

The Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son together is Worshipped and Glorified¹

Divine Being and Action

The God of biblical faith is a God of particular action. Israel, Jesus and the Church are at once typical of the way God works in the world, and more than merely typical, for they determine our understanding of how his acts take place. It is also the case that the creeds were formed in a particular historical development, though in this case the development is more ambiguous. It is possible to read the development of the creeds in a suspicious way, especially when you remember some of the political contexts, with the Council of Nicaea assembled for the peace of the Roman empire as well as – some would say more than – for the well-being of the Church. But for the most part it is perhaps as Barth liked to remark, *hominum confusione, dei providentia*: by human confusion and divine providence. The creeds emerge out of a particular story of worship and life, of thought and dispute. They develop out of the struggles of the Church to be itself, and to communicate its gospel in the world of which it was a part. Only by beginning there can we begin to learn how we should be the Church in the strangely similar world of which we are a part. (Of course, everybody says how different and unique the modern world is, and that is true also. I shall return to that point at the end.)

The emergence of the affirmation, ‘... the Holy Spirit who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified’ was by

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no means a straightforward matter. From one point of view, there seems to be very little difficulty, if we listen to Scripture, of concluding that the Spirit of God is divine. All the things the Spirit does are things done by God: he breathes over the waters of creation, inspires the prophets and the Church, raises Jesus from the dead and is poured out on the Church at Pentecost, in anticipation of the very end of all things. It is worth noting that according to one difficult saying of Jesus, sin against the Spirit – the Spirit of truth – is the only unforgivable sin (Matt. 12.31). We might say – and I want to stress this point – that very often for Scripture the Spirit is God being eschatological. For the New Testament especially, wherever the Spirit is, there the conditions of the last times are anticipated: in the Church being led into all truth, in the anticipation of the communion of the last days, in all kinds of ways in which the end is promised and anticipated – above all, of course, in the resurrection of Jesus. The Spirit is the one, as the Eastern Orthodox tradition likes to stress, who raised Jesus from the dead, in fulfilment of the promise inherent in Ezekiel 37.1–14. This eschatological note can also be illustrated from Romans 8 and from Paul's description of the Spirit as the 'down payment' – a monetary image speaking of the first instalment and guarantee of final redemption (2 Cor. 1.22, 5.5; Eph. 1.14). But perhaps the most interesting and extended illustration is to be taken from the book of Revelation. 'I, John . . . was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's day I was in the Spirit . . .' (Rev. 1.9–10). Being in the Spirit means, perhaps most obviously but also dangerously, being in an inspired state – dangerously, because we are always in danger of mistaking the Spirit of God for a force or an experience of some kind.² But I think that John means much more than that. It is the significant, for it refers to worship, and it is through sharing mysteriously in the worship of his separated fellow-Christians that John is enabled also to share the worship of heaven and the

² The suppositions that this book is reference to the Lord's day that is both a consummate literary product which draws on a long tradition of language and imagery and the product of some kind of ecstatic experience are by no means in conflict with one another. The processes of deep learning and inspiration involved are wonderfully illustrated by J. Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927).

vision of what is both happening now and is going to happen at the end. The Holy Spirit reveals to the seer at once the present and the future as it shapes the present, but only as a function of the communion of the Church in which he is enabled to share.

In that light, it seems far easier to see the Spirit as divine than it is to see the man, Jesus of Nazareth, as such. A man is, for Scripture in general, fairly obviously not divine, and that is why to confess Jesus, the crucified teacher and prophet, as Lord and God (John 20.28), is on the face of it far more difficult than to understand the Holy Spirit to be divine. Indeed, it has been suggested that perhaps the one attempted definition of God in the New Testament is that 'God is Spirit' (though whether 'God is love' is also a kind of definition and how it coheres with this is an interesting question).³ And yet what might appear to be obvious was not, for the most part, historically the case. It was 'for the most part' because the second-century theologian, Irenaeus, to whom we shall return, described both the Son and the Spirit as the 'two hands of God', God himself in action, and clearly believed in the eternal divinity of the Spirit.⁴ But Irenaeus was untroubled by considerations that troubled others – that is his unique genius – and after him it came to seem to some far from obvious that the Spirit was equal in rank with the Father and Son. It was not until after the full divinity of the Son of God had been established with much agony and argument that a similar process of discernment was applied to the Spirit.

