

## Advancing a Trinitarian Christology

*The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* by Myk Habets. Princeton Theological Monograph Series 129. Eugene: Pickwick, 2010.

Myk Habets's new book in the Princeton Theological Monograph Series, *The Anointed Son: A Trinitarian Spirit Christology* (hereafter *Anointed*), is a substantial contribution toward resolving the tensions resulting from the church's ongoing examination of the relationship between the divine and the human in the person of Christ. It represents a serious and balanced effort to transcend these tensions with an approach that is based on the biblical revelation of the person and work of Christ in the economy of God's salvation. Its approach is trinitarian in essence, emphasizing positive aspects of Spirit Christology without denying the essential components of Logos Christology. Notwithstanding some minor suggestions and one necessary critique, *Anointed* is helpful in advancing a fuller confession of an orthodox Christology.

Over the centuries considerations related to the person and work of Christ have resulted in two divergent approaches to discussing the relationship between the divine and human in the person of Christ. Logos Christology, the first and more prevalent approach, begins its discussion with an emphasis on Christ's divinity, that is, on His status as the Son of the living God, the incarnated Word who was in the beginning with God and who was God (Matt. 16:16; John 1:1). Spirit Christology, the second and more historically controversial approach, begins its discussion with an emphasis on Christ's humanity, that is, on His status as the Christ, the enfleshed Word (Matt. 16:16; John 1:14). When not taken to extremes, both approaches acknowledge the central elements of the church's confession related to Christ, that is, that in His person He is both the complete God and a perfect man. An inflexible adherence to either approach, however, often diminishes the other. And when this diminishment is not balanced, the inflexibility can result in heresies that deny either the full divinity or the genuine humanity of Christ.

An extreme emphasis on the divine in Christ often results in an explicit denial of the humanity of Christ, exemplified by the Docetic teaching that Christ was fully divine but human in appearance only, that is, that He did not truly possess humanity like us. Even though Logos

Christology is strongly rooted in the use of the word *logos* in John's Gospel (1:1), it is worthwhile to note that John battles the extremes of this position in his second Epistle when he speaks of deceivers "who do not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh" (v. 7). Although an explicit espousal of this Docetic heresy is not common today, Jehovah's Witnesses excluded, a rigid adherence to Logos Christology has, *Anointed* argues, resulted in an "implicit or popular Docetism" (38) that diminishes our understanding of the humanity of Christ and, by extension, undermines our faith in His mediatorial capacity to truly "be touched with the feeling of our weaknesses" because He was "tempted in all respects like us" (Heb. 4:15). Jaroslav Pelikan alludes to this consequence when he points out Tertullian's concern that stressing the monarchy, "the identity of the Son with the Father," often comes at "the expense of the economy" (176-177). However, since we encounter God only in and through His economy, it is important that we have a balanced view of Christ's divinity and humanity so that our experience is not circumscribed by a false or limited understanding of the person of Christ.

An extreme emphasis on the human in Christ often results in an explicit denial of the divinity of Christ, exemplified by adoptionist teachings that Christ was fully human but not pre-existently divine, that is, that He was simply a human being who was empowered by God with divinity being conferred upon Him through His adoption as God's Son at His baptism or His resurrection (Pelikan 175). Although Spirit Christology begins its examination from the standpoint of the Christ's actions in human history, which is also the starting point of the first three Gospels, it is important to note that John's Gospel begins by emphasizing that the Word who became flesh was the pre-existent Word as Son, who was with God and who was God (1:1). *With* and *was*, as used by John, are central to our confession of a proper and balanced Christology because *with* places John's subsequent speaking concerning the Son within a trinitarian context, and *was* acknowledges that all the Son's accomplishments in God's economy through His incarnation, human living, death, and resurrection have divine efficacy and merit.

The development and confession of a balanced Christology is the aim of *Anointed*, and although it begins from the perspective of Spirit Christology, it is not rigid in this regard. The subtitle of the work, *A Trinitarian Spirit Christology*, is evidence of its desire to

move beyond theological investigations that are predicated upon the thought that Logos and Spirit Christologies are mutually exclusive positions. In fact, the basis for achieving a balance between the two must be rooted in a trinitarian understanding of the person and work of Christ, and *Anointed* largely moves forward from this perspective, stating, “Spirit Christology must be related to some theory of Trinitarian construction where the unity and distinction of the divine persons has been thoroughly formulated” (6). Recognizing that the “history of Christian thought shows that Logos Christology has dominated resulting in both an eclipse of Trinitarian doctrine and a diminution of pneumatology,” it then proposes “a model of Spirit Christology which complements rather than replaces Logos Christology and does so in a robustly Trinitarian framework” (7).

### A Summary of *Anointed*

Chapter 1 of *Anointed* introduces the structure of the book. Chapter 2 presents a useful background on the methodologies that inform the analytical approaches inherent in both Logos and Spirit Christologies, defining and explaining the impact of methodologies that focus on ontology or function, person or work, or analysis from above or from below. As such, this chapter is useful in drawing out the tensions inherent in a strict adherence to Logos- or Spirit-oriented Christologies that incorporate these methods. For example, an ontological approach to Christology focuses on who Christ is, whereas a functional approach focuses on what He did. Thus, when looking at who He is, the aspect of His divinity is emphasized first, but when looking at what He did, the aspect of His humanity assumes greater importance. Inherent within each methodology, however, there is a propensity to privilege one aspect of Christ to the detriment of another aspect that is equally present in the Scriptures, and in this privileging, there is the potential for error. *Anointed* states, for example, “The main criticism of the classical Christological method from above is that it has the disadvantage of tending toward Docetism, Apollinarianism, or monophysitism in that it tends to compromise Jesus’s humanity in order to preserve his deity, seemingly at all costs” (39).

This same propensity can be seen in methodologies that focus on the person or work of Christ or on the question of whether we should begin our examination of Christ from above, that is, with His divine status, and then proceed to an examination of His human status, or from below, that is, with His human status, and then proceed to

an examination of His divine status. *Anointed* is helpful in pointing out that these approaches create artificial distinctions that complicate what should be a simple confession concerning Christ. “Thankfully,” it notes, “a number of theologians are now making the point that the function of Jesus cannot be separated from his nature” (22). Among these theologians, Habets quotes Walter Kasper, who “dismisses the dilemma of an ontological versus a functional Christology as ‘illusory and a position into which theology should not allow itself to be maneuvered’” (22). In effect, *Anointed* argues that these methodologies should not supplant the scriptural record that is two-sided, both ontological and functional and from above as well as below, by preferring one methodology to the exclusion of the other. According to *Anointed*, such a preference was not present within the early church:

This approach changed during the medieval period when the scholastic theologians separated the person of Christ (his divinity, humanity, and the unity of the two) from the offices and work of Christ. In so doing they made Christology virtually irrelevant to most believers by eclipsing the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ with metaphysical speculations as to his person. (25)

The basis for achieving a balance between Logos and Spirit Christologies must be rooted in a trinitarian understanding of the person and work of Christ.

The scriptural record affirms both the divinity and humanity of Christ, which is expressed in both His person and work and which can be viewed both from above and from below. Perhaps the most elegant scriptural expression of this connection is contained in the apostle John’s record of the Lord’s reference to Himself as the reality of Jacob’s ladder at Bethel, the house of God, which identifies His very incarnated being as the locus of the connection between divinity and humanity, between heaven above and earth below: In John 1:51 the Lord said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, You shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” In a footnote to this verse in the Recovery Version, Witness Lee states,

This chapter, as the introduction to this Gospel, introduces Christ as both the Son of God (vv. 34, 49) and the Son of Man. Nathanael recognized Him as the Son of God and addressed Him as such (v. 49), but Christ said to Nathanael that He was the Son of Man. The Son of God is God; as such, He has the divine nature. The Son of Man is man; as such, He possesses the human nature. For the declaring of God (v. 18) and for the bringing of God to man, He is the only begotten Son of God. But for the building of God’s habitation on earth among men, He

---

is the Son of Man. God's building needs His humanity. In eternity past Christ was only God, only the Son of God, and had only divinity; but in eternity future Christ, as God and man and as the Son of God and the Son of Man, will have both divinity and humanity forever. (Note 3)

Based on the scriptural record, *Anointed* states what should be evident and paramount:

If Jesus Christ is true man and true God in one person, then it would seem obvious that, in terms of method, we can legitimately begin with either approach. Furthermore, these two epistemological approaches have been adopted during the history of doctrine, and both are capable of affirming an orthodox understanding of the God-man. (30)

An orthodox understanding, ultimately, must be trinitarian in essence, and although *Anointed* acknowledges that its perspective begins from the standpoint of Spirit Christology, it by no means depreciates the trinitarian aspects inherent in Logos Christology.

A Spirit Christology when applied to theology proper, is able to lead us up from Christology (and anthropology), into Trinitarian theology, from the economic Trinity to the ontological Trinity, and from the economy to God's eternity. (52)

When ontology is considered, it is necessary to speak of the trinitarian realities of the immanent Trinity. Just as importantly, however, when function is considered, it is necessary to speak of the trinitarian realities of the economic Trinity because the "*homooousios* doctrine requires a Trinitarian framework that must incorporate the essential aspects of a Spirit Christology complementing the Logos Christology" (73). Ultimately, the benefit of *Anointed's* discourse in chapter 2 is its ability to cut through the false choices that have been promulgated by methodologies that attempt to explain how the divine and the human natures in Christ subsist and impact each other. In contrast to "metaphysical speculations" (25), a heart of faith simply says Amen to the truth that in Christ there is complete divinity and perfect humanity, as reflected in the titles *Son of God* and *Son of Man*. Such a heart knows that Christ's accomplishments in His work are eternally efficacious because He is the Son of God and that His accomplishments in His work can be both imputed and imparted to humanity because He is the Son of Man.

Following its discussion of the methodologies employed by Logos and Spirit Christology, chapter 3 contains a succinct historical review of the development of Logos and Spirit Christologies. Chapter 4 provides a review of relevant scholarship pertaining to Logos and Spirit Christology, and chapter 5 covers the testimony of the New Testament writers concerning the relationship between

Christ and the Spirit in both the person and work of Christ. *Anointed* accomplishes this by focusing on the Spirit's role in the conception and birth of Jesus, the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the ministry of Jesus, and the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. These three chapters alone are enough to recommend Habets's book because it is a clear presentation on multiple levels of the church's attempts to understand the uniqueness of Christ's person as it relates to His two natures and as it is unfolded in the record of the New Testament.

