

## GOD INSIDE OUT

Simon Ponsonby is in my view one of Britain's finest Christian communicators: he is thoughtful, insightful and passionate. Get ready to be inspired and challenged to go deeper with God.

Amy Orr-Ewing  
*European Director of Training,  
Ravi Zacharias International Ministries*

For a church that seems to insist on separating the work of theology and the person of the Holy Spirit, *God Inside Out* is a much needed response. Simon's logic is enviable, but for all that he is as passionate as someone in the first flush of charismatic enthusiasm.

Revd Dr Ian Stackhouse  
*Senior Pastor, Millmead Centre*

This is a masterly and wide-ranging study of one of the most vital doctrines for the Church today – mind-stretching, heart-warming and faith-challenging. An immensely readable piece of serious theology at a time when there is so much muddled thinking about the Spirit.

Canon David MacInnes  
*Former Rector of St Aldate's and university missionary*

Simon is a most gifted theological communicator. He thinks with rich understanding and writes with piercing clarity. This book gives great handles enabling us to wrangle with and grasp the vast subject of the Holy Spirit. And as a close friend, I can tell you his writing is consistent with his Spirit-filled living.

Joseph Steinberg  
*CMS Director and author of *The Y Course**

Writing from a Charismatic perspective Simon Ponsonby maintains the emphases of the Bible's teaching, stressing the intimate relationship of the Spirit with God's Word and his work of salvation through Christ. Many of the differences between Evangelical Christians would be kept in perspective if we all followed his example of faithful and passionate engagement with Scripture.

Vaughan Roberts  
*Rector, St Ebbe's, Oxford*

Simon has both an informed mind and a warmed heart, and he has drunk deeply of the God who satisfies. Reading this book will provoke thirst, thinking and theology! It is a rare read in an age in which there is no end of the writing of books. Here, at last, is one which is essential to read and think about. Read it and grow!

Canon David White  
*Diocesan Missioner Cornwall & Rector of St Austell parish*

Simon Ponsonby is one of those rare men who, without contradiction, has wedded a keen intellect to a simple faith in Christ, and thus is able to stand with his feet firmly planted in the twenty-first century, while hungering in his heart for union with Christ.

Eliot Tepper  
*International Director of Betel Ministries*

Simon is zealous for the Truth! I have seldom met anyone who is so passionate about digging to find every nugget hidden in the Word. As a 'Spirit' man, this makes him fascinating to listen to and read. He has that rare combination of being such a pastor, and such a strong communicator of truth, and able to prepare the word in such an easily accessible form. Come to the Banquet!

Gordon Hickson  
*Parish Vicar, St Aldate's Oxford*

Not only is Simon a man passionate about people, people who are sleepwalking away from God and Christians who live in mediocrity, but he is also a man who is passionate about God's word and how we can effectively make sense of it in and for our generation, in the light of those who have gone before.

Revd Lis Goddard  
*Tutor in Ministerial Formation, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford*

Simon is what we would call a 'people's theologian'. Someone once said 'to communicate something simply, you have to understand it profoundly', and Simon thoroughly fulfils that in his excellent teaching.

John and Debby Wright  
*Senior Pastors, Trent Vineyard, Nottingham*

Simon is a perfect combination of head and heart working together. He will amaze you with his knowledge and understanding and then challenge you with his humour and insight. This book will be deep and wide because that is who Simon is – a man who digs deep and finds treasure and then stretches wide, makes you laugh and gives you many practical answers to life!

Rachel Hickson  
*Founder of Heartcry Ministries, London PrayerNet*

It is rare to 'click' with someone heart, mind, and spirit. ... This book reads like an evening with Simon – engaging, thoughtful, devotional and informed. The man, and his book, are highly recommended!

Dr Guy Chevreau  
*Author of Catch the Fire*

This is simply the best contemporary book on the person and work of the Holy Spirit of which I am aware. Simon's style of writing is accessible and easy to understand, but his topic and his content are both deep and rich. Here is a masterful communicator addressing the third person of the Godhead in a way that will inform, challenge, comfort, and inspire.

