the power of the Spirit (thus heading for life). Those who are motivated or driven (agontai) by the Spirit of God are children of God. They have the Spirit of sonship rather than the Spirit of slavery. In this case the Spirit of God and their own spirits witness in unison to the fact that they are children of God. If children, they are heirs of God and heirs with Christ - provided they suffer with him so that they are also glorified with him.

Note, in the first place, that Paul's usage of the terms flesh and spirit does not mesh neatly with the rest of the tradition. Spirit is not simply the Spirit of God. It denotes the power of the new life in a transformed and empowered human being, which characterises the risen Christ and thus those who are "in Christ". Christ is the prototype of the new human being.

In the second place, God's Spirit, Christ's Spirit, and the believers' spirit overlap. It is one spirit, the Spirit of God that permeates the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the believers. Therefore the Spirit of God is the spirit of Christ, which in turn is the spirit of those who are in Christ, or in the Spirit. Alternatively Christ is in them, or the Spirit is in them. "The Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17ff). They become indistinguishable. That is what "peace with God" means. It is sin that breaks them apart and makes them distinguishable.

In the third place, this permeation of the human spirit by God's Spirit is what "life" means. The cessation of this permeation is what "death" means. The presumption is that God is the Source of life. It was said in Gen 2:7 and 6:3 that the creature cannot live without the life-giving "breath" of the Creator. Now it is said that the withdrawal of the human being from God (or the withdrawal of God from the human being) breaks down the relationship between them. This is considered to be the essence of death, even though one may still be physically alive.

This also implies, in the fourth place, that the Spirit is not a power that overwhelms us and we cannot help it.⁵⁸ Nowhere do divine agency and human agency compete with each other. When the Spirit comes upon them, humans remain in full control of the situation (1 Cor 14:32). Divine agency creates, activates and empowers human agency. The result is not

understand or incomprehensible, but in a totally unexpected comprehensibility and in an unbelievable, universal capacity to understand and act of understanding" (Welker 1994:230f). Granted, but this is still too numinous if it is not linked with the ensuing process of mission in the story.

58. Cf Conzelmann (1967:305).

slavery but freedom (Gal 3:23ff; 5:1; 5:13).⁵⁹ The Spirit calls for our active participation in the redemptive project of God, namely to kill the works of the flesh, and to live in the Spirit. This is an active, motivated effort on our part, sparked off and empowered by God. “Work out your own salvation ... because it is God who is at work in you ...” (Phil 2:12f).

Finally, we are heirs of God (= of his authority) and co-heirs with Christ. Originally this referred to the ancient promises to Israel. But here the emphasis lies on the promise of messianic authority. In principle we are at exactly the same level as Christ is; though in terms of causation our identification with, or participation in, Christ's death and resurrection makes the anticipation of our own deaths and resurrection possible. In this sense Christ is “Lord”. That is, our salvation depends on his death and his resurrection into a new life.

In short, what later dogmatics called the “divine nature” of Christ is nothing but the redeeming presence of God in his crucified and risen body, which now wants to be at work in our mortal bodies as well (Rom 8:11). He was crucified to do away with the flesh and risen into the new life of the Spirit to open up for us the sphere of righteousness (Rom 4:25; 6:10; 8:18) in reconciled fellowship with God (2 Cor 5:18ff). In the same vein, the Spirit is not for Paul a “third person” within God, as metaphysically inspired Dogmatics would have it, but a new divine-human relationship.⁶⁰

17. The Pauline school

Although the following writings are all late-comers within the New Testament witness (in staggered historical and material remoteness from Paul) we bring them in here because they show that the depths of Pauline theology could not be sustained, not even during New Testament times.

