

Knowing the Triune God

The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship, by Robert Letham. Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004.

Robert Letham is senior minister of Emmanuel Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware, and teaches at both Westminster Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary. In his book *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (hereafter, *Trinity*), Letham desires to reinstate the Triune God to His proper place in the daily life and worship of God's people. In his book Letham seeks to arrive at a conception of the Trinity that reflects the Scriptures' equal emphases on both the essence (unity) and the persons (trinity) of God. In so doing, he hopes to avoid the pitfalls that have beset the Western church—a focus on the former, which results in modalistic tendencies—and the Eastern church—an emphasis on the latter, which tends toward tritheism. Letham argues that a correct doctrine of the Trinity will ultimately result in a number of healthy developments within the church. The author confidently and comprehensively traverses two thousand years of Eastern and Western trinitarian discourse. The book, however, over-represents the aspect of the threeness of God and, in so doing, may unwittingly reinforce tendencies that the author has failed to observe within Western Christianity. The book's consideration of the union of God and man—the ultimate goal of the Triune God's salvific work—also requires some scrutiny. These criticisms aside, *Trinity* is quite commendable both as a survey of trinitarian conversation and as a call to believers everywhere to know and worship our Triune God as He is.

The 551-page book is composed of four parts, the first of which considers the biblical foundations of trinitarian doctrine both in the Old and New Testaments. In part two, *Trinity* outlines the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity from the post-apostolic age through the Reformation. Here *Trinity* gives ample space to the contributions of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen to trinitarian dogma and discusses the Arian problem, its resolution at Nicaea, and the contributions of Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Augustine to the doctrine. *Trinity* also discusses the *filioque* controversy and the positions of the West and East on the subject as represented by Anslem of Canterbury, Richard of St. Victor, and Thomas Aquinas for the West and John of Damascus, Photius, and Gregory

Palamas for the East. *Trinity* concludes the second section with a presentation of Calvin's openness to both East and West with regard to the Trinity. In part three, *Trinity* advances directly to the twentieth century and explores treatments of the Trinity from leading theologians of the West—Barth, Rahner, Moltmann, and Pannenberg—the East—Bulgakov, Lossky, and Staniloae—and the Reformed tradition—Thomas F. Torrance.

Having considered in detail the history of trinitarian dogma, *Trinity* in the fourth and final part tasks itself with enunciating a doctrine of the Trinity that avoids both modalism and tritheism and is acceptable to all orthodox conversants. *Trinity's* argument is that our view of the Triune God must be emphatically both unitary and trinitary. *Trinity* suggests that with this in mind, the church can

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avoid both the modalistic and tritheistic predilections of West and East respectively, and the great division of the Christian church regarding the Trinity can be healed. In this final section, *Trinity* also states its position on the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, raises points that pinpoint the trinitarian deficiency in the Western church, discusses the Trinity in terms of creation and missions, and comments impressively on the believers' eventual union with the Holy Trinity. The book concludes with two appendices in which Letham energetically responds to his critics and expands on the subjects of subordination (a notion he rejects) and order (one he affirms) within the Trinity.

Trinity is an admirable work of scholarship and synthesis. Expatiating on the Triune God—even on the history of trinitarian doctrine—is a matter that has traditionally been viewed as difficult at best, but Letham has done so ably. By giving a detailed bird's-eye view of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, he has done the Christian community a great service. Hopefully the fruit of his labor will be enjoyed by more than mere theologians and book critics and, in being enjoyed, thus can engender what he calls

“a recovery of the Trinity” that “will help revitalize the life of the church, and in turn, its witness in the world” (7).

Striking a Balance

Trinity proposes to arrive at a doctrine of the Trinity that rightly and evenly stresses *both* the unity and trinity of God.

Specifically, *Trinity* proposes six parameters that must be observed in order to conceive of the Trinity accurately: (1) The Trinity is “one being—three persons, three persons—one being”; (2) the three persons are *homoousios* (of the same essence or being); (3) the three mutually indwell one another in a dynamic communion; (4) the three are irreducibly different from one another; (5) there is an order among the three; and (6) a doctrine of the Trinity that is to be faithful to the Bible must give equivalent expression to each of the above parameters (381-383). These points are exemplary for their clarity and incisiveness.

Trinity also addresses some specific matters that should be kept in mind by every believer—especially those who tend to overlook the fact that God is not only one but irreducibly three. The author especially takes the church to task for having fallen into a mode of worship that is merely theistic as opposed to trinitarian: “General theistic worship is defective worship” (421). Part of the problem, he notes, or perhaps a result of the problem, is the West’s hymnody, which is often so generally theistic as to be comfortable to Islam and Judaism. “Examine any hymnbook or chorus book you can find,” *Trinity* suggests, “and search for compositions that are clearly Trinitarian. You won’t find many...Since theology and worship are integrally connected..., this is a serious problem” (410). Hence, there is “a need to refocus Western hymnody” (422). *Trinity* also states that “prayer is...exploration of the Holy Trinity” (422) and that “chief of all, the Trinity must be preached and must shape preaching” (423). If *Trinity* succeeds in getting any of its message out, let us hope that it is its injunction to bring the Trinity back into the Christian life and the church life. Believers specifically and the church as a whole would be helped immeasurably, and more to the point, the Triune God would receive the worship He seeks.