Revd Dr Bill Johnson  
*Professor of Philosophy, Husson University;  
Senior Pastor of Pittsfield First Baptist Church, Pittsfield, Maine*

# *God Inside Out*

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## PREFACE – INSIDE THE VEIN

Last Pentecost I was invited by my dear friend David White to speak at a weekend conference on the Holy Spirit at his thriving church in Cornwall. We both share a love of folk music, and as it happened, my favourite folk band, Show of Hands, were playing just a mile away on the evening before the conference. We all joined in singing along to their classic song about a Cornish miner, ‘Cousin Jack’. Set in the mid-eighteenth century, the lyrics are profoundly moving, speaking of John Wesley giving the miners a voice, and of the miners being sustained underground by visions of heaven. The chorus goes:

Where there’s a mine or a hole in the ground,  
That’s where I’m heading for that’s where I’m bound  
Look for me under the lode or inside the vein.

In many respects, the doctrine of the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit – that valuable ore, that beautiful vein, that precious divine deposit – has somehow been buried under years of Church tradition and theological debate. That Pentecost weekend, as I sought to teach those Cornish Christians about the Spirit, I felt rather like that Cornish miner working away under the lode, inside the vein.

This book is my mining of that golden vein of the third Person in the Trinity. It began life as a series of lectures given at the St Aldates School of Theology. Within the limits of my ability, it attempts to be a comprehensive summary of the Person and Work of the Spirit. Framed by three criteria: *biblical*, *theological* and *practical*.

First, *biblical* – sacred, inspired Scripture is the source and norm for all our reflection on God. It is in this repository of revelation that we meet God in his saving history. I have therefore sought to present what the Bible says, as I understand it, on any subject which the Spirit touches. The book’s text has several hundred biblical references, not all written out, and my hope is that it will be read and tested by its readers with Bible in hand.

Second, *theological* – almost two millennia have passed since the New Testament was written, and another millennium-plus since the oral traditions and earliest Old Testament materials were initially collated. There has been reflection

on these texts and truths across the length and breadth of the Church. To ignore this reflection and think we may come to a text in splendid isolation without thought and respect for the voice of our Christian forefathers would be ignorant and arrogant. Throughout this book, I draw frequent comment from the Church Fathers, reformers, and modern theologians. To cite a scholar is not to say I always stand with that scholar, but it is important to form one's position in the context of respectful listening. Theology is 'speech about God' (from the Greek *theo* meaning God and *logos* meaning speech), and I have sought to have something clear to say by attempting to systematically draw together the various threads in this elusive subject and hold them within a defined, articulate whole.

Third, *practical* – the Puritan divine William Ames said that 'Theology is the doctrine of living to God'. This is a study in pneumatology (from the Greek: *pneuma*, meaning Spirit, and *logos*, meaning speech). Therefore pneumatology is the study of the humanward operation of God. The Spirit is God with us, working in and through us, his Church, shaping us into the character of Christ, equipping us in service to Christ and the world. At times I have suggested how I see this operating – whatever those particulars, we must realise that the Spirit is not an intellectual study but always has an existential and external impulse. *Biblical, Theological, Practical*. No doubt, depending on their own spiritual commitments, some readers may find I haven't been biblical, or theological, or practical enough for them.

Several guides have accompanied me in this writing. The Puritan John Owen has repeatedly moved me through his combination of warm love for Christ, depth in the word and systematic theological grasp. The two volumes on the Holy Spirit by Stanley Burgess in the *Holy Spirit* series<sup>1</sup> have proved invaluable. Like a mountaineer pioneering a route, belaying for those coming up after, Burgess has read and recorded an encyclopaedic account of the treatment of the Spirit throughout the traditions. I have attempted to indicate wherever I have drawn on scholars and their books – I recognise that sometimes one thinks a thought or sentence is one's own, only to realise subsequently one had read it elsewhere! This book's style and structure show it is not written for the academic. However I would be delighted if it may hint at directions that young scholars may pursue more rigorously and fruitfully. Though not academic, it isn't an easy, quick read for the beach or airplane – it probably needs to be read slowly, a chapter at a time, in the bath with a cup of tea.