In chapter 6 *Anointed* sets forth six criteria that should inform the development of "a model of Spirit Christology which complements rather than replaces Logos Christology and does so in a robustly Trinitarian framework" (7). It lists and defends these criteria in descending order of importance, although it predicates its model upon all six.

A first criterion for Christology is the need to be faithful to the testimony of Scripture. It must be faithful to the biblical language about Jesus....A second criterion for Christology is: Does it adequately present the full divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ? This is an extension from the biblical material. It must be shown that our Christology is neither docetic nor adoptionist in both its theological formulation and practical application...Does the orientation of Christological method diminish either of these two natures? This question forms the third criterion...The fourth criterion asks: Can this Christology adequately conceive of the divine person (unity) of Jesus Christ? By the use of "adequately conceive" I mean that it must be both intelligible and coherent especially on this crucial point. (190-192)

These four criteria commendably acknowledge the importance of basing our understanding of Christ on the revelation contained in the Scriptures. This should be the starting point for any teaching concerning Christ; regrettably, it often is not. It is evident throughout *Anointed*, however, that Habets seeks to be faithful to the testimony of Scripture. Since the Scriptures contain and convey the word of God, there should be no teaching concerning Christ that goes beyond or falls short of the revelation contained in the Scriptures concerning the Son. And if one stays within the boundaries of the Scriptures, the person and work of Christ will not be separated from the operation of the Triune God within His economy. An orthodox Christology, consequently, will be trinitarian in nature and will reference the role of Father, Son, and Spirit in the incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, such a Christology will present the full divinity and genuine humanity of Christ, without diminishing either, because Christ is revealed as both the complete God with the divine nature (Col. 2:9; John 1:1) and a perfect man with genuine human nature

and genuine human experiences (v. 14; Heb. 2:6-10, 14), with both natures being joined and expressed in the one person and work of Christ (2 John 7-8). Lastly, although it does not seem directly related to the revelation contained in Scriptures, an orthodox trinitarian Christology will satisfy the fourth criterion because only it will register as truth within the mind of a believer, who has been created in the image and likeness of God to contain and express God and who has received a spirit of sobermindedness with a God-given capacity to come to the full knowledge of the truth (Gen. 1:26; 2 Tim. 1:7; 1 Tim. 2:4). These four criteria are worthy measures of an orthodox trinitarian Christology.

The fifth criterion that *Anointed* sets forth for an Orthodox Christology is the need to be “consistent with the accepted creeds of Christendom” (192).

The sixth and final criterion of contemporary Christology is that it must respond to contemporary issues; it must be truly contemporary and culturally relevant; it must be intelligible in today’s world and empower the Christian life. (192)

An orthodox Christology will reference the role of Father, Son, and Spirit in the incarnation, human living, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Both of these criteria are well intentioned, but both raise issues that can ultimately undermine a believer’s full acceptance of the truth contained in the scriptural testimony. It is understandable that *Anointed* would make creedal consistency a necessary criterion for its “Trinitarian Spirit Christology,” especially since some of the more extreme derivations of Spirit Christology are demonstrably heretical and at odds with the accepted creeds. But by defining the creeds as the “parameters within which Christology can unfold” (192), and then stating that the “Ecumenical Creeds and standards establish a perimeter within which the orthodox theologian may delve into deeply” (192), *Anointed* establishes another standard for validating a truth claim beyond that of the Scriptures themselves. This would not be a problem if the creeds fully articulated the truth of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit, but they do not, as even *Anointed* acknowledges:

Once Christology found creedal expression it had the effect of safeguarding sound doctrine. It also, however, tended to hinder new and significant theological reflection on the central themes of the faith...The theologians of the Byzantine, Roman Catholic, Reformation, and Protestant churches generally upheld the now long-standing Logos Christology that stresses incarnation over inspiration, ontology over function, and a methodology from above as opposed to one from below. The literature

of this time highlights the fact that christological discussion is dominated by reflection on the hypostatic union of the Logos and the human reality of Jesus. While these emphases are constitutive of Christology it is what is not examined that is of concern. What is neglected is the constitutive role of the Holy Spirit, especially when it comes to the relation between the Spirit and the Christ. (79-80)

If one defines the creeds as the “perimeter” of the realm of orthodox discussion concerning Christ and the Spirit, then the paucity of statements within the ecumenical creeds concerning the Spirit will hinder the development and confession of a Christology that fully accounts for the role of the Spirit in the economy of God’s salvation. What is contained in the creeds can be affirmed, but what is contained in the Scriptures yet largely ignored in the creeds, namely, the person and role of the Spirit in the economy of God, must be affirmed as well. And if this affirmation is at odds with the creeds, not because of a lack of accord with the truth, but simply because of its lack of inclusion in creeds that were addressing different aspects of our profession of the faith, the perimeters of the creeds are, at least in respect to the Spirit, inadequate and narrow.

Of greater concern, however, is the sixth criterion of cultural relevancy. To posit such a standard as a measure for the determination of orthodoxy is to sanction a weak, unreliable, and extra-biblical standard, one that is weaker than the creeds, and one that potentially can be in direct conflict with the word of the truth. This is because truth is above culture even though it is experienced within the confines of human culture with all its diverse and fleeting manifestations. The truth is eternal and unchanging, whereas culture is momentary and constantly changing. In the realm of truth, there is nothing that is culturally bound: There is no race or nationality (Greek and Jew), no position based on religious ritual (circumcision and uncircumcision), no status derived from degrees of civility (barbarian and Scythian), no social rank or status (slave and free man), and there is even no gender (male and female); there is only Christ who transcends all categories based on culture (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:28).

It is a mistake to say that the truth “must be truly contemporary and culturally relevant,” because this suggests that the truth must be tailored to fit contemporary expressions of culture in order to be both perceived and received by those who are currently participating in these contemporary manifestations of culture. Rather, the unchanging truth is always “contemporary” because it



---

speaks and continues to speak to all humanity regardless of time and place. And it is always “relevant” because it speaks and continues to speak through the sanctifying operation of the Spirit to those who hear the voice of the One who is both the Lamb of God in His humanity with His divinity and the great Shepherd of the sheep in His divinity with His humanity (John 1:29; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 1:2) The new man, the corporate expression of redeemed humanity, was created by God in righteousness and holiness of the reality, the truth (Eph. 4:24), indicating, among other things, that humanity was created to respond to truth, and when truth is heard, faith is produced irrespective of the outward cultural context. When the charge “Behold, the Lamb of God” is spoken, as it was to Galilean fishermen over two thousand years ago and as it is to the youth of our generation today, those who hear His call willingly drop everything and follow Him. A truly orthodox trinitarian Christology will convey the word of the truth that seals us with the Holy Spirit of the promise. Consequently, an orthodox trinitarian Christology does not have to be culturally formulated in order to speak to contemporary culture, because it reflects and conveys the eternally relevant Triune God in Christ. The thought that the truth must be compatible with culture makes culture the standard to which the Christian message needs to be conformed. This denies the power of the word and opens the door for much leaven to be added to the fine flour of the truth. Of the six criteria included in chapter 6, only the first four have real bearing on whether or not a particular Christological formulation is orthodox. However, the respect that *Anointed* renders to the creeds and its desire for cultural relevancy, while misplaced, do not significantly detract from its effort to put forth a Christology that is trinitarian in essence.

At the end of chapter 6, *Anointed* presents its trinitarian model, which is worthy of consideration and which opens up fruitful avenues for further consideration. Drawing from Karl Rahner’s axiom concerning the immanent Trinity being the economic Trinity, *Anointed* states, “The three persons of the Trinity, as they reveal themselves in the economy of salvation, manifest their inner-Trinitarian life and relationships in accord with the axiom that ‘the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity’” (221). Also drawing from Thomas Weinandy’s work in *The Father’s Spirit of Sonship*, which in many respects is a trinitarian application of Rahner’s axiom to the work of the Spirit in God’s economy, *Anointed* states,

A proper understanding of the Trinity can only be attained if all three persons, logically and ontologically, spring forth in one simultaneous, nonsequential, eternal act in which each person of the Trinity subsistently defines, and equally, is subsistently defined, by the other persons. (223)

*Anointed* seeks to apply this logical and ontological descriptive to the actions of the economical Trinity. In His economy all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt in Christ bodily, and of this fullness we have all received (Col. 2:9; John 1:16). “The Godhead is neither the Father alone nor a solitary substance separate from the three persons. The Godhead is the Trinity” (225). Because the Triune God is both economic in His immanent being and immanent in His economic operation, the trinitarian accomplishments of Christ in His person and work can be applied to as many as receive Him (v. 12).

Taking an opportunity to both affirm and extend *Anointed*’s trinitarian Christology, I would argue that the New Testament revelation of the Trinity in the economy of God’s salvation also stresses the varying roles of the persons of the Trinity which come to the fore in the process of the accomplishment of His economy for the believers and in the application of His economy to the believers. Although these roles may seem to be the exclusive provenance of one of the persons of the Trinity,<sup>1</sup> in reality, the other persons are present and active through the mutual coexistence and coinherence of the three. Thus, in the Gospels the role of the incarnated Son, who is with the Father by the Spirit, is emphasized for the sake of the accomplishment of redemption, whereas in the Epistles the role of the life-giving Spirit as the Son with the Father is emphasized for the purpose of imparting the divine life that was made available through the Son’s redemption. Lastly, in Revelation the role of the Spirit as the seven Spirits, who are out from the Eternal One and of the Redeemer, is emphasized for the sake of intensifying and consummating God’s economical operation in the believers to produce the New Jerusalem, which is the ultimate expression of the union of the processed Triune God and the glorified tripartite man.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter 7 *Anointed* seeks to show how its formulation satisfies a need within contemporary Christology for a renewed emphasis on the Spirit. What is helpful in this chapter is to see the extent to which the Spirit has been largely ignored in discussions of the Triune God, and how this lack impacts our understanding of such matters as the scope of our salvation. Because there has been a renewed focus on the Spirit’s trinitarian role in the economy of God, *Anointed* argues, for example, that the issue of theosis as a “biblical model of salvation” is being more readily accepted and “incorporated more into western soteriologies” (238). Finally, in chapter 8 *Anointed* stresses the benefits of adopting a trinitarian Spirit Christology upon the future development of study related to Christology itself and to theological anthropology. It also briefly touches upon the implications for discipleship and ecumenism.