The Deutero-Paulines (Col and Eph) are closest to Paul's theology, but they shift the Pauline paradigm in various ways. The “not yet” (in time) shifts to “already” (in space): Christ is already enthroned, we have already been raised, we are already seated with him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:4-6; Col 3:1ff). In contrast to the eschatological role of Christ in Paul (1 Cor 15:20ff), the Deutero-Paulines retrieve the paradigm of the king presiding over the cosmic order (Eph 1:20-23; Col 1:15-20). The term “in the heavenly places” implies authority: Christ is the head of the body, but also the ruler of the powers of the world. In the same vein the spiritual gifts become clerical offices (Eph 4:1ff).

'Ouranology' is now combined less with eschatology than with protology, which denotes stability (Eph 1:4; Col 1:15). Eschatology is not totally abandoned, but partially interpreted as the ultimate disclosure of a pre-existent truth (Eph 1:3ff; Col 3:3), going in the direction of essence. The Pauline flesh-spirit dialectic is not developed. In Col the Spirit is virtually non-existent. Eph uses the metaphor profusely, but not in the same sense as Paul does. In Eph it indicates individual renewal (Eph 1:17; 2:18; 3:16; 4:23; 6:17f) and new communal relations (2:18; 2:22; 5:19). But it also has universal dimensions: God intends to bring about one “new man” (1:9f, 1:20ff; 2:13-16); as a result we are all part of “one Body and one Spirit ... in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3f).

The Pastoral Epistles, though attributed to Paul, have virtually abandoned Pauline theology, although pithy dogmatic formulations of Pauline origin survived. The overwhelming emphasis lies on good moral behaviour and institutional stability. The Spirit plays virtually no role. 2 Tim 1:7 refers to a bold human spirit. Christ is “vindicated in the

59. Conzelmann (1967:305).

60. “Paul is hardly touched by the metaphysical question how God, Christ and the Spirit are related to each other” and it would be “a mistake to see the root meaning of the word (Spirit) for Paul as the 'third person of the Trinity'” (Schweizer et al 1960:82; similarly Kümmel 1972:149).

Spirit” after having been manifested in the flesh (1 Tim:3:16); the Spirit predicts apostasy (1 Tim 4:1); “living in us” he “helps” the Apostle to entrust the next generation of office bearers with the truth (2 Tim 1:14), and renewal takes place “in the Holy Spirit”, after baptismal regeneration (Tit 3:5). That is about it.⁶¹ The direction is set towards early Catholicism.

1 Peter contains a few allusions to Pauline theology without reaching Paul's depths. Believers are being put to death in the flesh and made alive in the Spirit (1Peter 3:18) and they are sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ (1:2). The “Spirit of Christ” was in the prophets and testified in advance to his suffering and glory (1:11). More recent preachers announced the good news “through the Holy Spirit” (1:12).

2 Peter refers to the Spirit only once. It is one of the two verses usually quoted in support of the theory of scriptural inspiration: “no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (1:21). This is the traditional Jewish view. Fortunately for critical scholarship, and unfortunately for fundamentalists, it says nothing about inerrancy. That is also true for its counterpart (2 Tim 3:16), though the latter does not refer to the Spirit but to inspiration by God.⁶² If one has understood the biblical understanding of God acting through human action, inspiration does not logically imply inerrancy, but actually precludes it. As we have seen in Paul's theology, no human reality this side of the grave is perfect.⁶³

18. The Synoptic Gospels and Acts

As the carriers of early Christian traditions, the Synoptic Gospels have a soteriology of discipleship. Believers repent and follow Christ. This brings about the righteousness that will save them from the last judgment. The usage of the ancient tradition of the Spirit of God is not very prominent.⁶⁴ It is not found in Q. In Mark it is restricted to the person and work of Jesus, who is the “Christ of the Spirit”.⁶⁵ Mark has six only references to the Holy Spirit.

-John the Baptist announces Jesus as the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8).

-Jesus is given the Holy Spirit in baptism (1:10), here combined with the (altered) adoption formula of Psalm 2:7.

-The Spirit drives Jesus into the desert where he is tempted (1:12).

-Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not forgiven (3:29).