I want to thank the students who attended St Aldates School of Theology and even appeared to enjoy it. Their critical questions and comments helped me further mine this doctrine's riches. I am profoundly grateful to Charlie and Anita Cleverly and the leadership of St Aldates for appointing me to this privileged role as Pastor of Theology, and for those who have financed and supervised the project. John Lowe, an Oxford classicist, deserves special mention as my research assistant,

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<sup>1</sup> S. M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*, Baker Academic 1989; S. M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Eastern Christian Traditions*, Baker Academic 1990.



who helped locate material, discuss topics and run the events. Mark Porter, an Oxford music graduate, has given invaluable assistance in formatting the lectures into book form and passing his keen theological mind over the material as well as compiling the scripture index. I am grateful for the critical constructive comments from theologians Dr Robert Forrest and Dr Ian Stackhouse. My dear father painstakingly read it in early draft and checked every reference, encouraging and nuancing where appropriate. My wife Tiffany is a model of the Spirit-filled life. I dedicate this book to her.

PART ONE

THE HOLY SPIRIT  
AND GOD

# THE DIVINITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE SPIRIT

## Introduction

The night before I began work on this book I was reading John Hunt's classic account of the first successful Everest expedition, of which he was leader. Moved by the whole event, I half prayed, half wished I could have the opportunity to attempt something as exciting and exacting. Immediately I was reminded of the next day's planned project. Truly, attempting to write a comprehensive study, which is accessible, biblical, theological, historical and practical, on the Person and Work of the Spirit, feels like climbing the Everest of Christian belief.

Immediately, one is confronted by a mountain of texts, a sheer proliferation of references to the Spirit in Scripture, some three hundred in the New Testament alone, the diversification of which touches every aspect or sub-sect of theology. Despite, or perhaps because of this, he remains elusive though not evasive. Metaphors are martialled to help us understand him: *wind, water, oil, fire, a dove* – which, though they may articulate our experience of him, are all kinetic in nature, and point to his dynamic divinity that may not be contained or constrained. This multiplicity and multiformity of terms, types and titles militate against us easily comprehending him. Alasdair Heron called the Holy Spirit 'the most elusive and difficult of all themes in Christian theology'.<sup>1</sup> Puritan genius John Owen, who wrote two massive volumes on the Spirit, said as he set out to write on this theme, that he found it, 'a work too great and difficult for me to undertake and beyond my ability to manage to the glory of God, or the good of men, for who is sufficient for these things'.<sup>2</sup>

Our frustration in articulation has been a general feature of every period of the Church. The best the fourth-century councils of Nicaea could come up with in their formularies was: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit', later expanded to, 'The Lord, the giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son and with the Father

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<sup>1</sup> *Holy Spirit*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Ferguson, *Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power*, p. 42.

and the Son is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. Not bad, but not enough.

The third person of the Trinity is the third article in the creeds, and sadly often ranked third in theology. Yet, as we shall see, 'from the stand-point of experience, the Spirit is first'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, notably in the early Orthodox tradition, late fourth-century prayers like the Trisagion (meaning 'thrice holy'), which undoubtedly reflect earlier devotions, are unapologetic in praying to, invoking and worshipping the tri-personal God. The Spirit was clearly regarded as central to worship very early on. It was only when the deity of the Spirit and the Son, who were worshipped, was placed under threat by errant theology, that the creeds were formulated to reassert the Church's belief. The doctrine of the Church did not arise at the councils and with the creeds, but was represented and firmly established by ecumenical councils. Theology articulated spirituality and worship, not vice versa.