The book perceives the West’s deficiencies with respect to the Trinity as being a tendency to stress the Triune God’s essence at the expense of His persons, which, if taken to its logical conclusion, results in modalism. The basis for this is the thought that the West, beginning with Augustine and continuing into our own time, has always given the oneness of the Trinity supremacy in theology, in the minds of the believers, and in the life of the church. The evidence *Trinity* presents is initially convincing. Among other things, it points out that with the exception of Calvin, the first major Western theologian after

Augustine to begin a discussion of the Trinity by speaking of His triune being was Barth. *Trinity* also speaks of the fact that worship in the West frequently fails to make mention of the Trinity, given its heavy emphasis on a uni-personal “God” as opposed to the Triune God. *Trinity*’s view, however, is suspect. What *Trinity* describes may well be the case among dogmatics. However, a street-level view of trinitarian opinion in the West, particularly among evangelicals, seems to paint another picture. True, the word *God* may evoke within most believers an image of the God who said “Jehovah is one” and not one that is explicitly trinitarian. But the core view of almost any Western believer, if anything, verges on the tritheistic. Most people speak of the Father, the Son, and/or the Holy Spirit almost as if they are referencing three deities who are somehow related and who sometimes work closely but at other times function quite autonomously. If *Trinity* is correct about a modalistic tendency in the West today (and its case is not convincing), there is a rather remarkable disconnect between the views of the Trinity held in the academy and those held by believers at large.

In its efforts to reveal a modalistic tendency in the West, however, *Trinity* reveals something rather surprising. At one point, *Trinity* remarks that “when an author is so vehement against one error, there is a good chance that he is in danger of the opposite” (494). This seems to be the case in *Trinity* itself. Despite a clearly articulated stance on the need for a balanced trinitarian doctrine, the full weight of the oneness of the Trinity does not strike as deeply as it should. Indeed, although modalism is *Trinity*’s intended target, an unconscious drift toward tritheism may well be a phenomenon that needs to be targeted as well. The argument is not that *Trinity* simply spends more time elucidating the side of threeness in the Trinity and must therefore be drifting toward tritheism; rather, it is that the Bible is full of language that indicates that the three of the Trinity are distinctly yet inseparably one in ways that *Trinity* does not seem to consider. Take for instance Isaiah 9:6, a classic problem text within the Scriptures: “For a child is born to us, / A Son is given to us; / ...And His name will be called / ...Eternal Father...” In this verse we read that the Son was prophesied to be called Eternal Father. Because we take the Word as it is given, we know that the Father and the Son in this verse are the first and second of the Trinity respectively. This verse does not confuse the persons of the Trinity on the level of essence—the hypostasis of the Son is not the hypostasis of the Father. To declare such would immediately remove one well outside the pale of trinitarian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the language identifies the persons of the Trinity in ways that leave even the most seasoned trinitarians grasping for explanations.

To give credit where credit is due—and to avoid misrepresenting *Trinity*’s position—the book comes very close to

enunciating what exactly the relationship between the three of the Trinity is in God's economy of salvation. When speaking of John 14:16ff., the author notes that "the coming of the Holy Spirit is, in effect, the coming of the entire Trinity" (469). However, *Trinity* does not explore the full implication of this statement and consequently misses what could have been a wonderful opportunity to advance the understanding of the Trinity. Kerry S. Robichaux's treatment of this matter in the initial issue of *Affirmation & Critique* is especially welcome. His comments are instructive in the apprehension of a balanced and biblical understanding of the one essence and three persons of the Triune God:

Perhaps the difficulty some interpreters have with these biblical trinitarian conundrums stems from a lack of appreciation for the economical aspect of the Trinity and an overemphasis on the essential Trinity. If one views God in His eternal existence, the greater focus will be more on His being than on His doing, and the distinctions among the three are very acute and well-defined. But when one turns to consider the economy of God, with His emanation in His Trinity and His action to fully save man, the distinctions become less defined. The reason for this is very simple: In His doing the Trinity is unitary, not triple. Thus, none of the three ever acts independently of the other two. Whatever one does, the other two also do with Him...

This is the key to resolving these biblical trinitarian conundrums. These three verses are all very economic verses...Certainly the Father is not identical to the Son and the Son is not identical to the Father, but the three of the Trinity are never separate from each other. Thus, the Son given to us not only is the Mighty God, but also can be called the Eternal Father, because the Father is in Him and with Him at all times. In His eternal identity God is distinctly three, but in His economic and salvific action He works as one, and the Son given can be called the Father, who works in His works. (48-49)

The foregoing excerpt illuminates an aspect of oneness among the three of the Trinity that should receive more attention among believers today. A stronger emphasis on the economic and essential aspects of the Trinity and a more thorough treatment of how the three of the Trinity are distinctly three while being inseparably one would render a more accurate portrayal of our Triune God. While the burden of *Trinity* is to address real modalistic tendencies by compensating for one-sided emphasis on God's essence, treatment of the distinct but inseparable aspect of this oneness as demonstrated in problematic verses such as Isaiah 9:6, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and 2 Corinthians 3:17 would not have undercut the book's central argument. Stressing only one side of the twofold truth of the Triune God leads to misunderstanding, and an unbalanced

understanding of God's triune being ultimately robs us of a full and free experience of who He is and what He has for us.

Oneness with the Triune God

The last twenty years or so have seen a relative explosion in the number of theologians in the West who have turned their energies toward the teaching of oneness with the Divine Trinity, also called deification. Letham is one of the small but ever expanding number, and it is apparent in *Trinity*. Indeed, *Trinity* makes a compelling case for deification's long history in the Western church and cites Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and the Westminster Larger Catechism to make the point. The particular foundation upon which *Trinity* sets forth deification as "our ultimate destiny" (465) and makes a clear connection between our "Christification" (460) and the triune being of God is as follows:

The Christ with whom we are in union is of the same—the identical—being as God. Strictly speaking, we are united to his humanity, but his humanity is inseparable

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from his deity, due to the hypostatic union. Thus, union with his humanity is union with his person. Moreover, since the person of Christ is that of the eternal Son, we are united to God. (468)

Elsewhere, it states that "we are called...to live in loving and joyful union and communion with the Holy Trinity" (475). *Trinity* hastens to add that "this does not mean any blurring of the Creator-creature distinction, any more than the assumption of humanity by the Son in the Incarnation does" (468). Indeed, *Trinity*, quoting from P. E. Hughes's *The True Image*, states that what is meant "is not the obliteration of the ontological distinction between Creator and creature but the establishment at last of intimate and uninterrupted personal communion between them" (468). Again, "This union and communion is not merely symbolic or figurative. It is more than metaphorical—it is real. It is brought about by the Holy Spirit and, being mystical, defies attempts to explain it logically" (473). Finally, *Trinity* hearkens back to the Westminster Larger Catechism and exults that "our ultimate destiny...consists in unbridled fruition (enjoyment) of the Holy Trinity" (473).

