



VOLUME ONE

**DOGMATIC  
ECCLESIOLOGY**

*The Priestly Catholicity  
of the Church*

**TOM GREGGS**

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# Abbreviated Chapter Theses for Volume 1

## Chapter 1—The Spirit: The Lord of and the Giver of Life to the Church

Ecclesiology describes a salvific event of the act of the Spirit in the context of creation in its spatiotemporal contingency. The church exists as an event of the act of the lordship of the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the community of faith in space and time and creates the community of believers in the time between the times—that is, between the ascension of Christ and the eschaton. This work of the Holy Spirit fulfills the mediating work of God on the vertical and horizontal planes: Christ, who mediates God to humanity and humanity to God, is made present in the community of believers by an event of the Spirit’s act which frees the believer to participate in the divine ways of love and grace in order to know the benefits of salvation and to love the Father (vertically), and simultaneously, in that participation in God’s love and grace, to love other humans through interhuman as well as divine-human restorative participation in the givenness of the community (horizontal).

## Chapter 2—The High Priesthood of Christ: The Essential Hierarchy of the Church (1)

The form which the church takes as it is created as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit of God is the form of Christ. Christ’s priesthood is a unique *Urpriestertum* and displays the particular modalities of priesthood: divine-human mediation; intercession; sacrifice; oblation; bearing iniquity; blessing;

holiness; and horizontal mediation. The material content of all priesthood can only ever be a type of Christ's priesthood since all Christian priesthood is derivative of His. To understand the church as a corporate priesthood, it is necessary first to describe the priesthood within which the church participates; and since the church's priesthood is a participation in the priesthood of Christ, all accounts of priesthood in the church must follow from an account of Christ as priest.

### **Chapter 3—Participative Ontology and the Church's Internal Priesthood: The Essential Hierarchy of the Church (2)**

The church is the body of Christ as it is enabled to be such through the work of the Spirit in freeing the believer to participate in the humanity of Christ. In Christ's humanity exists the primary and foundational identity of created humanity as a humanity ordered not towards itself but towards God and the other in creation: this humanity is the humanity after which prelapsarian Adam was modeled. In the Spirit's work of incorporating the believer into Christ (*de facto* within the church), humanity participates—in being ordered towards God and the rest of humanity—in its fundamental created eschatological determination and therefore becomes a sign of created and redeemed humanity.

### **Chapter 4—The Priestly Ontology and the Church's Life for the World: The Essential Hierarchy of the Church (3)**

Traditional accounts of the essential hierarchy of the church are inwards-facing: the damned exist for the sake of the elect in order that the elect may know the grace of God; the elect look to their salvation in the reception of the efficacious sacraments of the church; the efficacy of the sacraments of the church is determined by the authenticity of the priest; the authenticity of the priest is grounded in appropriate ordination by the valid overseer; and the valid overseer's authority is granted from the head of the church, who guarantees the catholicity (or even the salvation) of all beneath him. If, however, there is only one priest (Christ), and the church shares a corporate priesthood by participating in Him and the modality of His priesthood as His body through an event of the act of the Holy Spirit, the conceptualization of this essential hierarchy requires reexamining and reordering: the church as a priesthood mediates Christ by an event of the act of the Spirit to the rest of the world, and thereby the church exists for the sake of those outside the church.

## **Chapter 5—Baptism: Entry into the Priesthood of the Church**

In baptism the believer receives in space-time her true identity as a member of the corporate priesthood of the church. In this rite is the signification of the believer's death to self and new birth in Christ by the Spirit: in baptism the believer visibly shows the world and the community that she participates in the body of Christ and in this marks her membership in the community of Christ's body. This rebirth is not only individual but also communal: baptism signifies not only the individual's finding her fundamental identity ordered within the community and towards its other members, but also the fellowship (and worldwide communion) of the church promising to order itself towards this individual and to minister God to her in the service of ministry to the world.

## **Chapter 6—Holy Communion**

In the giving and receiving of bread and wine, the fellowship of believers binds its members to each other. The dominical command to share in the Lord's Supper makes present in time and space the past death and resurrection of Christ through the elements, and anticipates the coming of Christ and His kingdom. In eating the bread (which symbolizes the flesh) and drinking the wine (which symbolizes the blood of Christ), the church makes visible in its semiotic actions its participation in Christ, and all degree, status, and difference is removed by the unworthiness of each individual to receive the gracious gift of God's salvation symbolized in eating together. Each member of the church is sustained equally in sharing together in this simple act and symbolic meal; and the church is bound to the world in symbols that are the most basic food provisions of life.

## **Chapter 7—The Communion of Saints**

The church is an event rather than an institution; it is a spatial and temporal occurrence rather than an eternal reality. As an event of the Spirit, the church's being rests not in itself or its structures but in the holiness of the Holy Spirit—that is, in God's faithful and constant eternity and not the church's own particular historical identity. The communion of saints acts as a reminder to the congregation in time of the provisionality and passing nature of different (religious) structural forms of the church, and of the existence of the church being found in the event of the Spirit, whose act creates it in the historically

and geographically contingent form any given congregation and denomination takes at a given time.

### **Chapter 8—Intercessory Prayer**

The church actively enacts its twofold priestly form (in relation to its members and in relation to the world) in prayer through intercession. In intercession the church actively becomes one, and its individual members are ordered to each other and to the church universal (internally). In prayer for others, the church participates in the priestly work of Christ, the Great Intercessor, in His death by according the other priority over the self in requests to God.

### **Chapter 9—Thanksgiving and Praise: Participating Graciously in Grace**

The Christian participates within the life of the church in the priestly relationship of grace and gratitude in which the human creature responds to the superabundant merciful grace of God in oblation, but also in so doing participates in the merciful grace offered to the creature by God and vice versa. In other words, the response of gratitude is an event of the act of the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer actively to participate in the grace offered by God, and as such thanksgiving and praise are active recognitions of the ways of grace which flow from the divine life to creation. This relationship captures something of the priestly life of the church as it participates in the body of Christ: the church receives grace from God mediated to it in Christ by an event of the act of the Spirit, and the church also offers thanksgiving and praise in Christ's life of oblation through the Spirit's activity. This two-directional vertical relationality in Christ not only establishes the right relation with God but also frees the believer to give thanks for the other in the horizontal dimensions of creaturely reality—an other given by the grace of God.

### **Chapter 10—Congregation: Priestly Polity**

The primary form of polity for the church is the gathered community brought together by divine socio-poiesis. The gathering of the community is important: it presents the believer with others whom she may not choose or desire, but who are to her a gift of God in their givenness, difference, and diversity. In this, the gathered community is different from all other human communities in the world: the gathered are bound together not by bonds of human

agreement or political, ethnic, or social grouping but by the work of the Spirit, who makes those who were not a people now into a people.

### **Chapter 11—Sanctification**

Sanctification is not an aspect of the Christian life which is to be thought of as principally interior, or singularly as a description of human life in relation to God. Instead, sanctification is the nonprioritization of the self (even in the quest for the holy life): in place of a life ordered towards the self comes a life ordered outwards towards God and the world. The community is essential for the sanctified life, as in the community one shares in the objective sanctification of humanity as a participant in the body of Christ (*de jure*) and is enabled simultaneously and actively to be ordered towards God and the rest of humanity in those many around her in the congregation and through the congregation to the rest of humanity on earth (*de facto*).