Nevertheless, in the fourth century Gregory of Nazianzus called the Spirit *Theos Agraphos*, the God who nobody writes about. Theologians have described him as 'the Cinderella of theology', 'the orphan doctrine of theology', the 'dark side of the moon in Christian theology', and 'the stealth weapon of the Church'. Occasional bonfires lighting up the dimness in Spirit theology have been lit; perhaps we could mention Calvin who was titled the 'theologian of the Spirit', or more notably the Puritan John Owen. But tellingly he said that, in writing his classic text on the Spirit: 'I had not the advantage of any one author, ancient or modern, to beat the path before me.'<sup>4</sup>

Before he died in the early 1960s, the great theologian Karl Barth wrote of a dream he was beginning to express in various contexts, that someone, or perhaps a whole age, 'might develop a theology of the Holy Spirit which now I can only envisage from afar as Moses once looked on the promised land'.<sup>5</sup>

To some extent his hope and dream has been fulfilled and there has been a proliferation of works in the last forty years on the Spirit, notably coming out of the Pentecostal tradition and the charismatic movements, both of which claim to be movements of the Spirit, and which have seen remarkable growth in terms of the number of followers. Much of the voluminous material drawn from these movements tends to be at the 'personal, pastoral' level, articulating experiences of the Spirit and 'revelations from the Spirit', with rather more work needed at the theological level.

But the emphasis on 'testimony' is itself theological. It points us to a profound truth about the Spirit, that he is always the God we experience, the God who encounters us. Like Christ, he also is Emmanuel, God with us. Ontological categories concerning his eternal being, divine essence and trinitarian relations are vital, but it is the Spirit, who stoops and stays and speaks and brings salvation to us,

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<sup>3</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Ferguson, *Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power*, p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Busch, *Karl Barth*, p. 494.

with whom we have to do. Consequently, in renewal circles, the more conceptual and theological discussions have often taken a back seat to the experiential or experimental. Both are right and necessary.

In this book we shall be exploring the biblical witness to the person and work of the Spirit, reflecting respectfully on Church tradition, seeking to fashion a clear framework for our comprehension and articulation of the Spirit who is Lord. At the same time we want to open our hearts to accommodate the Spirit as divine Love raining on our arid souls (Romans 5:5); to allow the breath of God to vivify our listless state (Ezekiel 37); to allow the river of God to satiate our thirsting, searching emptiness (John 4:10f).

To grasp the Spirit or be grasped by him, we must engage our minds to understand the Mind who ordered the universe, who spoke to the prophets and still speaks through his Scriptures. But we must also, deep within, be inviting and invoking this breath of God – loving God, seeking God with our hearts as well as our minds. With God, learning without love is not learning. Love without learning is not love. The more we learn of him the more we will love him. The more we love him, the more we will want to learn of him.

*Doxology* has always been the test of theology. Right worship shows right theology, right theology leads to right worship. The best theology is itself an act of worship. If adoration and consecration are not the net result of our theological studies, either what we have studied is flawed, or we ourselves are blinded. Doing theology is stretching our minds to comprehend God's word, from a place of prayer and desire. As we study, let us pray the first stanza of that ancient, universally accorded hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*:

Come, Creator Spirit  
visit the minds of those who are yours,  
fill with heavenly grace,  
the hearts that you have made.

## The Holy Spirit is the Third Person within the One God

Whenever and wherever the Church has faltered in her understanding and relating to the Spirit, it is because one of two errors have been held. The first is when the Spirit is *granted personality but denied divinity*; regarded as a less-than-divine agent, a created being, perhaps even supreme among created beings, but nevertheless subordinate to God, marching to the beat of his superiors. The second is when the Spirit is *granted divinity but denied personality*; regarded as God in his action humanward in the mode of Spirit, an energy emitted, but not a distinct or divisible divine Person in God.

