

THE CHRIST OF THE SPIRIT:

The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Incarnate Christ in Athanasius and Kuyper

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One of the recurring problems of theology is the relationship of the members of the Trinity. We tend to think of the Trinity in almost hierarchical terms, with the Son subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit subordinate to the Father and the Son. Thus while we have little difficulty with understanding the Father sending the Son, and the risen and ascended Son sending the Spirit, we often fail to reflect on the work of the Spirit in and through the Incarnate Son, to whom the Spirit was sent by the Father. Berkhof has stated in his book on the Spirit:

Jesus can be the sender of the Spirit only because he is first the receiver and bearer of the Spirit. Now in the tradition of the church and its theology, the first relation is very much neglected. That fact is understandable insofar as this relation is often abused by those who want to emphasize Jesus' humanity at the cost of his divinity. From the time of the Adoptionists at the end of the second century until the Liberals of our time, there is an inclination to see Jesus mainly or exclusively as the one who, in the line of the prophets and of all true children of God, though more than all of them, is gifted with the Spirit. The church, in reaction against that trend of thought, neglected this aspect and stressed, in an equally one-sided way, the fact that Jesus has the Spirit at his disposal and that it is his gift to his church.¹

¹ H Berkhof. **The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit**. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964, p. 18. However, see the criticisms of Berkhof's alternative approach to the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in T Small. **The Giving Gift**. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1988, pp. 41-44.

We have neglected to reflect adequately on the relationship between the incarnate Word and the Spirit who descends and anoints and empowers Christ to carry out his ministry as the Messiah. This neglect comes about because of an over-emphasis on the divinity of Christ, obscuring to a considerable extent his true humanity. We need to re-emphasise the humanity of Christ, and that he performed his task as our redeemer as a true human being, empowered beyond measure by the Holy Spirit, and not as God masquerading as a human being. The failure to reflect adequately on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the humanity of Christ can be seen in the way his miracles are explained as the operation of his divine nature. However, it was not as God that Jesus performed his miracles, but as a man full of the power of the Spirit, and to ascribe the miracles to his divine nature is to obscure the true nature of the incarnation. I wish to explore the way in which this occurs, by examining the views of Athanasius and Abraham Kuyper, separated not simply by centuries, but also by their views of the miracles of Christ.

Athanasius

While the issue of the anointing of the Spirit on Christ may not be very prominent in contemporary debate, it played a part in the Christological controversies in the patristic period. In his theology of the incarnation, Athanasius consistently distinguishes the human from the divine in Christ, so that some actions are ascribed to his human nature, while others are ascribed to his divine nature. This is especially evident in his comments on the miracles of Christ. According to Athanasius, these are worked by his divine power, since the human nature lacks the ability to perform such deeds. As a result, Athanasius fails to recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in the human nature. For Athanasius, Christ as a human did not live and act as other humans live and act in relation to God, since he was himself God. This was proved by his miracles, so that the incarnation was in fact God taking on a human body and acting as a human being, yet by the very nature of his miraculous deeds proving that he was fundamentally not human at all. In one passage in *De Incarnatione* he provides a complete statement of his views.

But as thereby he was known to be bodily present, so by the works

which he did through the body he proved himself to be the Son of God. So he cried to the unbelieving Jews and said: *If I do not do the works of my Father, do not believe me; but if I do do them, even if you do not believe in me, believe in my works, that you may know and realize that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.* For as he is invisible yet is known by the works of creation, so, becoming a man and not visible in a body, it would have been known from his works that it was not a man but the Power of God and Word who was performing them. For the fact that he commanded demons and cast them out was not a human deed, but a divine one. Or who, seeing him healing the diseases to which the race of men was subject, would still think that he was a man and not God? For he purified lepers, he made the lame to walk, he opened the hearing of the deaf, he made the blind to see, and indeed cast out every illness and disease from men; from which anyone could see his divinity. For who, having seen him giving what was lacking to those whose very being was deficient and opening the eyes of the man blind from birth, would not think that the creating of men was in his power and that he was their Fashioner and Maker? For he who gave to a man what was missing from birth is most clearly the Lord of the creation of men. Therefore also in the beginning, when he came down to us, he fashioned for himself the body from a virgin, in order to give all men no small indication of his divinity; for he who fashioned this is himself the Maker of these others. For who, seeing that the body came forth from a virgin alone without a man, would not think that he who was revealed in it was the Creator and Lord of the other bodies? And who, seeing the substance of water being changed and turned into wine, would not think that he who did this was Lord and Creator of the substance of all water? So, for this reason, as Lord he walked on the sea and walked about on the land, and gave to all who looked on a proof of his universal lordship. When with a little he fed such a great multitude and brought about an abundance from a lack, so that five thousand were sated from five loaves and left as much again, this was nothing else but proof that he is the Lord of the providence of the

