

THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN REDEMPTION

CLARK H. PINNOCK

Let us continue to approach the doctrines of creation and redemption from the standpoint of the Spirit to see what insights arise. The aim is not to denigrate any previous insights but to increase the total supply and perhaps re-order our doctrinal priorities.¹

NEGLECT OF THE REDEMPTIVE DIMENSION

The work of the Spirit in redemption has not suffered the degree of neglect that it has in relation to creation. Certain aspects have been regularly noted and widely discussed: for example, the Spirit's work of revelation, regeneration, sanctification, ecclesiology, gifting, etc. Such topics receive lots of attention and rightly so. If the Spirit is the power of creation, it is even more obviously the power of redemption. Indeed the two themes are interconnected. By the power of the Spirit, God both creates the world and moves it along to consummation. The church understands well that the Spirit is paramount in the order of grace.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of Spirit in relation to redemption do not often appear in theology: for example, the centrality of the Spirit in relation to the mission of Jesus is seldom noted, except in relation to the issue of our own empowerment. As far as Christology is concerned, one gets the impression that the Spirit is a junior partner and of much less importance for the work of redemption than Jesus. The atonement, too, is normally discussed in quasi-legal terms with little attention being given to its participatory and representative aspects. We hear much more about Christ's work *for* us than about his work *with* us and *in* us. We hear more about salvation as a change of status than as union with God by the Spirit. There does seem to be at least some neglect of the Spirit's role in redemption and with it (happily) a promise of fresh insight.

Dr. Clark H. Pinnock delivered this lecture during the Theta Phi Lectureship, October 3-4, 1996, held on the campus of Asbury Theological Seminary. His theme for the two-day series was "The Role of the Holy Spirit." Dr. Pinnock is professor of Christian interpretation at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario.

THE ASBURY THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

SPRING 1997 • VOL. 52 • NO. 1

RECOVERY OF THE REDEMPTIVE DIMENSION

The most important thing to recover (I think) is the prominence of the Spirit in the Christ event—or what might be called Spirit Christology. By that I mean the early understanding of Jesus' identity as a man filled with the Spirit and whose existence was due to the Spirit's hovering over Mary, as it hovered over the waters of creation (Luke 1:35). We need to understand Jesus is the gift of God's Spirit and harbinger of new creation. He is the "Christ", the Spirit anointed One, who is empowered to carry through his God-given mission. Jesus says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). From the beginning, people marvelled at his speaking with charismatic authority and his ministering in the supernatural power of God. The Spirit was central to his self-understanding: "If I, by the Spirit of God cast out demons, the kingdom of God has come to you" (Matt. 12:28). Peter sums it up: Jesus was "a man attested by God with deeds of power, wonders and signs that God did through him" (Acts 2:22). Jesus "went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). The Spirit filled him "without measure" as John says (John 3:34). The synoptic gospels go out of their way to connect Jesus with the Spirit at every point of his career, because (I think) they want us to understand him as gift of the Spirit and as One dependant on the Spirit for the accomplishment of his mission.²

Recovering the redemptive dimension of the Spirit's work affects (first of all) Christology. It invites us to stop thinking of a single divine mission of redemption (Jesus' mission) and to think of a double mission. It suggests that two hands are at work in redemption, not just one (as St. Irenaeus put it). It convicts us of ignoring Spirit Christology in favour of logos Christology. It calls into question any unilateral subordination of the Spirit to Christ, when the relationship is actually reciprocal. True, the Spirit can be understood as an aspect of the Son's mission as we have always seen it—but the opposite is also true: Jesus is an aspect of the Spirit's mission. There is a dialectic here—Jesus is both bearer and giver of the Spirit. We have been right to say that the risen Lord gives the Spirit but wrong to ignore the fact that the earthly Jesus was a gift of the Spirit too. Before he sent the Spirit to us, Jesus first of all received the Spirit. Before the ascension, the Spirit had priority over Jesus. By an act of new creation, the Spirit caused his birth and facilitated the Son's partnership with the Father. After Jesus' exaltation, the Spirit, on the basis of Jesus' representation, brings healing and reconciliation. We should not see the Spirit as only an instrument of Christ's mission. The Spirit initiated Bethlehem, Easter, and Pentecost, which are new events in salvation history that open up to the new creation.³