Deification to *Trinity* is “the final goal of salvation” (474). However, it does not mean that deification is something that is strictly postponed until the Lord’s return. Although it is “the goal to which our salvation leads” (465) and “the ultimate goal of union with the Holy Trinity” (474), it is bound tightly to our daily experience as believers in this age.

Regeneration, calling, and justification by faith all occur at the start of the Christian life. Redemption from sin and Satan by the blood of Christ is also a once-for-all event, but it is paired with our adoption as the children of God and so continues on during our life in Christ. (473)

This lifelong experience *Trinity* identifies as sanctification, which is styled as “a process” that proceeds “throughout the rest of our lives” and “during which we are progressively conformed to the image of Christ” (474). Mindful that the reader might consider such an experience to be postponed to the hereafter, *Trinity* stresses the fact that “all these aspects of salvation relate to events here and now, to the path by which we travel to our final destiny. They are the means by which we are saved” (474). And while *Trinity* acknowledges that deification “is brought to fruition at the eschaton and lasts for eternity,” it cites Romans 8:30 to undergird its assertion that it “is true that in some respects this has already begun” (474). These words should elicit an enthusiastic affirmation. Talk of deification in non-Roman or non-Orthodox circles is still rare today, and the connection that *Trinity* draws to our daily experience of salvation is rarer still, thus all the more noteworthy.

Nevertheless, there are several points regarding these matters that warrant greater scrutiny. First, the salvation that believers can experience day by day as they await the redemption of their body is primarily an organic one. *Trinity* rightly points out that salvation begins with justification by faith, redemption, and our being made the sons of God and continues through a process of sanctification and conformation. It even quotes 2 Peter 1:3-4 and states that Peter’s language refers to something more than mere fellowship: it refers to “an actual participation in the divine nature” (469). Moreover, *Trinity* observes that “union with Christ is far wider than the legal or representative” (467). Yet *Trinity* lets an opportunity for discovery pass unexplored and frames deification more as an objective transaction than as the subjective and organic participation of the Triune God and redeemed humanity. For example, rather than stressing with the Scriptures that we have been begotten as sons of God, *Trinity* focuses on the juridical aspect of adoption. To do so is to rob the Scriptures of their decidedly organic and subjective approach to salvation. When we are regenerated by believing into the Lord Jesus, the divine life of the Triune God enters into us (1 John 5:11-12; Col. 3:4), and we were

actually *born* of God to be His spiritual offspring (John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5-6; 1 John 3:1) with His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). This is the commencement of our deification—a process in which we become fully God in life and in nature (but, as *Trinity* points out, not in the Godhead). Now as the children of God, we need to grow unto full deification, just as human beings grow to become mature human adults: we are sanctified through the addition of God’s holy nature, we are renewed to receive God’s mind, we are transformed to receive the image of Christ, we are conformed to receive the very being of God, and we are eventually glorified (that is, fully deified) to bear the image and glory of God. This aspect of God’s salvation is unrelated to juridical imputation; it has everything to do with the divine life and nature of God being added into us through the transmission of the ascended Christ as we open to Him in the Word, in prayer, and in fellowship with the members of His Body, thus growing up into Him (Eph. 4:15). Deification is nothing less than the organic process by which we, beginning with regeneration and continuing throughout our lifetime by the Triune God’s moment-by-moment organic salvation, become one with God at the level of life and nature.

Second, the salvation that we as believers experience in the process of deification and the outcome of that salvation are altogether different from anything that Adam ever experienced. Hence, we must here draw attention to the erroneous understanding by which *Trinity* (with the church fathers that he cites) supposes that deification is simply a return to a pre-fallen condition:

Since the image of God looks forward to Christ as the Second Adam, there is much justice in the teaching of the Fathers that the human race was created in Christ, the true image of God. After the Fall, this relationship was marred. Now we are being renewed in Christ, the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:4-6). (464)

This is where *Trinity*’s merely objective view of deification causes trouble. Adam was not one with God in a way that approximates that in which we believers are one with God today. God did not create a deified Adam, nor did God call Adam into the highest fellowship with Himself by fiat. Rather, He placed man in front of the tree of life, a symbol of the eternal life of God, with the intention that man would participate in the life of God and thereby *become* what he was not yet: one with God in life and in nature. Thus, Adam was in need of regeneration, but not redemption, at the point of creation; in contrast, sinners need both redemption and regeneration. Adam was initially sinless, but the absence of sin does not equal the presence of divine life. The negative problem of sin was taken care of on the cross, and our experience of Christ’s justification takes place at the point of our believing into Him; the positive problem of the divine life is solved when, upon

believing into Him, He enters into us as the life-giving Spirit. Only when man is fully one with the Triune God on the level of life and nature can he accurately be described as deified. Thus, deification is more than mere *association* with God; it is full-fledged union with the Trinity in life and in nature that easily is hinted at in the metaphor by which God has chosen to express it—the human process of reproduction and growth.

Conclusion

Trinity seeks carefully and largely successfully to arrive at the right understanding of the essence and persons of God and their relationship. Fearing modalism on one hand and tritheism on the other and giving the first place not to philosophy but to the Scriptures and the witness of the fathers, *Trinity* comes a great deal closer to a proper understanding of the Trinity than many other modern treatments. Moreover, in correctly and convincingly expounding upon the ultimate union of the Triune God with His regenerated believers and the day-by-day process that leads up to the crowning day, *Trinity* finds few contemporary equals.

by Nathan Betz

Work Cited

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The Two Aspects of the Spirit in the New Testament: A Response to Archie Hui

"Watchman Nee's Pneumatology: A New Testament Perspective," by Archie Hui. *Evangelical Quarterly* 74.1, Jan. 2004.