Here, we need to distinguish two aspects of the problem. The first concerns the being of God. Is the Spirit a distinct person within God's being? The difficulty here lay in the fact that the world in which all this was hammered out tended to think in

³ '... the Bible's closest approach to a definition of the divine nature, that "God is Spirit". Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *The Triune God* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 146. That, of course, is what Hegel also thought, and might be queried in the light of another near definition, if it is, from earlier in that same chapter, that God is love, 1 John 4.16.

⁴ 'Now what has been made is a different thing from him who makes it. The breath, then, is temporal, but the Spirit is eternal.' Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, 5. 12. 2. This is particularly important in view of the still repeated canard that Irenaeus was only an 'economic' trinitarian. ET in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), vol. 1.

hierarchies, in layers, so that it was almost impossible for theologians – and here we must exercise historical imagination – not to suppose that God the Father is fully divine, the Son rather less so and the Spirit even lower. The shape of the problem as it developed can be seen in the work of Origen of Alexandria in the third century. For Origen, God the Son was a second God, derivatively divine, we might say, and the Spirit was the highest of the creatures, sent by God to sanctify the believer.⁵ We must beware of dismissing this too easily. The point about these theological problems is that because they concern the being of God, there is no simple solution. The complexity is apparent if we again refer to the scriptural characterization of God. It is almost a commonplace of New Testament scholarship that when the New Testament speaks of God, *simpliciter*, it usually can be taken to be referring to God the Father. Similarly, there are respects in which Jesus and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father. In John's Gospel, for example, Jesus subordinates himself to the Father: he is sent to do the Father's work, to obey his will in Gethsemane and later to ask the Father to send 'another comforter' the Spirit. Similarly in 1 Corinthians 15, the point of Jesus' ministry and reign at the Father's right hand is, at the end, to hand all things over to God the Father, so that God may be all in all. What is technically called 'subordinationism', the teaching that the Son and the Spirit are in some way less divine than God the Father, *seems* to have some support in Scripture, so that from one point of view it is not obvious that some form of subordinationism is wrong. It seems a very satisfactory way to guarantee God's unity, something essential to the faith, for there is but one God and one gospel.

There is, however, a second side to the question – as always in theology! – and a brief outline of that will take us to the very heart of the matter. Christianity is what it is because it is a gospel, and that gospel implies, requires, that God act in and toward his world. And the problem is this. If we attribute particular actions in the world to the Son and the Holy Spirit, as

⁵ For evidence that this may not necessarily be the case with Origen, see David Rainey, 'The Argument for the Deity of the Holy Spirit according to St Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea', M.Th. thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1991, pp. 11–13, especially to *On First Principles*, 1.3.7.

when the book of Acts says things like, 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us', is that effectively to divide up the action of God? Can we really say that the Father does some things, the Son others and the Spirit yet others?⁶ This problem comes to a head in some of the creeds, for example the Apostles' Creed: 'I believe in God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth . . . and in His only Son, who was incarnate . . .' This raises the question of what is called modalism: that Father, Son and Spirit are different modes of the one being of God. And the problem with that is that it suggests that the real God is an unknown something lying behind the three agents but not really like any of them.

As in all theology, we are on a knife edge, or, we might say, a narrow path with precipices on each side. On one side, we deny the unity of God, and make it appear that there are three gods; on the other, we cause the distinctions of the three to disappear into some underlying undifferentiated deity.⁷ On the whole, our Western tradition has tended to the latter, so to stress the unity of God's action that it becomes difficult to do justice to its diversity. This is partly responsible for some prominent features of church life over the centuries. First, we have not known what to make of the Spirit's action, and tended to depersonalize it, speaking rather of 'grace' as a sort of fluid poured into the person (that is the 'Catholic' tendency); or (the Protestant side) we have identified the Spirit's action with warm feelings, subjective inspirations and the like – a sort of religious fix. Second, we have notoriously neglected the work of the Spirit in our life and thinking, and that is why there have been outbreaks of Pentecostal church life and belief which serve as a just reproach to the one-sidedness of the Western tradition.