universe.²

Athanasius considers that because the incarnate Christ also has a divine nature, he is therefore in full communion with God. But Christ did not come to live among us as “God in disguise,” rather the Eternal Word became human, taking a full human nature, and in that human nature relating to God exactly as any other human would. Thus Christ as a human needed to receive the anointing and empowering of the Holy Spirit, and it is through this power of the Spirit on the human nature that was the source of his ability to work miracles. This is in fact exactly as the Scriptures describe the situation.

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.³

This is not the only passage which teaches that Jesus worked miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit upon him, and find the same idea elsewhere.

Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, signs and wonders, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.⁴

While this idea can be substantiated from the Scriptures more extensively, here I want to examine Athanasius’ conception and to consider its place in the history of the doctrine of the incarnation. Athanasius centred in his doctrine of the incarnation not on the becoming-human of the Word but on the becoming-embodied of the Word. The

² Athanasius. *De Incarnatione* 18. **Athanasius. On the Incarnation.** Oxford Early Christian Texts, pp. 177, 179, 181.

³ Acts 10:37-38.

⁴ Acts 2:22.

emphasis of Athanasius in the doctrine of the incarnation was the taking of a human body by the Word, not the taking of human nature. That taking of a human body was for the purpose of purchasing our redemption through the death of the body: all of Athanasius' thought is focused on the work of redemption, defined as the death of Christ on our behalf.

...the Word was made flesh in order to offer up this body for all, and that we, partaking of His spirit, might be deified, a gift which we could not otherwise have gained than by His clothing Himself in our created body, for hence we derive our name of "men of God" and "men in Christ." But as we, by receiving the Spirit, do not lose our own proper substance, so the Lord, when made man for us, and bearing a body, was no less God; for He was not lessened by the envelopment of a body, but rather deified it and rendered it immortal.⁵

Here we can clearly see the emphasis on the embodiment of the Word but little conception of the enhumanisation of the Word. This is probably the root of Athanasius' inability to see the Messianic nature of Christ: the human being who lived and acted not as "God in a body" but as a human being, anointed with the full measure of the power of the Holy Spirit, who was at the same time the Eternal Son of God. Athanasius focuses so heavily on the deity of the person of Christ that he does not have an adequately developed doctrine of the humanity of Christ.

The Holy Spirit does not appear in the double apology *Contra Gentes-De Incarnatione*. His absence may be compared to that of the human soul in the humanity of Christ as the author of the apology evokes it.⁶

The clues to a more coherent Christology are however present in the thought of Athanasius. He correctly insists that the Word was not constrained or confined to a

⁵ Athanasius. *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 3.14. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series 2, Vol. 4, [NPNF 2/4] p. 159.

⁶ C Kannengiesser. "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Holy Spirit between Nicea I and Constantinople I." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 48 (1981) 172.

body during the incarnation on earth, but was simultaneously upholding the universe by the power of his word (Hebrews 1:3, Colossians 1:15-17). Athanasius wrote:

He was not enclosed in the body, nor was he in the body but nowhere else. Nor did he move the latter while the universe was deprived of his action and providence. But what is most wonderful is that, being the Word, he was not contained by anyone, but rather himself contained everything. And as he is in all creation, he is in essence outside the universe but in everything by his power, ordering everything and extending his providence over everything. And giving life to all, separately and together, he contains the universe and is not contained, but in his Father only he is complete in everything. So also being in a human body and giving it life himself, he accordingly gives life to everything, and was both in all and outside all. And although he was known by his body through his works, yet he was not invisible by his action on the universe.⁷

Similarly elsewhere he describes the incarnation as the coming of the Creator to humankind in order to communicate to them once again the truth about God. In order to be fully understood by humankind, he became a man himself. But he stressed that the works which the incarnate Christ did while in the body were the works of the Creator, and that these were performed to give evidence of the Creator to those who were unwilling to accept the evidence of the world around them concerning the Creator.

For it was the task of him who by his providence and regulation of the universe teaches about the Father, also to renew the same teaching... So as it was right for him to wish to be of help to men, he came as a man and took to himself a body like theirs of humble origin [I mean through the works of the body] in order that those who were unwilling to know him by his providence and government of the universe, yet by the

⁷ Athanasius. *De Incarnatione* 17. Oxford Early Christian Texts, p. 175.

works done through the body might know the Word of God who was in the body, and through him the Father.⁸

Athanasius stated on many occasions that the actions of the incarnate Christ were the actions of the Word, creator and ruler of the universe. His miracles were proofs of his divinity, which thereby vouched for his work of redemption.