### **Chapter 12—Love**

The concrete form that the sanctified human life takes in the realities of spatiotemporal existence is love. Love is made possible only by God, who is the source of all love. In love the believer participates as a human through Christ's humanity in God's own relations, which Scripture identifies as love. Love is the active expression of the priestly life since priesthood is by definition instrumental: there is no priest without God and other humans. So too the individual in Christ is instrumental for the purpose of the love which the individual mediates between God, those others around her in the life of the church, and the world. The church also is instrumental for the purpose of love, as the context in which members love each other simply on the basis of the love of Christ, in which (and in whom) they actively participate; and in Christ, participating corporately in His body, the church is freed to love the world around it.

### **Chapter 13—Priestly Catholicity**

Catholicity is the means of determining the fringes and boundaries of the universal church. However, catholicity should be thought of as being most intensive not in the center of the church but at the fringes and boundaries, where the church fully enacts its priesthood in relation to the world. The

church is most intensively priestly, and its priestliness is most meaningful and clear, at the bounds where the church meets the world. The world is not instrumental for the church, but the church for the world; in this the church's priestly catholicity exists.

### **Chapter 14—Coda: The Church as One**

The priestly catholicity of the church is one of three irreducible narratives of the church. It cannot be considered singularly foundational or fitting in and of itself. This irreducible narrative of the Spirit's activity in the church must be held together with the prophetic apostolicity of the church and the kingly holiness of the church. The oneness of the church needs to be accounted for in relation to the oneness of the one God.

# 1

## The Spirit

### *The Lord of and the Giver of Life to the Church*

*E*cclesiology, as a derivative doctrine of pneumatology, describes a salvific event of the act of the Spirit in the context of creation in its spatiotemporal contingency. The church exists as an event of the act of the lordship of the Holy Spirit, the giver of life, who gives life to the community of faith in space and time. Ecclesiology concerns the salvific work of the Holy Spirit in creating the community of believers in the time between the times (that is, between the ascension of Christ and the eschaton). This work of the Holy Spirit fulfills the mediating work of Christ on the vertical and horizontal planes of ongoing creaturely existence: Christ, who mediates God to humanity and humanity to God, is made present in the community of believers by an event of the Spirit's act. This event frees the believer to participate in the divine ways of love and grace in order to know the benefits of salvation and to love the Father (vertically). But this event is simultaneously—in that participation in God's love and grace—the freedom to love other humans through interhuman as well as divine-human restorative participation in grace within the givenness of the community (horizontal). The church's existence rests in its fulfillment of the call of Christ to love God and to love others as Christ has loved us. The principal activity of ecclesiology is to describe this work of God the Holy Spirit. Ecclesiology concerns, therefore, simultaneously the hidden and the visible church, which can never be spoken of separately, since the church (as an object of faith) is (a) a creation of the Spirit *ex nihilo* (b) in the visibility of the space and time of history.

## The Church as Creature of the Spirit: An Act of Divine Grace<sup>1</sup>

A theological account of the church begins with an account of the *Theos* by and through whom the church comes into being. The church is unlike every human community or society in one profound and fundamental way: the church is a community which is a creature of the event of the intensity of the Holy Spirit's economy of grace in redeeming creation. Although the church shares in many—if not all—of the characteristics of other organizations, its primary existence is ultimately distinct from every other expression of human sociality. The church comes into being as an event of the act of the lordship of the Holy Spirit of God who gives the church life. This demarcation of the church from other societies and communities is primary to all theological accounts of the church. The demarcation does not mean that the church does not exist as a visible sociological entity in space-time (there is no church which is not visible).<sup>2</sup> But the demarcation does mean that the church exists distinctly from all other expressions of creaturely community by virtue of the intensity of the event of the act of the Holy Spirit which brings the church into being in its particularity.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Holiness of the Holy Spirit*

The bringing about of the event of the church's existence is also not an expression of some shared common creaturely spirit or spirituality in the community. This is the profound mistake that Friedrich Schleiermacher, for all of the worth of his account of the church, makes in speaking of the Spirit as “the vital unity of the Christian fellowship as a moral personality” and denoting this as “the *common spirit*.”<sup>4</sup> There is too close an account of the human (or community's) spirit and the divine Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity in Schleiermacher's theology, which has led in many quarters to a fear of engaging in a dogmatic account of the faith which rests on the Holy Spirit:<sup>5</sup>

1. See also the initial methodological discussion in the preface of this volume. Where the preface attends more to questions of method, this discussion parallels (or deepens) aspects of that discussion but attends more to material statement. Since method and material cannot be prized apart in theology, some degree of overlap will be inevitable.

2. See below.

3. To quote Philip Hefner: “The doctrine of the church aims at making a foundational statement about the church which qualifies as a genuinely theological statement. To qualify as such, the doctrine must speak about what the church is, in light of what we believe about God” (“Church,” 183). It is because of this point that this chapter in its discussion of the Holy Spirit begins the material content of this volume on ecclesiology.

4. *CF*, 535.

5. See Karl Barth, who hopes future generations (distant enough from Schleiermacher) might do theology from the perspective of pneumatology: Barth, *Theology of Schleiermacher*, 277–79.

the generations following Schleiermacher found it difficult to demarcate sufficiently the divinity of the Holy Spirit from the creatureliness of creation and the human spirit. The Spirit is not, as Geoffrey Lampe would have it, an in-between term, something which God and humanity hold in common;<sup>6</sup> and the church is not an expression of the shared commonality of this *tertium quid* or mediating presence which falls into a category between Creator and creature. The Spirit is the *Holy Spirit*, the Lord, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, who is to be worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and who as a worshipful person of the Trinity is fully divine.

When we speak of the church as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit of God, therefore, the need to demarcate human and divine agency comes to the fore. There will, of course, be a need to speak of the human action which takes place within this event of divine action, and of the event of divine action which takes place with a terminus in the creature.<sup>7</sup> But there is a need *first* to speak of the place of the church within the events of the action of God's creation, salvation, and redemption of the creature. The creed does not begin by talking of the church or of the nature of faith and then go on to speak of the acts of God. The creed begins with the God who is believed and the acts of God in the events of creation, salvation, and redemption. It is strictly under and within these discussions that the discussion of the church which believes in God falls. It is *God's* action which theology needs to speak of in accounting even for the very contingent, creaturely humanness of the church. There is nothing common about the Spirit in the church. The Spirit in the church is the *Holy Spirit*. The Spirit is Lord!

The need to think of the divine agent and the events that arise from the act of the divine agency is particularly pressing within discussions of the church. The church is the spatiotemporal, human community in which the Word of God is heard and received, and in which the people respond to that hearing and receiving. The church is the event of revelation and salvation in which God's presence is known most intimately in creaturely media—in space and time, in words and actions, in the quotidian givenness of the other in the community, in water, bread, and wine. However, because the community comes into being in creaturely media (most fundamentally the medium of space-time) and in the use of those media in an event of God's action, we must carefully parse the action and agency of God in this specific event. If the church is important, if the church matters within the *Heilsgeschichte* of

6. See Lampe, *God as Spirit*. For a critique of this perspective, see Webster, "Identity of the Holy Spirit"; Jenson, "Holy Spirit," 106–8.