We therefore need as clear as possible an understanding of both aspects of our theology of the Spirit: of the Spirit's part in a unified conception of God's action and of the distinctive character of his action. For the first, I do not think that we can do better than hold to Irenaeus' straightforward characterization

⁶ We speak, for example, of the Holy Spirit 'indwelling' believers, but what sense does it make unless we relate this action to that of the Father and the Son?

⁷ Which we can, as a result, call with equal validity mother and daughter, in contradiction of Scripture, than which we then presume to know better.

of God's action in the world: the Father works, as we have already heard, by means of his two hands, the Son and the Spirit. That is not as inappropriate to the 'spiritual' nature of God as may appear. When you use your hands, to greet someone or to write a letter, it is you who are doing it. 'God's right arm has gained the victory . . .' That is not mere metaphor, but a metaphor that conveys a great and important Christian truth. Our God's action is not immediate but mediated action. Immediate action would overwhelm and depersonalize, if not worse; recall the story of Moses wishing to see God's glory (Exod. 33.19–23). The incarnation provides our chief model of mediation. God's actions in Christ are sovereign and achieve their end, but they respect our createdness and personhood. But the incarnation happens through the Spirit, too, and in that respect God's actions in the Spirit serve to bring about those things God purposes in Christ. In sum: all divine action, whether in creation, salvation or final redemption is the action of God the Father; but it is all equally brought about by his two hands, the Son and the Spirit. And these hands do not act separately, like someone holding a baby in one hand and trying to bang in a nail with the other – though I fear that our talk of the Spirit might sometimes suggest that. The Spirit works through the Son, paradigmatically as Jesus' ministry was empowered by the Spirit. All is the unified action of the one God, the one God of Old Testament confession, mediated in this twofold way.

How, then, do we achieve our second aim, of doing justice to the distinctions, the differences, between the persons? Let me approach that by outlining a further complication. It is not in every way a bad thing that we do not speak much about the Spirit. It is sometimes said that the Spirit is the self-effacing person of the Trinity. Think especially of John's Gospel, where the Spirit is sent to witness, to draw human beings to Jesus, and through him to God the Father. That 'self-effacingness' is even, though in a different way, the case with Jesus in that Gospel, who is sent to do the Father's work. Compare also the apparently offensive saying recorded by Mark, and altered in other accounts: 'Why do you call me good? There is none good – except God alone' (Mark 10.18). Jesus indeed effaces himself so that he may point us to his Father, but he does not efface himself in the same way as the Spirit does. The Spirit's characteristic action is self-effacing, because the Spirit is the one who enables

people and things to be themselves through Jesus Christ. We are called to proclaim Jesus Christ, not, or at least not in the same way, to proclaim the Spirit – and that is perhaps where some Pentecostalist emphases are wrong. The Spirit is the one who enables us to present Jesus Christ in our teaching and to live in his way, so that there is a sense in which it is truer to say that we speak *from* than *about* the Spirit. And yet we do need to know from whom we are speaking. If the Spirit is a person, then we need to identify, to mark out the being, of the kind of person with whom we have to do.

We have, then, but begun our differentiation of the three persons of the Trinity, and need to be more specific. If we are to identify a person, to say something about specific characteristics, something more general needs to be said. And that is something Irenaeus did not really do, tending simply to place the two hands side by side. To go the next stage, let us consider observations about the Spirit by two later theologians, and first Basil of Caesarea, who speaks of: 'the original cause of all things that are made, the Father; . . . the creative cause, the Son; . . . the perfecting cause, the Spirit'.⁸ John Calvin is remarkably similar: 'to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and well-spring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity'.⁹ It is Basil who makes, I think, the most important point. To say that the Spirit is the perfecting cause of creation is to make the Spirit the eschatological person of the Trinity: the one who directs the creatures to where the creator wishes them to go, to their destiny as creatures. Where the Spirit is, there do the creatures become that which God creates them to be. (In our case, it means our freedom: 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty', 2 Cor. 3.17.) That, we must remember, happens only

⁸ Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, XV.36 and 38.

⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill, tr. and index F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Library of Christian Classics 20 and 21, I. xiii. 18. Cf. John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, each Person Distinctly, in Love, Grace and consolation; or The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded*, Works vol. 2, p. 16: 'the Father doeth it by the way of *original authority*; the Son by the way of *communicating* from a *purchased treasury*; the Holy Spirit by the way of *immediate efficacy*'.

through Jesus Christ, so that we are distinguishing, not separating what the three persons do. But the allusion to Basil takes us back towards the track that is the main one for this chapter: can we say, and in what sense, that ‘the Holy Spirit . . . with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified’?

The Problem in Historical Context

It has already been noted that after Origen there was always in the Church a temptation to rank the three persons of the Trinity on a descending scale. This was done, let me repeat, for the best of reasons: to maintain the unity of God and to do justice to the fact that the Son and the Spirit are in certain respects subordinate to the Father. After all, the Son obeys and the Spirit is sent, subordinate functions in that they are ordered by the Father to certain forms of action. In our modern obsession with equality, we tend to think that subordination is a bad thing, but that is wrong. It is only as humble that Jesus is divine, as Barth never tired of pointing out, only as the Church serves her Lord that she is truly the Church. The temptation then as now was to assume that this must be wrong, and to conclude that because the Spirit is sent by the Father, he cannot be as divine as he. About a century after Origen, Athanasius of Alexandria wrote a series of letters in defence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit. His opponents were known as the *Tropici*, because they argued that when we speak of the Spirit as divine, we are using only a figure of speech. It is merely, they argued, honorific, as when one Hollywood actress tells another that her performance was divine. (At least, it did when language like that was modish.)¹⁰

The *Tropici*, like so many of the protagonists in this struggle, were resolute defenders of the unity of God. The trouble was that they defended an abstract and unbiblical conception of divine unity. The Bible’s God is rich and various in his personal being, and it was this that Athanasius was concerned to defend. Just as it was often argued that God the Son was fully divine

¹⁰ The arguments of this group bear a remarkable similarity to some proponents of today’s ‘metaphorical theology’, arguing as they do on the basis of a unity of God underlying the apparent plurality that one can in effect project on to deity such attributes as appear to suit the needs of the day.

because he brought salvation – and only God could do that – so it was argued by Athanasius that only God can make holy, so that if the Spirit makes holy, the Spirit must be God. (Calvin makes a similar point about the Spirit's work in creation: 'in transfusing into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine'.¹¹) This led Athanasius to attempt to do justice to the two things we have been exploring, the unity and the diversity of God's action. In his earlier arguments against the Arians he had already tried an explanation, rather different from the one Basil was to use, but complementing it: 'one God, the Father, existing by himself according as He is above all' (what we call 'transcendent') 'and appearing in the Son according as he pervades all things' (immanent) 'and in the Spirit according as in Him He acts in all things through the Word'.¹² Stressing, on the other side, the unified activity of God, he says that the Spirit is the energy of the Son, 'as realising and giving actuality to the power of God'.¹³ As Theodore Campbell says, there is here both equality and subordination.¹⁴ Because the Spirit is God in action, he is equally divine; but because he is sent by the Father, he is only such *as subordinate*.

Basil faced a similar problem, and it took the form of a challenge to the very expression I am addressing: 'who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified'. He was criticized for the apparently contrary forms of benediction that he was using in worship. One, more characteristic of the worship of the early Church, said: 'Glory to the Father, through the Son and in the Holy Spirit.' That implies the account I have been recommending: as God's action in the world is mediated through the Son and Spirit, so is our response in worship and life. In worship, we are brought to the Father by the Spirit through the Son. The other form, however, went rather differently: 'Glory to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit.' It raised objections, because it seemed to imply an absolute equality of the three persons, something which, as we have

¹¹ John Calvin, *Institutes* I. xiii.14.

¹² Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 3.15.

¹³ Theodore Campbell, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Theology of Athanasius', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 27 (1974), pp. 408–40 (p. 427).