Recovering Spirit Christology would help us recover other facets of redemption not customarily noted too. It would bring out the theme of recapitulation, the ancient reading of the story of Jesus as a Spirit-empowered representative journey of atonement from beginning to end. It would allow us to view atonement more broadly, as more than a transaction outside of us, but as inclusive of his whole life of suffering and rising. It would help us think about salvation differently too, not only as a change of status with the theme of justification dominating, but in terms of conformity to and union with Christ. Spirit invites us to view salvation as life "in Christ" which is both corporate and mystical.

Recovering the Spirit-dimension of redemption would bring into focus the theme of union with God by the Spirit, a theme neglected in the forensic model. Viewing salvation as participation in the divine nature is central in Orthodoxy but less prominent among us, even though the theme is found in Luther, Calvin, and Wesley (2 Pet. 1:4).⁴ Looking at salvation from the standpoint of the Spirit directs our attention to the love of the Trinity (of which it is the bond) and to the task of fostering loving relationships among creatures, in echo of the trinitarian relationship. It lets us view Christian spirituality as intimacy with the Spirit and a following of the Spirit-led path of Jesus.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REDEPTIVE DIMENSION

Let us consider what light is shed on the doctrine of redemption through recovering neglected dimensions of the Spirit's work in it.

First, recovering the work of the Spirit in redemption permits a different reading of the life of Christ and allows a different interpretation of the work of Christ. By "different" I mean different from the prevalent view among evangelicals, which is to see atonement as a legal transaction more than a representative journey. It invites us to see the work of Christ as a Spirit-empowered journey of atonement. We see the Father giving the Spirit to enable Jesus to complete a representative journey for us all (the objective dimension).

According to this understanding, Jesus Christ, as last Adam, touches each human person in assuming vicariously our common humanity. By incarnation and the Spirit-led representative journey, he effected a change in the human situation. Now it can be said that "there is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). The world is not what it was before it was taken up through death and resurrection into the divine life in the Son by the Spirit. Objectively (one could say) humanity now belongs to God, even though it does not yet belong subjectively. The Spirit effected by incarnation a union between God and humanity which has transformed time and space. In this way God accomplished an objective act and saved us by a Spirit-empowered recapitulation of the human journey. God dealt with the old Adamic solidarity in Christ and brought about a new creation in him. God effected a change in the human situation by reconciling the world through the Spirit-empowered event of incarnation and representation. The juridical and other aspects of atonement can be understood in this larger context of Christ's journey and are not lost.

This model restores the corporate dimension of atonement which is often lost in favour of individualist and juridical categories. It does greater justice to texts that speak of our dying and rising with Christ. "If one died for all, all died" (2 Cor. 5:15). "God made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 2:6). "If we have died with him, we will also live with him" (2 Tim. 2:11). Let us not neglect the preposition "with" which indicates our dependance on and union with Christ: to die with him—to live with him, to suffer with him—to be glorified with him, to be crucified with him—to be raised with him, to be buried with him—to be raised with him, to be planted with him—to reign with him. We are saved by the communal bond that has been formed between us.⁵

When I read such phrases (we died with him, we were raised in him, we sit with him, etc.), I take them to be referring to events in the life of Jesus, not (first of all) to events in my own life. I take them to be saying that we are able to share in the events of Jesus' life because he is representative of humanity. I take it that the old Adam was dealt with on the cross and that a new humanity came forth in his resurrection. I hear the theme that in Christ, the conversion of humanity occurred and the race passed from death to life, that the man of sin was wiped out and the new man raised up. This interpretation views the work of Christ as a decisive and objective event of the past, which waits to be manifested and (in our case) appropriated.⁵