7. See ch. 11 on sanctification.

God's relationship to creation, then the church needs to be accounted for as more than a human organization which could or could not exist solely on the basis of the exercise of human willing. The church is not simply a voluntary society of individual human wills which come together out of a shared or agreed sense of beliefs.<sup>8</sup> The church is not simply a place where humans are attracted to one another by virtue of a common or shared spirit. Of course, the church might be both of these things as well (though a true understanding of the power of the divine life's work of presenting us with the givenness of the other might prevent us from desiring to form such an idealized community of the like-minded or attractive).<sup>9</sup> But in the first instance, theology must remind the church at every point that the church is an *event created by an act of the Spirit of God*, an act commensurate to creation and salvation, as the creation awaits its redemption as it is proleptically being redeemed.<sup>10</sup>

The church comes into being as church through the epicletic call for the Spirit in the gathered community—a call which is enabled first through the prevenience of the Spirit's grace.<sup>11</sup> It is as the Lord, the giver of life, that

8. For a thoroughgoing theological account of ecclesial voluntarism (in the context of the nonconforming of aspects of the English church), see John Owen, "True Nature of a Gospel Church" and "Tracts on Excommunication, Church Censures, Baptism, etc.," in *Works of John Owen*, vol. 16. The key word in the above discussion is "solely." Of course, there is some voluntarism and human agency here, but the question which this discussion attends to is the divine willing in which human willing takes place, and the interrelation between these wills. See further ch. 11.

9. See the discussion of givenness later in this chapter.

10. This conceptualization trades on the idea of a "realizable" and "realizing" kingdom in the world, which is future but is breaking into creation: not only is the kingdom so close that it is at hand (*engizō*, Mark 1:14–15), but the kingdom—in the Holy Spirit—in-breaks in anticipations (however imperfect these may be in the fallen context of the world). The idea of eschatology being traded on here is neither altogether future (as famously in Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*), nor altogether realized (as famously in Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* and *The Founder of Christianity*). To a degree, this volume follows the idea of Kümmel that the kingdom is present only in Jesus (and not in the disciples); see Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* and "Futurische und Präsentische Eschatologie"; cf. a similar perspective in relation to the history of Israel in Wright, *New Testament*, 390–96. However, the current volume considers that the kingdom which lies ahead and which is fulfilled in (or even within the theater of) the life of Jesus can be participated in proleptically and provisionally through the event of the act of the Spirit. For a consideration of proleptic anticipation (specifically in relation to the resurrection), see Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:56 (and *passim* through all three volumes), and—though there is room for a further account of the work of the Spirit—Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, esp. 365–410.

11. This point is an attempt at preserving a careful distinction which was always traditionally held in many Nonconformist churches between "the chapel" as the institutional and physical locus of the community and "the church," which gathers in the coming together of the people of God. However, crucially, within that distinction it is not simply the coming together of the

the Holy Spirit creates the church, giving life to the church and bringing the event of this community into being. Clearly, the Spirit uses creaturely media to create the church—the given people of the community in a given time and place—but this creation is no less an act of God by virtue of the Spirit’s use of the created media of space-time than salvation is an act of God by virtue of the Son’s use of space-time for the means of incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection for the eternal purpose of reconciliation.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, we may say that creation exists for the purpose of being the theater for the acts of the divine economy (of which creation’s own coming into being is one), and this divine economy includes the salvation and redemption of creation. As creation awaits that redemption, this economy contains in the divine patience the creation’s being caught up in the movement of redeeming grace in an act of the Spirit of which the event of the church is a part.<sup>13</sup>

### *A Note on the Doctrine of Appropriations: Spirit and Church*

There is an important note to make in relation to the doctrine of appropriations.<sup>14</sup> While the dogmatic principle of *omnia opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* always applies, the church has always considered it correct to appropriate particular acts of the economy of salvation to particular persons of the Trinity, recognizing simultaneously the perichoretic relations of the Trinity and thereby not separating any act of one of the persons from the other two: creation to the Father; reconciliation to the Son; redemption to the Spirit.<sup>15</sup> Within the redeeming act of God the Spirit exists the twofold event of (1) sealing the disciple with the guarantee or deposit (*arrabōn*) of salvation in Christ, of which she is assured through hearing and receiving the

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people but *the coming together of the people to call for the Spirit to constitute them as church* which is the base condition for the chapel being the location for the church’s coming into being. Indeed, the very call for the Spirit in the epiclesis at the start of the service is already an acknowledgment that the act of the community gathering together is an event of God: the act of calling on the Spirit to constitute the church is in and of itself an *acknowledgment* that we cannot even gather together in this way save by the Spirit’s grace.

12. “Eternal” is important here: we should not think in a simply linear manner of the events of God’s act of salvation: creation as the first act which goes wrong and needs to be responded to, with reconciliation as a second and redemption as a third. God redeems for the sake of creation just as much as God creates for the sake of redemption. See on this both Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation*, and Greggs, “Order and Movement of Eternity.”

13. Robert Jenson says, “The Spirit’s intervention at Pentecost has its dramatic necessity within God’s history. Pentecost is the Spirit’s particular personal initiative to delay the Parousia: when the Spirit descends eschatologically without raising all the dead and ending the age, the time of the church is opened” (*Systematic Theology*, 2:178–79).

14. Cf. “The Methodological Ambition of These Volumes” in the preface.

15. For a helpful summary of the doctrine of appropriations, see *CD I/1*, 373–74.

gospel of salvation in the contexts of her given spatiotemporal createdness (Eph. 1:13–14; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5);<sup>16</sup> and (2) bringing into life the church as a proleptic anticipation of the coming of God’s kingdom and the locus of divine revealedness in the context of divine patience in the time between the ascension of Christ and the eschaton. Indeed, this ecclesial event of the Spirit’s act is anticipated in the life of the people of Israel.<sup>17</sup> The Spirit (who is transcendent and other to creation in the creation) is given to individual people in Israel *for the sake of the community*. Kings, prophets, and judges receive the Spirit for the sake of an action or for the sake of the community—not for the sake of an individualized “spiritual experience.”<sup>18</sup> And a time is anticipated when the Spirit will be given to all (Joel 2:28–29). The Spirit’s actions in relation to the community continue to be described in the New Testament, in which the church is seen in Acts 2 as a fulfillment of the promise to Israel that the Spirit will be given universally.<sup>19</sup> Although there are various ways of speaking about the church and various images in the New Testament (many of which focus on the person of Christ), the efficient cause of the community which takes the form of Christ, or is spoken of as being “in Christ,” is the Holy Spirit:<sup>20</sup> it is the Spirit’s descent in Acts which establishes the church. It is the other Counselor (or Advocate) in John who is promised for the time when Jesus is with His disciples no more.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, in the creed of Constantinople, the discussion of the church does not follow the work of Christ or of the Father, nor does it form a separate (fourth) article of its own.<sup>22</sup> Discussion of the church follows the third article of the creed (on the person of the Holy Spirit)

16. Although it seems inappropriate to even have to note this, I have decided (in light of the exclusion of women from aspects of the life of the church throughout history) to use feminine pronouns for humans throughout as an attempt to express the necessary inclusivity of the church about which it is prophesied that sons *and daughters*, manservants *and maidservants* will receive the Spirit.

17. This notion of anticipation does not need to imply any sense of supersession. Indeed, we might see the coming of the Spirit here as a universalization of what was particular: the promise of being a light to the gentiles is being fulfilled as gentiles are grafted into God’s covenant with God’s people. See further discussions throughout this book on the relationship of church and Israel/synagogue, and—for the most helpful discussion of this topic—see Ochs, *Another Reformation*.

18. See Thiselton, *Systematic Theology*, 266–67.

19. This fulfillment is noncompetitive. It is a fulfillment of the promise *to* Israel regarding those outside its bounds. It does not nullify or remove the promises to Israel and the existence of the people of Israel but rather arises from the promises to Israel.

20. Discussion of the Christ in whom the church exists or who is the church will take place in subsequent chapters, most especially in ch. 2 on priesthood (and the subsequent volumes’ chapters on Christ as prophet and king).