¹⁴ Campbell, 'The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit', p. 429.

seen, parts of the tradition found very hard to accept. One can put the theological problem quite simply: we are enabled to worship by the Spirit; can we also be said to worship the Spirit, the one through whom we worship? Basil's opponents, this time with a different name, the Pneumatomachi – the 'Spirit fighters' – put forward similar arguments to those of the Tropici, concentrating on the argument that the Spirit is nowhere explicitly called divine in Scripture.¹⁵

Basil's great treatise on the Spirit was designed to contend that we can, nevertheless, so describe the Spirit. His argument is the classical one: from the Spirit's activities. If God is given through the Spirit, then God is what you get. He argues: the Spirit can be blasphemed; according to the Old Testament he fills the universe, and can yet be present in particular places; he intercedes, is described as Lord and remission of sins is granted through him.

He is called Spirit, as God is Spirit . . . He is called holy, as the Father is holy and the Son is holy . . . not as being sanctified, but as sanctifying. He is called good, as the Father is good and He who was begotten of the Good is good . . . He is called Paraclete, like the Only begotten, as He Himself says, 'I will ask the Father and He will give you another comforter.'¹⁶

Is it right to use both of Basil's doxologies? Why not? In so far as the Son and the Spirit share the Father's divinity, they are equally to be given that which only God should receive, at least receive absolutely: worship and honour and glory. But in so far as they are his two hands, we recognize also that they are at the same time the mediators to us of God the Father's being and action. In a certain respect, we can draw a parallel with our understanding of the doctrine of Christ. Inasmuch as Christ is both God and man, he is at once our Lord and the one who shares our condition so that we might come before God forgiven and renewed: both one of us and the one who is the object of our praise and worship. The reason why we can similarly do both in the case of the Spirit is given by the great

¹⁵ This was something of a commonplace. In his fifth Theological Oration, Gregory of Nazianzus also acknowledges that the deity of the Spirit is not clearly and explicitly taught in Scripture.

¹⁶ Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* XIX, 48.

Puritan theologian of the Holy Spirit, John Owen. ‘The *divine nature* is the reason and cause of all worship; so that it is impossible to *worship any one* person, and not worship the *whole* Trinity.’¹⁷ You cannot have one without the other two, and therefore they are worshipped together. There is, according to Owen, a distinction of persons according to their *operations* – what we can call their originating and mediating activity – but not as to their being objects of worship. ‘So that when by the distinct dispensation of the Trinity, and every person, we are led to worship . . . any person, we do herein worship the whole Trinity; and every person, by what name soever, of Father, Son or Holy Ghost, we invoke him.’¹⁸

When we come now to ask what is the point of it all, we shall pursue the two aspects of our topic that we have met, the being and action of God, one by one.

The Point of It All?

God’s Being

The strength of Basil’s argument that we worship God the Spirit with the Father and the Son is this: if the Son and the Spirit are as truly God as God the Father, then all three together are worshipped and glorified. In one respect, that is all the Church is for: to praise the one who made us and has rescued us from the domain of darkness into his glorious light. The Christian life is first of all one of thanks and praise to God simply for what he eternally is, just as at our best we love our fellow human beings simply for what they are. That is in no way inconsistent or apart from saying that our worship also makes much difference in how we live our lives on earth. We need to know that it is one thing to be God, quite another to be a creature: to know what the distinction is, because that determines where are our priorities, those things we hang our lives on. And for our purposes the crucial factor is that there are no intermediates between God and the world: nothing created that we should

¹⁷ Recall the word ‘together’ in our credal formula.

¹⁸ Owen, *Of Communion* pp. 268–9. I owe this reference to Kelly Kacic.

half worship, or treat as a privileged way to God. We worship the triune God, and no other.

Here, the function of the doctrine of the Spirit is to show that God is complete in himself, as the particular kind of God we worship: the perfecting cause in respect of God's eternal being as well as of his creation. First, there is an eternal communion of love that we call the triune God. The Spirit perfects the divine communion by being the dynamic of the Father's and Son's being who they distinctly are. God's being is, therefore, perfect in itself, but, second, is at the same time of such a kind that its very character provides the basis of God's movement out into the world to create, to redeem, and to perfect. God is no lonely monad or self-absorbed tyrant, but one whose orientation to the other is intrinsic to his eternal being as God. God's work 'outwards' is an expression of what he is eternally. The Spirit, we might say, is the motor of that divine movement outwards, just as the Son is its focus and model (*eikôn*). Augustine called the Spirit the bond of love between the Father and the Son, but this is in danger of leading us to think of God as a kind of self-enclosed circle. The medieval, Richard of St Victor, provided the basis of a correction by making it possible to suggest that the Spirit is the focus of a love beyond the duality of Father and Son, of a love outwards to the other.¹⁹ The Spirit's distinctive inner-trinitarian being is oriented not on inwardness, but on otherness: as perfecter both of the eternal divine communion – in which there is real distinction, *otherness* – and of God's love for the *other* in creation and redemption.

