



Recent Trends in Pneumatology

The Revd Dr Gerald Bray, one of our editors, begins an occasional series of reviews of recent literature in the various branches of theology

It used to be said that the Holy Spirit was the 'forgotten Person' of the Trinity, though since the arrival of the Charismatic Movement few would wish to claim that that is still true today. One of the leading theologians of that movement has even suggested that now it is the Father who deserves that title! (T. Smail, *The Forgotten Father*, Hodder, London, 1980). However, a glance at scholarly publishing will soon show that although it is probably no longer correct to say that the Holy Spirit is 'forgotten', he is still a long way from receiving the kind of attention devoted to the Son, or even to the Father, if books on theism in general can be said to relate in some special way to the First Person of the Godhead. Leaving aside works on spiritual gifts, which usually concentrate more on the gifts themselves than on the giver, there are only about 20 serious theological studies of the Holy Spirit which have appeared in the 1980s, and few of these emanate from 'charismatic' sources.

Books on the Holy Spirit usually divide fairly naturally into those which deal with his Person and those which concentrate on his Work. This division has been traditional since the Reformation though, until recently, books in the latter category far outnumbered those in the former. Indeed, in some compendia of theology, the Personhood of the Holy Spirit continues to be treated in a very sketchy way, even though there are almost as many questions and difficulties surrounding it as there are surrounding the Personhood of the Son. But recently this situation has changed somewhat, and the question of the Spirit's Personhood has started to occupy a more prominent position than it once did in theological thought.

Even so, the subject of the Person of the Holy Spirit rarely forms the exclusive theme of a whole book, so that it is more convenient to consider what has appeared in recent years under the confessional headings which mark out their authors, rather than in a purely thematic way. This is the more significant in that disagreements between the main Christian churches have often revolved round issues of pneumatology. The Western and Eastern churches are divided over the question of the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Son with the Godhead, whilst Protestants and Roman Catholics have split over a number of issues connected with the Holy spirit's work in the church and in the world. It is therefore only to be expected that work in this field will have a confessional flavour not found to the same degree in Christology, for example.

Roman Catholic pneumatology

Protestants are often prone to think that Roman Catholics have a weak pneumatology, even going so far as to suggest that they treat Mary as the third Person of the Trinity and the Pope as his effective replacement on earth. These charges have been felt by Catholics engaged in ecumenical dialogue, and the past few years have seen one or two major studies designed to put Catholic pneumatology back on the map. Here the influence of the charismatic movement has also been great, since it is within the Roman Church that it has had its greatest impact so far.

Most comprehensive of all is the three-volume study by Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, which appeared in French in

1980-81 and has since been translated into English (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1983). The first volume begins with a thorough examination of the biblical evidence for the Spirit, taking in the Old Testament, the gospels and the ecclesial books of the New Testament in that order. The author tends to accept the findings of critical scholarship as far as the dating and attribution of particular books are concerned, though this is more obvious in the Old Testament than in the New, but it does not affect his main theme. The Baptism of Jesus receives particular attention, as do the Johannine writings, which were so influential in later theological developments.

The second part of the first book takes us through some of the major figures of church history, drawing on a wide ecumenical range of sources. Congar includes such figures as Symeon the New Theologian, Joachim of Fiore, George Fox and Edward Irving, and faces the issue of Catholic 'suppression' of the Spirit head-on. He concludes with the teaching of Vatican II, which he sees as a necessary corrective to what had preceded it, and as a restatement of the best in the Catholic tradition.

The second volume takes up the question of the Spirit's role in the church today. Here Congar insists that it is he who founds the church who makes it one in Christ, who guarantees its catholicity and who sets the seal on its apostolicity and holiness. He then goes on to apply this to the personal experience of the believer, relying on texts like Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 to make his points. There is a particularly good section on the place of the Spirit in our prayer life, which he bases on an exegesis of Jude 20. The third section of this volume deals with the charismatic movement in some depth, linking it to classical Pentecostalism but holding out the hope that renewal of this kind may eventually further the unity of Christendom.

The third and longest volume deals with the intra-trinitarian relations of the Holy Spirit, and tackles the famous controversies which have surrounded him. He gives a full account of the *Filioque* dispute, adding for good measure a synopsis of recent ecumenical discussions with the Eastern Churches. His own stance is fundamentally loyal to the Western, Augustinian tradition, but is very sympathetic to the Eastern viewpoint, even going so far as to suggest that the offending clause be removed from the Nicene Creed, provided that this is not understood as an abandonment of the traditional Roman position laid down at the Council of Florence in 1439. In the second part of the book, he deals with the role of the Spirit in the sacraments, concentrating on confirmation as the 'seal' of baptism, and on the eucharistic epiclesis, which has met with so much resistance in the West. Once again, he is very sympathetic to the Eastern position, and does his best to find ways of integrating it into Western pneumatology without destroying the latter's inner consistency.