### *The Holy Spirit's Divinity*

One can marshal a host of biblical texts which equate divinity with the Spirit, both directly – in using the divine names of Lord and God interchangeably and

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synonymously with the Spirit (there are nineteen instances in the New Testament alone); and indirectly – as pointers to the Spirit’s divinity, evident in the Spirit’s activities and abilities which are exclusively divine domains. W. H. Griffith Thomas rightly said: ‘The allusions to the Holy Spirit are such as cannot possibly be predicated of anyone else than God himself.’<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament and the New Testament, the Spirit is synonymous with the presenting, speaking, acting God. Peck says that in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, no categorical distinction is made between God and the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> To speak of one is to comprehend the other. A few examples of the Holy Spirit’s divine ascriptions will suffice to establish the point:

- Genesis 1:1–2 – God introduces himself as God (*elohim*), who creates the world in the beginning. The Spirit of God (*ruach elohim*), which hovers over the waters ... is God (*elohim*), who speaks and creates.
- Luke 1:35 – the angel says to Mary, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God.’ Most High is a divine title applied to the Spirit.
- Acts 5:3f – Ananias is accused by Peter of ‘lying in your heart to the Holy Spirit.’ Peter then says, ‘You have not lied to men but to God.’
- 2 Corinthians 3:3 – Paul speaks of the ‘Spirit of the Living God’ who has written on human hearts (echoes of Ezekiel 36:24–27). Most telling is 2 Corinthians 3:17–18, ‘The Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom.’ Then, echoing Moses gazing on God (Exodus 33 and 34) and reflecting his glory, Paul states: ‘And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed ... for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.’

### The Holy Spirit’s Divine Attributes:

- The Spirit is *eternal*. In Hebrews 9:14 Christ ‘through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God.’ The Greek word for eternal, *aioniou*, means ‘without beginning or end’<sup>8</sup> and as a predicate is only attributable to divinity.
- The Spirit is *everywhere* (omnipresent). Psalm 139 is addressed in verse 1 to the Lord. But in verse 7 the psalmist states: ‘Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!’ (ESV) This key text states that the Spirit is the presence of God who is everywhere.

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<sup>6</sup> *Holy Spirit of God*, p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit*, pp. 119f.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 28.

## THE DIVINITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE SPIRIT

- The Spirit knows *everything* God knows (omniscient). 1 Corinthians 2:6–12 states that the Spirit reveals to us the wisdom of God. Paul’s argument appeals to an anthropological metaphor in verse 11 that only a person’s own spirit knows the person’s own thoughts. Similarly, only God’s Spirit knows God’s thoughts, and the Spirit of God, who alone knows God, reveals the thoughts of God to man.
- The Spirit can be sinned and *blasphemed* against (Matthew 12:31). Ultimately, sin is against God, violating his will and way. Blasphemy is a thought, word or deed which manifests contempt for God. To blaspheme the Spirit is to reject God’s saving plan revealed in Christ, manifested by the Spirit’s power in which he ministered.

### The Holy Spirit’s Divine Actions:

- The Spirit is God *present* among us. In Leviticus 26:11–12, the Lord promises Israel he will be their God who will walk with them and make his dwelling/tabernacle among them. In part this was fulfilled through the Tabernacle, later Solomon’s Temple, where God’s manifest localised presence (*shekina*) dwelt. In 2 Corinthians 6:16 Paul takes this very text and says it is fulfilled through the Church, which corporately forms the temple of the living God. This theme is repeated elsewhere in Corinthians, as the Church in Corinth is the temple of God by virtue of God’s indwelling Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).
- The Spirit is *life-giver*. In Genesis 2, we see God creating humankind from dust and then bringing that to life with his own breath (*ruach*). Psalm 104:27–30 states that when God withdraws his breath/Spirit (*ruach*) there is death, yet when he sends forth his Spirit there is creation. The Old Testament understanding is of all life sustained by the providential sending of the breath/Spirit of God. In the New Testament, Paul says that the Spirit is life (Romans 8:2), gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6), and raises us to new life (Romans 8:11).

### The Holy Spirit’s Divine Associations:

- In the *trinitarian baptism* in Matthew 28:19, discipleship – the identification with Christ’s lordship by an individual – is signified by being baptised in the tri-personal name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. ‘Baptism into the name of’ reflects a Hebraic/Aramaic concept *lesem*, which means to be ‘fundamentally determined by.’<sup>9</sup> The existence of the Christian disciple is to be fundamentally determined by a tri-personally named, tri-personal God. Subsequent interpreters rightly see in the triadic name an implicit equality among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Expanding on this text, Calvin says:

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<sup>9</sup> Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary*, p. 888.