---

## Suggestions and a Critique

In reading *Anointed*, several suggestions come to mind. First, the title's allusion to the anointing Spirit, no doubt, is part of *Anointed's* effort to highlight the role of the Spirit, but there is little development of the term *the anointed Son* within its pages. In fact, the term may appear only in the title itself. This oversight should be corrected because the term alludes to significant items in both the Old and New Testaments that could advance its thesis. In the Old Testament the anointing oil is a type of the Spirit, and in the New Testament the anointing is the reality of the Spirit. In the scriptural presentation of both the type and the reality, the person and work of Christ the Son are presented within a trinitarian context. For example, the compound ointment in Exodus 30:23-30 contains a hin of olive oil, signifying the one unique God as the base of the Spirit, and three units of measure related to four spices, signifying that Christ's work in His humanity, reflected by the number four (the number of humanity in the Bible), has a trinitarian base, signified by the number three (the number of the Trinity in the Bible). The New Testament subsequently reveals that when the Spirit as the reality of this anointing oil is imparted into the believers, there is a firm attachment to Christ (2 Cor. 1:21), making the believers anointed sons in the Son because this anointing first abides in us and then teaches us to abide in Christ (1 John 2:20, 27).

Second, as we abide in Christ through the anointing of the Spirit, the relevance of God's economy becomes experiential, dynamic, and knowable, eliminating the need for *Anointed* to buttress its Christology with an appeal to cultural relevancy. The anointing teaches us all things, and it is our experience of the anointing that convinces us that He is both God and man. *Anointed* acknowledges this, saying,

The church cannot deny the humanity of Jesus since it "remembers" Jesus and it cannot deny the divinity since it knows him as the divine Lord. But we experience Jesus with those two natures together, not abstracted apart or even philosophically explained. (86)

*Anointed*, however, does not truly develop the matter of our need for experience by showing how Christ's person and work are applied by the Spirit to the believers in the economical operation of the Triune God.

The aim of Christology should be more than to merely explain Jesus; it should unveil Jesus so that He becomes experiential to us. Our entrance into the economy of God

is predicated upon our experience of Christ, the One who is both God and man, divine and human, the One who has been revealed in us and who needs to be formed in us (Gal. 1:16; 4:19). Although *Anointed* alludes to our capacity to experience the Triune God in a mystical union with Him, it contains one significant drawback that will ultimately frustrate a believer from experiencing the anointing: this drawback pertains to *Anointed's* implicitly stated view that humans are dichotomous rather than trichotomist in our essential created being. The scriptural testimony speaks of humanity as being of three parts—"spirit and soul and body" (1 Thes. 5:23). There is a spirit in man, a human spirit, created by God and designed by God to contain and express Him (Job 32:8; Zech. 12:1; Gen. 2:7; Isa. 66:1-20). It is this human spirit that was deadened by the fall (Eph. 2:5), and it is this spirit that is born of the Spirit and enlivened through regeneration (John 3:6). In fairness,

*Anointed* does not focus on this matter because its efforts are directed toward moving beyond the false choices posed by a rigid adherence to either Logos or Spirit Christologies. However, given its laudatory efforts to move us closer to knowing the truth and thus desiring to experience the truth, it should recognize that the desire within every believer

to experientially know the Triune God in Christ can be satisfied only when we contact the Triune God who indwells our human spirit. In God's economy, when the human spirit is born of the divine Spirit, the two become one spirit, and in this one spirit, the believers are economically joined to the Lord as one spirit (1 Cor. 6:17). The truth of the regenerated human spirit, born of the divine Spirit, is the key to experiencing Christ's accomplishments in His work and Christ's divine attributes and human virtues in His person. God can be manifested in the flesh because humanity was created with a human spirit that can be joined to the Lord through faith.

Without seeing the distinction<sup>3</sup> between spirit and soul, it is difficult to comprehend, much less experience, the application of God's economical operation. This operation involves regeneration in our spirit, transformation in our soul, and glorification in our body. The regeneration of our spirit is because of righteousness, the transformation of our soul through the renewing of the mind produces sanctification, and the glorification of our body is the consummate expression of redemption. Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption are possible only because Christ has been made wisdom to us from God through the trinitarian operation that is God's economy (1:30). This operation begins in our spirit and spreads outward to soul and body.

A trinitarian Christology does not have to be culturally formulated in order to speak to contemporary culture, because it will convey the eternally relevant Triune God.

---

Without this tripartite understanding of humanity, *Anointed* conveys an unbiblical and wholly inadequate view of humanity in its effort to account for the biblical references to a human spirit. It notes,

When we start with the Spirit in our anthropology we inquire as to the identity and mission of the Holy Spirit in human existence. Prelapsarian humanity was created with a transcendental determination for God. By means of the indwelling Holy Spirit men and women have a divinely implanted religious inclination which ultimately finds its end in the triune God. (241-242)

Since the Bible speaks of every human created in the image of God as having a human spirit, *Anointed* is forced to equate the human spirit with the indwelling Holy Spirit because it rejects the revelation of the tripartite nature of humanity. This understanding is mistaken and should be rejected. The Holy Spirit cannot indwell fallen humanity, because unredeemed humanity bears only a sinful nature, and in God's economy there is no fellowship of light with darkness (2 Cor. 6:14). The term *Holy Spirit* is not used in a loose way in the Bible; it first appears in Matthew 1:18 within the context of Christ's incarnation. When the Word became flesh, bearing the likeness of the flesh of sin but being without sin (Rom. 1:3; Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21), the Holy Spirit became intrinsically and incorporately identified with humanity for the first time in human history in the person of Christ. It is simply erroneous to say that the Holy Spirit indwelt fallen humanity before indwelling Christ at the point of His conception. In God's economy Christ is our Forerunner, pattern, and model. Every aspect of our salvation is dependent upon Christ's experience and the Spirit's application of that experience. We can be born of God because He was born of God in His humanity (John 1:13; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5). We can be sanctified because He lived a life of sanctification, and we can be glorified because He was glorified in His humanity. All that Christ is, is available to us, but it is available only because we are in Christ. Consequently, it is wrong to assert that humans, even prelapsarian humans, were indwelt by the Holy Spirit before the incarnation of Christ.

### Conclusion

Despite this drawback, *Anointed* is a worthy contribution toward advancing the church's understanding of the trinitarian accomplishments in and trinitarian application of the economy of God. *Anointed* can be recommended on several levels. First, it provides a well-articulated summary of the historical development of Logos and Spirit Christologies and the current state of scholarship related to these Christological methods. It demonstrates an adherence to the Scriptures in its argument for a trinitarian Christology that acknowledges the robust role of

the Spirit in the economy of God. It well supports the statement that a "Trinitarian perspective is already emerging...whereby we understand the divine-human identity [of Christ], largely through Jesus's relationship to the Father through the Spirit. Divinity is communicated to humanity via the indwelling Spirit and humanity is communicated to divinity in the exact same way" (128). By helping to overcome the church's neglect of the role of the Spirit, particularly as it relates to the person and work of Christ in His incarnation, human living, and death, *Anointed's* work is welcome. It also acknowledges the role of the Spirit in the person and work of Christ in His resurrection and ascension, stating,

For Paul "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Here "Spirit" is best identified as Holy Spirit. Christ on his ascension came into such a complete possession of the Spirit who had so associated himself with Jesus through the incarnation, that an economic equivalence of sorts resulted. The resurrected Christ and the Spirit are now experientially one (although not undifferentiated). (179-180)

By acknowledging the role of the Spirit, *Anointed* establishes a base for a Christology that transcends the limitations of both Logos and Spirit Christology in favor of a trinitarian Christology that brings the economy of God into greater focus.

by John Pester

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>In many respects Rahner's axiom is a response to the complete separation in the minds of many believers of the persons of the Trinity in the economy of God.

<sup>2</sup>This extension is thoroughly trinitarian and even Christological because the actions of one of the persons of the Trinity cannot be separated from the actions of the other persons, even if the roles of the persons vary in terms of emphasis depending on the aspects of the economy that are being accomplished and applied to the believers at specific points in time. In the incarnation the Son's role is most prominent, but in His resurrection the Spirit's role assumes greater prominence. However, in the incarnation and during the days of His flesh, the Spirit and the Father were still working, and in the aftermath of His resurrection, the reality that the Spirit gives is still the Son with the Father. I am indebted to Witness Lee for these insights, which are particularly covered in his book *God's New Testament Economy*. Although he did not reference his understanding of God's New Testament economy as being a trinitarian Christology, it is thoroughly trinitarian and, hence, pneumatological in its Christology.

<sup>3</sup>In the aftermath of the emergence of Cartesian dualism,

the mind-body distinction in Western cultural understandings of humanity was pushed to an unsustainable point of completely separating the functions of the mind from the functions of the body. As the rigidity of this dualism increasingly became the focus of valid criticism, the scriptural revelation of the tripartite nature of humanity was criticized on the same basis, that is, that a tripartite view of humanity only compounds the epistemological problem of dualism by positing a third part that is equally and rigidly separate from the other two parts. This is regrettable, not only because it is a false reading of the biblical record, but also because it leads to a denial of the biblical record. Humanity is composed of three parts—spirit and soul and body—but these three parts cannot be separated anthropologically even though they are distinct in their function. Even Hebrews 4:12, which speaks of the dividing of soul and spirit, does not support an anthropological separation: the living and operative word divides the fallen functions of our soul, principally the function of our unrenewed mind, from the regenerated functions of our spirit which are expressed through the renewal that occurs in the spirit of the mind (Eph. 4:23).

### Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 2003.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971.

## Longing for the Original Church

*Back to the Original Church: The Secret Behind Church Movements*, by Alan J. Delotavo. Eugene: Resource Publications, 2010.

For centuries, conscientious Christians have lamented the divided state of Christianity and have recognized the need for a restoration of the oneness that characterized the church in its earliest days (Acts 2:42-47). In *Back to the Original Church: The Secret Behind Church Movements* (hereafter, *Back*) Alan J. Delotavo (Ph.D., University of Pretoria) lends his voice to the cry for unity. Instead of proposing a scriptural “remedy” to the discord, however, Delotavo enthusiastically offers to readers his

“discovery” of God’s secret work to recover the church to His original intention. The premise is intriguing, and the notion of recovery, though not original to Delotavo, is certainly valid.<sup>1</sup> But *Back* rings hollow, for the “discovery” that it purports to have made is that the modern Evangelical movement is the culmination of God’s progressive work to restore the church according to the New Testament pattern.