For this reason, not as soon as he came did he complete the sacrifice on behalf of all and deliver his body to death, and resurrecting it make himself thereby invisible. But by means of it he rendered himself visible, remaining in it and completing such works and giving such signs as made him known to be no longer a man but God the Word. For in two ways our Saviour had compassion through the incarnation: he both rid us of death and renewed us; and also, although he is invisible and indiscernible, yet by his works he revealed and made himself known to be the Son of God and the Word of the Father, leader and king of the universe.⁹

But while Athanasius was able to accept that the man Jesus was simultaneously the Eternal Word and Creator, he did not seem to also accept that the Eternal Word was simultaneously a fully human being, who in his human nature required the anointing of the Holy Spirit in order to be able to fulfill his appointed task. He considered that because the Incarnate Word therefore had the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in him, that the power of the Spirit would be there as a matter of course. The man Jesus therefore had the power of the Godhead at his disposal to work miracles because he was the person of the Eternal Word. But the man Jesus did not relate to God as any other human being relates to God: he did not need the power of the Holy Spirit on his human nature, and therefore was not like us in that respect. Neither were the actions of Jesus in performing miracles the acts of the incarnate Christ, but they were the actions of the Eternal Word through the instrument of the human body. They were the acts of

⁸ Athanasius. *De Incarnatione* 14. Oxford Early Christian Texts, p. 169.

⁹ Athanasius. *De Incarnatione* 16. Oxford Early Christian Texts, p. 173.

the divinity, not acts of the human nature anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit. The incarnational theology of Athanasius is therefore to a considerable extent a docetic theology: the humanity of Christ is compromised.

This shows the importance of emphasising that the incarnate Christ was fully human, not simply God in human disguise. There is no way anyone could discern that Christ was the incarnate deity from observation: his godhead was concealed from human gaze and he appeared in all respects human, because he actually was in all respects human. That he was also God is known only by the revelation of the Father to the human heart, not by examining anything that Christ might have done.¹⁰ Thus his miracles, his forgiveness of sins, his prophetic utterances, and his powerful preaching were all the result not of the activity of his divine nature, but of the limitless anointing of the Holy Spirit on the sinless human being, Jesus the Christ.

Athanasius similarly did not have an adequate theology of miracle with respect to Christians. He saw these similarly as signs worked by the power of Christ, not through the Holy Spirit's anointing on the believer, but as a direct operation of the Word. In the *Life of Anthony*, he cites a comment by Anthony which shows this lack of appreciation of the work of the Spirit in miracles.

For the working of signs is not ours but the Saviour's work: and so He said to His disciples: "Rejoice not that the demons are subject to you, but that your names are written in the heavens." For the fact that our names are written in heaven is a proof of our virtuous life, but to cast out demons is a favour of the Saviour who granted it.¹¹

Thus exorcisms and other miracles are direct works of God, not the working of the power of God through human beings. In the same way, the miracles of Christ were performed not as a human being endowed with power from God, but by the Word working from within a human body.

¹⁰ For example, Matthew 16:15-17, John 6:42-45.

¹¹ Athanasius. *The Life of Anthony*, 37. NPNF 2/4, p. 206.

...when He did divinely His Father's works, the flesh was not external to Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them. Hence, when made man, He said: "If I do not the works of the Father, believe Me not; but if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works, that ye may know that the Father is in Me and I in Him." And thus when there was need to raise Peter's wife's mother, who was sick of a fever, He stretched forth His hand humanly, but He stopped the illness divinely. And in the case of the man blind from birth, human was the spittle which He gave forth from the flesh, but divinely did He open the eyes through the clay. And in the case of Lazarus, He gave forth a human voice, as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise Lazarus from the dead.¹²

The miracles of Christ were therefore the deeds of the incarnate Word, but the emphasis in Athanasius' understanding of those miracles was on the work of the Divine Word, not of the human nature of the incarnate Christ, who had but little involvement, merely acting out physical motions, while the real power was that of the Word.

Athanasius argued that the Trinitarian nature of God meant that when one member of the Trinity was spoken of, the others were included. Thus anything done by the Word is also *ipso facto* done by the Spirit, and therefore there was no need for him to make any special provision for the power of the Spirit in the miracles of the incarnate Word: it was the same divine power exercised by the Word as that exercised by the Holy Spirit. And because it was the divine Word and not the human nature of Christ that was involved in the working of miracles, there was no need to introduce the Holy Spirit into the discussion.