-David was inspired by Holy Spirit when he prophesied about the coming Messiah.

-Disciples under persecution will be told by the Holy Spirit what to say.

61. Schweizer et al (1960:99).

62. For a detailed treatment of the theological problem of the inspiration of the Scriptures see Welker (1994:272ff). His solution of a “plurality of testimonies” belonging to various situations is commendable, but it does not address the hard questions of error, ideology and distortion, nor does he trace the evolutionary trajectory of an undercurrent of meaning which may lead to the inversion of the original paradigm (compare, e.g., Psalm 2 with Mat 20:20ff).

63. The fact that both texts are found in (late) pseudepigraphs underlines this fact. But on its own this is no argument against their validity because God always uses fallible human beings to make himself known.

64. Schweizer's explanation that Jesus did not use the concept or that it became a reality only after Easter is hardly convincing (1960:33ff). One has to realise, rather, that the royal metaphors (Son of God, Son of David, Son of Man) are alternatives to the metaphor of the Spirit.

65. Moltmann makes a distinction between the Christ of the Spirit, expected in the Old Testament and prevalent in the Synoptic Gospels, and the Spirit of Christ prevalent in Paul and John (1992:58ff), thus between a pneumatological Christology and a Christological pneumatology.

Matthew repeats the 6 Markian topics but alters them slightly: Jesus is led into the desert by Spirit to be tempted; blasphemy against the Spirit is specified with reference to driving out demons (12:28). Matthew has very little own material on the Spirit: Mary is with child of the Spirit (1:18, 20); Is 42:1-4 is quoted in Mt 12:18; the name of God in the great commission includes the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). All this is in line with Old Testament traditions.⁶⁶

In contrast, Luke is very fond of the metaphor. Again the 6 Markian topics are mentioned. The first three are extended: Jesus returns from Jordan filled with the Spirit; he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where he is tempted; he returns in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. The David quotation has no reference to the Spirit.

Luke's own material shows his love for the Spirit as well as the trend towards its "democratisation": John (the Baptist) will be filled by the Spirit (1:15); the virgin birth is announced as "the Spirit coming over you" (1:35); when Mary visits, Elizabeth is filled with the Spirit to bless her (1:41); Zechariah is filled with Spirit to prophesy about John (1:67); the Spirit rested on Simeon, told him that he would live to see the Messiah and inspired him to praise God (2:25ff). There is also the famous quotation from Is 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ..." When utilising Q material, Luke also adds two references to the Spirit: Jesus rejoices "in the Holy Spirit" about the revelation to the insignificant ones (10:21) and Jesus says: how much more will the father give "the Holy Spirit" to those who ask him (11:13).

Luke really pours out his love for the Spirit in the Acts of the Apostles.⁶⁷ His decisive clue is the prophesy found in Joel 3:1-5 that the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh (2:17ff). But it is now the risen Christ who is the giver of the Spirit to his disciples (Lk 24:49; Acts 2:33). This means that, "the Spirit or the risen Lord can be referred to exchangeably".⁶⁸ Christ is no longer the agent of the Spirit but the subject of the process.

Luke's passion is, however, the mission of the church. Those who stare upwards are told to look forward towards their mission in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:4f; 11f). The immediacy of the second coming of Christ is replaced with "salvation history".⁶⁹ Christ has come, not at the end of times, but in the middle of times. The eschatological end is shifted into the indefinite future. The time between ascension and the second coming of Christ is the age of the church in her universal mission.⁷⁰

The crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit are distinct foundational events, drawn out in time, and separated from each other by symbolic time spans.⁷¹ This is in marked contrast to John, who collapses these metaphors into one, that is, Christ is "lifted up".⁷² For Luke Pentecost is the constitution of the new community.⁷³ The function of the Spirit is to open closed doors and empower the church to move into the world. Prophecy (= the proclamation of the gospel) is the decisive gift of the

66. "Matthew and Mark ... have substantially the same conception of the Spirit of God as the Old Testament" (Schweizer et al 1960:36).