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For this means precisely to be baptised into the name of the one God who has shown himself with complete clarity in the Father, Son and the Spirit. Hence it is quite clear that in God's essence reside three persons in whom one God is known.<sup>10</sup>

It follows that the tri-personal God with whom we have to do, is the God from whom we seek and receive a Trinitarian blessing, hence in 2 Corinthians 13:14: 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.' Murray Harris says: 'Without embarrassment, Paul has conjoined the Lord Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit with God in benediction.' Parity of status is implied, for it would be blasphemous for a Jew to place alongside God any other name in blessing.<sup>11</sup> We have seen that Scripture portrays a Spirit who sports the exclusive names of God, who acts like God, who looks like God and who hangs out on equal terms with God. To claim the Spirit is God seems a safe bet. 'The Holy Spirit is no less and no other than God himself, distinct from Him whom Jesus calls Father, distinct also from Jesus himself, yet no less than the Father and no less than Jesus, God Himself, God altogether.'<sup>12</sup>

### *The Holy Spirit's Personality*

*Holy number-crunching:* Confronted with the reality of the divinity of Jesus and the Spirit along with the Father, the early Church wrestled to the limits of their minds and abilities to articulate the mystery of how God could be One, as revealed in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4), while being seen to be identifiably and onomastically divisible. To escape this conundrum, some slipped into a rather platonic hierarchy, with the Son and the Spirit less than God, created, albeit exalted, subordinate demi-gods. However, the orthodox theologians in the East and West were searching high and low to comprehend and articulate the biblical witness, apostolic deposit and devotional experience of the tripersonal God. By the early third century, Tertullian in the West was speaking of *tres personae, una substantia*; while in the East, Origen was speaking of the three *hypostases* sharing one *ousia* essence. Both wrestled with matters of source – whether and how one came first in the triad, whether there was absolute equality, eternity etc. The universal Church Councils of Nicaea in 325 and Chalcedon in 451 defended trinitarian theology and formulated the language (focusing as need called more on Christology), and ratified the orthodox view – one God, in three Persons: one Person the Father, another the Son, another the Holy Spirit, who all share the same divine essence, eternity and glory. The later Athanasian Creed agreed: 'the persons are not to be confounded nor the essence divided'.

There is some debate about what the terms *personae* and *hypostases* actually meant for the ancients, especially in being predicated of divinity. The Latin *personae* referred to a mask worn by a character in a play or an identity enacted; while the

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<sup>10</sup> McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:13:16.

<sup>11</sup> *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 938.

<sup>12</sup> Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1:1, p. 459.



Greek *hypostases* referred to an individual, substantial, actual being. These terms came to convey a sense which approximates to our modern notion of the identifiable, communicable, distinguishable self. For the Church Fathers, these were terms that they searched for and settled on, not semantically biblical in origin, but ones which conveyed the biblical presentation of ‘inner distinction’ within the unity of the godhead, of distinguishable personality and ability to commune with humanity.

There remains a debate today about what ‘person’ means – a biologist, ethicist, philosopher, psychologist, theologian, communist, economist would all come up with rather different definitions.

Conscious of its limitations, I am working from a definition of the person as a distinct individual possessing the traits of ‘personhood’, defined as ‘agency, reason, language, intentionality, relating to others self consciousness’.<sup>13</sup>

The distinguished Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (d. 1965), coined the classic ‘I-Thou’ definition of personhood.<sup>14</sup> Persons are beings in relationship, communion, interaction. Unlike an ‘I-It’, which would be a person using something in a utilitarian manner, or relating in monologue, I-Thou is in dialogue, valuing, giving and receiving from an other. There is mutual, reciprocal, respectful interchange, self giving, receiving, risk, vulnerability, communion, bonding. This I-Thou framework has been fruitfully explored in modern theology by such giant theologians as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner and Paul Tillich in understanding human identity, the imminent Trinity (God in himself), and the economic Trinity (God in his activity within the world).