God sent Jesus to live our human life, as we should but do not live it, and to work atonement, not in the sense of appeasing an angry God, but after the manner of a representative journey of obedience through suffering and death. Now that he is risen and humanity is risen in him, his journey can become ours and the Spirit can conform us to his likeness and lead us to share in his glory. In this rendering, resurrection and the Spirit are among the means of atonement, whereas in the prevalent view they are obscured.⁷

The Father gave the Spirit to Jesus so that he might complete an atoning journey for us and Jesus gives the Spirit to us that we might participate in his journey. By faith and the Spirit, we are inserted into the journey of Jesus and united with him in his dying and rising. Paul states that we are "buried with him by baptism unto death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). God gave the Spirit to Jesus that he might triumph over sin and death in his atoning journey and Jesus gives the Spirit to us in order to work out in us what it had already worked out in him. The Spirit of adoption joins us to Christ and takes us on this journey, that we might be conformed to his likeness and share his glory. The death and resurrection of Christ are saving events into which we are being drawn by the Spirit for purposes of transformation. Recovering the Spirit dimension of redemption portrays an atonement which involves our sharing his death and resurrection by baptism through the Spirit. It not only clears our record but rescues us from the power of sin.

Barth uses the parable of the prodigal son to express the thought. Jesus left the house of his Father and became a prodigal for our sakes. Not as a rebellious but as an obedient son, he came into the world to bring home the lost children of God. Jesus went to the foreign country, gave away all that he had, and returned through the cross to God. Now the Spirit points us to him, unites us with him, makes us like him, and directs us with him to the Father's house of love ("The way of the Son of God into the far country" in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 157-210).⁸

Second, recovering the Spirit's role in redemption also lets us understand the work of Christ as a participatory journey into which we are being united (the subjective dimension). It sees the atonement corporately and mystically, in terms of our being united to Christ and baptized into his dying and rising by the Spirit. With the representative journey, a turning point has been reached and the renewal of humanity can go forward. Now people can participate by the Spirit in Christ who represented them in his person and work. The renewal of the race can proceed and the Spirit can take us

as we are, without leaving us as we are. He can begin to form us into the image of the new man who made his appearance in Jesus Christ.

Paul gives indication of this participation when he says that our salvation is "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1) and that Christ is also "in us" (Col. 1:27). Salvation is not primarily a change of status but a loving relationship, analogous to the union of man and woman (Eph. 5:32). Our bodies are members of Christ, we united to Christ, and are now "one spirit" with him (1 Cor. 6:17).⁹ The Spirit, who is the bond of love between Father and Son, has been poured out to embrace the world and to place it in the arms of divine love. The Spirit unites us to the God of love. The aim is to integrate creation into the life of God which is the goal of creation.¹⁰ The theme of union with Christ is not a minor aspect following justification—it is the heart of salvation—being drawn into the saving events to be transformed. We are not saved merely by Christ doing something for us externally; we are saved by Christ doing something in us and with us, as his journey becomes our journey, until we are reconciled and brought into union with God.

Spirit is working to make the representative journey of Jesus into a participatory journey for us all. He is gathering those whom Christ represented on his journey into his body, the community which is itself a provisional representation of the whole world (Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 643). Christ died and rose, not only for-us, but also with-us and the Spirit's task is to make objective salvation into subjective salvation through uniting people to the crucified and risen Lord. By the Spirit, we are baptized into his death and resurrection as Paul says: "When you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God" (Col. 2:12f). The old Adam is drowned in baptism (as it were) and the new humanity rises up into which we are being united. This is more than an event of conversion—humanity is involved in the death and resurrection of Jesus, its representative. Truly, we have been hidden with Christ in God as members of his body (Col. 3:3).