21. See further below.

22. The structure of certain dogmatic presentations would suggest this in the identification of the church as a unit distinct from the direct economy of the Spirit. Calvin’s presentational

in the same way the event of creation follows from the Father's acts and the event of salvation or reconciliation from the Son's act.<sup>23</sup> As Irenaeus puts it, "Where the Spirit of Christ is, there the Spirit of God is, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and the fullness of grace."<sup>24</sup>

The mistake of failing to speak of the act of the Spirit when speaking of the event of the church runs deep in speech about the church. Any speech about ecclesiology which (as is most usually the case) is orientated first on forms of church governance, institution, or even patterns of worship and behavior, rather than speaking first of the gracious economy of God's salvation in the event of the church as an act of the Holy Spirit, mistakes the church's fundamental reality with the reality of all other community in the world. A primary orientation on polity and form in ecclesiological speech is an indication that the church is not being believed in faith to be a community which is an event of the divine action in the person of the Spirit. Of course, polity is important and has its place (a derivative one),<sup>25</sup> but the community is not seen *in faith* when it is seen *only or primarily* as arising out of its structural form and polity. The *primary* means, instead, of accounting for the church's being stems from seeing the church as a community brought into being by a special and specific event of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit responds faithfully to the call of the people, "Come, Holy Spirit,"<sup>26</sup> and comes to create the event of the church. It is by the Spirit's faithful and eternal act time and time again to fulfill the promise of Christ that where two or three are gathered in His name, there Christ will be (Matt. 18:20). So many accounts of the church describe the church with little discussion of the agency of the divine life in its gracious act of movement towards creation in the economy of salvation. This salvation is ontically real in the community which is proleptically, provisionally—in anticipation of the consummation of things—being reconciled and redeemed in time.<sup>27</sup>

However, there is a danger in this kind of account. It is possible to see the church as an institution which is founded by the Spirit and which, ironically,

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decisions in the *Institutes* are indicative of this: the church forms the subject of book 4 in a presentation in which decisions seem to be based on the creedal structure.

23. T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 252: "The clauses on the Church do not constitute an independent set of beliefs, but follow from belief in the Holy Spirit, for *holy* Church is the fruit of the *Holy* Spirit, the result of his sanctifying activity in mankind, and as such is, as it were, the empirical correlate of the *parousia* of the Spirit in our midst."

24. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.24.1 (PG 7:966).

25. Discussion of polity can be seen in ch. 10 of this book in terms of the congregation, and in the parallel chapters in the subsequent two volumes, as well as some primary discussion in ch. 4.

26. Indeed, this very call and prayer is possible only by the faithfulness of the Spirit in the Spirit's prevenient grace.

27. For a discussion of some examples of this, see the preface.

then claims too great a continuity between its governance and God. Speaking of the forms, structures, and institutions of the church as founded by the Spirit might mistake the *particular form* of the human community of the church for a divine ordinance, in which its community forms and structures are given directly by God and are themselves somehow imbued with the divine. We come to believe in the church, one might say, in the same way we believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The church almost becomes a fourth member of the Trinity,<sup>28</sup> or else is conflated too easily with Christ as if in its particular forms (indeed any particular forms) it were a continuity of the incarnation.<sup>29</sup> We might see this as the divine error in trying to protect from an overemphasis on the anthropological. This is an error which fails to appropriately demarcate the church from the Godhead's *act* which creates the church as an *event* in its ordinary, creaturely, spatiotemporal givenness in the conditions of lapsed creation. But the church is not God nor a human society. The church is an *event* of the *act* of the Holy Spirit. There is a need to be attentive to the demarcated agency of divine and human in the spatiotemporal and creaturely community which by an event of the Spirit's act becomes the people of God, "the society of God,"<sup>30</sup> the church.

## A Reformation Church: An Event of God's Act

### *Reformation Concerns about Agency*

This concern about differentiated but related agency is at the very heart of the Reformation's ecclesial concerns. Although often the concerns of the Reformation are considered to rest upon the prioritization of the Word of God and upon the centrality of justification by grace through faith as an approach to soteriology, the Reformation also concerned very directly issues of

28. Calvin is very concerned to demarcate believing the church from believing in the church: *Inst.* 4.1.2 (1013).

29. In order not to fall prey to the idea of some "distributed" Christology within the life of the church, and too close a connection between the church and Christ, it is necessary both to think of the form of relation of the church to Christ (and the agency of this Spirit in that relationship, as is the case in this chapter) and to remember that language about the body of Christ is accompanied by language about Christ as "head"; see Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18. There needs to be sufficient order and differentiation of agency so as not to conflate unhealthily Christ and His church. Understandings of the church which do not parse these relations out carefully and which rest on images of the mystical body are prone to think of the church as the continued presence of the body of Christ without sufficient demarcations and cautions being expressed. This is perhaps akin to the mystical model Daniel Hardy suggests and critiques in *Finding the Church*, 30–34.

30. This phrase is borrowed from Calvin; see the preface.

ecclesiology, and not simply in relation to the practice of stripping altars.<sup>31</sup> These ecclesial concerns primarily revolve around the relationship between divine and human action in the church,<sup>32</sup> and a particular concern that these not be conflated such that the church as a creature was given with the rights and powers of the divine. All human action, for the Reformers, remains continually and constantly dependent on God as its basis, but it was considered necessary to firmly guard the difference and distinguish between God's action and human action. Christoph Schwöbel's summary is helpful here:

God's action in creation, revelation and inspiration establishes the relationship between the creator and his creature, in which God is the creative ground for their existence and where he discloses the truth about his relationship to humanity and enables human beings to accept the truth of revelation as the certainty of faith. The action of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, makes human action possible and enables human beings to act in accordance with the will of the creator which is disclosed and authenticated through Christ by the Spirit. Because of this distinction divine and human agency can never compete or co-operate on the same level. God's work is always the condition of the possibility of all human action.<sup>33</sup>

God's work cannot be fully embodied in any human act—including any ecclesial act. The act of God *makes possible* the action of the human, but the act of the human does not contain unmediated the act of God. Divine action is the condition of human activity; human activity is not the condition of divine activity. This principle applies to the church. No institution or form or organization can be said to be fully representative of the action of God, or be the basis on which the true presence of God can be assured. In calling to mind the event of the church as an act of the Spirit, order is important. The Spirit is the *condition* for the event of the church's coming into being. It is not that the act of the Spirit *is* the event of the church: there is infinitely more to the dynamic self-determining act of the Holy Spirit than the event of the church, and the church cannot simply be identified with the Spirit. Faithful attendance to the

31. On this aspect of Reformation ecclesiology in England, a detailed example can be found in Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.

32. In an age of ecumenism, when Protestantism and the Reformation can be seen as the cause of division in the church, there is an increased hesitancy about seriously engaging the ecclesiologies of Reformers. However, as I have discussed elsewhere, this very point may well open up a Protestant account of the nature of the church to further ecumenical possibilities. It is not that one particular form of the church is the condition for the coming of the Spirit, but that the Spirit is the condition for the coming into being of the event of the church in its many and manifold forms. See Greggs, "The Catholic Spirit of Protestantism."