It is this God, as Father, Son and Spirit, whom Christians worship, and we worship a God who is as such distinguished from every other principle of lordship or object of worship. That is the point of Basil's second doxology, 'Glory to the Father with the Son together with the Holy Spirit.' But we worship in a world which has numerous other objects and focuses to which to attribute absolute value. There are a number of candidates for divine status in our world, and that is where it is peculiarly like the ancient world in which Basil and his

¹⁹ Richard of St Victor, *On the Trinity* III, 19–20; *Richard de Saint-Victor: De Trinitate* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vein, 1958), ET Richard of St Victor, *On the Trinity*, Book 1, tr. Jonathan Conser (1999).

colleagues did their theology: in the words of Paul, 'there are gods many and lords many' (1 Cor. 8.5). Our age has two in particular, the self and the earth: the god within and the god in nature (in the end, they come to the same thing). But there is no god within; only a mess. The self is our problem, not our solution. There is likewise no god in the earth, except the one that having given us life, can offer us only death, not the resurrection of the dead.²⁰

In sum, to ask what the doctrine of the third person of the Trinity achieved, in its development in Basil and the other Cappadocians, is to enquire your way to the completed doctrine of the Trinity – complete at least in its confirming of the absolute distinction, begun in Irenaeus two centuries before, between the creator on the one hand and that of the creation on the other. To say that there is an absolute difference in being between God and the world is to say: look out, up even, not in or down, if you want to know the real source of our being and meaning. To look into the self or the earth is to put your trust in that which cannot save. The doctrine of the Trinity is the Church's resource against idolatry, against worshipping anything other than the one who by the eternal Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

God's Action

But if you ask, how this is to take shape in worship and life, then you need Basil's other doxology: through the Son and in the Spirit. There is no God within, but there is the Son who comes alongside us in mercy and judgement. There is no God in the earth, but there is the Spirit who comes, through that same Son, to transform our personal being into that which it was created for, a living sacrifice of praise and thanks to God the Father. The Pauline blessing speaks of the communion of the Holy Spirit, and I think we can take this to mean the communion with God that the Holy Spirit gives (2 Cor. 13.14). John Owen again: 'And

²⁰ We are today too much inclined to put our faith in politics also. Just after the present British government was elected, someone at a conference in Australia opined that there seemed to be new hope for Britain: 'Tony Blair'. My reply was instant, sceptical and biblical: 'Put not your trust in princes . . .' (Ps. 146.3).

truly for sinners to have fellowship with God, the infinitely holy God, is an astonishing dispensation.’²¹ That is what all are offered through the Spirit now, in the present. Perhaps the great expression of this in Scripture is Eph. 2.18: ‘For through [Christ] we both’ – Jew and Gentile – ‘have access to the Father in the one Spirit.’ Listen also to 1 John 1.3: ‘our fellowship – *koinonia* – is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ’.

In one sense, that communion is an end in itself, just as the life of the triune God is quite complete without there being a world. Yet just as the Spirit, as we have seen, is the focus of God’s creation and love of the other, so the distinctive personal action of the Spirit is to prevent us from being content with that communion, but to share it with the world. The mission of the Spirit, his sending by the Father through the Son, is to create communion in the Church, and in so doing to prevent the Church from remaining content with its own fellowship. Speaking of the Fourth Gospel’s teaching on this topic, Francis Watson writes:

The movement of the Spirit towards Jesus’ followers includes them within the scope of Jesus’ relation to his Father, thereby gathering them together in *koinonia* with one another. But it also has the effect of directing them outwards, turning them towards the world. The comfort that the Spirit brings is not the comfort of communal self-absorption, for it is the role of the Spirit to bear witness to Jesus in the world, and to enable Jesus’ followers to do likewise (15.26–7, 16.7–11).²²

Conclusion

For Basil, as we have seen, the chief work of the Spirit consists in making the Church holy: hence the ‘Holy Spirit’, whose action is, in the New Testament, often concentrated on the Church. That is something we need to relearn today, and it takes us back near to where I began, with the fact that the final, eschatological,

²¹ Owen, *Of Communion*, p. 7.