In "Watchman Nee's Pneumatology: A New Testament Perspective," Archie Hui questions whether Watchman Nee is right to distinguish two aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament: the aspect of indwelling for life and victory and the aspect of outpouring for power and ministry. In disagreeing with Nee, Hui denies that there is a difference between the character of the Spirit's work in the Old Testament and His work in the New Testament. He fails to distinguish any difference between the nature of the Holy Spirit's operation in John the Baptist and His operation in the Lord Jesus. He fur-

ther asserts that the disciples' receiving of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22 and in Acts 2:4 are one and the same. Finally, Hui contends that there is no basis in the New Testament for a believer to seek the filling of the Spirit subsequent to his or her conversion.

In this article, I will briefly summarize Watchman Nee's understanding of the Spirit's work in the believers and then address Hui's principal objections.

Watchman Nee's Pneumatology

Watchman Nee contrasts the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament with His work in the New Testament.¹ He points out that there is no case in the Old Testament of the Spirit dwelling in man's heart, only of the Spirit acting on man. Thus, in the Old Testament the Spirit comes *upon* man; He never dwells *in* man. In the New Testament, the former aspect continues; that is, the Holy Spirit still comes upon man, but another aspect is added: the Holy Spirit's indwelling of man. The latter aspect is to give life, that is, to impart Christ, for living and the former aspect confers power for ministry.

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According to Nee, the two aspects of the Holy Spirit's filling explain the different experiences of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22 and in Acts 2:1-4. In John 20:22 the breathing of the Holy Spirit is related to inward filling for life, as the fulfillment of the promise of giving the Paraclete before the Lord's resurrection in John 14:16-17. In Acts 2:4 the outward filling of the Holy Spirit is related to the aspect of ministry as the fulfillment of the Father's promise in Joel 2:28 and prophesied by the Lord after His resurrection in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:8. These two aspects of filling can be seen in the use of different Greek words for filling, *pleroo* and *pletho*.

According to its usage in [Acts], *pleroo* denotes the filling of a vessel within, as the wind filled the house inwardly in [2:2], and *pletho* denotes the filling of persons outwardly, as the Spirit filled the disciples outwardly in [2:4]. The disciples were filled (*pleroo*) inwardly and essentially with the Spirit (13:52) for their Christian living, and were filled (*pletho*) outwardly and economically with the Spirit for their Christian ministry. The inward filling Spirit, the essential Spirit, is in the disciples (John 14:17; Rom. 8:11), whereas the outward filling Spirit, the economical

Spirit, is upon them (1:8; 2:17). Every believer in Christ should experience both aspects of the Holy Spirit. (Recovery Version, Acts 2:4, note 2)

In practical application, Watchman Nee points out the believers' need to seek both aspects of the Holy Spirit's filling. Even though we receive the Spirit through faith at our conversion, many do not experience victory in their Christian life or power and impact in ministry. The former requires the inward filling of the Holy Spirit, which comes through submission to the Spirit, through knowing Him not merely as an influence but as a person, and through the work of the cross. The latter requires the filling of the Holy Spirit outwardly, which is our appropriation, through faith, of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. We need to differentiate between the two aspects, because victory is not obtained by the outward aspect of the Spirit's work, and power in ministry does not come through the inward aspect.

The Spirit Being Only upon Man in the Old Testament

Hui questions Nee's statement that in the Old Testament the Spirit came upon man but did not dwell in man, in contrast to the New Testament where the Spirit also dwells within man.² Hui cites three instances in the Old Testament when the preposition *in* is used of the Spirit's relationship with man—Joseph (Gen. 41:38), Joshua (Num. 27:18), and Daniel (Dan. 5:11). According to Hui, these cases prove that the Old Testament also speaks of the Spirit dwelling in man and thus invalidate Nee's argument that the indwelling of the Spirit is a new aspect that belongs only to the New Testament.

There are at least twenty-six instances in the Old Testament where the Spirit is said to be upon a person: the seventy elders of Israel (Num. 11:17, 25, 26), all Jehovah's people (v. 29), Balaam (24:2), Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (6:34), Jephthah (11:29), Samson (14:6, 19; 15:14), Saul (1 Sam. 10:6, 10; 11:6; 19:23), David (16:13), the messengers of Saul (19:20), Elisha (2 Kings 2:9), Amasai (1 Chron. 12:18), Azariah (2 Chron. 15:1), Jahaziel (20:14), Zechariah (24:20), the sprout and branch of Jesse (Isa. 11:1), restored Israel (32:15), the Servant of Jehovah (42:1), the seed of Israel (44:3), Israel (59:21), Isaiah typifying Christ (61:1), Ezekiel (Ezek. 11:5), the house of Israel (39:29), all flesh (Joel 2:28), the male and female slaves (v. 29), and the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:10). There are a further fifteen instances where the Spirit's work is clearly characteristic of acting upon a person, even though the preposition itself is not used (Gen. 6:3; Judg. 13:25; 1 Sam. 16:14; 2 Sam. 23:2; 1 Kings 18:12; 22:24; 2 Kings 2:15-16; 2 Chron. 18:22-23; Ezek. 3:12, 14; 11:1, 24; 43:5; Micah 3:8; Hag. 2:5; Zech. 4:6; 7:12). All these instances are in contrast to the three instances of *in* that Hui identifies.

Moreover, the three instances that Hui identifies are a very weak basis for asserting that the Holy Spirit dwelt in man in the Old Testament. Genesis 41:38 says, "Pharaoh said to his servants, Can we find such a man like this, in whom the Spirit of God is?" The NASB translates the end of this verse as "in whom is a divine spirit." At a minimum, we may question how much Pharaoh understood concerning the Spirit of God. Similarly, Daniel 5:11 is the word of a heathen idolater: "There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods." Here again, the reference to the Spirit of God is not strong.