33. Schwöbel, "Creature of the Word," 119.

Spirit's activity is needed, but overconfidence that human activity is the condition of or even is divine activity must be guarded against. The church's creaturely forms cannot be the basis for such claims, nor can they straightforwardly be identified with the Spirit's presence. Rather, despite the human propensity to sin and idolatry, it comes to pass that, in the Spirit's gracious faithfulness, the Spirit acts faithfully to bring about the event of the church. No form of church—high or low, traditional or modern—can ever be either conceived of as the basis for the Spirit's act or identified with the Spirit's act. These forms are merely the events of the creaturely and contextual spatiotemporal conditions in which the Spirit acts to fulfill faithfully and constantly the promise of the presence of Christ where two or three are gathered in Christ's name.<sup>34</sup>

### *Demarcating Act and Event*

There is a need for care here. In speaking of the church as (1) an event of (2) the act of the Holy Spirit, demarcation of the asymmetric relationality is important.

1. The church is an event which takes place in creaturely space and time in the condition of creaturely fallenness as it is being reconciled and redeemed. That it is an *event* of the act of the Spirit in which the church comes into being should help prevent us from believing the church to be possessed of the direct authority from or of God, or of being an eschatologically fully realized community. The church is not the kingdom of God, nor is the church a perfect society, nor is the church the unmediated presence of God in the world; the church is that community which God—for God's gracious purposes—creates

34. This criticism is equally aimed, therefore, at charismatic and evangelical communities (the communities with which the author identifies) in their formulaic "waiting on the Lord" with particular use of music and worship songs, as it is aimed at higher church brothers and sisters. A good example of the kinds of concerns discussed here can be found in C. S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, in which the senior devil addresses his nephew with the following point:

I warned you before that if your patient can't be kept out of the Church, he ought at least to be violently attached to some party within it. I don't mean on really doctrinal issues; about those, the more lukewarm he is the better. And it isn't the doctrines on which we chiefly depend for producing malice. The real fun is working up hatred between those who say "mass" and those who say "holy communion." . . . And all the purely indifferent things—candles and clothes and what not—are an admirable ground for our activities. We have quite removed from men's minds what that pestilent fellow Paul used to teach about food and other unessentials—namely, that the human without scruples should always give in to the human with scruples. You would think they could not fail to see the application. You would expect to find the "low" churchman genuflecting and crossing himself lest the weak conscience of his "high" brother should be moved to irreverence, and the "high" one refraining from these exercises lest he should betray his "low" brother into idolatry. And so it would have been but for our ceaseless labour. (84–85)

as an *event* of the Spirit's act in the space-time between the ascension of Christ and the consummation. The church has not yet and never will escape its creaturely conditions as an event in space-time among those who are *simul iustus et peccator*.<sup>35</sup> The church exists this side of the eschaton in the conditions of God's reconciling and redeeming of fallen humanity, a redemption which has yet to be fulfilled. The church is not a locus of unmediated divine action but exists always as an event in its creaturely status even as it is brought into being by an act of the Holy Spirit. Some have said that to fail to recognize this would be the ecclesiological equivalent of docetism.<sup>36</sup>

2. But it is necessary to remember simultaneously that the church is, nevertheless, caused by the Spirit, who acts to bring the church into being. The cause of the church's becoming is an act of the Holy Spirit. It is crucial to remember that it is not the church as an event which causes the Spirit to come. Not only is there a danger in an approach to the church which proceeds in the belief of God's working within it *ex opere operato*, even with the necessary appropriate disposition of faith.<sup>37</sup> There is an equal danger from the Protestant (and particularly Pietist) context in which certain behaviors are considered essential to bringing about the presence of the Holy Spirit. Such conditions vary in time and place and from denomination to denomination. The condition might be a particular mode of worshiping practice, such as worship led by a worship group that presents the "conditions" for the descent of the Spirit in a charismatic context (without the recognition of the Spirit's prevenience to this); or it might be the purity of lives of the faithful who are gathered, as in Puritan groups; or it might be assent to a particular set of doctrines; and so forth. However, nothing conditions God's Spirit into creating the church. The Spirit is Lord and as such free. The church is called simply (in the prevenience of the Spirit's grace) to call epiclestically upon the Spirit and to respond to the Spirit's faithful presence. It is God who fits God's church to meet and to come into being despite the individual and community's

35. Clearly, a discussion of holiness is relevant here. See ch. 11 on sanctification and particularly the third volume of this trilogy, which will be the principal locus for discussion of the holiness of the church. On church as *simul iustus et peccator*, see Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, ch. 2.

36. For this use of language of docetic (albeit it has its limitations, especially since ecclesiology has to be mediated in its relationship to Christology through pneumatology), see Gunton, "Church on Earth," esp. 65; and O'Grady, *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 255.

37. The key here is not whether there is a need for a faithful disposition. The key is whether the graciousness of God is such that in God's freedom nothing can condition God into coming present to and in the church community. Order is vital: God comes in the person of the Spirit to constitute God's community, and this is an act of the Spirit's faithfulness not a responsive conditioning to human action. Human action arises *from* the free and gracious coming of the Spirit; human action is never the cause of this free and gracious coming of the Spirit.

sinfulness, creaturely limitations, poverty of worship, and propensity to idolatry.<sup>38</sup> The Holy Spirit speaks through the church as through Balaam's ass—that is, through a divine willing to speak through and create the church in this way. The church is called to be the place which, on calling for the coming of the Spirit to create it, offers itself as Mary did upon news of the descent of the Holy Spirit for the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35) with the words: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord” (Luke 1:38). It is the *act of the Spirit* which is the cause of the event of the church. Some have said that to fail to recognize this would be the ecclesiological equivalent of Ebionitism.

### A Truly Pentecostal Church Whose Life Comes from the Living Holy Spirit<sup>39</sup>

Another way to discuss this issue is to consider the differentiation of the church and the church so-called in Acts 2 and 1, respectively. Much in ecclesiology is in effect an account of the church as spoken of in Acts 1. In the opening chapter, Luke presents us with a community of the faithful “constantly devoting themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). There is even a sermon (the proclamation of the Word of God) by what seems to be the community's leader (Peter), as well as a reading from what we now think of as the Old Testament. There is, furthermore, an ordering of the community (a polity), with the lot falling to Matthias and with a clear sense of distinctive roles implied thereby. The themes evident in the first chapter of Acts are often the primary concern of discussions of ecclesiology: the gathering of the community; the liturgical life of the community; the governance of the community; the creation of the community from the reading and proclaiming of the Word; the self-ordering of the gospel under oversight of officers.<sup>40</sup> No end of practical discussion of the church exists in this kind of ecclesiology. But the gathering we see in Acts 1 is not yet the church. And this is vital to note.

What makes the church the church, what breathes life into the church, what brings the church into being is the event of Pentecost as an act of the Holy Spirit.<sup>41</sup> The coming of the Spirit in Acts 2 is the cause of the event of

38. See my earlier book *Theology against Religion*. Also of use here is Boulton, *God against Religion*.

39. This is an expansion of some of the points made in the preface. “Pentecostal” (for all of the author's sympathy to those denominations) refers not to a denominational family but to the event of Pentecost as the birth of all churches in whatever denominational form they order themselves.

40. This is the approach that Webster takes; see his *Word and Church*, ch. 6.

41. Of course, in the Johannine account the Spirit is breathed on the disciples by Jesus in the resurrection appearances. The point for ecclesiology remains, however, the same: the Spirit's

the church's coming into being.<sup>42</sup> Without this Spirit, the church (so-called) remains a shut-away society in an upper room. But with the Spirit, the church becomes the church—that body which is propelled outwards and which internally and corporately is orientated not only towards God but also towards the human others and the rest of creation.<sup>43</sup> The Spirit is the agent who brings the church into being. It is imperative for an ecclesiology, rather than focusing primarily on the themes one sees in Acts 1, to focus on that act of God which brings the church about actualistically as an event.