67. Green (1975:60ff) gives a popular account of this, again without distinguishing between his sources.

68. Schweizer et al (1960:39).

69. For the following see Conzelmann (1967:169-172).

70. So according to Luke, these were not "the last days" (Gaybba 1987:16f), but the beginning of a new epoch, in spite of the quotation from Joel 3:1ff).

71. In contrast, John's Gospel collapses the motifs of the cross, the resurrection, the ascension, and the coming of the Spirit all into one event, namely the "lifting up" of Christ.

72. Conzelmann (1967:389).

73. This meaning is depicted by Gaybba, but with his own reservations (1987:15ff).

Spirit.⁷⁴ As mentioned above, the gift of tongues, as depicted in Acts 2, is the miracle which makes it possible that people of all languages and cultures can hear the message.

On the one hand, all believers are “filled with the Spirit”. As a Hellenist, he thinks of the Spirit as a substance.⁷⁵ The Spirit was given to the Old Testament authors, then to people surrounding the birth of Jesus, then to Jesus, now by Jesus to the church. On the other hand the Spirit is personalised. He is the companion and guide of the church. He practically functions as the “Lord” of the community.⁷⁶ He speaks and empowers believers in very specific terms: calling, authorisation, guidance, engagement, joyous fellowship, authority to witness, the gift of ecstasy (prophecy and tongues). Often he does not only work through these gifts but complements them. The Spirit also has his own opinion that may conflict with that of his agents (Acts 16:7).

The gift of the Spirit is loosely, but not intrinsically, attached to baptism and the laying on of hands.⁷⁷ However, there are quite definite tendencies towards institutionalisation. The church is the true Israel, founded not upon the twelve patriarchs, but on the twelve apostles. That is why Jerusalem is the centre of gravity (where the Apostles had to wait for the Spirit and where they stayed even when others were scattered through persecution); why Paul, the hero of Acts, is not an Apostle; why Peter had to lay his hands on the Samaritans so that they would receive the Spirit (Acts 8:14ff); why Peter had to legitimate the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 10-11); why the Apostolic Council in Jerusalem under Peter's leadership had to ratify dispensation from circumcision (Acts 15).

19. The tradition of John

The prologue to John's Gospel combines protology, cosmology and logos-metaphysics with the Jewish Wisdom speculation. In the original text the “Spirit” has not been a leading metaphor; its place was taken by others such as Logos, Light, and Life. Its Johannine version utilises the tradition of the Spirit descending upon Jesus at baptism (1:32ff), but this competes with the incarnation of the Logos and the “coming from above” in the later Gospel. Jesus in turn baptises with the Spirit (Jn 1:33). But this again is in competition with the metaphor of a rebirth by the Spirit - which, by the way, is the Johannine version of the virgin birth (Jn 1:13; 3:3ff.).

In the body of the Gospel, Christ is the representative and plenipotentiary of God. The old metaphor of the “Son of God” is utilised extensively, as is its equivalent the “Messiah” (Greek *Christos*), and the “Son of Man”. The metaphor of the “image of God” is utilised implicitly: “Whoever has seen me (= Jesus) has seen the Father” (14:9). John is also very creative in the use of other metaphors, often followed by the characteristic formulation “I am”: bread of life; light of the world; door to the sheep; good shepherd; resurrection and life; way, truth and life; vine, etc. All these metaphors highlight the prime significance of Jesus, the Christ, in whom God is at work.⁷⁸

74. Schweizer et al (1960:43).

75. Schweizer et al (1960:40f).

76. In this sense, Shepherd is justified in speaking about the Spirit as a “character” in a narrative (1994:90ff). He believes that “the Spirit becomes the onstage representative of the God who directs everything from the wings” (1994:41). This appealing idea would mean that the Spirit plays the role of the “Son of God” in the royal tradition, but it does drive a wedge between Christ enthroned in heaven and the Spirit here on earth, as well as between God in heaven and his representative on earth. As Shepherd recognises, these distinctions pave the way for a trinitarian doctrine of three persons in one Godhead (1992:255f).