In Numbers 27:18 Jehovah tells Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand upon him." Here, the word *Spirit* is mentioned without qualification; for example, it is not "the Spirit of Jehovah" or "My Spirit." The parallel verse to Numbers 27:18 is Deuteronomy 34:9, which says, "Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him." Here it is the spirit of wisdom, denoting not the Spirit of God but Joshua's human spirit into which the Spirit of God had imparted wisdom (Job 32:8).

In the Old Testament dispensation the Spirit acted upon man; He did not dwell within man. As Watchman Nee points out, God's dwelling in the Old Testament was in a physical tent, the tabernacle, but in the New Testament, the believers become the dwelling place of God (1 Cor. 6:19-20).³ Even if we do infer the Spirit's dwelling in man from these cases, it is exceptional, a borrowing from the coming New Testament dispensation of reality, temporary in nature, and specific to a particular function.⁴

When the Old Testament speaks clearly of the Spirit of Jehovah dwelling within man, it does so prophetically, looking forward to the New Testament age. In Ezekiel 36:27 Jehovah declares, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and My ordinances you shall keep and do." Like the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:33, this verse provides a clear note of contrast with Israel's experience in the Old Testament dispensation. This is a prophetic utterance concerning the New Testament dispensation, clearly indicating that the indwelling of the Spirit is a New Testament matter.⁵

The Spirit Being Both upon Man and in Man in the New Testament

Hui uses Mark 1:10 to argue that *upon* and *in* are not to be taken literally in relation to the Spirit. According to Hui, the Greek text in Mark 1:10, where the Lord Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism, "describes the Spirit coming down and entering 'into him'" (10), whereas Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22 (and also, incidentally, John 1:32) speak of the Holy Spirit coming down

upon the Lord Jesus. Quoting Turner, Hui argues that this proves that the two prepositions *upon* and *in* are not technical expressions but “merely two different spatial metaphors denoting the same reality” (10).

However, from a fairly extensive review of Mark 1:10 in translation, it is apparent that nearly all translators render the Greek text as either “upon Him,” “on Him,” or “to Him.”⁶ Hui requires us to accept, without justification, a most exceptional reading of the Greek text of Mark 1:10 in support of his argument that the prepositions *upon* and *in* denote the same reality.

Hui is unable to provide convincing evidence that the Spirit dwelt *in* man in the Old Testament in the sense of a dwelling place, as He does in the New Testament. His attempt to discredit the distinction between the two prepositions *upon* and *in* on the basis of an idiosyncratic rendering of Mark 1:10 is unconvincing. Rather, the outward anointing of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit (referred to by all four evangelists as a descending on Him), contrasts with the Holy Spirit being with the Lord Jesus as His divine essence from His birth. The two aspects of the filling of the Spirit, indwelling for life and outpouring for ministry, are represented in the incarnated Lord in the New Testament.

The Inward Aspect Being for Life, and the Outward Aspect Being for Ministry

Hui further disagrees with Nee that the baptism in the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 and its subsequent manifestation in the outward filling with the Holy Spirit is only for empowerment for ministry. He endeavors to show that what Nee identifies as the outward filling with the Holy Spirit by the baptism with the Spirit had significant soteriological consequences in the lives of those who were filled as well as consequences for their work.

First, Hui asks why John the Baptist would need to be filled with the Holy Spirit outwardly from birth if such a filling of the Spirit was only for ministry. How are we to explain Jesus’ exceptional wisdom and knowledge of God as His Father (Luke 2:47, 49), Hui asks, if not by the Spirit who came upon Mary (1:35)? He further asks, if John, a prophet of God, was filled with the Spirit, “is it really thinkable that Jesus the ‘Son’ of God can be less affected by the Spirit in his childhood (1:32, 35)?” (16).

When we compare the childhood of John with that of the Lord Jesus, there is an absence of any reference to the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s case (2:40; cf. 1:15, 80). Hui is right to identify the exceptional wisdom and knowledge of the child Jesus, but his assumption that the Lord must have been filled outwardly with the Holy Spirit as John was does not respect the biblical record. It

is interesting to note that the questions Hui raises can be satisfactorily explained only by reference to the two aspects of the Holy Spirit which he denies. John was the last and greatest of the prophets in the Old Testament dispensation of law (Matt. 11:13; Luke 7:28). In contrast, the Lord Jesus was the first man in the New Testament dispensation of grace and reality. John prepared the way directly for the incarnated God, and his being filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb no doubt indicates a much greater role for the Holy Spirit in the New Testament dispensation (even the title “Holy Spirit” is new). But he was still in the Old Testament dispensation. He was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit but only empowered by the Spirit to carry out his particular ministry, just as Elizabeth and Zachariah were filled with the Holy Spirit for their prophetic utterances (Luke 1:41, 67).

The birth of the Lord Jesus marks the beginning of the New Testament dispensation, and with it, the second and more intrinsic aspect of the Spirit’s work, His indwelling. The Lord’s birth is quite different from John’s. The New Testament begins with a great contrast between these two births:

From His birth, the Lord was not just a man filled outwardly with the Holy Spirit as John was, but a God-man constituted of the divine essence from the Holy Spirit and the human essence from Mary.

The conception of John the Baptist was strikingly different in essence from that of Jesus the Savior. The conception of the Baptist was God’s miracle, accomplished with the overage human essence, merely by the divine power without the involvement of the divine essence. This resulted in the bringing forth of a mere man who was filled with the Spirit of God ([Luke] 1:15) but who lacked the nature of God. The conception of the Savior was God’s incarnation (John 1:14), constituted not only by the divine power but also of the divine essence added to the human essence, thus producing the God-man of two natures—divinity and humanity. Through this, God joined Himself to humanity that He might be manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) and might be a Man-Savior ([Luke] 2:11). (Recovery Version, Luke 1:35, note 2)

From His birth, the Lord was not just a man filled outwardly with the Holy Spirit as John was, but a God-man constituted of the divine essence from the Holy Spirit and the human essence from Mary. When the Lord was baptized by John in the Jordan, however, the Spirit descended upon Him in power for His ministry, His work.