*Who’s who?:* The descriptions of the Spirit are not as gender-specific as for God the Father and Son. In the Hebrew Old Testament, the word (*ruach*) is usually grammatically feminine and in the Greek New Testament it (*pneuma*) is grammatically neuter. In the Latin Bible, *spiritus* was masculine. The pronoun ‘it’ is commonly adopted. However, in John’s Gospel, the proper name *Paraclete* is masculine (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:8, 13–14) and John employs the ‘masculine adjectival demonstrative’ *ekeinos* – that one’.<sup>15</sup> While we may not want to apportion ‘maleness’ to the Spirit, we do want to say the Spirit is not impersonal.

Grammar doesn’t prove personhood, but points towards it. This is underlined when Jesus speaks of sending ‘another Counsellor’ (John 14:16), someone like himself – and not an abstract impersonal force. This thought is supported when Jesus says the Spirit, not speaking on his own (John 16:13), will teach truths he has heard from Christ, speaking with authority from the Father. These certainly imply a person in partnership with the purposes of God in Christ.

*Qualities of ‘personhood’ exhibited by the Spirit:* We have already noted that he *comforts, hears, speaks, teaches*. Other actions and possessions logically understood as ‘personal qualities’ include:

<sup>13</sup> ‘Personhood’ in Audi, *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, p. 663.

<sup>14</sup> *I and Thou*.

<sup>15</sup> Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, p. 15; Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, p. 178.

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- Determining the Church's course of direction (Acts 11:12; 15:28; 16:6; 21:4) – the early Church was led by *someone*, not *something*!
- Helping and praying for the Church in her weakness (Romans 8:26–27).
- The mind, or *phronema* (Romans 8:27) – the capacity for intelligent thought, used exclusively as a predicate of humans and God.
- The will, or *boulomai* (1 Corinthians 12:11) – a term used of 'a person's desire, decision of the will after deliberation by humans'.<sup>16</sup>
- Feeling – the ability to be grieved or insulted (Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 10:29).

These faculties can hardly belong to an inanimate, insentient, impersonal force or energy. They are traits of a living, dynamic, sentient, rational, relational person. Consequently, John Owen can say: 'For he to whom all personal properties, attributes, adjuncts and operations are ascribed and to whom nothing is ascribed but what properly belongs to a person, he is a person and so are we taught to believe him to be.'<sup>17</sup>

The Spirit is God is Person. Not an independent autonomous self, but a person in relation within the godhead, who reaches out personally to relate to mankind. Yves Congar called him 'A person without a face',<sup>18</sup> but a person nonetheless. In an old scene from *Coronation Street*, Maureen said that she believed the Holy Ghost to be 'a sort of essential essence' – perhaps thinking of some aromatherapy oil, oriental chi, postmodern 'flow', or 'The Force' from *Star Wars*. Maud Grimes piped up from her wheelchair: 'The best description I heard of was that it was a sort of oblong blur and that'll do me.'

Well, it won't do me, nor may it do for you.

## Conclusion

The Spirit is eternal, personal, powerful God. What difference does, should this make to my worship, work and my walk with him? The Lord the Spirit is able to see and to save – nothing I face is outside his comprehension or command. But he is not a force or energy to be manipulated for my own ends, but Lord in his sovereign freedom, to be 'worshipped and glorified'. As a person, he is a 'being in relation' with me, a being/person wired for relationship. The Holy Spirit is not an *It*, not a *What*, but a *Thou*, a *He*, a *Who*. No oblong blur, but God, outgoing, outreaching, outstretching to me in love. The Spirit is not a vague, distant, abstract, incommunicable force-field, but divine Lord and personal Lover.

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<sup>16</sup> Bauer et al., p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Ferguson, *Holy Spirit, His Gifts and Power*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> *I Believe in the Spirit*, p. 5.