For the holy and blessed Triad is indivisible and one in itself. When mention is made of the Father, there is included also his Word, and the Spirit who is in the Son. If the Son is named, the Father is in the Son,

¹² Athanasius. *Third Discourse against the Arians*, 26.32. NPNF 2/4, p. 411.

and the Spirit is not outside the Word. For there is from the Father one grace which is fulfilled through the Son in the Holy Spirit; and there is one divine nature, and one God “who is over all and through all and in all [Ephesians 4:6].”¹³

The miracles worked by Christ are in fact the works of the Father: they are not performed by the Word alone, but are the works which the Father has assigned to him to do. The Son is not independent of the Father but obeys him. The miracles of Christ are then correctly spoken of as the works of the Father.

Again, the Son declared that the Father worked the works that he did - for he says: “It is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves [John 14:10-12].” So Paul declared that the works he worked by the power of the Spirit were the works of Christ: “I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done - by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Holy Spirit [Romans 15:18-19].”¹⁴

But while Athanasius emphasised the activity of the Father in the working of miracles by the Word, the Holy Spirit had a subordinate place. It is merely in the Holy Spirit that the works are performed. “The Father does all things through the Word in the Holy Spirit. Thus the unity of the holy Triad is preserved.”¹⁵ There is a sense of subordinationism in Athanasius’ doctrine of miracles: while they are the works of the Word, they are in fact the works of the Father, in which the Holy Spirit plays little part. The Holy Spirit is not brought into direct activity through the Word, since

¹³ Athanasius. *The Letters on the Holy Spirit to Serapion*, 1.14. **The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit**. Trans. by C R B Shapland. London: Epworth, 1951, pp. 93-94.

¹⁴ Athanasius. *The Letters on the Holy Spirit to Serapion*, 1.19, p. 113.

¹⁵ Athanasius. *The Letters on the Holy Spirit to Serapion*, 1.28, p. 135.

Athanasius emphasises the priority of the Word over the Holy Spirit in this area. The reason for this is that Athanasius sees miracles as a vindication of the Word to humanity, and as proof of his Deity. Even then, they are witnesses to the Father and not simply to the divinity of the Word.

For, men as they are, they will be able to know His Father more quickly and directly by a body of like nature and by the divine works wrought through it, judging by comparison that they are not human, but the works of God, which are done by Him.¹⁶

Again it is the divine power of the Word which is at work in miracles, and the body of the incarnate Christ is there to prove that they are not human works: therefore the person who has taken up a human body is divine.

...it must be plain and will be owned by all, that this is the true Son of God, even the Word and Wisdom and Power of the Father from the beginning. For this is why His works also are no works of man, but are recognised to be above man, and truly God's works, both from the facts in themselves, and from comparison with [the rest of] mankind.¹⁷

The miracles in fact prove that Christ is not merely human, but that God is at work, and that this would have been readily recognised by those who had accepted the sovereignty of the Creator over the universe.

For if they knew His Godhead from His power over the universe, they would have also known that the bodily works of Christ also are not human, but are the works of the Saviour of all, the Word of God.¹⁸

The miracles then do not prove the humanity of the incarnate Word, but his

¹⁶ Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word* 43.5. NPNF 2/4, p. 60.

¹⁷ Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word* 48.9. NPNF 2/4, p. 63.

¹⁸ Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word* 53.4. NPNF 2/4, p. 65.

fundamental non-humanity: his miraculous deeds are proof that he is not a human being, but God. Thus Athanasius through failing to see the nature of the miracles as works of the power of the Holy Spirit through the anointed human being, Christ, undermines his doctrine of the incarnation with indications that the incarnate Christ was not truly human. No other human being can manifest divine power. It is surprising that Athanasius was not aware that he had undermined the incarnation in a docetic manner. In one passage he emphasises the fully human nature of the incarnation, but concludes by stating once again that the miraculous deeds of the incarnate Christ were in fact the deeds of God himself and not of the human person.