### Preliminary Remarks

Before taking a closer look at *Back*, two preliminary matters deserve comment. First, the book evinces the author’s genuine love for Christ and His church, and his longing for oneness in the Body of Christ is borne out of that love. As evidence of his sincerity, Delotavo offers thanks to Jesus “for giving us the church that has been

our refuge in times of our deepest needs” and to the Christians of varying persuasions who rendered him comfort during his time of undefined sorrow and wandering (ix). Further, the author’s biographical blurb refers to Delotavo’s “trials in life and unusual journey of faith” that “providentially led him to the discovery of the secret mes-

sage behind church movements” (101). The “secret message” that the author attempts to convey, therefore, is not the result of an academic exercise but the product of a faith that has been tried by suffering. Although the message ultimately falls short of God’s goal for the church, as this review seeks to explain, the search itself bears the mark of sincerity.

Second, readers should be cautioned that *Back* makes for a cumbersome read as the writing itself never rises to the level of quality expected in a professionally published volume. Further, the manuscript appears not to have been edited, as it is blighted with errors, many of them the common missteps of second-language learners. These blemishes regrettably detract from the book’s readability and compromise the effectiveness of the affirmable points that it makes. Nonetheless, the book has been offered to the Christian public as is, and in that form it stands for review.<sup>2</sup>

### An Overview

*Back* proceeds along an arc of nine chapters. Chapter 1, “Why This Book is Important to All Christians,” serves as a one-page invitation to prayerfully consider the book’s message and suggests that the current state of the church could be “a deformation of the original church” (1).

It is wrong to assert that humans, even prelapsarian humans, were indwelt by the Holy Spirit before the incarnation of Christ.



---

Chapter 2, "What the Original Church was Like," highlights characteristics of the life of the early church, notably its Christ-centered faith and Spirit-equipped missionary activity as portrayed in the New Testament. Chapter 3, "What Happened when the Disciples were Gone," traces key developments in Christian history after the time of the apostles through the seventeenth century. Delotavo underlines the church's steady decline through the Middle Ages, the Reformation as the beginning of "a long process of regenerating the church" (30), and the periods of alternating recovery and loss following the Reformation. Pointing toward the climax of *Back's* message, Chapter 3 observes that "church movements are not ends in themselves, but a means for a more profound and holistic end" (31). Chapter 4, "The Birth of Puzzling Modern Evangelicalism," looks at the first and second Great Awakenings, Protestant liberalism, Christian fundamentalism, and the birth of the modern Evangelical movement as "the fuller regeneration of the Christian church" (42).

Chapter 5, "The Grand Mosaic," offers definitions of Evangelicalism from various Evangelical authors and synthesizes those definitions according to "the three layers of evangelical faith" (55): a focus on the Great Commission, Bible-based teachings, and a ministry of conversion. Chapter 6, "Checking the Message Again," reviews the gains made by the church in its historic periods of recovery and goes further to identify specific items recovered by varying groups within that history. For example, *Back* states, "In Calvinism, we see the re-emphasis of God's sovereignty in human salvation when people had forgotten it...In Methodism, we see a return to life-oriented Bible teachings" (71). The apex of this process of recovery is identified as the "Modern Evangelical movement," in which, *Back* insists, "we see God's leadings in restoring the Christian church back to its wholesome pristine state" (72). Chapter 7, "The Past Chosen Ones," reviews Old Testament history through the forming of the nation of Israel as a type of the Christian church. *Back* warns that, as seen in the history of Israel, God's calling is conditional. If the Christian church fails to fulfill God's purpose today, as Israel did in its history, then God may call another people to complete the work that He desires to accomplish. Chapter 8, "The New People of God," retells New Testament history and defines the identity of the church as "the one new family of Christ" contra denominational segregation and "religious camps" (91). The characteristics of the "original" church are again covered, this time described as Christ-centered, Spirit-equipped, missional, and one in living and activity (92-95). Chapter 9, "The Last Call," insists that the church must not be confused with the future kingdom and calls the church today to "set an example to the world in preparation for the coming kingdom of God, that coming grand reunion of humankind" (100).

### Christ versus Division and the Need of Recovery: an Affirmation

A particular strength of *Back* is Delotavo's forthrightness to oppose sectarianism and to call the church back to its simplicity in Christ and the preaching of the gospel to a fallen world. Yet at no time is Delotavo offensive when he appeals to the consciences of his readers. Rather, his infectious enthusiasm for Christ and his yearning for the church to fulfill its divine purpose shine forth throughout the book and are properly convicting. He writes,

The centrality of Christ reminds us, as Christians, that the church is universally Christ's, not exclusively ours. It reminds us that Christ's church exists not because we created or re-created it, but because Christ commissioned it to exist. And we are called Christians not because we are followers of our own respective denominations, but because we are believers and followers of Christ. Above all is Christ! Christ is the foundation of our Christian identity. Christ is the identity of our Christian faith; he is the identity of our Christian church, and he is the core of our daily life of faith and mission. Should we not then transcend our separatist superficial identities and just restore the all-inclusive Christ as the center of our respective church life? Should we not then just restore the proclamation of the gospel of salvation to our lost world as the reason for existence of our respective churches? Do denominational and cultural idiosyncrasies have place in the heart of Jesus? (60-61)

Delotavo's objections to sectarianism are particularly useful because they go beyond general complaints to identify the various bases of division that exist within the church today.

Everyone still sees each other as an exclusive denominational organization instead of, altogether, one family of faith reflecting the coming new and whole human family in the kingdom of God. Why? Each believes that by remaining separate, distinct, and dogmatic about itself, it preserves its existence, as if the Christian church is nothing more than an exclusive religious club. Each unit creates a church-club for itself. Doctrinal distinctions (as if each has its own exclusive doctrinal patent) instead of mutual faith in and mission for Jesus pervades. And even among those who hold a similar statement beliefs, ethnically segregated churches still exist. As if superficial cultures, skin colors, and geographic roots could not be transcended by the gospel (remember what the apostles said that neither Jew, nor Greek, nor Gentile, nor slave, nor free?). (64-65)

*Back's* recognition that denominational, doctrinal, racial, and geographic preferences have compromised the church's purity toward Christ leads to the book's crucial

realization that a work of recovery is needed to restore the church to its original purpose. Further, *Back* rightly acknowledges “the progressive revelations of the Holy Spirit” since the Reformation and states that “the Holy Spirit has been working with true-hearted Christians from one generation to another toward a finale” (31). It also affirms the need for the church’s cooperation “to recover the original characteristics of church life to learn what the church originally was, and its purpose” (2). Notably, *Back* does not stop at general calls for recovery but seeks to identify in the church’s history since the Reformation specific “regenerative movements [e.g., Puritanism, Pietism, the Great Awakenings]” that God has used in His work of recovery “to finally bring the church back to its grand synthesis and to prepare the world for the coming kingdom of God” (71). *Back*’s affirmation of the Lord’s work of recovery in church history and the ongoing need for recovery until the church fulfills its original purpose are noteworthy indeed, but *Back*’s definition of the original purpose of the church falls short of the full New Testament revelation.

### Back to the Church’s Original Purpose

*Back* defines the purpose of the church’s existence as “living a daily Christ-centered life of faith and fulfilling the Christ-centered Great Commission” (43). While this is not wrong and is commendable for its “Christ-centered” view, it also is not complete. The purpose of the church, the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4) is, more fully, to express the all-inclusive Christ, the mystery of God (Col. 2:2), as His organic Body (Eph. 4:15-16). *Back*’s shortage of vision concerning the purpose of the church’s existence is a natural consequence of its deficient view of the church itself.

While *Back* rightly and commendably refers to the “universal” identity of the church (89), “the universal household of Christ” (93), “one universal church of Christ,” “just one universal Christian church” (95), the “original oneness and universality of the church” (96), “the universal people of Christ” (99), and “one universal Christian church” (101), it also suffers under the debilitating notion that nearly all of the New Testament designations for the church (e.g., the family of God, the bride of Christ, the Body of Christ, etc.) are merely metaphors (90-91, 6). But the church is the family of God because it possesses the life of God, as the members of human families are designated as such because they have been born of a common life. The church is the bride of Christ because it has been produced from the

side of the crucified Savior (John 19:34), as Eve was produced from the rib out of Adam’s side (Gen. 2:21-22), and because the church is Christ’s counterpart in love and is “one flesh” with Him (Eph. 5:31-32), as human spouses are to one another. The church is the Body of Christ because it is composed of many organic members who, in their oneness in life and function, express the Head that bears them and directs their movements, as human bodies do by God’s creation. If it is appropriate to speak of metaphors at all, perhaps it is fitting to suggest that human families, spouses, and bodies are God-created metaphors for the spiritual realities in the divine economy and not merely convenient descriptors that the apostles employed to help believers relate to one another. The church is certainly universal, but it is also organic, and the various designations for it point to its organic nature. Absent the organic view of the universal

church, believers may object to sectarianism in principle but may not repudiate the separatist inclination as long as respective groups can work together peacefully for a common cause. And this, regrettably, is where *Back* ultimately leads.

As it traces the various streams of recovery through the church’s history since the Reformation, *Back* insists that the river into which they all flow is the modern Evangelical movement. The evangelicalism that it preaches is not “a separate denomination but a modern movement for the *re*-formation of the centrality of Christ in Christian faith, the centrality of Christ in the life of Christian church!” (60). Further,

as a more Christ-centered movement, it transcends all denominations (including Christian ethnocentrism) and directs the churches of Christianity to become more Christ-centered. Thus there can be Evangelical Catholics, Evangelical Protestants, Evangelical Pentecostals, and Evangelical Orthodox who are all Christ-centered in their mission, teachings, and ministries. Wow! What does this imply? Can you sense something exciting and grand here? (60)

For *Back*, then, the key to unity is transcending all factors of division to fulfill the church’s purported identity as a “transdenominational transracial people of God” (41-42), the “interracial transcultural new people of God,” and “an interracial spiritual community” (87). Therefore, in *Back*’s view, the saints of God, the members of the Body of Christ, can remain Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal, etc., if they take the “evangelical” way of Christ-centeredness, gospel preaching, Bible-based teaching, and

Denominational, doctrinal,  
racial, and geographic  
preferences have compromised  
the church’s purity  
toward Christ.

