



## **The Debate about the Nature and Authority of the Holy Spirit**

### **Prayer Before Studying Theology:**

Almighty God, who taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit: grant to us by the same Spirit to have a right judgment in all things and always to rejoice in his holy comfort; through the merits of Christ Jesus our Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

--Book of Common Prayer, Whit Sunday

### **The Divinity of the Spirit**

- Unlike Jesus, Spirit is not explicitly called God or identified with YHWH in NT; in fact there is relatively little explicit reflection about the identity of the Spirit in the NT but is usually discussed in context of God/Father or Jesus/Son rather than as a separate agent in his own right. As John (chs. 14-16) points out, the Spirit never points to himself but to the God the Father or the Son.
- The Spirit is often identified in both the OT as "the Spirit of the Lord [i.e. YHWH]" and is therefore somehow associated with YHWH without being clearly distinguished from YHWH.
- The same usage is also found in the NT, although since "Lord" is used to indicate either YHWH/Father (as in the OT) or Jesus (cf. Acts 16:7: "the Spirit of Jesus"), some caution is needed in interpreting these passages; see for example 2 Cor. 3:17: "The Lord is the Spirit", where Lord probably=YHWH.
- Spirit indicates the presence of God acting on and in people. More particularly:
  - In the OT prophetic literature, the giving of the Spirit is associated with renewal and the giving of new life:
    - Ezek. 36:26-7: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you." (cf. the giving of life in Ezek. 37:9)
    - Is. 44:3: "I will pour my spirit upon your seed, and my blessing upon your offspring"
    - Joel 2:28: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh"
    - Cf.
      - new birth in Jn. 3:5: must be born of water and Spirit before can enter the kingdom of God
      - Tit. 3:5: "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"(do these have a baptismal context)

### The Spirit is distinguished from, yet coordinated with, the Son:

- Jesus receives the Spirit at his baptism and pours out the Spirit on his followers after his resurrection.
- Those who are baptized in the name of Jesus receive the Spirit; those who receive the Spirit are called by God to salvation in Christ.
- Those who have shared in the HS (Heb. 6:4) also share in Christ (Heb. 3:14)

### The Development of Threefold (Triadic) Formulae, Where the Spirit Is Coordinated with F and S

In the formula to be used in baptizing (Mt. 28:19: "baptizing them in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit), the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are connected and yet distinguished. (Compare Jn. 14-16: the Father has sent the Son and the Son must go away so the Spirit may come.)

Salvation is related and described in the names of God/Father, Jesus/Son, and Spirit and is understood to be a work of these three (coordination). The coordination of names, however, does not explain the relationship actually existing between the three, but merely shows that the three were inseparably linked in Christian thought and devotion)

- 2 Thess. 2:13-14: "for that God chose you from the beginning unto salvation in sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ"
- 1 Cor. 12:4-6: "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations but the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who works all things in all
- Tit. 3:4-6: But when the kindness of God our Savior...appeared...according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Savior"
- 1 Pet. 1: 2: "According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"

### **Personal Functions of the Spirit in the NT**

#### The Spirit Speaks/Bears Witness/Testifies

The Spirit "is the agent of revelation, who brings the content of the truth to the spirit of man" (Thornton, *The Incarnate Lord*, p. 324).

- Mk. 13:11: "But whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Cf. Acts 1:16; 5:32; 8:29; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2; 20:23; 28:25; Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Jn. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; ; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 14:13)

#### Other Personal Functions

Since speaking could simply replicate or transmit the words of another, the following functions ascribed to the Spirit are perhaps even more significant:

- Acts: The Spirit thinks good (15:28); forbids (16:6); appoints (20:28); sends (13:4); snatches (8:39); and prevents (16:7); etc.

- Paul: The Spirit is grieved, cries, leads, and makes intercession (Rom. 8:14,26; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:30)
- John: is another Paraclete (comforter, advocate--personal titles) alongside Jesus (Jn. 14:16; 1 Jn. 2:1).

### Subsequent Developments

We have noticed the linkage between the sending of the Spirit and the appearance of prophecy in the NT communities. Prophecy begins to decline after 120 A.D., apparently as part of a transition to more fixed forms of worship and hierarchical leadership in the local church. This tends to further limit discussion about the Spirit's nature and identity.

### Montanism

There is however a brief backlash in the second half of the second century when a movement when a sectarian movement called Montanism appeared and again brought the issue of the nature and work of the Spirit back to the forefront.

- As discussed in previous lecture, Montanism emerged in a poor mountainous area of Phrygia where a prophet named Montanus and two female prophetesses (Maximilla and Priscilla) claimed to be mouthpieces of the Spirit of God and to speak immediately from God. They were convinced that the Spirit was delivering fresh revelations through them with new instructions for the life and the Church.
- The movement declined in importance after their prediction of the second coming in 177 failed to materialize, declined in importance after 200 A.D.
- Still it did call attention to the Spirit and forced the Church to re-emphasize that what the Spirit is and does is to call to mind and reply the things previously revealed by the Son--Spirit is not separate from Son and does not bring a new revelation independent of that previously brought by the Son.