The atonement has a participatory dimension. Paul wants, not only to have his sins forgiven, but to "know" Christ in the power of his resurrection and in the sharing of his sufferings (Phil. 3:10). He can even rejoice in these sufferings as completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of the church (Col. 1:24).¹¹ The Father, who gave the Spirit to Jesus, so that he could complete a representative journey of atonement, now gives the Spirit to us that we might participate in his journey. Having been reconciled by the Spirit-empowered recapitulation, we are being incorporated into it by the same Spirit.

God takes pleasure in humanity, whom he longs to be his covenant partner. He wants us to be like Christ, who is his true partner. Our predestination is "to be conformed the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn within a large family" (Rom. 8:29). The way to that goal lies along the path of his atoning journey and consists in participating in his way. Christ went to the goal ahead of us and opened the door for us. We are called to follow Christ and participate in his journey through suffering to glory. We are called to experience the hostility of the world before we taste the glory which lies ahead. The goal leading to conformity with the risen Christ comes by way of incorporation into the way of the suffering Christ into whose image we are

being transformed by the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).

"It is remarkable" (Hendrikus Berkhof remarks) "how rarely the question concerning God's purpose in the renewal of man has been explicitly discussed in the study of the faith." This must be because the focus has been on atonement as a judicial transaction rather than on it as a transforming process. The Asbury community will appreciate what Berkhof adds: "An important exception in this respect was Methodism, particularly its founder, John Wesley."¹²

There is a philosophical issue underlying the concepts of representation and participation which I have been using. It assumes a "realist" as opposed to a "nominalist" view of universals. A realist is one who feels justified in speaking of a generic or universal human nature which Christ assumed and in which he exercised an influence on the whole human race. It enables one to see a kind of ontological connection, such that what happens to Christ can happen to us, because of the common human nature uniting us. It means that his death can be our death, his life our life and that Christ can effect a recapitulation of the human journey and a conversion of humankind in himself. But one can ask: is this intelligible? Was Christ really more than an individual man? The Bible seems to say so. It likes to say that because the last Adam lives, so shall we. As far as rationality goes, I think we can say that God made humanity in such a way that it would be possible for him to assume our nature should that be required. It is due to the hidden wisdom (his deep magic) which, had the powers known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8).

Third, recovering the work of the Spirit in redemption can put a new focus on the goal of salvation as union with God. It highlights the goal as sharing the glory which the Son enjoys with the Father. It makes salvation more personal and relational. The Spirit is bonding us to God and to Christ in the way he bonds the Son to the Father. Salvation is a relationship more than a change in status. The believer is introduced into the life of God by the Spirit. Paul says: "We boast in hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2). The Spirit's proper sphere is the world to come, being the Spirit of the end-times and the foretaste of what is coming. Spirit makes us long for consummation, where our destiny is to have "spiritual bodies", bodies which are created, permeated, and controlled by the Spirit. Spirit plans to make us partakers of the divine nature. As John says: "though it does not yet appear what we shall be, we will be like him when he is revealed" (1 John 3:2). The goal is to share the rapturous fullness of God's life and participate in the feast of eternal joy.¹³

From eternity God has been in love with the world and longing for the union of creatures with himself. We are loved with an everlasting love and through the joint and reciprocal missions of Son and Spirit, God is implementing his seeking love in the Son and extending his gathering love in the Spirit to bring us to union with himself. What manner of love is this that God would open the perichoretic unity of the triune society to us? Not only does he want to do this, God is actualizing it by the Spirit at this moment.

Fourth, recovering the work of the Spirit in redemption also indicates a spirituality based on atonement as journey and salvation as union. It is a spirituality which prays: Draw me into this journey, Lord, and bring me to the house of love. Share with me

the intimacy that Jesus shares with you by the Spirit. Let me be bread that is taken, blessed, broken, and given.