...the Word himself was made flesh, and being in the form of God, took the form of a servant, and from Mary after the flesh became man for us, and that thus in him the human race is perfectly and wholly delivered from sin and quickened from the dead, and given access to the kingdom of the heavens. For they confessed also that the Saviour had not a body without a soul, nor without sense or intelligence; for it was not possible, when the Lord had become man for us, that his body should be without intelligence: nor was the salvation effected in the Word himself a salvation of body only, but of soul also. And being Son of God in truth, he became also Son of Man, and being God's only-begotten Son, he became also at the same time "firstborn among many brethren." Wherefore neither was there one Son of God before Abraham, another after Abraham: nor was there one that raised up Lazarus, another that asked concerning him; but at the same it was that said as man, "Where does Lazarus lie;" and as God raised him up: the same that as man and in the body spat, but divinely as Son of God opened the eyes of the man blind from his birth; and while, as Peter says, in the flesh he suffered, as God opened the tomb and raised the dead.¹⁹

But did Athanasius in fact recognise any place for the anointing of the Spirit on the

¹⁹ Athanasius. *Letter to the Church of Antioch*, 7. NPNF 2/4, p. 485.

incarnate Christ and did this have any influence on his view of Christ's miracles? In his *First Discourse against the Arians* Athanasius discusses Psalm 45:7, concerning the anointing of the messiah.

And therefore he is here "anointed," not that he may become God, for he was so even before; nor that he may become King, for he had the Kingdom eternally, existing as God's image, as the sacred oracle shows; but in our behalf is this written, as before... the Saviour on the contrary, being God, and ever ruling in the Father's kingdom, and being himself he that supplies the Holy Ghost, nevertheless is here said to be anointed, that, as before, being said as man to be anointed with the Spirit, he might provide for us men, not only exaltation and resurrection, but the indwelling and intimacy of the Spirit.²⁰

Athanasius insists that the Spirit is given to Christ not for his own benefit as man, but for the benefit of those he redeems, for by this means he gives the Spirit to us. We are sanctified by the Spirit which Christ gives to us. But because he is the sanctifier, he cannot himself receive the Spirit of sanctification, as he is not sanctified by another, but is himself the one who sanctifies. But as God, he gives the Spirit to himself as man, so that he can win our sanctification.²¹ He argues in this vein concerning the descent of the Spirit on Christ at his baptism, maintaining that it was not at all for his benefit but ours that this happened.

If then for our sake he sanctifies himself, and does this when he is become man, it is very plain that the Spirit's descent on him in Jordan was a descent upon us, because of his bearing our body. And it did not take place for promotion to the Word, but again for our sanctification, that we might share his anointing. and of us it might be said, "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and the Spirit of God dwells in you?" For when the Lord, as man, was washed in Jordan, it was we

²⁰ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.46. NPNF 2/4, p. 333.

²¹ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.46. NPNF 2/4, p. 333.

who were washed in him and by him. And when he received the Spirit, we it was who by him were made recipients of it.²²

The anointing of the Spirit is therefore not on the Word who has taken flesh, but on the flesh which the Word has taken. The Word sends the Spirit on humans, he does not receive it. The purpose of the anointing which the flesh has received is redemptive, that is, so that the Spirit can be granted to other human beings.

And if, as the Lord himself has said, the Spirit is his, and takes of his, and he sends it, it is not the Word, considered as the Word and Wisdom, who is anointed with the Spirit which he himself gives, but the flesh assumed by him which is anointed in him and by him; that the sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from him.²³

The anointing of the Spirit on Christ does not appear to be a genuine anointing, for it is performed for our benefit and on our behalf, not for the benefit of Christ himself.

For, when he is now said to be anointed in a human respect, we it is who in him are anointed; since also, when he is baptized, we it is who in him are baptized.²⁴

But even when the miracles of Christ come into consideration, the anointing of the Spirit on Christ is downplayed. The anointing is not for the actual performance of the miracle, since this is the operation of the divine power of the Word, but it is merely for the benefit of those who witness the miracle. It is the flesh which Christ has which receives the anointing although that anointing plays no part in the miracles, since Athanasius holds that only the power of the Word is active in these miracles. And as it is the divine Word working in Christ and not the human, the anointing plays no part in

²² Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.47. NPNF 2/4, p. 333.

²³ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.47. NPNF 2/4, p. 334.

²⁴ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.48. NPNF 2/4, p. 335.

the miracle.

What is there to wonder at, what to disbelieve, if the Lord who gives the Spirit, is here said himself to be anointed with the Spirit, at a time when, necessity requiring it, he did not refuse in respect of his manhood to call himself inferior to the Spirit? For the Jews saying that he cast out devils in Beelzebub, he answered and said to them, for the exposure of their blasphemy, “But if I through the Spirit of God cast out demons.” Behold, the Giver of the Spirit here says that he cast out demons in the Spirit; but this is not said, except because of his flesh. For since man’s nature is not equal of itself to casting out demons, but only in power of the Spirit, therefore as man he said, “But if I through the Spirit of God cast out demons.”²⁵

The anointing of the Spirit is here spoken of as an anointing on the flesh only: it is not genuinely through the power of the Spirit that Christ cast out demons, but it only appeared so because of the inability of humans to cast out demons. It was therefore to be understood, humanly speaking, as the power of the Spirit. But that power of the Spirit was not for Athanasius the anointing on the human nature of Christ, but the divine power of the Trinity working through the Word, appearing in the flesh. It was true that it was the power of the Spirit that cast out the demons, but it was as the divine power of the Word who is one with the Spirit. Athanasius gives a similar explanation of the meaning of Luke 4:18:19.