---

advancing a ministry of conversion. In this paradigm, cooperation among the various groups is essential:

Furthermore, Modern Evangelicalism charismatically draws churches together in fulfilling their common gospel mission...Faithful Modern Evangelicals shun separatist denominationalism and racial Christian segregation, and promote interdenominational and interracial missional cooperation. (56)

But the New Testament revelation is not that believers must transcend the factors that divide them by taking the Evangelical way but that all the dividing factors were crucified with Christ as He created the new man in Himself, “so making peace” (Eph. 2:14-15). Therefore, in the new man “there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). Further, the church as the Body of Christ indeed has a practical expression on the earth, but it is not embodied in denominational structures that are “Evangelical” and cooperative across party lines. Rather, the practical expression of the universal church, according to the New Testament, is in local churches that take Christ as their foundation, the oneness of the Body of Christ as their ground, the city in which they meet as their boundary, and the fellowship with all the local churches throughout the earth as their living.

The Lord Jesus prophesied that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18), that is, the universal church composed of all the believers in Christ. The universal church is His one Body composed of many members and organically constituted with His unsearchable riches (Rom. 12:4-5; Eph. 5:30; 3:8, 10). A local church that stands on Christ as its unique foundation (1 Cor. 3:11) is a local expression of the Body and, therefore, is a part of the universal Body (12:27; Eph. 2:22). According to the New Testament pattern, each local church takes the city where it meets as its boundary and is not greater or smaller than its city (Rev. 1:11; Acts 8:1; 13:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; cf. Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The churches endeavor to practice mutual fellowship (Rom. 16:1-16; Col. 4:16), and their oneness—the oneness of the Spirit as the essence of the “one Body” (Eph. 4:3-4)—is maintained by this fellowship, which is in the divine life, with the Triune God, and with the apostles (1 John 1:1-3). The universal church, therefore, is realized in local churches, not in denominations that merely cooperate in mutually beneficial endeavors. And regardless of how cooperative they are, entities that define themselves according to denominational, doctrinal, natural, or traditional affiliations can remain only as divisions within the Body of Christ and in need of recovery to God’s original purpose for the church. To recover the New Testament model of the church, then, is to recover the local churches as local expressions of the universal, organic Body of Christ.

## Conclusion

The church has deviated from its apostolic roots, and *Back* is to be commended for unabashedly pointing out the deviation. The book’s stress on God’s work of recovery also deserves affirmation. But *Back* errs by insisting that the “final synthesis” of that recovery work is embodied in modern Evangelicalism as a transracial, transdenominational, interracial, intercultural movement (97). Instead of taking us back to the original church, therefore, *Back* can only continue to foster a view of the church and its purpose that is ultimately short of the emphasis of Scripture.

by Tony Espinosa

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>*Affirmation & Critique* covered the principle of recovery in its January 2000 issue, “God’s Economy and the Principle of Recovery.”

<sup>2</sup>All quotations from *Back*, including chapter titles, are reproduced as they appear in the book. Errors have not been corrected or indicated with “[sic].”

## Advocating a Proper Role for the Spirit

*Trinitarian Christology: The Power That Sets Us Free*, by Michael L. Cook, SJ. Paulist Press, 2010.

In *Trinitarian Christology: The Power That Sets Us Free* (hereafter *Trinitarian*) Michael L. Cook, SJ, Flannery Professor of Theology at Gonzaga University, emphasizes the role of the Spirit in Christology as a means to a proper understanding and conceptualization of the Divine Trinity. Drawing from the Scriptures and from the works of other scholars, *Trinitarian* seeks to advocate a more active role for the Spirit in the Trinity. At the same time, it offers a tactful analysis of the controversy between the Eastern and Western traditions concerning the conceptualization of the Trinity and presents various alternatives that conceive a more active role of the Spirit in the immanent Trinity to further Cook’s desire for ecumenical unity.

## An Overview

In its introduction, based upon Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19, *Trinitarian* states that in verse 19 “what the

---

fullness entails is the subject matter of a trinitarian Christology” (5). It then introduces its approach toward trinitarianism by setting it in contrast to Roger Haight’s proposal in the book *Jesus, Symbol of God* (5).

Roger Haight’s approach employs a “structure of understanding” that begins “from below” and “entails an ascending Christology,” includes the “uncentering” the resurrection of Christ, and holds a “normative but pluralist” position concerning Jesus as the cause of salvation such that Christians may regard other world religions as true (6-7). In contrast to this extra-biblical approach, *Trinitarian’s* approach, in seeking to “develop an integrated trinitarianism that affirms both Spirit and Word within the divine life and in the economy of salvation,” includes “an analysis of the historical development from Jesus to the early Church,” beginning from the death and resurrection of Christ as the point of synthesis (9, 6). This analysis takes the resurrection of Christ by the Father through the power of the Spirit as the “synthetic key” to all that is said about Jesus (7). It regards the resurrection of Jesus as the “constitutive cause of salvation” (7), viewing Jesus as the One who was and is “inseparably human and divine” (8) and including a more robust pneumatology by incorporating Spirit Christology with Logos Christology and vice versa. As a conclusion to its introduction, *Trinitarian* points out that the way to know the immanent Trinity is through the economic Trinity as recorded in the biblical data (9).

In Chapter 1 *Trinitarian* provides a context for its development of trinitarian Christology. First, based on the writings of Paul Davies, Diarmuid O’Murchú, John F. Haight, and Walter Wink, *Trinitarian* examines four questions: how “scientific rationality” is related to “the mind of God”; “cosmic evolution” as the understanding of “God’s story”; the future and its interaction and dependence on “novelty”; and Jesus as the embodiment of the divine intention for the fullness of the “human being” (14). Second, it discusses the language and concerns regarding the emphasis of the Spirit for a proper trinitarian Christology. Based on the works of Kilian McDonnell and David M. Coffey, *Trinitarian* discusses the role of the Spirit and the Son in the order of salvation as distinctive yet equally important, such that Christology does not replace pneumatology but complements it. Further, it considers the function of the Spirit as a “contact function”; that is, “within the rhythm of the economic Trinity, the Spirit exercises a contact function, giving pneumatology a hermeneutic role” (22, quoting

McDonnell). Thus, the Spirit becomes the way to know Jesus and the Father. Based on this, *Trinitarian* opens a dialogue between East and West by centering the *filioque* as the issue of contention and presents the view of Eastern Orthodoxy by examining the writings of Vladimir Lossky and John D. Zizioulas.

In Chapter 2 *Trinitarian* states that the Spirit is inseparable from the activity of the Father and the Son. Rooting the “experiential basis” for this statement in “the human life, death, and resurrection of the Son who is inseparable from the Spirit,” *Trinitarian* examines the role of the Spirit in “the unfolding of Christology” beginning from the death and resurrection of Christ (33). When considering the death and resurrection of Christ, *Trinitarian* points out that “while the image of the Father raising the Son is clear, the important question for a trinitarian Christology is the role of the Holy Spirit,” and thus poses the question, “Can the Father raise the Son without the active involvement of the Spirit?” (34). Taking 1 Corinthians 15 as its primary text, *Trinitarian* presents the Spirit’s role in the resurrection not only of the believers but also of Christ. It concludes,

To recover the New Testament model of the church, then, is to recover the local churches as local expressions of the universal, organic Body of Christ.

The Father’s activity is always inseparably the action of the Holy Spirit. The Father works through the Holy Spirit and, if this is true in our case, it must be even more true in the case of Jesus’ own resurrection. If we are a new creation in Christ (Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17), then the risen Christ is himself a new creation in the sense that he has become completely and fully the “Human One” transformed by the same creative power of the Spirit that accompanied the Word at the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:1-3) and animated the first human being as the Lord God’s own “breath of life” (Gen. 2:7). The creativity of God (the Father) is always accompanied and vivified by the Spirit. (35-36)

Pursuant to this, *Trinitarian* makes a connection between the resurrection and the title *Son of Man*, thereby linking the Spirit’s activity to the returning Christ. It then examines and emphasizes the role of the Spirit in Paul’s experiences, Luke’s writings, the Lord’s promise of another Comforter in John, and traces the Spirit’s activity back to the anointing of Jesus and to His birth.

In Chapter 3 *Trinitarian* returns to the ecumenical Creed of Constantinople in A.D. 381 as a universally accepted conceptualization of the Triune God of the



---

Christian faith and discusses the implications of the addition of the *filioque*. *Trinitarian* points out that the issue of contention between East and West is not the *filioque* as such but the theological questions associated with it, primarily the lack of a proper understanding of the Spirit as a person.

He [Lossky] recognizes that there has been imprecision and obscurity in the description of the Holy Spirit (e.g., procession vs. generation), but to consider the Holy Spirit as a merely passive recipient of the “relation of opposition” between Father and Son renders even more obscure the distinct identity of the Spirit as a *hypostasis*. (62)

Summarizing the controversy between East and West, *Trinitarian* says,

The strength of the Eastern position is the strong emphasis on the primacy of the Father, while its weakness is the lack of a clear view on the relation of the Spirit and the Son. The strength of the Western position is that it anchors pneumatology in Christology, the Spirit is clearly the Spirit of the Son, while its weakness is that the Spirit does not seem to be on the same level as the Father and Son insofar as the Spirit has no part in bringing forth a divine person as does the Son. (64)

In the final chapter and conclusion, *Trinitarian* examines three Western approaches—Jürgen Moltmann, David M. Coffey, and Thomas G. Weinandy—to the understanding of the inner trinitarian life that respect the concerns of both East and West. It concludes that Weinandy’s proposal of the Spirit’s active role in the begetting of the Son, a “perichoresis of action” that “constitutes each person in their distinctiveness” so that “all three persons are active in constituting the triune life,” that is, “each person subsistently defines and is defined by” the others “is attractive insofar as it transcends the necessity of the *filioque* altogether” (89, quoting Weinandy and Cook). As a concluding word to the entire treatise, *Trinitarian* states that

the importance of the Trinity is not primarily a matter of doctrine as precise concepts but...a matter of the grammar of doxology. Both East and West can agree that all theology is *practical* in the sense that it is oriented to the fullness of human life, so that we will be fully alive and free as God has intended us to be. (89)

### Positive Aspects

In its unfolding of “a paschally oriented Spirit Christology” (32) as an attempt to provide scriptural context for a more active role of the Spirit in the economic Trinity, *Trinitarian* approaches and verifies a most crucial truth that in the carrying out of the divine economy, the actions

of any one person in the Divine Trinity incorporates the operations of the other two. This understanding is vital not only to trinitarian thinking but also to the believers’ experience and enjoyment of the Triune God. Furthermore, it identifies the believers’ experiences of the Spirit during the time of the apostles and concludes that they experienced the Spirit not merely as an objective force but as a personal reality who is “deeply involved in the future of the church” (43).