Contrary to left-brain Christianity, God is not far away but very near, not outside the self, but inside. In fact, the redeemed self dwells in the Spirit and the Spirit in the self. The spiritual life is getting to know the Spirit, not as a concept, but as intimate presence. It consists of experiencing his indwelling in the midst of life. Deep within us, in the sanctuary of the soul, God's Spirit is present, initiating prayer and speaking in a still small voice. God is here and now in the sacrament of this present moment, wanting to love us.¹⁴ We are called to calm and quieten our souls like a weaned child on its mother's breast (Ps. 131:2). We are invited to build disciplines into our lives which foster intimate relationship with God. Let us take time to let God love us. Let us put our lives in God's hands and turn everything over to him in ceaseless prayer. Let us seek spiritual milieus in which the seeds of faith can grow.¹⁵

One needs to be cautious about mysticism because it can devolve into turning inward and we can become forgetful about following Jesus. The Spirit, in mediating between the resurrection and the coming kingdom, would point us to Christ's suffering love. As such, mystical union points us outward and forward. This is not a spirituality that denies the world but a mysticism of the cross, rooted on the history of Jesus, which refuses detours. In our passion for the Spirit, let us not forget the true passion of the cross. Let us not follow a partially trodden mystical way which eschews suffering. Spirituality is not a straight road but one with ups and downs and turns like a mountain path. It includes both ecstasy and the dark night of the soul, both dying and rising. Its essence is not the love of power but the power of love.¹⁶

Spirit whispers to all of us who are in Christ the words the Father spoke to the Son: "You are my beloved." Our identity does not lie in what we do, in what others think, in what we possess. All such things are fleeting and fragile. No, the Spirit urges an identity grounded in God's everlasting love. It is the Spirit of adoption which cries out: "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15) The spiritual life means claiming our belovedness, on the secure basis of which we are sent forth into the world to proclaim God's love for all people, a love which is stronger than death.

Notes

1. My book *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996) looks at major themes of theology from the standpoint of the Spirit.
2. Gerald F. Hawthorne has written about the significance of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus: *The Presence and the Power* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991).
3. Hendrikus Berkhof attributes the neglect of Spirit Christology to the fear of adoptionism: *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1964), p. 18.
4. As a theme in Orthodoxy, Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994, chap. 6). Compare "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences" *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45 (1990), pp. 29-53. As a theme in Anglicanism, A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1988). Leanne Van Dyk notes it as central in Calvin: *The Desire of Divine Love: John McLeod Campbell's Doctrine of the Atonement*

(New York: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 151. The Finnish school of Luther scholars find it central in Luther: Risto Saarinen, "Salvation in the Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue: A Comparative Perspective" *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (1996), pp. 202-13.

5. Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), pp. 162-64.
6. Along these lines, compare Perry L. Stepp, *The Believer's Participation in the Death of Christ: Corporative Identification in Romans 6:1-14* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edward Mellen Press, 1996).
7. On these themes, Anthony J. Tambasco, *A Theology of Atonement and Paul's Vision of Christianity* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991). The model is dubbed a realist-transactional type of atonement in the case of Barth and realist-processive in the case of Irenaeus by George Rupp, *Christologies and Cultures: Toward a Typology of Religious Worldviews* (Paris: Mouton, 1974), chap. 4.
8. Donald G. Bloesch expounds Barth's re-interpretation of atonement: *Jesus Is Victor: Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), chap. 4.
9. On the phrase "in Christ", Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul, Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 160-70.
10. Richard J. Hauser, *In His Spirit: A Guide to Today's Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), pp. 26-29.
11. On the relation of the resurrection of believers to the resurrection of Christ, see Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 98-114 and Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).
12. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, p. 426.
13. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 336-39.
14. Some editions of Jean Pierre De Caussade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence* (New York: Doubleday, 1975) are entitled "Sacrament of the Present Moment" which is an idea that he uses.
15. George A. Maloney, *Called to Intimacy: Living in the In-dwelling Presence* (New York: Alba House, 1983) and *The Spirit Broods over the World* (New York: Alba House, 1993), chap. 7.
16. Jürgen Moltmann has this concern: see Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), chap. 11. Jean-Jacques Suurmond also speaks of it: *Word and Spirit at Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), pp. 156-60.