As then in this place the Lord himself, the giver of the Spirit, does not refuse to say that through the Spirit he casts out demons, as man; in like manner he the same, the giver of the Spirit, refused not to say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me,” in respect of his having become flesh, as John hath said; that it might be shewn in both these particulars, that we are they who are unable to cast out demons without the Spirit’s power. Through whom then and from

²⁵ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.50. NPNF 2/4, p. 335.

whom behoved it that the Spirit should be given save through the Son, whose also the Spirit is? And when were we enabled to receive it, except when the Word became man? And as the passage of the Apostle shows, that we had not been redeemed and highly exalted, had not he who exists in the form of God taken a servant's form, so David also shows, that no otherwise should we have partaken of the Spirit and been sanctified, but that the giver of the Spirit, the Word himself, had spoken of himself as anointed with the Spirit for us. And therefore have we securely received it, he being said to be anointed in the flesh; for the flesh being first sanctified in him, and he being said, as man, to have received it for its sake, we have the sequel of the Spirit's grace, receiving "out of his fulness."²⁶

The purpose of the anointing on Christ spoken of in Luke is for our benefit, since through the anointing of the flesh of Christ the Spirit becomes available to others in the flesh. It was still as the Word that demons were cast out, but it is only through the power of the Spirit given to us that we are able to cast out demons. The nature of this miracle is then different in Christ from its operation through us: one is the divine power of the Word directly at work, the other is the divine power of the Spirit working with us.

Similarly his "nature miracles" were not the exercise of the power of the Spirit in the incarnate Christ, but the operation and demonstration of the divine power of the Word who was present in the flesh. Again it is the demonstration of Christ as Creator which is central in Athanasius' explanation.

The Lord proved the disciples, when He was asleep on the pillow, at which time a miracle was wrought, which is especially calculated to put even the wicked to shame. For when He arose, and rebuked the sea, and silenced the storm, He plainly shewed two things; that the storm of the sea was not from the winds, but from fear of its Lord Who

²⁶ Athanasius. *First Discourse Against the Arians*, 12.51. NPNF 2/4, p. 336.

walked upon it, and that the Lord Who rebuked it was not a creature, but rather its Creator, since a creature is not obedient to another creature. For although the Red Sea was divided before Moses, yet it was not Moses who did it, for it came to pass, not because he spake, but because God commanded. And if the sun stood still in Gibeon, yet this was the work, not of the son of Nun, but of the Lord, Who heard his prayer. He it was Who both rebuked the sea, and on the cross caused the sun to be darkened.²⁷

Thus we can see that the miracles of Christ were not worked through the anointing of the Spirit upon his human nature, but were the direct operation of his divine power as Creator. The anointing of the Spirit was incidental to the ministry of Christ, since it took place not for his benefit, but for ours. Christ therefore did not live and act as a human being anointed with the power of the Spirit, and there was as a result a qualitative difference between the miracles of Christ and those worked by his disciples. Through this approach to the miracles of Christ, Athanasius has compromised the full effect of his incarnational theology, and in this respect has presented a Docetic view which does less than full justice to the unambiguous and complete humanity of Christ.

Abraham Kuyper

In contrast to Athanasius, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) acknowledge the complete humanity of Christ, which for him mean that the human nature of Christ stood in need of God's grace and gifts in the same way that any other human being does. He recognised that the work of the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Christ has not been adequately addressed, and made some significant contributions towards an alternative Christology which acknowledged the full humanity of the Messiahship of Jesus.

...the church has never sufficiently confessed the influence the Holy Spirit exerted upon the work of Christ. The general impression is that

²⁷ Athanasius. *Letter 29*. NPNF 2/4, p. 550.

the work of the Holy Spirit begins when the work of the Mediator on earth is finished, as though until that time the Holy Spirit celebrates his divine day of rest. Yet the Scripture teaches us again and again that Christ performed His mediatorial work controlled and impelled by the Holy Spirit.²⁸

Kuyper insisted on a distinction between the divine nature of the Eternal Word which was in full union with the Holy Spirit, and the anointing of the Spirit which came upon the human nature of the Incarnate Word. That which the human nature of Christ received was the gift of God through the Spirit, not the result of a fusion of the divine nature with a human one (resulting in a confusion of the natures).