### Negative Aspects

Using Ephesians 3:19 as a springboard into its subject matter, *Trinitarian* states that “what the fullness entails is the subject matter of a trinitarian Christology” (5). Yet its understanding of the fullness of God as revealed in Ephesians and Colossians is at best shallow. *Trinitarian* points out that all the fullness of God must include the comprehensive image of the “triune life”—“the *mystical praxis* of seeking to transcend time and space in the ecstatic experience of the eternal embrace of God,” and “the *emancipatory praxis* of seeking to realize in time and space...the full and final liberation of the children of God in God’s kingdom” (89, 2-3), that is, a comprehensive understanding of the Trinity in His immanent and economical aspects. Furthermore, *Trinitarian* states that “the fullness of God is the power that sets us free” (89), and defines freedom to be “the freedom of God in creating” the universe and the freedom of man in “responding to the divine initiative,” which includes the responsibility of God and man in “the building of the earth” and “the transformation of the world through the power of God’s love on the cross” (65-66).

Although *Trinitarian* tries in many ways to explain the fullness of God, it misses the thrust of God’s fullness being related to believers’ experience of Christ for the accomplishment of God’s goal, which is to express Himself in humanity. According to Paul’s usage in Ephesians 3, the fullness of God is related to knowing by experience the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ (v. 19). By experiencing what Christ is, we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Thus, the fullness of God is not only the riches of what Christ is but also is the expression that issues out of the experience of these riches.

In the New Testament the fullness is the expression through the completeness of the riches. This is the reason that in v. 8 Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches of Christ and that in 1:23 and then in 4:13 he speaks of the fullness of Christ. The riches of Christ are all that Christ is and has and all that He has accomplished, attained, and obtained. The fullness of Christ is the result and issue of our enjoyment of these riches. When the riches of Christ are assimilated into our being metabolically, they constitute us to be the fullness of Christ, the Body of Christ,

the church, as His expression. First, in 1:23 this expression is the fullness of Christ, and then in this verse it is the fullness of God, for the fullness of Christ, the embodiment of God, is the very fullness of the Triune God. (Recovery Version, Eph. 3:19, note 3)

*Trinitarian's* review of the presence and power of the Spirit, though insightful, displays a lack of understanding of the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. It not only confuses the divine Spirit for the human spirit in John 4:23-24 but also speaks of Jesus' giving up His spirit in John 19:30 as His having "handed over the Spirit" (66) and points to this Spirit as the Spirit breathed into the disciples in John 20:22. Strictly speaking, however, *spirit* in the phrase "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truthfulness" in John 4:24 does not refer to the Holy Spirit but to the human spirit as the New Testament reality of the Old Testament place of worship.<sup>1</sup> Further, the Lord's breathing of the Spirit into the disciples in John 20:22 was

the fulfillment of His promise of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. This fulfillment differs from the one in Acts 2:1-4, which was the fulfillment of the Father's promise in Luke 24:49...In Acts 2 the Spirit as a rushing, violent wind came as power upon the disciples for their work (Acts 1:8). Here the Spirit as breath was breathed as life into the disciples for their life. By breathing the Spirit into the disciples, the Lord imparted Himself into them as life and everything. Thus, all that He had spoken in chs. 14—16 could be fulfilled. (Recovery Version, John 20:22, note 1)

Finally, *Trinitarian* concludes that "the importance of the Trinity" is a matter of "the grammar of doxology" (praise of God according to His deeds) and that "theology is *practical* in the sense that it is oriented to the fullness of human life, so that we will be fully alive and free as God has intended us to be" (89). This understanding is shallow, and it misses the mark of God's goal. God's intention is not that His people praise Him with proper grammar, nor is it that they be "fully alive and free"; God's intention is that His people would know Him and experience Him as their life and everything so that they would be filled with Him to express Him corporately. Any proper knowledge or experience of the Divine Trinity must be directed toward this end. Thus, the importance of the Trinity in knowledge for experience (cf. Phil. 3:8; Eph. 1:17-23) is the dispensing of Himself into His chosen people for His corporate expression in this age and for eternity.

*Trinitarian* is successful in presenting a more active role for the Spirit in the economy of salvation, and in its review and support of Weinandy's judgment concerning a mutually interactive inner-trinitarian life it presents a strong participatory role for the Spirit in the "triune life." However, as pointed out in a 1996 review in *Affirmation & Critique* of Weinandy's *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*,

the prevailing understanding of the church across the ages constrains him to the language of essence in referring to the Spirit. Certainly the church has long affirmed the personhood of the Spirit; it has not, however, adequately defined how the Spirit is a person. Weinandy's own attempt does little to advance the cause...But while his attempt to define the personhood of the Spirit fails (leaving us really where we were before his study began, that

is, with the Spirit as the love in the Trinity), his understanding of the Spirit's role in distinguishing the Father and the Son is profound. The existence of God the Son has long been seen as the necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of God the Father, and vice versa. But few have attempted to define how the Father can beget the Son and

how the Son can be filially related to the Father. (58)

Although *Trinitarian* identifies the believers' experiences of the Spirit in the New Testament, it not only fails to adequately apply these experiences to the believers today but also misses the mark of demonstrating that the Triune God can be known and experienced by the believers for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

by Joel Oladele

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to typology, God should be worshipped (1) in the place chosen by God for His habitation (Deut. 12:5, 11, 13-14, 18), and (2) with the offerings (Lev. 1—6). The place chosen by God for His habitation typifies the human spirit, where God's habitation is today (Eph. 2:22). The offerings typify Christ; Christ is the fulfillment and reality of all the offerings with which the people worshipped God. Hence, when the Lord instructed the woman to worship God the Spirit in spirit and truthfulness, He meant that she should contact God the Spirit in her spirit instead of in a specific location, and through Christ instead of with the offerings. (Recovery Version, John 4:24, note 4)

*Trinitarian* misses the mark of demonstrating that the Triune God can be known and experienced by the believers for the fulfillment of God's purpose.

---

## Works Cited

Lee, Witness. Footnotes. Recovery Version of the Bible. Anaheim: Living Stream Ministry, 2003.

Robichaux, Kerry S., and John Pester. "Reconceiving the Importance of the Economical Trinity." *Affirmation & Critique* 1.1 (Jan 1996): 56-58.

### Dispensationalism and the Revelation of the Church

"The New Testament Church as a Mystery," by Gary W. Derickson. *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (October-December 2009): 436-45.

In order to support the dispensationalist position that the church and Israel are entirely distinct in God's plan and in the Scriptures, Gary W. Derickson, Professor of Biblical Exposition at Corban College and Graduate School, in "The New Testament Church as a Mystery" (hereafter, "Church"), uses Paul's word concerning the church as a mystery, "which in other generations was not made known" (Eph. 3:5), to argue that the church is revealed exclusively in the New Testament. "Church" is an attempt to refute covenant theology's assertion that the Old Testament promises to Israel now apply spiritually to the church and will have no literal fulfillment for the nation of Israel. The article's aim is worthwhile, for replacement theology, or supersessionism, certainly stands in error. However, the article's narrow understanding of *mystery* and its use of an argument that there are no "references" to the church in the Old Testament also lead to error (444-445), for they obfuscate the full scriptural revelation of the church as the goal of God's eternal economy. Although the Bible reveals that God's economy is carried out in time through a series of successive dispensations, the governing principle in understanding the Bible must be His unique divine economy, which is eternal—not limited by the constraints of time—and mysterious—beyond human comprehension apart from spiritual revelation.

The basic thesis of "Church" is evident in its opening paragraph, which states that the church is a mystery in the sense that "it is not revealed in the Old Testament but is introduced and described in the New" (436). The first brief section of the article, "Biblical Concept of Mystery," quickly dismisses other modern and ancient definitions of *mystery* in favor of "the New Testament meaning of something kept secret but later revealed"

(436). In order to support this definition, the article cites Jesus' speaking to His disciples of the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 13:11 and His subsequent reference to presumably Old Testament "prophets and righteous men" (v. 17), who desired to but did not see or hear what the disciples had seen and heard (437). This section finds further basis for its definition of *mystery* from Paul's word in Ephesians 3:5 and 9 and Colossians 1:26.

The article's second section, "The Church as a Mystery," begins with a summary of the understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church advocated by covenant theologians, namely, that of supersessionism, which it seeks to disprove. The article traces the history of this notion through the second-century fathers, early modern Reformers, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century theologians who have argued for the church's replacement of Israel in God's plan and the resulting negation of any future for the nation of Israel. This section states that "each" of Paul's references to the church as a mystery indicates that the content of the mystery is the "Gentile inclusion in Israel's participation in Christ as part of the New Covenant community" (439), and it concludes with further exposition of Ephesians 3:5 and 9 in order to support and develop this thesis:

It is not a matter of the [Old Testament] prophets failing to understand or of God intending deeper truths beyond their scope of understanding. Rather the "mystery" Paul described was information kept from the prophets...It was not an intended secondary sense to promises made, for if it were, then it would have been knowable. (440)

After denying that *mystery* may refer to a "secondary sense" in the Old Testament, the article proceeds in its next section to reject *sensus plenior* as a biblical hermeneutic that allows for the association of the Old Testament content with the church. "Church" defines *sensus plenior* as "additional meaning" intended by God that "the human authors" did not intend or understand but which can be found in later, New Testament revelation (440). At least with regard to the church, the article disagrees with Kevin Vanhoozer's argument that divine authorship allows for meaning that "'emerges' at the 'level of the whole canon,'" which can supervene the meaning intended by the human authors without contravening it (440-441). This section suggests that no new or fuller meaning is added to a symbolic Old Testament prophecy in the "New Testament report of fulfillment" (442). It concludes that every Old Testament prophecy must be literally fulfilled, and conversely there is "no divinely intended *second* sense or *fuller* fulfillment, no secondary sense given in the New Testament" (442).