The Holy Spirit in power descended upon Him [at His baptism], but He had the Holy Spirit in essence from His birth; and while the Holy Spirit in power was descending upon Him, He was existing with the Holy Spirit in essence. (Recovery Version, Luke 3:22, note 1)

Therefore, in Jesus, as the first God-man, both aspects of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament are seen: the indwelling, essential aspect for life and the outpoured, economical aspect for ministry. In contrast to this is the single economical aspect for ministry in the Old Testament seen in His forerunner.

Second, Hui argues that if Nee is correct that the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts is only for ministry, then this should preclude any soteriological consequences from the receiving of the Spirit in this book. The logic of his argument is that for the two aspects of the Spirit's filling to be valid, Luke and Acts should refer exclusively to the outward aspect, and the Gospel of John exclusively to the inward aspect. But John, while emphasizing the receiving of the Spirit for life and salvation (4:14; 7:37-39; 10:10), nevertheless includes both aspects of the Spirit (1:32-33). It seems a little far-fetched to limit Luke and Acts to only one aspect.⁷ In fact, the greatest evidence that the disciples were inwardly filled for life is found not at the end of the Gospel of John but at the beginning of Acts. There, after receiving the Spirit through the Lord's breathing on the day of resurrection in John 20:22, the disciples prayed together in one accord for ten days, and Peter expounded the Scriptures with revelation and authority.

The Two Aspects of the Spirit's Filling Explaining the Two Gifts of the Spirit in John and Acts

Hui disagrees with Nee over the meaning of "receive the Holy Spirit" in John 20:22 by reference to the different schools of interpretation for this verse. These he classifies as follows: First, there are those who regard the John 20:22 gift as merely symbolic. This includes the church father Theodore of Mopsuestia and also some modern commentators. Second, there are those who regard John 20:22 as an actual impartation of the Spirit but in such a way as to make room for Pentecost. Third, there are those who regard John 20:22 to be Pentecost. This is the Johannine Pentecost school that argues that the apostle John brought the gift of the Holy Spirit forward from Pentecost to Easter to suit his literary and theological purposes.⁸

Because each interpretation has its strengths and weaknesses, Hui attempts to synthesize the first and third groups while rejecting the second group. He proposes that John 20:22 should be viewed from two perspectives—one from the perspective of narration and theology (the Johannine Pentecost), and the other from the perspective

of chronology and history (the symbolic gift). By the former perspective, Hui intends to accommodate Pentecost within the Gospel of John as the substantial fulfillment of the promise of the Comforter in 14:16. By the latter perspective, he intends to preserve the chronological integrity of John's account. He justifies his scheme by arguing that the apostle John and his readers were post-Pentecost, looking back on the events of the day of resurrection and the day of Pentecost, thus somehow able to receive both perspectives without tension. But far from overcoming the weaknesses of these interpretations, Hui merely inherits them. On the one hand, for readers to ascribe to John such a disregard for historical facts is to fatally undermine the integrity of his Gospel. On the other hand, to regard the chronological event in John 20:22 as symbolic is a very poor ending to the Gospel, which leaves the great promises of 7:37-39; 14:16-17, 20, 26; 15:26; and 16:13-15 still unfulfilled.

However, any "tension" between the giving of the Holy Spirit in John 20:22 and Acts 2:1-4 can be easily resolved by acknowledging the inward and outward aspects of the Holy Spirit's filling as set forth by Nee. With these two aspects, neither gift—the Spirit's dwelling within man or His coming upon man—detracts from the other, and the events on the day of resurrection and the day of Pentecost are fully in harmony with each other. Nee says,

From the Lord's last supper until Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was spoken of *four times*: (1) During the Lord's supper, He was spoken of as the Paraclete, the Comforter. "He will give you another Comforter... He...shall be in you" (John 14:16-17). (2) After the Lord's supper the Holy Spirit was spoken of on the evening of His resurrection. He breathed into them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:22). (3) Immediately before the Lord was taken up to heaven, He referred to the Holy Spirit when He said, "I send forth the promise of My Father upon you;...stay in the city until you put on power from on high" (Luke 24:49). (4) Finally, the Holy Spirit was referred to on the day of Pentecost. (46:1142-1143)

Before the Lord's ascension He gave His disciples two great promises. The first was given before His death, and the second was given before His ascension. The first promise was that the Holy Spirit would abide in man (John 14:17), and the second promise was that the Holy Spirit would come upon man (Acts 1:8). (41:158)

Moreover, these two gifts of the Spirit have two distinct purposes. In John 20:22 the Spirit's indwelling in man "is for the purpose of becoming life to the believers and also for the purpose of producing the fruit of the Spirit in the believer's living, such as holiness, righteousness, endurance, and joy," and in Acts 2 "the Spirit's outpouring

upon man is for the purpose of clothing the believers with the Lord's power for their testimony and also for the purpose of producing the gifts of the Spirit and empowering the believers to work for the Lord for the accomplishment of His will" (41:161).

The Believers Needing to Know the Holy Spirit as a Person in Order to Experience His Inward Filling

Hui disagrees with Nee's distinction between the Spirit's influence and the Spirit's person in the experience of the believers, and also with Nee's view that the believers should seek the filling of the Spirit based on knowing the Spirit in His more personal aspect. While Hui acknowledges that as one of the three of the Divine Trinity, the Spirit may be considered a person, like the Father and the Son, he says that it is the lordship of the Father and the Son that should be the focus in the believers' experience.