Congar has followed up his *magnum opus* with a shorter study of the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit which appeared in English as *The Word and the Spirit* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1986). This follows the same general pattern as the longer work, but gives special attention to questions of Christology and offers a critique of so-called 'Christomonism' in

the chapter on the *Filioque*. For those who may find the longer work a bit daunting, this is an ideal place to begin looking at Congar's work, and to take in his analysis of recent developments in Continental theology, many of which will be little known in the English-speaking world.

Less ambitious than Congar, but still worthy of serious attention, is F. X. Durrwell's *Holy Spirit of God: An Essay in Biblical Theology* (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1986). Originally written in French, this book provides a good introduction to the renewal of Biblical themes in Roman Catholic theology, and Durrwell's conclusions will often sound strangely familiar to a Protestant ear. The overall approach is a systematic one, using the Bible as the virtually exclusive source of doctrinal data. He begins with a description of the Spirit's attributes and then goes on to expound his relationship to Christ, both in terms of the earthly, Spirit-filled ministry of Jesus and the heavenly dispensation of the Holy Spirit to the church. The next chapters describe the founding role played by the Spirit in the formation of the church, with special emphasis on the ministry of Word and Sacraments. There then follows a section on living in the Spirit, which deals with the great Christian virtues of faith, hope and love, and includes prayer, the experience of suffering and death, and the triumphant victory over these things which is the Christian's birthright. Lastly, there is a short section dealing with the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son, in which traditional Catholic teaching is presented in an irenic tone.

On a completely different track there is Donald Gelpi's recent work, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (UPA, Washington, 1984). Deliberately distancing himself from Congar and from the scholastic tradition of Roman Catholic theology, Gelpi sets out to discover a new way of looking at the Holy Spirit. The title of his book suggests that somewhere along the road to Jerusalem he fell among feminists, but this is not really correct. Gelpi is a Jesuit who has been deeply affected by the charismatic movement, and it is this emphasis which predominates throughout. He prefers to call the Spirit the Holy breath, and concentrates heavily on personal experience. The femininity of the Holy Spirit derives from his (her?) nurturing role in the spiritual life, and is an image which goes back at least as far as the Desert Fathers of the fourth century. Whether it is really helpful as a new model today may be doubted, but Gelpi's attempt is worth serious study. In particular, those who tend to think that charismatic literature is lightweight will have to revise their opinion on reading this book, which contains a heavy dose of traditional theology. It is probably best to regard Gelpi's book as an honest attempt to revitalise pneumatology on the basis of a very real experience of God, even if not everything in it is convincing.

Protestant pneumatology

As one might expect, the Protestant scene is much more varied than the Roman Catholic one, though by no means necessarily more profound in its treatment of the subject. Particularly disappointing here is the relative dearth of charismatic material touching on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, despite the very real influence which this movement has had on the spiritual life of so many Christians. On the subject of the Person of the Holy Spirit, there are two excellent books, one by Thomas Smail (*The Giving Gift*, Hodder, London, 1988) and the other a World Council of Churches symposium, edited by Lukas Vischer (*Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, Geneva, 1981), which is an ecumenical attempt to wrestle with the famous *Filioque* clause. Smail's book is particularly interesting in that it comes from a leader of the

charismatic renewal movement who has always recognised the importance of a sound theological base. In the Augustinian tradition, he concentrates on the Spirit as Gift, and examines the implications of this both in the life of Christ as revealed in and to the church, and in the Godhead itself. Here, however, he reveals the attraction of the Eastern tradition, and prefers to speak of the procession of the Spirit from the Father *through* the Son, a compromise formula which, in his opinion, does the greatest justice to both traditional views of the matter in the church.

Smail's book is written for a popular audience, to introduce them to some of the complex issues which surround the Person of the Holy Spirit. The WCC symposium is in a different league, bringing together leading theologians to try to thrash out an ecumenical understanding of the procession of the Spirit. In this symposium we are not surprised to find that the Eastern Orthodox representatives are staunch defenders of their position. What is surprising is the degree to which Roman Catholic, and especially Protestant, contributors are willing to move in that direction. Partly, this is because the Western Church has never really understood the issues involved, and has never given them the same degree of importance as has the Eastern Church. But partly, also, it shows a failure to appreciate the importance of pneumatology for the spiritual life of the believer, an aspect of the question to which the Orthodox are particularly sensitive. Of particular note is the contribution by Jurgen Moltmann, who argues that the credal formula should read 'from the Father of the Son', on the ground that the generation of the Son is a prior datum for the procession of the Holy Spirit. For those unable to enter the *Filioque* discussion because they lack a proper understanding of the background to the controversy, there is a comprehensive introduction to the issue by the present writer in *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983), pp. 91-144.