The article's penultimate section, "The Mystery Revealed,"

traces Israel's rejection of Christ, Christ's subsequent "rejection of the unrepentant nation," and His subsequent instruction of His disciples concerning the provisional divine work during the delay of the "messianic kingdom" (443). This instruction includes parables of the kingdom in which "the church remained a mystery" and Christ's first explicit words concerning the church in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17. Although this section emphasizes Christ's repeated commission to His disciples to preach the gospel to "all the nations," it insists that the Gentile inclusion in the church remained a mystery to the apostles until events in Acts 10–11 and 15 (443–444).

"Church" concludes by reiterating that God kept His plan concerning the church a secret in the Old Testament and that *sensus plenior* cannot be used to argue that Old Testament "references" or "promises" to Israel "mean" or "are to be applied" to the church (444). In order to support the necessity of a literal fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, the article's conclusion appeals again to "Paul's description of the church as a divine mystery" (445).

The article fails to demonstrate that the church's being hidden in the Old Testament means that it is not prefigured in the Old Testament.

The word *mystery* in the Bible is rich in significance. Contrary to the claim of "Church" that it presents the biblical concept of mystery, the article neglects both the Old Testament notion of mystery and its full New Testament significance.<sup>1</sup> The article also fails to demonstrate that the church's being hidden in the Old Testament means that it is not prefigured in the Old Testament, and in this regard, it ignores the ample biblical evidence of Old Testament typology related to the church. Furthermore, the concept of mystery promoted in "Church" erroneously presumes a human capacity to mentally grasp divine and eternal things independent of revelation that God grants to individuals, which is contingent upon their inward condition and which requires the involvement of the human spirit. The article's definition of *mystery* and its conclusion that the Old Testament reveals nothing concerning the church, no doubt, arise from its well-intentioned aim to refute replacement theology. However, in its strict adherence to a dispensationalist perspective, "Church" misses the centrality of God's eternal economy, which runs through the Old and New Testaments.

### Biblical Use of the Word *Mystery*

In the article's dismissal of unspecified occurrences of *mystery* in the New Testament, it cites the possible influence of "rabbinic and Hellenistic concepts" (437).

However, it fails to mention the isolated but significant use of the term in the Septuagint, where Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2:26–30; 4:9). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says that in this case, *mystery* refers to "the concealed intimation of future events that will be disclosed or interpreted only by God or by those whom he inspires" (616). This Old Testament denotation matches Jesus' use of the term in Matthew 13:11, for the divine meaning was concealed in His parables and required His interpretation.

The definition of *mystery* endorsed in "Church" emphasizes the aspect of time—"something kept secret but *later* revealed;" "a *previously* unrevealed truth" (436, 439, emphasis added). When "Church" cites Matthew 13:11, it ignores verse 13, which indicates that Jesus used *mysteria* primarily to refer to things that could be understood by some but not all who were present: "For this reason I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." Thus, the biblical concept of mystery includes something that is present in a hidden form and that is understandable only to those whom God

wills to make it known.

"Church" cites Colossians 1:26 to support its time-oriented perspective, but verses 26 and 27 also demonstrate a personal aspect of revelation associated with mystery:

The mystery which has been hidden from *the ages* and from *the generations* [chronological] but *now* [chronological] has been manifested to *His saints* [personal]; to *whom* [personal] God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (emphasis added)

Although God did not explicitly reveal the church to anyone in the Old Testament because the time was not right, He has revealed the church to persons in the age of the New Testament because the time is not only right but also because He has chosen to grant revelation to specific persons. To those whom God does not deem fit to receive revelation, such as the religious Jews who rejected Christ during His earthly ministry, the church and other crucial items of God's purpose still remain a mystery.

Even those to whom God wills to reveal the church often require a period of time and divinely arranged experiences in order to comprehend the revelation, as evident



---

in the case of the disciples discussed in the article. The church that Christ spoke of in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 was certainly not a Jewish-only church. Furthermore, the Gentile inclusion in the church was arguably revealed in the three instances of the “Great Commission” quoted in the article (443) and by Christ acknowledging that He was crumbs that had fallen from the table to the Gentile “dogs” (15:27-28). “Church” states, “The apostles did not fully comprehend the nature of the church as God intended it until after Peter’s meeting with Cornelius’s household...and the Jerusalem Council’s recognition... and further revelations given to Paul” (444). This is contrary to the article’s assertion that the church “is not something especially ‘mysterious,’ because once made known it is understandable” (436-437). The biblical concept of mystery certainly includes the notion of something mysterious, the understanding of which can still be impeded, particularly by traditional religious concepts (2 Cor. 3:14-17).

### Old Testament “References”

“Church” seems to interchange broad terms, such as “the Old Testament text” and “references,” with more specific language like “promises” and “prophecy [sic]” (444-445). Even if no promises or prophecies concerning Israel applied to the church, this would not mean that there are no Old Testament types of the church. Moreover, for Israel to be a type of the church does not mean that the Jews have no place in God’s coming kingdom or that God’s promises to Israel will not literally be fulfilled. In fact, the church is typified by Israel as well as by other people and things in the Old Testament. Apart from these Old Testament types, we cannot have a full understanding of the church. Consequently, to reference Paul’s use of *mystery* in order to deny the possibility of the presence of types of the church in the Old Testament is to negate the full scope of God’s revelation of the church.

**I**n His wisdom, God arranged for the Old and New Testaments to complement one another. The meaning of each is clarified and augmented by the other, just as the illustrations and written explanations in a textbook convey more meaning than either could independently. For instance, the significance of the blood and water flowing from the Lord’s pierced side in John 19:34 is illuminated by several Old Testament types, including Eve being produced out of Adam’s opened side (Gen. 2:21-23; cf. Exo. 12:7, 22; 17:6).<sup>2</sup> Eve typifies the church not only because the church was produced through Christ’s death but also because she returns to Christ to be one with Him (John 12:24; Eph. 5:27, 31-32; Rev. 19:7; 1 Cor. 6:17).

Covenant theologians err by claiming that Old Testament

persons, events, and institutions existed or took place only for the sake of their typological significance. Dispensationalist theologians overcompensate by contending that such persons, events, and institutions existed or took place primarily for their own sake. Although dispensationalists accept the Old Testament types that are plainly defined as such in the New Testament, many dispensationalists limit typology to those explicit cases. Old Testament types that are not explicitly identified in the New Testament canon certainly may be debated, but to entirely discount them based merely on a lack of explicit statements would seemingly require one to reject the truth of the Triune God, which is not explicitly stated as such in Scripture. Moreover, even those who accept only the Old Testament types that are explicitly identified in the New Testament must acknowledge that the church was typified in the Old Testament long before Israel existed, for Ephesians 5:31-32 clearly establishes Eve as a type of the church.

**C**ovenant theologians contend that promises and prophecies concerning Israel have been transferred spiritually to the church. Dispensationalist theologians fear that if such predictions are applied spiritually to the church, their literal fulfillment will be nullified.<sup>3</sup> This anxiety is certainly reflected in “Church,” for its claim that all promises to Israel must be fulfilled is based on its argument that the Old Testament contains no “references” to the church (445). For Christ to come as the reality of the Jewish feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths, however, does not mean that these shadows ceased to exist as literal, physical phenomena (Col. 2:16-17). Concerning the Old Testament record of Sarah and Hagar, Galatians 4:24 says, “These things are spoken allegorically.” This does not mean that Abraham and his seed had only a temporary place in God’s plan or that God’s promises to them will not be literally fulfilled. These verses simply point to the fact that God sovereignly arranged for certain Old Testament persons, events, and things to prefigure in types and shadows deeper, divine New Testament realities.

“Church” states, “References to Israel do not have a second, deeper, divinely intended meaning” (445). This assertion is proven patently false by the fact that 1 Corinthians takes the history of the children of Israel in the Old Testament as a type of the church (5:7-8; 10:2-4). First Corinthians 10:6 says, “These things occurred as examples to us.” The Greek word for “examples” is *typos*. Verse 11 also uses this word: “These things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our admonition.”

“Church” sometimes limits what it says is hidden in the Old Testament to the “Gentile inclusion,” but other times it more broadly denies that “God included references to

the church” in the Old Testament (439, 445). However, both the church and the Gentile inclusion in it are pre-figured in the Old Testament. We have already seen that Eve and Israel are types of the church. Rebekah and Asenath typify the church as Gentiles married to men who are types of Christ—Isaac and Joseph (Gen. 24; 41:45; Gal. 3:16).<sup>4</sup> Two of the five Old Testament women included in Christ’s genealogy in Matthew were Gentiles who joined themselves to God’s people and thereby participated in bringing forth Christ (1:5). These two women, Rahab and Ruth, also foreshadow the inclusion of Gentiles with God’s people.

God has not discarded the children of Israel. Those of the restored nation of Israel will be the priests in the earthly part of the millennial kingdom (Rom. 11:26-27; Zech. 12:10; 8:20-23; Ezek. 36:25-28; Isa. 2:2-3). God will include the overcomers of both the Old and New Testaments in the kingdom feast (Matt. 8:11), and the New Jerusalem will be composed of both Old Testament saints and New Testament believers eternally (Rev. 21:12-14). God will fulfill every promise He made to Israel. It is regrettable that the artificial constraints of dispensationalism frustrate the revelation of crucial aspects of the church portrayed in Old Testament types.

#### Analysis of Information versus a Spirit of Revelation

“Church” concludes, “Any argument from *sensus plenior* that in the Old Testament God included references to the church is invalidated by Paul’s affirmation that God intended to keep His plan for the church a secret” (445). The article transgresses its own narrow, chronological definition of mystery when it asserts that the church was not only hidden in Old Testament times but also is not present in any form in Old Testament Scriptures. Earlier generations of dispensationalists found many types in the Old Testament (Glenny 632). However, “Church” and the brand of modern dispensationalism it represents fail to acknowledge the vast wealth of Old Testament typology, perhaps because they assume that such types are automatically and independently knowable to human authors and readers. We have seen that, according to the biblical concept of mystery, if God arranges for something to be spoken, exist, or take place and be canonically recorded, this does not necessarily mean that He has revealed its deeper meaning.