An account of the church cannot presuppose a fourth article of the creed which separates the church from the preceding in such a manner as to afford it either too much status (almost akin to the persons of the Trinity) or too little (as a merely anthropological extra). Nor can an account of the church confuse the church singularly with the work of Christ in a reductive manner to that work.<sup>44</sup> It is most proximately the Spirit who is the “giver of life” to the church. The Spirit's divinity is known not only in the Spirit's lordship, in which the Spirit shares in the title *kyrios* with the Father and the Son, but also in the Spirit's active lordship over the life of the saints and the community of the church. This particular work of the Spirit does not mean that the Spirit is not, with the Father and the Son, the Lord over *all* creation; but the Spirit (who is spirated and proceeds from the Father and the Son) has a special (appropriate) lordship over the life of the church which the Spirit brings into being. The Spirit who is extensively present in all creation is the one whose act of intensive presence brings the community into being in the event of the church.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the very language of Acts 2 is language of living and dynamic divine intensity, which has the effect of leading the believers to the very extensity of the world (the nations and tongues paid testimony to). The Spirit's dynamically intensive and acting presence is the means by which the church comes into being as it is “built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph. 2:22).

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intensive descent onto the disciples is the act which creates the event of the church—either the reception of the Holy Spirit from the resurrected Jesus or the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

42. As Donald MacKinnon puts it, “The opening words of the *Benedictus* are so familiar that we forget what a stumbling-block they essentially are. We bless God because he ‘hath delivered and redeemed’ us, has come and loosed us from the prison in which we were fast bound” (*The Church of God*, 86).

43. This is the account of the church's priestliness, which is discussed in chs. 3–4 of this volume.

44. See Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation*, in which I argue that the more extensive and universal work of God is the work of the unique, particular, and single act and event of Jesus Christ, whereas the more particularizing work of God is the act and event of the universally present Holy Spirit.

45. I borrow the terms “extensity” and “intensity” from Hardy, *Finding the Church*.

It is certainly the case that much speech by the church about the church has proceeded without a fulsome account of God's agency, the Spirit's work. In characteristically forceful manner, Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt lambasts the church's negligence of the dynamic aliveness of the divine life. While he accepts that there has been much talk of the church and its teachings, of denominations and their forms,<sup>46</sup> he gives a clarion call for us to move from speech about our religious self-fulfillment and perpetuation (as "the ones that look out for their own salvation").<sup>47</sup> In speaking of the church, we are called, instead, to speak of the livingness of God:

God is dead, murdered. Nietzsche experienced more truth in his wrought-up nerves than all the boring Christians, who don't have a serious thought left for God! God is of no real importance, even for people with religion because religion has become more important than God. Though people get into tremendous arguments about religious questions, all the time God is dead. And it is perfectly all right with them if he is dead, because then they can do what they like. . . .

But that is just it: God in Christ is not dead: he still is the Alpha and the Omega.<sup>48</sup>

Although Blumhardt constructs his analysis here in a dominantly christological mode, his point remains equally true for our purposes. To speak of the church without due emphasis on the act of the Spirit which brings the church about as an event is ecclesiological Nietzscheanism—a belief that accepts that God is dead even (and perhaps especially) in relation to the church. There must be serious thought, in the discussion of the church, left for the God who brings the church into being by God's Spirit; just as an account of creation would require discussion of God the Father bringing creation into being through God's Word and by God's Spirit, so an account of the church requires an account of God's Spirit and God's Word.<sup>49</sup>

Here order is once again and as always absolutely key. To speak of the church as an event of the act of the Spirit is to give the Spirit lordship over the church and all speech about the church. There can be no pure identification of God with the institution of the church. In ecclesiology the theologian should offer a "sharpened witness to the unalterable truth that God who is present in

46. Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting*, 2.

47. Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting*, 31.

48. Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting*, 31.

49. Indeed, the only modality for the life and speech of the disciples without the Spirit is failure: the only way they leave the upper room and proclaim the gospel is by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. As with the first disciples, the same is true for the church today.

his Church is subject not object.”<sup>50</sup> Indeed, consideration of the very manner of the act of the Spirit, as the one who acts as the omnipresent God in and with creation in its creaturely limitations and finitude so as to particularize the universal message of the gospel of the Lord, should prevent the church not only from believing that it can “control” or even “cajole” the Spirit but also from an overconfident, unmediated identification of its structures and institutions with God.<sup>51</sup> Colin Gunton is wise in his account of the church, indeed, to question whether the church has claimed too much premature universality for its works and words, instead of praying for the Spirit to come and leaving all to God.<sup>52</sup> Certainly it is the case that the Spirit uses creaturely media for the purposes of the Spirit’s work (most notably the finitude and contingency of created spatiotemporality in its quotidian givenness),<sup>53</sup> but particular forms of those media are not themselves the condition for the Spirit’s intensive presence. Instead, they become by the Spirit’s gracious act the theater of the event of the act of the Spirit’s intensity. Put formally, while the Spirit is the *sine qua non* of the church, the church is not the *sine qua non* of the Spirit. This aphorism seeks to capture not only the nonlimitation of the Spirit to the church but also the appropriate foundational and relational order between the Spirit and the church.

### Pneumatologically Actualistic Ecclesiology

This actualistic account of the church might seem too unstable, uncertain, and dynamic for many,<sup>54</sup> especially as a means of speaking about a visible organization and institution within the world. The Spirit is after all one who is wild, powerful, like the rush of a violent wind (Acts 2:2), and one who blows wherever the Spirit wills (John 3:8). Such an emphasis on the living and electing will of the divine life as the means for first speaking of the church does not perhaps sit well with the church’s sense of its institutional stability. How does the account thus far relate to the phenomenal reality of the ecclesiastical history and of the visible, institutional communities in the world?

50. Barth, *Theology and Church*, 316.

51. Gunton, “Church on Earth,” 61.

52. Gunton, “Church on Earth,” 61–62.

53. Hefner: “The church is a concrete entity within the created order. Its existence, therefore, occurs within the realm of the third *archē*, the realm of nature and history and of the Holy Spirit. *This means that what happens in the church is best located and assessed when we say that it belongs to God’s actualizing of the divine purpose in the concrete realm of nature and history*” (“Church,” 189 [emphasis original]).

54. As is the case in Schepers, “Work of the Holy Spirit.”

*Appropriating Barth's Theology of Election in Relation to the Spirit's Act*

According to such an actualistic view of the church's life in relation to the Spirit, it might seem possible to speak only of the church as existing properly invisibly, since God's Spirit alone gives life to the church and so "the church is an assembly that is always being reconstituted by the graceful act (election) of God."<sup>55</sup> This need for constant renewal and to be reminded of the church's dependence on the act of the Spirit is found powerfully in the theology of Karl Barth: "Once again, I would emphasize this moment of action, this event. The Church exists through the Holy Spirit and not otherwise. But the Holy Spirit is a divine person. His instituting is decisive, divine act. And this institution's truth stands or falls with continuous renewal and preservation of the foundation. How else would it continue to be instituted in the outpouring of the Spirit?"<sup>56</sup> Speaking of the church as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit, who establishes this human organization in divine freedom, might well lead one to doubt at any and every moment whether the community is the church. Such a doubt is perhaps no bad thing. It is the ecclesial action akin to the individual's falling on her knees and asking each night and morning for forgiveness from the Lord's grace.<sup>57</sup> Such doubt might be preferable to an overconfidence that the grace and activity of God can be captured, located, and localized in specific practices and institutional forms which become the Spirit's condition. However, the instability which gives rise to such doubt might also lead one to imagine an arbitrary freedom of the divine life which capriciously chooses at any point on no basis to give or remove the act of the Holy Spirit in creating the event of the church. Or else it might seem to suggest a divine doppelgänger which, as the "true" and "invisible" church in faith, has loose connections to the phenomenological institution of the church in space-time.