Even in His conception and birth the Holy Spirit effected not only a separation from sin, but He also endowed His human nature with the glorious gifts, powers and faculties of which that nature is susceptible. Hence His human nature received these gifts, powers and faculties not *from the Son* by communication from the divine nature, but from the *Holy Ghost* by communication to the human nature; and this should be thoroughly understood.²⁹

Kuyper correctly recognised that it was not simply as the incarnate Christ, the Messiah, that the anointing of the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus. It was as a human being in covenant relationship to God who stood in need of the grace of God, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit for **human** life, not simply for Messianic ministry. There was nothing which the incarnate Christ received from God except as a human being who stood in need of the gifts of God: they came upon him as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in his human nature, not by communication from his divine nature. Kuyper thus in this way preserves the full humanity of Christ and avoids the Docetic tendencies in the Christology of Athanasius.

²⁸ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979, p. 97.

²⁹ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, pp. 94-95.

Even apart from His Messiahship Jesus stood, with reference to His human nature, during all the days of His humiliation, under the constant and penetrating operation of the Holy Spirit. The Son, who lacked nothing, but as God in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit possessed all things, compassionately adopted our human nature. And inasmuch as it is the peculiarity of that nature to derive its gifts, powers and faculties not from itself, but from the Holy Spirit, by whose constant operation alone they can be exercised, so did the Son not violate this peculiarity, but, although He was the Son, He did not take its preparation, enriching and operation into His own hand, but was willing to receive them from the hand of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at His Baptism, although He had received Him without measure at His conception, can only be explained by keeping in view the difference between the *personal* and *official* life of Jesus.³⁰

The anointing of Jesus at his baptism was then not the first coming of the Holy Spirit to Christ, but a continuation of that which began at his conception. It was the beginning of his ministry, his public manifestation as the Lamb of God, which was marked in that way. The significance of the emphasis that the Holy Spirit anointed Christ for his work as Messiah can be seen in the complete identification of Christ with humankind. His full and unambiguous humanity was not compromised, and therefore he stood in relationship to God in exactly the same way as we stand in relationship to God. He is truly one of us, not merely in appearance but completely. And because of this Kuyper was able to recognise that everything Christ did in his ministry in the flesh was as a result of the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon him. It was not the manifestation of the divine power of the Word somehow concealed behind a human act revealing the divinity of the person: it was openly acknowledged as the Holy Spirit's anointing upon the human nature, vindicating Christ's ministry, which enabled the miracles to be performed.³¹

³⁰ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, p. 96.

³¹ However, Kuyper's view of the **mechanism** by which miracles happened was heavily influenced by Augustine's views, which drew on Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophy. See my

The Holy Spirit did not support His human nature in the temptation and in the opening ministry only, but in all His mighty deeds, as Christ Himself testified: “If I cast our devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you” (Matthew 12:28). Moreover, St Paul teaches that the gifts of healing and miracles proceed from the Holy Spirit, and this, in connection with the statement that these powers worked in Jesus (Mark 6:14), convinces us that these were the very powers of the Holy Spirit.³²

Kuyper then proceeds from this testimony of Scripture that the Holy Spirit was working in Christ the same way he was working in other human beings, to the recognition that every manifestation of God’s grace in Christ was the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in the human nature, not through communication from his divine nature. In this way he was truly like us.

And since in the Son the divine Person and the divine nature are nearly one, it must be acknowledged that the Godhead of our Lord directly controlled His human nature. This is the meaning of the confession of God’s children that His Godhead supported His human nature. But it is wrong to suppose that the divine Person accomplished in His human nature what in us is effected by the Holy Spirit. This would endanger His true and real humanity. The Scripture positively denies it.³³

Berkouwer points out that Kuyper insisted that Christ believed and hoped in clinging to the Word of God. Berkouwer insists that the person of the incarnate Christ must be given full due as human: the union of the two natures did not result in the human

articles “Bavinck and Kuyper on creation and miracle.” *Anakainosis* 7 (1984) 1-2:1-19, and “Creation order and miracle according to Augustine.” *Evangelical Quarterly* 60 (1988) 3:217-240.

³² Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, p. 100.

³³ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, p. 97.

nature being submerged in the divine nature.³⁴ There was a clear distinction between the two, but Kuyper was able simultaneously to give each its due: he was neither adoptionistic nor docetic. Christ was the incarnation of the eternal Word, and at the same time fully human in every way. And in that respect, Christ in his human nature stood in need of the power of the Spirit not only for his human life, but also for his Messiahship and work of redemption.