77. Cf Schweizer et al (1960:50ff).

78. Kümmel (1972:252ff).

But Christ is meant to impart his divine authority to the believers. Without God, Christ can do nothing (Jn 5:19). Without Christ, his disciples can do nothing (Jn 15:4). In God, Christ has unlimited authority, even the power of resurrection; in Christ, the disciples share in his authority. The disciples are entitled to ask him to do “even greater things” through them than he had done himself, so that the Father may be glorified in Jesus (Jn 14:12ff). So Christ acts in the authority of God, authorising the disciples to act in the authority of God: “As the Father sent me, I send you” (Jn 20:21-23). The democratisation of the gift of salvation is complete.⁷⁹

Where Paul uses the concepts flesh and Spirit, John uses other concepts such as darkness and light, death and life, being of the world and being of the Father.⁸⁰ The metaphors are explicitly filled with the concept of love. God is light and there is no darkness in him (1 Jn 1:5f); love is from God, in fact, for all intents and purposes God is love (1 Jn 4:7ff), and those who love remain in God and God in them (4:12). It is God's love which manifests itself in Christ, and which wants to manifest itself in the disciples. It is, at the same time, a gift, a commandment, and the reality of being in Christ and Christ in them (Jn 13:1ff; 14:21; 15:17; 17:21ff).

John existentialises the Christian faith. With a few exceptions (which may have been added by a later redactor), there is no apocalyptic eschatology. The coming of Christ is the “eschatological event” which manifests itself here and now.⁸¹ What ought to be occurs as a challenge to a decision for or against participation in the authentic life of the risen Christ. He is “the resurrection and life” (11:25). Eternal judgment and the gift of eternal life occur when we encounter Christ (3:18; 5:22-24; 12:46).⁸² Eternal life means authentic life - a life that participates in God's love.

But all this happens in the Spirit. Christ himself is given the Spirit “without measure” (Jn 3:34). And the same Spirit, emanating from the Father, is sent by Christ to the disciples (Jn 14:26, 15:26). John's use of metaphors is extremely varied and volatile. But there is common ground. Paul says that the Lord is the Spirit, John says that God is Spirit (Jn 4:24). It is clear that the Spirit is the way we encounter the risen Christ, and thus God in Christ, here and now. The Spirit can only come when Jesus goes (Jn 16:7; cf 7:39); but when Jesus goes, he comes in much greater fullness: “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you” (Jn 14:18 - note the Synoptic parallel in Mt 28:20).⁸³ The understanding is not that the

79. The authorisation of the disciples happens when Jesus breathes the Spirit on them (Jn 20:22). This is akin to Gen 2:7, but here it consists of the authorisation to act in the name of Christ in his capacity as eternal Judge.

80. Conzelmann (1967:360).

81. Bultmann (1958:389f), Conzelmann (1967:388). Of course, Bultmann's interpretation is highly controversial.

82. Bultmann (1958:374f).

83. In contrast to Moltmann (1992:70, 71ff and elsewhere), Gaybba (1987:17) and many others, I do not think that these texts provide a basis for trinitarian speculations. Gaybba concedes that “the average Christian of those times would most likely have thought of the Spirit as the way in which God's (and ... Christ's) presence was experienced” (1987:17) and that reference to a third person in a trinity “is not the way the New Testament generally thinks of the Spirit” (1987:31). So why does he go beyond that? Gaybba is strangely inconsistent in this regard. It is clear that the later trinitarian dogma imposes itself on the reading of the text. Sure, according to John, the Spirit is a person (Gaybba 1987:17), but it is the person of God working through the person of Christ in the persons of the believers, not a separate entity. Green too is inconsistent: “the spirit is stamped with the personality of Jesus”; from that he follows that “the Spirit is seen as person within the Trinity, though the New Testament is not interested in doctrinal formulations of this type” (Green 1975:51). The test case: does the fact that “Wisdom” (an alternative to the Spirit) is personified in Wisdom literature make it another person alongside the person of the Father and the Son in God? Of course not! In biblical language, notably in Paul, wisdom, flesh, sin, the law, the heavens, the world and many other overarching concepts can be personified without becoming hypostatized. “The word 'personal' does not exist in either Greek or Hebrew” (Schweizer et al 1960:83). What John really means, is expressed in metaphorical statements such as