While Barth's theology points perhaps in the negative to some of these problematic qualities of speaking stringently of the church as an event of the Holy Spirit,<sup>58</sup> it also provides (though in a form which needs development for these particular purposes) the very guard against such unstable and chaotic

55. Hardy, *Finding the Church*, 32. Hardy critiques such a view, suggesting that it can lead to a certain "purism" of the Word around which the community gathers, and an inattentiveness to other practices of the church.

56. Barth, *Theology and Church*, 336–37.

57. This is how John Wesley understands assurance; see Sermons 10–12, WJW 1. Cf. Luther's comments (LW 14:163). An ecclesial version of this perspective would be wise and appropriate.

58. This may well have been a concern which Bonhoeffer in his early theology had with Barth's account; see DBWE 2. Of course, Barth continued to write, and his monumental shift in his theological understanding of election may well mean some of those accounts and critiques do not stand for the mature Barth; see Greggs, *Theology against Religion*, chs. 3–4.

arbitrariness which confuses itself with the dynamic and living act of God. Barth's actualism does not operate with the purpose of speaking about the arbitrary willing of a capricious and hidden God; Barth's concern is quite the opposite. Barth's actualism is based on his understanding of reality that God is the God who determines Godself to be none other than the God of the covenant,<sup>59</sup> the God of the gospel, the God of creation, salvation, and redemption. Barth's concern with election is not the freedom of God as an arbitrary condition of God beyond our knowledge of God as God makes Godself known to us, but a concern that we understand the very faithfulness and constancy of God, who is eternally as God acts. There is no going behind these acts and works of God to a hidden divine being, for Barth. God's act is who God is. God's act is who in God's freedom God graciously determines Godself to be for all eternity. God's act is who in God's faithfulness God is, such that God is none other than the God known to us in God's gracious revelation. And more powerfully still, God's act is who in God's faithfulness God is such that God is faithful to God's own eternal grace towards the creature. Certainly, for Barth, the dominant form of this discourse about election is in relation to the Second Person of the Trinity and the covenant of salvific grace.<sup>60</sup> However, insights from this understanding of election are relevant particularly to an account of the Spirit and the Spirit's faithfulness to the church.<sup>61</sup>

Barth's concerns in election relate to God's free electing will not being subjugated to a prior conceptualization of God's freedom in abstract metaphysics. Instead, the concern is the God who in God's gracious freedom determines Godself to be for the creature. Because God willed this relationship with that which is not God in creation and has entered into it, God cannot now be God without it.<sup>62</sup> The task of theology is not to speculate on an abstract deity but to expound this "Subject" God:

It must do this in such a way that quite apart from what must be said about the knowledge and the reality of God as such, it makes the Subject known as One which in virtue of its innermost being, willing and nature does not stand outside all relationships, but stands in a definite relationship *ad extra* to another. . . . That God is God only in this way and not in any other, must now be made explicit.<sup>63</sup>

59. For an excellent summary on actualism in Barth, see Nimmo, *Being in Action*, 4–12.

60. See Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation*, esp. chs. 2 and 5.

61. Nimmo has gone some way to discuss this, claiming that we cannot abstract the person of the Spirit from the Spirit's work within the church and we are wise to think of the Spirit as eternally *inecclesiandus*. See Nimmo, "Barth and the Election-Trinity Debate."

62. *CD II/2*, 7.

63. *CD II/2*, 6.

Clearly, this relationship with the creature is not a necessary relationship for God. God is free, but this freedom is such that in God's free decision of love, God freely and eternally binds Godself to that which is not God—to creation, to humanity. We cannot, therefore, ever consider who God is *in abstracto* apart from and outside the acts and works of God: "God is God in the very fact, and in such a way, that He does stand in this relation, in a definite relationship with the other."<sup>64</sup> To go behind this free but definite decision is to venture into abstraction. We can speak only of the work of God, knowing this attitude God has in God's act in grace and which God has revealed to the creature. It is necessary, therefore, to deal with the Christian God in the *relationship* God establishes—"a relationship outside of which God no longer wills to be and no longer is God, and within which alone He can be truly honoured and worshipped as God."<sup>65</sup>

### *The Constancy of the Spirit and the Life of the Church*

This relationship from which one can never abstract discussion of God is not only the relationship God establishes with humanity in the life of Jesus Christ. This relationship is also the relationship God establishes with the church in the person of the Holy Spirit. The dynamism of the church's life as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit is not the unstable dynamism of a capricious "god": the dynamism is the dynamism of the Holy God, who is faithful and constant to Godself. This relationship of the Spirit to the life of the church is, because the Spirit is constant and faithful, "an actuality which can neither be suspended nor dissolved."<sup>66</sup> The church rests as an event on the act of the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit—who is Holy—is faithful to the Spirit's self and to the constancy of the Spirit's act. In other words, the "being" of the church as an event is held not in its own institutions but in the reality that the one whose act brings it into being is the eternal God, who is faithful and unchanging in the person of the Holy Spirit. The confidence for the church's *being* lies not in the institutions and forms it comprises but in the Holy Spirit of God, who acts faithfully and constantly and in that act responds to the epicletic call of the people (made possible, indeed, through the prevenience of the Spirit's grace) to constitute them as church.<sup>67</sup> Because the Spirit has

64. CD II/2, 6.

65. CD II/2, 7.

66. CD II/2, 7. Barth uses this phrase about the covenant of God with humanity in Jesus Christ. The logical form is, however, being applied here in relation to the Spirit and the church.

67. See here Hütter, "Ecclesial Ethics," 433–34, on a pneumatological and not utopian account of the church.

created the church in fallen creaturely and contingent spatiotemporality, the Spirit will (faithful to the Spirit's self) re-create again and again the community of faith in the event of the church. The being of the church is not held in the particular contingent phenomena of the church's forms; the being of the church is held in the constancy of the Holy Spirit.

Far from a fear of instability and an incapacity to relate to the community over time in what is perceived to be such an overly event-orientated dynamic and actualistic ecclesiology, an emphasis on the work of the Spirit in founding and preserving the church as an event through the constant faithfulness of the Holy Spirit to the Spirit's own act should help the church to feel confident in its existence in any given moment of space-time. What preserves the church and relates all parts of the church to one another across space-time—in the contingencies of spatiotemporality in creation as it is being reconciled and redeemed—is the Holy Spirit's faithfulness and eternal omnipresence. As Schwöbel helpfully puts it,

In a situation which seems to be almost universally characterised by a loss of nerve on the part of the churches, and where self-preservation seems to be the chief point on the hidden agenda of ecclesiastical existence, it could only be a liberation to see that the Church cannot preserve its existence because it has not constituted itself. That there will always be a Church is an article of faith, but the continued existence of the Church cannot be guaranteed by our programme of Church reform or our programmatic appeals to resist such an attempt. We can only witness to *God's faithfulness* who will complete the work he has begun by creating the Church.<sup>68</sup>

To place an emphasis on the church as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit is to place confidence where it should be placed—in the Lord who made heaven and earth and whose reconciling and redeeming grace is restoring all things. Ironically, to concern ourselves not with our own survival but with the God whose act in the person of the Spirit brings the church into being may well determine that the church is far more attractive to those who are not the church, since the church in this way is functioning as it is called to do so: it becomes not a self-referential community orientated towards its own constitution, but a community which exists only for the sake of God and the world.<sup>69</sup>

None of this is to say that the church's actions and governance are irrelevant, but it is to say that there is a need for a proper and appropriate order which recognizes that nothing can precede the grace of God in eternity or in time.

