

The Ascension and St Agnes (ASA), DC, School of Theology and Prayer

May 31, The Day of Pentecost (Whitsunday), 2020

‘The Coming of the Spirit: What Sort of “Interruption”?’

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[All questions are open for discussion! Short sections of exposition or interchange from the presenters in each section will be followed by brief phases of discussion, with questions taken from the participants via the facilitator (right-click the Q and A icon at the bottom of the Zoom screen to open the box to compose a question, then press Enter to send it).]

Introduction: A paradox to be considered today and next week (in the ‘Trinity’ webinar): according to the (varied) biblical witnesses the Spirit is an ‘interrupter’ of normal life, a bringer of specific events, experiences and gifts; yet, later, as redefined in Christian ‘orthodox’ teaching from the late 4th century, the Spirit in the Trinity is ‘co-equal’ with the Father and Son, such that necessarily the three ‘Persons’ are never to be divided or allocated different divine characteristics. How did the latter perspective emerge from the former? And does it threaten the distinctive *challenge* of the New Testament witnesses to the Spirit? (A related pastoral aside: what might be the relation of this ‘interruption’ of the Spirit to the current ‘interruption’ of the coronavirus pandemic?)

1. *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament:*

Background: the crucial inheritance from the OT, which builds especially in the prophetic period: lit., ‘breath’/‘wind’ in God (Gen 1.2) and in the human (Gen 7.22); a key metaphor for God’s creative power and outreach (Judges 6.34); a sign of special prophetic or Messianic gifts (1 Sam 10. 5-6; Isaiah 11.1ff.); a signal of the arrival of the end times (Joel 3. 1-2).

a. Acts account of Pentecost (Acts 2. 1-42: hallmarks of speaking in tongues, fire, prophetic outpouring, call to repentance and baptism ‘in the name of Jesus’); link back to Luke’s pervasive theology of the Spirit in his gospel (esp. the Annunciation, Luke 1.35, and the centrality of Jesus’s prayer, Luke 10. 21), and his ongoing theology in Acts of the providential guidance of the era of the mission of the Church (e.g., Acts 2. 1-4, 4.28-31, 8.15-17, 10.44, 15. 28, 19.21).

b. What is the exact relation of the Spirit and baptism in Luke/Acts? ‘Q’ (source behind Matt and Luke)’s account of John the Baptist and the relation of Jesus’s baptism to ‘fire’ as well as descent of the dove: Luke 3.16; cp. later account in Acts 19.1-7: essential mark of baptism in the name of ‘Jesus’ is reception of Spirit and particular ‘charismatic’ gifts.

c. Paul’s distinctive theology of the Spirit: Romans: Raiser of Christ from the dead, unique ‘gift’ to the Church, agent of distinctively Christian prayer; agent of sanctification (flowing from justification-by-faith); bearer of distinct gifts to each member of the Church. Emerging pastoral issues: 1 Cor discussion of diverse ‘charisms’ and ‘gifts’, including the blessing and problem of

speaking in tongues (1 Cor 12-13). [Cp. later listing of 7 'gifts' of the Spirit (cf. Isaiah 11. 1-2: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord), and either 9 (Gal 5. 22-23) or 12 (later Catholicism) 'fruits' (the means of moral and spiritual 'discernment'): love, joy, peace, patience [benignity], kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [mildness], self-control [chastity].]

d. John's theology of the Spirit: being born of the Spirit (John 3. 5-8); the 'comforter' / 'advocate' (*parakletos*) who leads into all 'truth', after Jesus 'goes away', and ensures even an era of 'greater works than these' (The 'Farewell Discourses', John 14-16); breathed on the disciples (John 20).

Some puzzles for reflection: Is there any unified doctrine of the Spirit in the NT? Is the Spirit in the NT a 'person' or simply a 'metaphor' for divine action or 'force'? What should any baptized person expect of the Holy Spirit?

2. Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement: Their Witness and Continuing Challenge

What sort of 'interruption', then, does the Spirit involve (or should the Spirit involve) in contemporary Christianity? (The problem of 'then' and 'now'.) The great challenge of Pentecostalism: can/should the Holy Spirit be distinctively experienced? Is there a 'baptism in the Spirit' distinct from water baptism (see again Acts 8. 16 and 19. 1-7)? And – a slightly differently nuanced question – is 'renewal in the Spirit' necessary for any renewal in the Church? The ecumenical significance of the 'charismatic renewal' and varied Anglican and Catholic responses (Dunn, Congar, Tugwell). What is lost when a vibrant theology of the Spirit is neglected?

3. *The Holy Spirit in the Early Church and Beyond: Some Test Cases or Dangers:* a. Elevation and Separation of the Spirit?: the 2nd-3rd century Montanist movement (with political overtones for sectarianism and women's leadership); or b. Intentional Subordination of the Spirit? (the 'Spirit-fighters' in the later 4th century, countered by Basil the Great, *de Spiritu Sancto*); or c. 'Feminization'? (The Syriac-speaking church and later 'alternative' renditions of the Trinity)? How would the emerging 'orthodoxy' of the Trinity respond to these different challenges?

Conclusions: The challenge of intentional response to the Spirit remains; the challenge of the place of the Spirit in the Trinity remains; the challenge of the expectation of divine 'interruption' and spiritual discernment presses (as in today's crisis over the pandemic).

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