Spirit takes the place of Jesus.⁸⁴ On the contrary, while before his death the bodily restricted Jesus was bound to the limitations of time and space, the presence of God in Christ becomes universally valid and accessible when Christ is “lifted up”.⁸⁵

It is the same Christ, but now in such an universal accessibility and immediacy that the disciples do not have to ask Jesus for anything any more, but approach the Father directly in his name (Jn 16:23-27). Similarly, the Spirit is the guide into all truth, but he has nothing to say except what belongs to Christ (Jn 14:26; 16:13f), which is again nothing else than what belongs to the Father (16:15).

So the Spirit is God's presence in Christ and Christ's presence in the believers, thus the presence of God in the believers through Christ: “I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you (14:20) ... Those who love me will keep my word and my Father will love them and we will come and make our home with them” (14:23) ... As you, Father, are in me and I in you, may they also be in us ... The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:21-23).⁸⁶ As in Paul, the thrust of the message is that God's own creative, redemptive and transformative presence creates and empowers the new kind of human being, which lives in fellowship with God, which manifested itself in Christ and which is shared by those who identify with Christ in faith.

Because this situation is the result of a new birth in the Spirit (Jn 3:5), which the world cannot receive (Jn 14:17), the Gospel also expresses the existential dialectic between what Paul would call “flesh” and “Spirit” in the form of presence and concealment, as the Deutero-Paulines do. Tangible reality is used by John pervasively as a metaphor of a spiritual reality that cannot be discerned outside faith. Therefore the truth is linked to a faith decision in the encounter with Christ. This again is akin to the idea of the concealed essence of reality that only the enlightened perceive, or the idea of divine wisdom that underlies creation.⁸⁷

20. Hebrews, James and Revelation

The profundity of Paul and John is not reached by any other New Testament author. Hebrews ritualises the gospel. Some motifs are taken over from the tradition, such as the gifts of the Spirit and the Spirit of Old Testament prophecy, but the Spirit does not play a prominent role in this soteriology. Unique expressions are that Christ offered himself as sacrifice through the “eternal Spirit” and that true partakers of the Spirit cannot sin again.

James, a Jewish Christian document with a strong emphasis on the law, has no reference to the Spirit. The same is true for Revelation. It represents a baroque development of the apocalyptic paradigm. A cosmic drama unfolds, but the Spirit plays virtually no role in this

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father ... the words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his work ... (14:10); I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you” (14:18).

84. Gaybba (1987:22).

85. “In a word, it is the task of the Paraclete to universalise the presence of Jesus. In the days of his flesh Jesus was limited by space and time ... He has dwelt with them, but the one whom he promises ... will dwell in them (John 14:17)” (Green 1975:42f).

86. As Gaybba himself puts it: “The way in which the risen Lord is actively present in the community's midst” (1987:18) and “The Spirit does not simply replace a Jesus who is now absent from his disciples” (1987:24). But this does not “elevate Jesus to God's level, make him a participant in God's own life” (1987:22) in a way that would distance us from Christ and God. The whole thrust of the argument is that in Christ God opens up for us a realm of fellowship with him, not that he draws Christ away into an inaccessible heaven. “God is present through the presence of Christ” (Gaybba 1987:25).