68. Schwöbel, "Creature of the Word," 150 (emphasis added).

69. Cf. Jinkins, *Church Faces Death*, 32, 83.

This grace includes God's eternal determination to be the God of the church, the God of a particular people.<sup>70</sup> As Barth writes, "God acts in His free grace, but He also wills and expects and demands something from His covenant-partner."<sup>71</sup> However, in accounting theologically, dogmatically indeed, for the life of the church, the first statement that must be made is that the church's becoming rests on the graciousness of the divine life in God's act: the church exists as an event of this act. All action that the church engages in stems from this act. It is not that first God demands something from us and then God acts in grace towards us. Eberhard Jüngel helpfully identifies the issue as follows:

The difference between the creator and his creation, and the saving work of God which defines this difference, means that every human action is characterized by a fundamentally *receptive* action, by a creative *passivity*, that is by faith rather than by good works in which we seek to do something to God in direct correspondence to his benefits. . . .

*To let God perform his work*—this and this alone is the function of the church's action. . . . In the action of the church, there occurs an elemental *interruption* by God himself.<sup>72</sup>

For the church to seek to identify its existence anywhere other than in the free and gracious outpouring of the Spirit is for the church to believe in its own religious self-realization and not in the divine realization of its existence in an act of the Spirit of God. Only those who know the gracious act of the Spirit of God can know the continuity of their election in Christ, and know the assurance of the Spirit's own faithful constancy in time and space in the Spirit's bringing about the event of the church. It is because God the Spirit is faithful, because God the Spirit is holy, because God the Spirit is constant, because God the Spirit is eternal, that we may in faith trust that God will again and again bring into being the life of God's church.

This emphasis on the church as an event of the act of the Holy Spirit also does not mean that we are speaking of an invisible church, as an echo of the phenomenological reality. There is no such thing as an invisible church.<sup>73</sup> The church's very being is to be an anticipatory, proleptic sign to the world of the movement of divine grace towards and in creation as it is brought to redemption. But the power, the means, the agent of the church's existence

70. This people also includes Israel. Throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit rests on those creating the people of God, the people of Israel—on the patriarchs and matriarchs, judges, kings, prophets, and priests.

71. CD II/2, 11.

72. Jüngel, *Theological Essays 1*, 202–3.

73. The term "invisible church" functions herein thereby in a formal and not a material way.

is the Spirit of God. It is strictly the case and only the case that “the ‘invisibility’ of the Church refers to God’s act in constituting the Church which, as the power to create a visible *community of witness*, is itself invisible.”<sup>74</sup> It is in faith in the Spirit’s coming to the community, and in faith in the Spirit’s establishing it by the act of the Spirit’s intensive presence in the givenness of space-time as a locus for the anticipatory redeeming work of God, that one can speak of the invisibility of the church. But that very invisibility is meaningful strictly in relation to the visible community which stands across the variance and contingencies of quotidian space-time and, by the Spirit’s prevenience, calls on the promises of God in the act of the Holy Spirit to bring the church into being. It is the visible community of the Spirit’s coming that the Spirit (invisibly) seeks to create.

### The Mediation of the Spirit: God’s Vertical Act in the Horizontal Axis of the Medium of Creaturely Space-Time

#### *The Terminus of Reconciliation and Redemption—the Creature*

What, then, does the Spirit do in the Spirit’s act which brings about the event of the church? The Spirit is the one who makes present to the horizontal axis of creaturely space-time in the media of createdness the reconciling and redeeming acts and works of God on the vertical axis. In the Spirit’s intensive act of bringing the reality of the vertical work of God to the horizontal conditions of human existence in the life of the church, the revelation and reconciliation of God is proleptically, contingently, and anticipatorily present in those whom the work of God’s salvation is reaching. The work of God in reconciling and redeeming has a terminus, and that terminus is the life of the creature who is being redeemed. The Spirit is the one who is ever particularizing in creation (indeed, in the very contingent and fallen spatiotemporal createdness in the life of the church) that universal work of God in reconciling all things to Godself in the person of Jesus Christ.

The works of God’s salvation do not happen abstractly in a way which cannot reach the creaturely limits of the creation in its given place and time. The once-for-all nature of the life, cross, and resurrection of Christ does not happen in such a way that it does not touch the continuing life and history of the world.<sup>75</sup> That Christ’s life, cross, and resurrection mean

74. Schwöbel, “Creature of the Word,” 131.

75. Cf. Barth, *Theology of Schleiermacher*, 278:

Everything which needs to be said, considered, and believed about God the Father and God the Son in an understanding of the first and second articles might be shown and

something outwith the bounds of first-century Judea, that they touch those beyond the first apostles, that they have a capacity to affect the particularities of time and space and not simply the universalities of eternity and the cosmos, is a grace of the act of God in the person of the Holy Spirit who brings the creature to participate in her creatureliness in her present and local setting in space and time in the reconciling and redeeming work of God.<sup>76</sup> God determines Godself in free grace to be God not for the creation *in abstracto* but for the creation *in concreto* in its changing and contingent spatiotemporality. Revelation reaches out and has a terminus; salvation reaches out and has a terminus. That terminus is creation not in the abstract but in its concrete existence. That terminus in the present is the people of God who witness (imperfectly and in anticipation) proleptically to the universal work of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. The act of God which creates that terminus is the person of the Holy Spirit, whose universality in all creation ("Where can I go from your spirit?," Ps. 139:7) particularizes the work of Christ in revelation and salvation in the space-time of the incarnation to the particularity of ongoing creation in its spatiotemporal contingency.<sup>77</sup>

### *The Self-Effacing Glory of the Spirit's Life*

The very nature of the Spirit's being is as the one who is the bond of union between the Father and the Son (the *vinculum amoris* in Augustine's terms).<sup>78</sup> The Spirit brings unity in and to diversity. Indeed, the very personality of

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illuminated in its foundations through God the Holy Spirit, the *vinculum pacis inter Patrem et Filium*. The entire work of God for his creatures, for, in, and with human beings, might be made visible in terms of its one teleology in which all contingency is excluded. . . . Might it not even be possible and necessary to place justification, sanctification, and calling under this sign—to say nothing of creation as the *opus proprium* of God the Father? . . . Isn't God . . . the God who in his freedom, power, and love makes himself present and applies himself?

76. This is a theme I have discussed in some detail from the perspective of salvation. The reader is directed to *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation*, chs. 5–7.

77. There is implicit in this construction a critique of the Lutheran *corpus majesticum*, which is considered to make Christology do too much work (as well as undermining aspects of the humanity of Christ, overemphasizing the Eucharist, and failing to attend to the condition of living in the world following the ascension). This volume trades more, therefore, on the Reformed emphasis on the particularity and ascension of Christ, seeking to ask *how* and *in what sense* Christ is present, and how the Spirit works in the economy of salvation to enable us to participate in (this volume), encounter (vol. 2), and be transformed into the likeness of (vol. 3) Christ. The reader is directed to chs. 2, 3, and 4 on the priesthood of Christ, participative ontology, and the priesthood of the church.

78. Augustine, *Liber de spiritu et anima* (PL 40:820); cf. *De Trinitate* 6.7; 15.27, 50.