The assumption in “Church” that the deeper meaning of a typological reference to the church in the Old

Testament would have been automatically “knowable” as such to Old Testament persons presupposes the capacity of an unrenewed human mind to comprehend the things of God (440). Accordingly, the article claims that the church as a mystery hidden in Old Testament times “was unknowable, not because it could not be understood, but because its information was unavailable for analysis” (437). However, revelation does not depend on mere mental analysis of available information but on God’s granting of revelation through His Spirit in the human spirit. Therefore, the incorporation of types of the church in the Old Testament indicates that God’s purpose was concealed within the text of the Old Testament, not missing entirely, because it was beyond the capacity of mental apprehension alone. In fact, even in the New Testament mental apprehension must be accompanied by revelation in the human spirit.

In His wisdom, God arranged for the Old and New Testaments to complement one another. The meaning of each is clarified and augmented by the other.

According to God’s Word, man is composed of three main parts—spirit, soul, and body (1 Thes. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; Gen. 2:7; cf. Prov. 20:27). The mind is the leading part of the soul and is a necessary faculty for comprehension, but it alone is insufficient to receive revelation of the deep and hidden things of God.

Instead, the Holy Spirit reveals such things in our human spirit (Isa. 55:8-9; 1 Cor. 2:9-10). Hence, they remain a mystery to those who think that they are wise and rely on their minds to grasp the things of God (v. 7; 1:18-23; Matt. 11:25-27).<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 3:5, the central scriptural basis of “Church,” says, “It has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in spirit.” The human spirit regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit is the starting point of revelation not only for the apostles but also for every believer. For this reason, Paul prayed that God would give to us “a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Him” (1:17). The following verse speaks of “the eyes of your heart having been enlightened” (v. 18). Thus, revelation requires not only the participation of the Holy Spirit in the human spirit but also a proper heart, which is composed of the conscience, mind, emotion, and will (cf. Matt. 5:3, 8).

Revelation involves more than mental comprehension of divine facts—it also entails spiritual apprehension of divine realities (John 16:13-15). God’s intention is not merely to communicate information into our mind but to convey Himself as reality into our spirit in order to produce His corporate expression, the church, which fulfills the eternal purpose of His will according to His good pleasure (14:6; Eph. 3:16-19; 1:9). God’s purpose and heart’s desire are accomplished through His economy—

---

His dispensing of Himself into His chosen and redeemed people (v. 10). The divine economy is revealed throughout the Bible and is the unique standard by which the Word of God can be rightly understood.

### Rightly Dividing or Cutting Straight the Word?

“Church” denies that the Old Testament includes any references to the church, because of its rigid application of dispensationalism, which emphasizes a systematic division of the Scripture into portions addressed to Jews, to Gentiles, or to the church. The dispensationalist motto, “rightly dividing the word,”<sup>6</sup> is based on an inaccurate understanding of Paul’s exhortation in 2 Timothy 2:15, which says, “Present yourself approved to God, an unashamed workman, cutting straight the word of the truth.” To cut straight the word means to “teach the word aright...The metaphor may be derived...from the mason’s cutting stones fair and straight to fit into their places in a building” (Moulton 456). The Recovery Version explains, “It means to unfold the word of God in its various parts rightly and straightly without distortion” (2 Tim. 2:15, note 1). A sister passage, 1 Timothy 1:3-4, says, “Charge certain ones not to teach different things... which produce questionings rather than God’s economy.”<sup>7</sup> *Economy*, from the Greek *oikonomia*, denotes “household law” and implies distribution, or dispensing (cf. Eph. 1:10; 3:9).<sup>8</sup> God’s economy is His plan and arrangement to dispense Himself in Christ into the believers until the church becomes the fullness of Christ, His full expression (v. 8; 1:22-23). To teach differently from the apostles’ teaching, which centers on God’s economy, is to fail to cut straight the word. Dispensationalism creates artificial divisions in the Bible, and covenant theology forces an artificial unity, but God’s economy cuts straight the word of the truth.

God’s economy is a superior lens through which to study the Bible because His economy is eternal and is the central line of the entire Bible (3:9, 11). A few key examples demonstrate that the unique divine economy is revealed consistently from Genesis to Revelation. Man was made in God’s image in order to express God, given a spirit to receive God, and placed before the tree of life, indicating that God intended for man to receive Him as food (Gen. 1:26; 2:7, 9; Zech. 12:1). The children of Israel ate the passover lamb and the manna before they entered into the good land, where they labored on the land to obtain its produce for their eating and worshipping of God (Exo. 12:5, 8; 16:15; Josh. 5:12; Deut. 12:5-7). The lamb, the manna, the land, and its produce typify Christ for the believers’ experience and enjoyment, which issue in their building God’s house and becoming His kingdom for His expression and representation on the earth (John 1:29; 6:35; Col. 1:12; 2:6-7). In the New Testament Christ came not only to redeem us

but so that we could receive Him as life and be produced as His organic Body, the church, for His corporate expression (John 6:57; 10:10; 1 Cor. 15:45; Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23). Ultimately, the church becomes the holy city, which contains the tree of life and the river of water of life for our eternal enjoyment, and which fully expresses God (Rev. 21:9-10; 22:1-2, 14; 4:3; 21:11).

Despite the clear scriptural revelation of God’s unique, eternal economy in both types and in fulfillment, dispensationalism emphasizes that God is “pursuing two distinct purposes”—one for Israel and one for the church—placing primary importance on God’s plan for Israel and relegating His plan for the church to a parenthetical role (Chafer 448).<sup>9</sup> The insistence in “Church” on the complete absence of the church from the Old Testament likely results from the article’s grounding in this ideology. Dispensationalism’s characteristic devaluation of the church becomes apparent in the article’s framing of Christ’s revelation and institution of the church as an “interim” divine activity coming only as a consequence of Israel’s and Christ’s reciprocal rejection (443). Moreover, the article’s conclusion subjugates “the church’s place in God’s present program” to “promises made to the nation Israel” (445). This thought contradicts the scriptural revelation that the church is the goal of God’s eternal purpose and the reason for which He created all things (Eph. 3:9-11; Rev. 4:11). A vision of God’s economy is necessary to guide our understanding of the Bible from beginning to end.

### A Regrettable Consequence

The dispensationalist truncation of the scriptural revelation concerning the church and its failure to account for the church’s being God’s eternal purpose result in an inadequate vision and experience of the church. The opening paragraph of “Church” concludes, “When the church is removed from Old Testament revelation, all that remains is to take the promises made to Israel literally and await their fulfillment” (436). Here the article intimates that dispensationalism may issue in believers’ passivity and even indifference toward the church while awaiting the literal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Conversely, the healthy teaching of God’s economy encourages the believers to be overcomers who turn the age by building Christ’s Body and preparing His bride (Rev. 2—3; 19:7; Eph. 4:16).<sup>10</sup> The outward events of Christ’s second coming can occur only when the inward reality of His Body and bride has reached completion.

### Conclusion

The last sentence of “Church” accuses those who see the church in the Old Testament of “violating [Paul’s] definition of ‘mystery.’” However, the article itself violates

both Paul's definition and the full biblical meaning of *mystery* by presenting an incomplete view of *mystery* in order to find support for its dispensationalist preoccupation with dividing ages (445). On one hand, the church did not exist and was not explicitly revealed in Old Testament times; it was a hidden mystery that was not revealed until God revealed it to the New Testament apostles and prophets in spirit. On the other hand, as the New Testament demonstrates, the Old Testament is filled with types of the church, which reveal many aspects of the church not fully expounded in the New Testament.

Israel's being a type of the church does not mean that its only purpose is typological, that it has been replaced by the church, or that God's promises and prophecies to it have been revoked. Nevertheless, Israel's rejection of Christ did allow participation in the greatest promise of all, Christ Himself, to be extended to the Gentiles. Christ has made Jewish and Gentile believers one in His Body. Now in the church as the new man, "there cannot be Greek and Jew...but Christ is all and in all" (Col. 3:11).

Beginning with John Nelson Darby, the teachers of dispensationalism have contributed much to an accurate interpretation of the Scriptures. Moreover, God does have distinct arrangements, or dispensations, for dealing with His people in the Old Testament and the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, God certainly will fulfill all His promises to Israel. As "Church" affirms, "God's gifts and calling are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29)" (445). However, the dispensationalist removal of the church from the Old Testament in favor of a strictly literal application to Israel misaims concerning the truth that the church is the goal of God's eternal purpose. Between dispensationalism's bifurcation of God's plan and covenant theology's contention that the church has replaced Israel lies the truth of the divine revelation—God's one, eternal economy, in which there is a place for the church and Israel. This economy must be our governing principle in order to rightly unfold the word of God.

by Peter Roberts

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Of the twenty-eight New Testament instances of *mystery* or *mysteria*, "Church" mentions only five. See "Glossa" in this issue of *Affirmation & Critique* for a more thorough linguistic discussion of *mystery*.

<sup>2</sup>See note 1 on John 19:34 in the Recovery Version for an exposition of the Old Testament typology and New Testament fulfillment and significance.

<sup>3</sup>This description of the extremes of covenant and dispensationalist approaches to Old Testament typology is based on W. Edward Glenny's useful summary in "Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion" in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.4 (December 1997): 627-38.

<sup>4</sup>See notes in the Recovery Version for aspects of the church revealed in these types.

<sup>5</sup>See "The Dangers of Systematic Theology" in *Affirmation & Critique's* Spring 2009 issue.

<sup>6</sup>As evidenced by C. I. Scofield's 1888 *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* and Clarence Larkin's 1921 *Rightly Dividing the Word*.

<sup>7</sup>The parallelism of 2 Timothy 2:14-16 and 1 Timothy 1:3-6 is demonstrated by the exhortation to charge others "not to teach different things" (1 Tim. 1:3) or "have contentions of words" (2 Tim. 2:14) and the warnings regarding "vain babblings" (v. 16) or "vain talking" (1 Tim. 1:6) and those who have "misaimed" concerning the truth (v. 6; 2 Tim. 2:18).

<sup>8</sup>It is sometimes translated as "stewardship" (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25).

<sup>9</sup>See "The Word of Righteousness: The Millennial Age (2)" in the October 2005 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*, especially pages 86 and 87.

<sup>10</sup>See "The Word of Righteousness: The Economy of God and the Consummation of the Age" in the April 2008 issue of *Affirmation & Critique*.

<sup>11</sup>E.g., the dispensation of law extended from Moses to Christ; the dispensation of grace lasts from Christ's first coming to His second.

## Works Cited

- Bornkamm, G. "mystérion." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Dispensationalism*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1936.
- Glenny, W. Edward. "Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.4 (December 1997): 627-38.
- Moulton, James Hope, and George Milligan. *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1930.