87. For a very instructive comparison between Paul and John see Bultmann (1958:357ff). There is a “deep material kinship between John and Paul” without any dependence between the traditions (361).

soteriology. The phrase “in the Spirit” only indicates a prophetic vision: the Spirit “carries away” the seer to the different scenes of the drama. There are the “seven spirits of God” and “the spirits of the prophets”, but these are different from the motif of the Spirit of God. In Rev 22:17, the Spirit, together with the “Bride”, calls for Christ to come.

21. The significance of the trajectory for us today

The exuberance that, through the centuries, has grown out of the seed of this humble metaphor on the fertile soil of Hellenistic metaphysics is truly astounding. Classical trinitarian doctrines continue to excite the imagination of the experts, but they hardly clarify the biblical message for grass roots congregations and interested outsiders. On the contrary, these doctrines are formidable obstacles to the plausibility of the Christian faith today. I doubt whether they have ever helped ordinary Christians to understand the gospel better. Believers may defer to the dogmatic tradition as a cluster of divine mysteries which must have some celestial meaning and which one therefore has to believe, whether they make sense or not.

But the tradition was intended to convey “revelation”, not obfuscation. If the accessibility and clarity of the biblical faith is the prime criterion of an appropriate theology, our task today is to lead the dogmatic tradition back to the elementary meaning of the biblical metaphors. In the case of the Spirit of God this is fairly clear. The Spirit is one of the more prominent metaphors in the biblical witness expressing the creative, redemptive and transformative presence of God, the ultimate Source and Destiny of reality as a whole. It is thoroughly experiential.⁸⁸

This awareness emerged and unfolded in the history of Israel and reached its culmination in the Christ event. It has found many alternative (partially contradictory and partially complementary) expressions, one of which is the Spirit of God. A metaphor is not meant to be reified and used as a point of departure for deductive speculations, but to be brought home to its primary referent. A few consequences follow from this demand.

First, as in the case of similar metaphors, such as God's glory, God's word, God's name, God's wisdom, God's angel, God's holy mountain, God's heavenly abode, the presence of God in the Spirit is poetically, thus figuratively, distinguished from God, and often personified as such. It is also often depicted as a “power” as opposed to the flesh, or the world, or sin, or the law, as a “power”. But it would be a mistake to reify the presence of God in the Spirit as a hypostatic entity of its own alongside other such entities within God and then use this reified concept as a point of departure for further deductions.⁸⁹

As long as the presence of God (and the risen Christ) could be thought of as located in a geographical realm of its own and distinguished from the presence of the Spirit with us here and now, it could make sense to see the Spirit as a separate entity. But the modern worldview has lost its innocence in this regard. As mentioned above, the projections of

88. The “very diverse testimonies to the Spirit of God found in the biblical tradition ... make use of a realism that remains to be discovered anew” (Welker 1994:2).

89. In Galatians “Paul consistently portrays the Spirit ... as a mode of the continued presence and activity of Christ ... ‘the Spirit’ denotes a special mode of divine immanence whose historical base is Christological” (Lull 1980:161). In John's Gospel “the Logos is a real hypostasis - the only one. In the case of the Spirit the hypostatisation is a metaphor, even if there may be a mythological figure in the background. If one takes the Paraclete as a real hypostasis, the statements on Jesus and the Spirit become mysterious. The Paraclete does not have an independent existence apart from the Logos” (Conzelmann 1967:389). This is not only true for Paul and John; the elegant symmetry constructed by the Fathers between the “three persons of the Trinity” at Constantinople 381 has created plausibility problems ever since. They were right in positing the divinity of the Spirit against the Arians, but not in making “him” a distinct hypostasis or neglecting “his” humanity.

what ought to be to “the beginning”, or to “the end”, or to a “heaven above”, or to an assumed “essence” hidden beneath experienced reality are metaphorical (or mythological) means of expression. A potentially authentic reality must be a vision of the authentic version of actual reality, not something divorced from actual reality. It is the presence of the authentic in the unauthentic which constitutes the biblical faith.