²² Francis Watson, ‘Trinity and Community: a Reading of John 17’, *International Journal of Systemic Theology* 1/2 (1999), pp. 167–83 (p. 182). In a recent article it was argued that Britain would now be a gentler place if churches had built up their communities rather than spending their energies trying to persuade Mrs Thatcher to change her policies. Iain Murray, ‘Faith Healing’ in *The Spectator*, 9 October 1999, pp. 22–4.

book of the New Testament, becomes possible through the work of the Spirit on the Lord's day. Worship, communion, the fellowship of the last days, all these are the gifts of God the Spirit as he relates his chosen people to God the Father through the one who became man and died for us. If nothing else comes out of this essay, I hope it will be a conviction that we need to recover again a sense of the Church as the holy people of God, called first and last to praise his – threefold – name in all the ways that it can be done: formal worship, holy living and the proclamation of the gospel in all the world. We shall not perform that mission unless we learn again what it is for the Church to be God's distinctive and holy people in a world that for the most part seeks and worships gods and lords other than the one triune God of Scripture. One of the things that recent reappropriation of our Jewish heritage is teaching us also is the importance of Torah, of God's dispensation for those who are chosen to be his holy people on earth – the people who are different because he is different. Holiness is the gift of the Spirit, and, as Calvin knew so well, the Spirit works in part through the law that God has given to be a guide to our life on earth, through the routines of worship and behaviour that we learn among the people of God. The Fathers were not all that far out in concentrating on the Spirit as the one who sanctifies.

Yet there is also a weakness in the ancient account, located in its perhaps too restricted concern with sanctification. It is now fashionable to extend the Spirit's action to the created world as a whole, especially in view of our ecological worries. Although, as I have suggested, there are in that dangers of idolatry, so that we must be cautious, yet there are positive points to be made.

First, let us return to Basil: the Spirit is the one who perfects all God's creating action, and that is why Calvin, for example, is quite happy to attribute all right human action in the arts and politics to the action of the Spirit.²³ Wherever there is truth and

²³ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.12–17. It is also noteworthy that Basil at times platonizes the Spirit, takes him out of the realm of the material creation. '“Holy Spirit” is a name peculiarly appropriate to everything that is incorporeal, purely immaterial, and indivisible' (IX. 22) – like raising Jesus from the dead? we might enquire. 'Now the Spirit is not brought into intimate association with the soul by local approximation. How indeed could there be a corporeal approach to the incorporeal?' Irenaeus would, I think, conceive otherwise, as did Owen. See the final words of the passage cited in note 8 above.

right is done, there is indeed the perfecting Spirit. But, second, perfection is, after the fall, or however we wish to characterize the sway of sin, death and the devil,²⁴ achieved only through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of the Son of God. Perfection comes only by salvation, and that means that things become what they are only by being brought back into right relation with God through Jesus Christ. The Spirit is the one who restores through Christ the direction of things to their proper end. And the call of the Church, her mission, is to remind the world that, as the priests of nature, human beings are called to enable the world to be itself – which means to praise the one who made it. In that service, and in the gift of God the Spirit alone, is all true art and science, political and natural alike.

Finally, a brief return to the point made at the beginning about our distinctive modern situation. In many ways our world is very like that of the early Church: pluralistic, hedonistic, moving perhaps towards the death of a civilization. The way in which it is different is that, as Robert Jenson has pointed out, this is the first culture to have rejected the gospel after once having, apparently, accepted it. That makes our mission all the more complex and difficult. How do you communicate the gospel in a world which is effectively inoculated against it? How do we, like the early Church, outthink and outlive the decadent civilization around us? A large part of the answer lies in the one whose being and action we have been exploring, so that it seems to me both right and necessary that we should pray: ‘Come, Holy Spirit’, come and lead us into the truth that is Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

²⁴ See here Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, eds, *Sin, Death and the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).