One of the interesting conclusions of Kuyper's thought is in respect to the continuing humanity of Christ. If he remains fully human after his resurrection, as we believe, then he is still in full relationship to the Holy Spirit in his human nature even now, as we shall be throughout eternity.

If, therefore, our blessedness in heaven consists in the enjoyment of the pleasures of God, and it is the Holy Spirit who comes into contact with our innermost being, it follows that in heaven He cannot leave us. And upon this ground we confess, that not only the elect, but the glorified Christ also, who continues to be a true man in heaven, must therefore continue to be filled with the Holy Spirit.³⁵

This shows the consistency of Kuyper's Christology: it maintains the full humanity of Christ not merely during his earthly life, but also into eschatological life. If Christ took on human nature and did not discard it, then he retains that human nature even now, and in that human nature still is dependent on the Holy Spirit even though he has ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He ties in this eschatological theme with the anointing of Christ with the Holy Spirit during his earthly ministry, and thus is able to explain the work of the Holy Spirit in the incarnation from the conception of Christ into eternity following his resurrection.

The same Holy Spirit who performed His work in the conception of our Lord, who attended the unfolding of His human nature, who

³⁴ G C Berkouwer. **The Person of Christ**. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954, p. 221.

³⁵ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, p. 110.

brought into activity every gift and power in Him, who consecrated Him to His office as the Messiah, who qualified Him for every conflict and temptation, who enabled Him to cast out devils, and who supported Him in His humiliation, passion and bitter death, was the same Spirit who performed His work in His resurrection, so that Jesus was justified in the Spirit (1 Tim 3.16), and who dwells now in the glorified human nature of the Redeemer in the heavenly Jerusalem.³⁶

Kuyper therefore proposes a more thorough-going and more Biblical doctrine of the incarnation of Christ in terms of the anointing of the Holy Spirit on his human nature, thus explaining the true source of his miracle power, than Athanasius was able to do.

The anointing of Christ and the Anointing of the Believer

The contemporary relevance of this doctrine includes the relationship of the anointing of Christ and the work of the Spirit in the believer today. Can we expect to receive the anointing of the Spirit in the same fashion as Christ, or was his anointing somehow different from that of ours? At issue in this question is the relationship of Christ's humanity to our humanity: was it the same or was it somehow different? Also at issue is the relationship of the anointing of Christ by the Spirit to the anointing of the believer: are they comparable? Another way of posing this latter question is discussed by Turner, who asks, was the anointing of Christ **paradigmatic** for the believer? His answer seems to effectively settle the issue.

While we can draw certain parallels between *some* of the activities of the Spirit in Jesus during his ministry, and what we later witness in the disciples after Pentecost, we cannot without further ado speak of Jesus' reception of the Spirit as *archetypal*. No disciple is called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus *qua* eschatological Prophet; no disciple receives a chrism that makes him this. Indeed the point of the parallels between Jesus' ministry in the Spirit and what takes place in Acts is not that the

³⁶ Abraham Kuyper. **The Work of the Holy Spirit**, p. 110.

church has inherited Jesus' anointing, but that the risen Lord himself continues his redemptive activity, as Lord of the Spirit (Acts 2:33, 16:7), through the charismata he bestows in his church; hence Peter's declaration (Acts 9:34), "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you."³⁷

Thus Turner preserves the distinction between the unique task of Christ, for which he was anointed by the Spirit, and the task of the believer, for which we are anointed by the same **Spirit** (but not with the same **anointing**). Christ was anointed as a human being by the Spirit for his unique task, just as we need to be anointed in order to carry out our tasks. Only in this way can we preserve the true humanity of Christ in his messianic task; otherwise he would be unique in the sense of being the only human being who did not receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and his identification with fallen and redeemed humanity would be seriously jeopardised if not totally denied.

If we understand the miracles as an outworking of the empowering of Christ's human nature by the Holy Spirit which had a redemptive-historical uniqueness, we can confront some of the wilder claims by some charismatics concerning contemporary miracles. It is claimed on the basis of John 14:12-14 that we can expect extraordinary miracles today which surpass those of Christ:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. *He will do even greater things than these*, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father, *You may ask me for anything in my name*, and I will do it.

However, the emphasis Jesus places here is not that anything he had done his disciples can do better (a common interpretation placed on the passage) but that anything he had done so far he will excel later through his disciples because after he ascends to the Father he will receive all power in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18). This interpretation preserves both the possibility of miraculous deeds today through the

³⁷ M M B Turner. "Jesus and the Spirit in Lucan Perspective." *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981) 28-29.

anointing of the Holy Spirit on his disciples, and the uniqueness of Christ's anointing and ministry on earth.