So it is God himself who is in Christ, not something of God, not even one of his “persons” as distinct from others.⁹⁰ And it is, therefore, God himself in Christ himself who is in the believers, when the Spirit is in them, not something of God, or Christ, or one of the “persons” within God.⁹¹

There are sound biblical reasons for speaking of the Father, the Son and the Spirit when speaking about God, but these metaphors have an experiential and interpretative history. They refer to the way God disclosed himself in redemptive events to concrete people with concrete mindsets living under concrete circumstances, not to timeless metaphysical entities.⁹² The idiom of Greek ontology simply cannot unlock their meaning.⁹³ If they are to make sense to our critical contemporaries, we have to retrieve their historical background and analyse their experiential and interpretative base. Because the biblical faith is all about salvation, or redemption, or liberation, or transformation, or fulfilment, this means, concretely, that biblical metaphors must be shown to express God's response to human needs, both immanent and transcendent.

Third, if the Spirit is indeed an expression of the creative, redemptive and transformative presence of God in Christ, valid and accessible at all times and all places, then the Spirit must have the same divine-human subject structure that we find in Christology - as indeed he has in Paul and John. We encounter the true God through the true human being, in whose authenticity believers are privileged to participate.⁹⁴ Because the divine subject does not compete with the human subject, but generates it, empowers it and uses it as its medium, there is no paradox in this complex subject structure. The apparent contradiction between divine and human subject, leading to the classical trinitarian and Christological paradoxes, is rooted not in the biblical witness, but in the Greek dualism between matter and spirit, history and eternity, concrete and abstract. Of course, we are not obliged to defer to an obsolete mindset.

90. It is also not appropriate to differentiate between “the self-surrendering God and the self-surrendered God” (Moltmann 1992:48). If a father jumped into the sea to rescue his daughter one could theoretically distinguish between the risking father and the risked father, but these are intellectual games. The more common notion of a Father who is left behind in heaven while the Son is going to the cross is an idealistic construct, which flies in the face of the existential assurance that the Source of reality is in Christ and with Christ and thus with us right within a situation of suffering and death.

91. Trinitarian speculations invariably drive a (hellenistic) wedge between abstract ‘spirit’ and concrete ‘matter’, between abstract eternity and concrete history, between abstract divine omnipotence and concrete divine action, also between divine impassibility and human passion, between an abstract power of life and the actual powerlessness of death. All this is foreign to the biblical faith. God is present in his creative, redemptive and transformative action, nowhere else.

92. Referring to early experiences of the Spirit, Welker speaks of processes of emergence which “constitute a new beginning, new relations, a new reality” which are “anything but speculations about metaphysical entities ... indeterminate mystical ‘experiences’ ... ‘encounters’ with a numinous and incomprehensible appearance and dynamic ...” (1994:65).

93. The ancient Israelites and the early church did not ask “What is this?” but “What happens here?” Therefore the church did not ask whether Jesus was in himself the Son of God, but whether it is he who reigns as the “Son of God”. That is the prime motive in the motif of his resurrection (Schweizer 1980:55f).

94. This is already the case in the Old Testament. “One will have to describe *ruach* from the outset as a theo-anthropological concept” (Wolff 1974:57).

The divine subject is God, the Source and Destiny of reality as a whole, in his creative, redemptive, transformative intentions and actions. The human subject is the human being as far as it has been created, redeemed and transformed by God, and is used by God for his redemptive intentions and actions. Using the parallel metaphor found in John's Prologue, the divine dimension of the Spirit is identical with the "Logos". The human dimension of the Spirit is identical with "Jesus of Nazareth" in as far as the Logos was "incarnate" in him. As a metaphor for the mediation of the divine through the human, valid and accessible at all times and places, it is identical with the "risen Christ". As a metaphor for the redemptive effects of such mediation it is identical with the "new life of Christ" in which the community of believers participates in the execution of its mission and in anticipation of its transformation.

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