### Irenaeus

As discussed in previous lecture, Irenaeus was originally from Asia Minor but bishop in Gaul (southern France); wrote a work *Against Heresies* (refuting teachings of Gnostic groups)

- In book IV, he refers to Prov. 8, which speaks about God's Wisdom and, following Hellenistic Jewish interpretation, interprets God's Wisdom to be identical with God's Spirit (4.20.3).
- So the Father has his Word, which is his Son and his Wisdom, which is his Spirit and these are the two hands by which he created all things (4.20.1=parity).
- Also speaks of the Spirit as being given by the Word (V.xviii.1) and that "By the Spirit man ascends to the Son, through the Son to the Father" (5.36.2=subordination). This difference is never really explained or worked out.

### Origen

As discussed in previous lecture, Origen was originally from Egypt, later taught in Palestine; most important single theologian of Greek church (comparable to role played by Augustine in Latin church).

### Origen on the Trinity

- In his treatise *On First Principles* tried to use the tools of Greek philosophy to help sort out the various relations between Father, Son and Holy Spirit described in the Scriptures.

To explain the *unity* of Son and Holy Spirit with the Father, Origen refers to the idea of participation (*methexis*) found in Plato's philosophy.

- Roughly speaking, Plato made a division between physical things you could grasp with the bodily senses and non-physical things you could grasp with your mind. Physical things are imperfect images of non-physical things; what makes all physical things here good (small g) is that they are connected with and participate in some higher Good (with a capital G) that makes them good (archetype produces images of itself).
- What the Father, Son and HS have in common is that they are good by nature (in and of themselves--no one else makes them good; always remain what they are--unchanging); everything in the created realm is good only in a derivative way (is able to receive goodness but is dependent upon Father, Son and Holy Spirit for their goodness--must be made good and can fall in and out of goodness).

On the other hand, Origen needed some way of *distinguishing* the three.

- In the case of the Son, he argued that the Son is God by participation (Comm. Jn. 2.2); he is truly whatever it is to be God but gets this God-ness from his Father, so that he is *distinct from the Father* and *dependent upon the Father* (who alone is the God, the source of divinity).
- Origen here is able to take over and develop an early Christian image of relation of Son to Father being same as that of radiance to light (can't have one without the other, but a distinct qualitative difference remains).

### Origen on the Spirit:

- Similarly, the Spirit depends upon the Son (gets his existence, wisdom and reason from the Son by way of participation) (Comm. Jn. 2.10).
- Thus, although the Spirit is not explicitly called God, the Spirit is holy by nature; creatures become good by participating in this holiness.
- So creatures derive their existence from the Father, reason from the Son and holiness from the Spirit. Made holy by the Spirit, they are made able to receive Christ who is the wisdom and righteousness of God and are therefore made able (worthy) to commune with the Father (cf. *De princ.* 1.3.8)

The Spirit is thus the source of holiness, which created beings receive by participating in him (*De princ.* 1.3.8), which should associate the Spirit with the divine life.

Nonetheless, in *De principiis* 1.1.2-6 Origen also incautiously argues that Holy Spirit is "the first of all that have been brought into being by God through Jesus Christ", which could seem to put on creature side of Creator-creature divide.

### *The Council of Nicaea*

The Council of Nicaea in 325 had simply mentioned the Holy Spirit without saying anything about its nature and identity.

When the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed at the Second Council of Constantinople in 381 (the latter is the form of the creed used in churches today), an additional phrase was inserted, reflecting the conclusion of the debate between the neo-Nicene and later Arian parties over the honor that was to be accorded to the Spirit:

"and in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the Life-Giver,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
and with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,  
who spoke through the prophets"

This reflects the fact that during the course of the fourth century it had become increasingly necessary to

- reflect on the origin and nature of the Spirit and
- define the Spirit's relation to the Father and the Son.

### *Cyril of Jerusalem*

Cyril of Jerusalem can be viewed as a transitional figure, writing about 350 A.D., immediately prior to the controversies about the Spirit that would rage throughout the 350's and 360's.

- As discussed in previous lecture, catecheses are lectures about basic Christian beliefs delivered to candidates for baptism.
  - Cyril is content to present the traditional (2 c.-early 4 c.) consensus about the Spirit's identity and
    - to discourage any further speculative enquiry (XVI.1-2,24) while
    - repudiating a few earlier heretical views.
- Cyril's positive teaching generally follows the outline earlier laid down by Origen.
  - The Spirit's principle function is sanctification (making believers holy and strengthening them to live the Christian life).
  - On the one hand, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are regarded as a unity and held to be the source of salvation.
  - The Spirit is therefore honored together with the Father and the Son in the act of baptism.
  - On the other hand, there is a sort of relation of dependence that distinguishes the three:
    - "And the Father indeed gives to the Son and the Son shares with the Holy Spirit. The Father through the Son with the Holy Spirit is the Giver of all grace; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son and those of the Holy Spirit; for there is one salvation, one power, one faith; one God the Father, one Lord, His Only-begotten Son, one Holy Spirit, the Paraclete" (XVI.24)

- Still in XVI.3, Cyril (following Origen) can still conceive of the Spirit as having been brought about or made by God through Christ.

This kind of possible contradiction had to be dealt with at some point; controversies about the Spirit's identity that had emerged by the end of 350's forced the issue.

We will look next at these controversies in detail, discussing especially

- Athanasius' *Letters to Serapion* and
- Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*.