Regrettably, Hui's criticism misrepresents Nee. In speaking of the filling of the Spirit, Nee first emphasizes the revelation of Christ: "When we see Christ as Lord objectively—that is, exalted to the throne in heaven—then we shall experience the power of the Spirit upon us. When we see Christ as Lord subjectively—that is, as effective Ruler within our lives—then we shall know the power of the Spirit within us" (33:95). Then Nee refers to the experience of the believers in Corinth. He observes,

To many Christians the Holy Spirit is quite unreal. They regard Him as a mere influence—an influence for good, no doubt, but just an influence for all that...The trouble with the Corinthian Christians was not that they lacked the indwelling Spirit but that they lacked the knowledge of His presence. They failed to realize the greatness of the One who had come to make His abode in their hearts; so Paul wrote to them: "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" Yes, that was the remedy for their unspirituality—just to know who He really was who dwelt within. (96)

Nee then testifies,

I could shout with joy as I think, "The Spirit who dwells within me is no mere influence, but a living Person; He is very God. The infinite God is within my heart!" ...I would fain repeat it to you a hundred times—*The Spirit of God within me is a Person!* I am only an earthen vessel, but in that earthen vessel I carry a treasure of unspeakable worth, even the Lord of glory. (96-97)

Nee's following section is entitled "The Absolute Lordship of Christ" (98). There he states that "a day must come in our lives, as definite as the day of our conversion, when we give up all right to ourselves and submit to the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ...Not until the Lordship of

Christ in our hearts is a settled thing can the Spirit really operate effectively in us" (99). In conclusion, he again stresses the lordship of Christ in relation to the Spirit's filling:

If we yield wholly to Him and claim the power of His indwelling Spirit, we need wait for no special feelings or supernatural manifestations, but can simply look up and praise Him that something has already happened. We can confidently thank Him that the glory of God has already filled His temple. (103)

From the above passages it is clear that for Nee, submitting to the lordship of Christ and acknowledging the indwelling Spirit as a person are one and the same. For Nee, in the New Testament the Spirit Himself is not separate from Christ or the Father: "In the person of the Spirit, God is present, and Christ is no less truly present too. Thus if the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts we have the Father and the Son abiding in us" (96). It is evident that Hui fears that Nee's emphasis on the person of the Spirit distracts from the lordship of Christ and the Father. But the true effect of knowing the indwelling Spirit as a

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person is just the opposite: to cause Christ and the Father to be more of a reality to us.

The Believers Needing to Pursue the Filling of the Holy Spirit in Both Aspects

Hui objects to Nee's view that the believers should seek both to be full of the indwelling Holy Spirit as in John 20:22 and to be filled with the outpoured Holy Spirit as in Acts 2:4. Hui argues, "The gift of the Spirit is not a *donum superadditum*, but is usually given at a person's conversion-initiation," and "the experience of the earliest disciples at Easter should not be seen as a pattern for post-Pentecost believers today" (28-29).

What Hui is referring to in these statements is the theology of Pentecostalism. This holds that the believers receive Christ but not the Spirit at conversion and that the pattern of the early disciples shows that the gift of the Spirit is given at a different time from believing in Christ. But he wrongly attributes this view to Nee and then argues against it.⁹ Nee clearly states that the believers receive the Holy Spirit when they believe in Christ:

For example, the Bible says that every regenerated person has the Holy Spirit abiding in him...Once a man believes in the Lord, the Holy Spirit *will* surely dwell within him...All these passages [Romans 8, 1 John 4, and 1 Corinthians 6] speak of the Holy Spirit dwelling within man as soon as he believes. (41:161)

There is also no suggestion in Nee's writings that he considered the staggered experience of the early disciples in their salvation history to be a pattern for believers after Pentecost. By identifying the two gifts of the Spirit in John 20:22 and Acts 2:4, Nee distinguishes two aspects of the Spirit in the believers' experience, not two chronological stages in their salvation. Nee holds that often believers can experience being filled outwardly without the experience of being filled inwardly; that is, they experience Acts 2:4 but not John 20:22:

The Corinthian believers had the outward manifestations of the Spirit, but they did not have the filling of the Spirit inwardly. They were fleshly believers. There are many people today who have received the outpouring of the Spirit, yet they are not filled with life within. (164)

For Nee, the gift of the Spirit in Acts 2:4, far from being a *donum superadditum*, is an accomplished fact that belongs to every believer in Christ, in the same way that the forgiveness of sins is theirs through Christ's death:

The Spirit *has been poured out*. This is the gospel. (46:1153)

The passages [Acts 2:33-36; 8:14-17; 10:44-47; 19:1-6] prove that the Spirit that has been poured out upon believers is the common heritage of the whole Body. (1155)

If the exaltation of the Lord is a fact, the outpouring of the Spirit must also be a fact. On the contrary, if the Lord was not exalted, it would have been impossible for the Holy Spirit to have been poured out. The Lord was crucified and shed His blood for the forgiveness of sins. All those who believe in Him can receive the forgiveness of sins. In the same principle, one should not say that even though the Lord was exalted to be both Lord and Christ, he has not received the outpouring of the Spirit. This is impossible. We must be bold to say that the Lord has been exalted to the throne. May the Lord fill us. We need a full faith to believe in the Lord and His accomplished works. (41:145)

For Nee, the indwelling and the outpoured Spirit is a believer's from the moment he or she believes in Christ. The degree of our experience of being "full of the Spirit" inwardly for life and being "filled with the Spirit" outwardly for service, depends respectively on the degree of our submission to Christ and on our exercise of faith.

Conclusion

Archie Hui objects to the two aspects of the Spirit taught by Watchman Nee, using linguistic arguments that lack rigor and a theological argument concerning John 20:22 that is unconvincing. He misrepresents Nee's position on the matter of the personhood of the Spirit and the lordship of Christ, and wrongly attributes to Nee a Pentecostal theology of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

What Hui objects to in Nee's teaching concerns some of the crucial matters related to the full revelation of God's economy in the Scriptures, namely, (1) the difference between God's Old Testament dispensation of law and God's New Testament dispensation of grace, (2) the oneness of Christ and the Spirit in Christ's resurrection for the dispensing of the processed and consummated Triune God into His chosen and redeemed people, and (3) the importance of the Holy Spirit's work within the believers to impart Christ into them for their regeneration and transformation in God's organic salvation, as distinct from the Holy Spirit's work upon man for his repentance and reconciliation in God's judicial salvation. Only by maintaining a clear understanding of the distinction between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for life and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for power can these aspects of the New Testament economy be fully apprehended.

by Jim Batten

Notes

¹See Nee, 46:1141-1143, 1153-1156; 41:141-171, 187-194; 33:83-103.