On a broader canvas, and embracing much of what would more properly come under the heading of the Work of the Holy Spirit is Eduard Schweizer's *The Holy Spirit*, which appeared in German in 1978 and was translated into English two years later (Philadelphia, 1980; London, 1981). This is a survey of the Biblical evidence for the Holy Spirit, beginning with the Old Testament and including a section on inter-testamental Judaism. It is written from the perspective of an evolutionary approach to Israelite religion, which culminates in John's Gospel. Schweizer finds it impossible to accept the traditional doctrinal expression of devotion to the Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity, and virtually reduces him to an 'it', which points in the direction of Jesus. A Christocentric doctrine of the Spirit is neither new nor exceptional, of course, but its association with liberalism makes it unsatisfactory, especially as Schweizer doubts whether Jesus ever mentioned the Spirit at all! On the other hand, there is a detailed presentation of the biblical evidence, which the careful reader will know how to use to his profit.

Covering much the same ground, but extending also into the area of historical theology, is Alasdair Heron's *The Holy Spirit* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1983), which is intended as a comprehensive beginner's guide to the subject. In this it succeeds remarkably well, being clearly written and highly informative. Heron is a Barthian who has been persuaded that the Eastern Church's approach to the *Filioque* is the right one; this bias is evident in his book! Nevertheless, his treatment of the biblical evidence is at least as thorough as Schweizer's, and more satisfactory from the conservative point of view. For anyone embarking on a study of the subject with little background knowledge, this is undoubtedly the place to begin.

For those who want a thorough examination of the Biblical evidence from a clear, conservative evangelical standpoint, there is John Williams' *The Holy Spirit: Lord and Lifegiver* (Loiseaux Brothers, Neptune, N.J., 1980). A major purpose of this book is devotional, and there is therefore a great deal of emphasis on the Work of the Spirit in the Church and in the life of the individual believer. This makes a refreshing change from much of what is currently available, especially in that the devotional aspect is tied to a clearly articulated doctrine of the Spirit based on biblical evidence. It would be a pity if the rather obscure publication of this book were to mean that it will be neglected in large parts of the theological world.

Revival in the church

Another book which combines devotional concerns with a conservative Evangelical scholarship is *Keep in Step With the Spirit*, by J. I. Packer (Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, 1984). Packer is especially concerned to emphasise the need to recover the biblical pursuit of holiness, which he senses is lacking in much of the modern emphasis on the Holy Spirit. His perspective is that of the need for revival in the Church, but he is very critical of some past revival movements, notably the one associated with the Keswick Convention. Criticisms such as his are seldom heard nowadays in evangelical circles, and it is only fair to point out that his views on Keswick are out of date, at least as far as the convention itself is concerned, but the main thrust of his message is an important one which we need to pay heed to today.

A curious feature of recent writing is that much of the traditional understanding of the Holy Spirit has given way to new concerns and emphases. However, there are some articles which continue to examine more classical themes, such as G. C. Berkouwer's *The Testimony of the Spirit*, a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical interpretation. There is also an interesting piece on the relationship of the Spirit to the atoning work of Christ by K. W. Clements in the *Expository Times* 94, 1983, p. 9. Readers interested in the role of the Spirit in evangelism will want to look at David Wells, *God the Evangelist* (Grand Rapids, 1987), which covers this important ground from a consistently conservative angle.

On a rather more esoteric note, there is F. S. Elmore's *Evangelical Analysis of Process Pneumatology in Bibliotheca Sacra* 145, 1988, pp. 15-29. This is a brave attempt to make sense of a movement more familiar to American than to British theologians, though it concentrates most heavily on the work of Norman Pittenger. The author is severely critical of the whole movement, and points out its many deficiencies in the light of Scripture. For those who want an evangelical critique of process theology, this article will be most rewarding.

Conclusion

This brief survey of recent writing in the field of pneumatology shows that while much has been written in the area, much remains to be done to bring the doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit to the forefront of the church's attention. In particular, there is a great need to re-examine how the Holy Spirit relates to Jesus Christ, and how they both fit in to the wider picture of the Trinity. This work is not peripheral to our life as Christians, but is central to it, because at the end of the day the Holy Spirit is our contact point with God the Person, who introduces us to the fellowship of the Godhead. May we continue to search for a deeper understanding of his being and his ways, as we seek to use his gifts for the edification of the Church of Christ on earth.

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