²In the first part of his critique Hui objects to a distinction that Nee makes between two phrases for the filling of the Holy Spirit in Luke and Acts: "filled with the Spirit" and being "full of the Spirit." It seems that Nee makes this distinction only once, namely, in a booklet that was published in Chinese in 1928 and included in *Ni To Sheng Zhu Shu Quan Ji* [The Collected Works of Watchman Nee's Writings] (Hong Kong: Manna Publisher, 1994), 21:30-32. This is scant "evidence" for Hui's objection, especially since Nee clearly does not stress a theological distinction based on the descriptive utterances. Since Nee does not declare a fundamental distinction between the phrases, Hui overreaches in finding an objection to them.

³Nee, 33:97-98.

⁴First Peter 1:11 says that the Spirit of Christ in the prophets made clear concerning the New Testament age, the sufferings of Christ, and the glories after these. This verse has troubled interpreters. Was the Spirit the Spirit of Christ before Christ's incarnation? As regards to dispensation, the Spirit is only the Spirit of Christ after Christ's resurrection (Rom. 8:9-11), but because He is also the eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14), in function He was the Spirit of Christ before Christ's incarnation. Similarly, after Christ's resurrection the Spirit is the Spirit of

Christ who dwells in us (Rom. 8:9). Before then, His indwelling was not normal, but particular to His purpose in revealing the coming mystery of Christ. Furthermore, this verse needs to be read in the light of 2 Peter 1:21, where Peter says that the prophets spoke “while being borne by the Holy Spirit.” The metaphor *being borne* refers to a ship “borne by the wind” (Recovery Version, note 2). This is a general designation for the work of the Spirit in the Old Testament, and indicates that the Spirit’s operation was upon the prophets rather than in them.

⁵Other occurrences of *in* with *spirit* are 1 Kings 22:22-23, 2 Chronicles 18:21-22 (“a lying spirit in the mouth of...”), Job 27:3 (“the spirit of God is in my nostrils”), and Isaiah 63:11 (“He who put in their midst [or within him] / His spirit of holiness”).

⁶Versions which translate the preposition as either “upon” or “on” include: Analytical Literal Translation of the New Testament, American Standard Version, Bible in Basic English, Contemporary English Version, Darby’s New Translation, Douay Rheims Bible, English Majority Text Version, English Standard Version, Elberfelder (German), Luther (German), Good News Bible, Neue Evangelistische Ubertragung (German), Hebrew Names Version, International Standard Version, Jerusalem Bible, King James Version, New King James Version, Literal Translation of the Holy Bible, Modern King James Version, The Message, Murdock New Testament, New American Standard Bible, New English Bible, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, Recovery Version, Revised Standard Version, Reina-Valera (Spanish), Word English Bible, Wuest’s Expanded Translation, Young’s Literal Translation. God’s Word and Weymouth New Testament Translation both translate the phrase as “coming down to Him.” I have found only one version, the Amplified, that supports Hui’s understanding of Mark 1:10.

⁷Indeed, Hui’s argument would be more convincing if he could demonstrate specific soteriological consequences in the cases where, according to Nee, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit outwardly for ministry (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; 13:9, 52). Instead, it is in the cases where, according to Nee, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit for life (Acts 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24), where Hui observes such outcomes. See note 2.

⁸Rather strangely, Hui places Nee within the Johannine

Pentecost group, probably because Nee regards John 20:22 not as the initial reception of the Holy Spirit, which he believes the disciples had already received through faith, but as an additional filling of the Spirit, the fulfillment of the promise of having life abundantly in John 10:10. But in so doing, Hui misleadingly groups Nee with those commentators who view John 20 and Acts 2 as the same gift.

⁹For his argument here, Hui relies on James Dunn, who is writing against the Pentecostal position. Dunn writes, “The Pentecostal attempt to evade the NT emphasis by distinguishing the acceptance of Jesus at conversion from the later gift of the Spirit is in fact a departure from NT teaching,” and “to become a Christian, in short, is to receive the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. What the Pentecostal attempts to separate into two works of God is in fact one single divine act” (95-96). Dunn’s analysis, in fact, supports Nee’s view contrary to Hui, for Dunn allows that the apostle John may have perceived the work of the Spirit at Pentecost as a different work to that in John 20:22: “John may well have considered that the baptism in the Spirit [in Acts 2] was a second and distinct work of the Spirit in the spiritual experience of the first disciples” (178). The point Dunn makes is that the two aspects of the Spirit’s work are no longer divided chronologically in the experience of the believer after Pentecost.

From Pentecost onwards he who believes receives the Spirit in his cleansing, regenerating, baptismal power, bringing the forgiveness and life of the new dispensation. With the transition period ended, the theological emphasis of John is no longer complicated by a necessary chronological disjointedness, and the theological unity of the Spirit’s life-giving and empowering ministry becomes a chronological unity as well. (182)

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Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

“These all **continued** steadfastly with one accord in prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers” (Acts 1:14).

continued: Before the Lord’s death the disciples had no interest in praying for spiritual things (Luke 22:40, 45-46); rather, they contended among themselves as to which of them was considered to be greatest (Luke 22:24). But after the Lord’s resurrection and ascension, their spiritual condition changed radically. They did not contend among themselves but were burdened to continue steadfastly with one accord in prayer, even before the day of Pentecost, when they would receive the outpoured Spirit of power economically (ch. 2). This is a strong sign and proof that they had received the indwelling Spirit of life essentially on the day of the Lord’s resurrection (John 20:22). This is also evidence that they had been strengthened in God’s New Testament economy by the vision of the Lord’s ascension.