

# *Resonance*

A THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



## The Trinity

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## *The Trinity*

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*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee.  
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!*

*Holy, Holy, Holy! All the saints adore Thee,  
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,  
which wert and art and evermore shalt be.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy! though the darkness hide Thee,  
though the eye made blind by sin Thy glory may not see,  
only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,  
perfect in pow'r, in love, and purity.*

*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.  
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity.*

*— Reginald Heber*



**ANN GILLIAN CHU**  
*Ann Gillian Chu grew up in Hong Kong as a Canadian, and graduated from the University of Edinburgh with Master of Arts (Honours) English Language in 2006. In a turn of events, she became a Chartered Accountant, and had been working as one for around a decade. She completed the Postgraduate Diploma in Theology with the Alliance Bible Seminary in Hong Kong in 2015, and graduated from Regent College's Master of Divinity program in April 2018. She started her Doctor of Philosophy program at the University of St. Andrews in September 2018.*

## ***Is There Any Historical Support for Spirit Baptism?***

### ***Comparing and Analyzing the Theological Views of the Cappadocian Fathers and the Pentecostals on Spirit Baptism***

As a Christian who grew up in the Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination, I was not familiar with the concept of Spirit baptism prior to entering into seminary education. Having been introduced to this in my theological studies, I found the practice of Spirit baptism intriguing. Broadly speaking, Pentecostals understand Spirit baptism as a distinctive stage that is separate from water baptism, a practice they brought back from the apostolic church.<sup>1</sup> If Spirit baptisms were indeed prominent and orthodox in the apostolic church, then surely the Early Church Fathers, who were closer in time, culture, and language to the apostles, would have endorsed such practices. However, no such evidence of this has been directly found. Therefore, Spirit baptism has a different meaning for the Early Church Fathers than what Pentecostals claim, and this will be demonstrated through a comparison of their views with those of the Cappadocian Fathers.<sup>2</sup> Through this comparison, it will be established that, unlike the Pentecostals, the Cappadocian Fathers did not separate water baptism from Spirit baptism as two distinctive stages. The theological implication of this thesis for contemporary Evangelical Christians is that, since they have generally not experienced Spirit baptism, the existing Pentecostal view might lead them to doubt their faith or view God as loving Pentecostals more than Evangelicals, as he seems to allow them to experience him more. The Cappadocian Fathers and the Assemblies of God are representative groups for which to investigate this topic, as both groups have addressed the topic of the Holy Spirit extensively.

In order to investigate whether Spirit baptism is a distinctive stage from water baptism, a working

definition of water baptism should first be established. Water baptism, as a rite of Christian initiation, is for converts to be admitted into a particular teaching or doctrine through immersion in water in the name of the Trinity. As a symbolic act, the focus is on one's confession of Christ, rather than the water in which one is being baptized. After being baptized, believers still need to undertake a lifelong process of mortification and renewal, since the water does not contain the Spirit but rather points believers towards the Spirit and reminds them of their utter dependence on God's grace.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, water baptism should not be dismissed as a mere public expression of personal faith, since it is the means by which God confronts believers with the power of his personal presence.<sup>4</sup>

The definition of water baptism as both a symbolic act of faith and a presence of the Spirit provides a solid basis for understanding Pentecostals' definition of Spirit baptism, which is the empowerment of believers for witnessing Christ. For the Pentecostals, though the term "Spirit baptism" does not occur in Scripture, it is theologically and experientially distinguishable from and subsequent to conversion.<sup>5</sup> Spirit baptism is confirmed through the initial physical

sign of speaking in tongues, and all believers are entitled to and should ardently expect such.<sup>6</sup> The Pentecostals base their understanding mainly on Acts of the Apostles. They emphasize that the Scriptural focus should be on Spirit infilling, rather than on the timing of Spirit baptism coming before or after water baptism. Moreover, it should not be called a second blessing, as that implies there can be no experience of divine grace when one is in the stage between conversion and Spirit baptism. While water baptism is for declaration of repentance, Spirit baptism is the infilling of the Spirit, which should be an ongoing, edifying experience in believers' personal relationships with the Lord, providing spiritual gifts to believers for them to act as his witness to the world and to enable the recipients to live righteously. As for those who have not yet received Spirit baptism, the Pentecostals support that all believers are candidates. Moreover, the Spirit already indwells all believers after conversion, even without Spirit baptism, as Spirit baptism is just an overwhelming experience of the already indwelling Spirit. Those who have not yet received Spirit baptism can participate in prayer and praise, as these events often lead to Spirit baptism, since praising God often facilitates transition to

praising him in tongues. Spirit baptism is attested by speaking in tongues, but one may have other valid and meaningful spiritual experiences between regeneration and Spirit baptism, which is a foreshadowing of climatic experiences.<sup>7</sup>

An overview of various theologians' interpretations of the Pentecostal view reveals that, though the Pentecostals' emphasis on the Spirit is helpful in comparison to the Evangelicals' overemphasis on Jesus and the Bible and lack of emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit, their doctrine of Spirit baptism creates division within Christianity more so than helping to foster empowerment for witnessing to Christ. There are many Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians who have pondered this topic in great detail. Shane Clifton, Director of Research at Alphacrucis College, a Pentecostal seminary in Sydney, claims that the doctrine of Spirit baptism is used as a marker for Pentecostal orthodoxy, and he argues that the Pentecostals should embrace their experience without elevating it to a level of spiritual superiority.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, with New Testament descriptions of Spirit baptism, R. E. O. White, former principal of the Scottish Baptist College and a New Testament scholar, argues

that the Pentecostal experience places less emphasis on the indwelling of the Spirit for the purpose of illumination of mind and refinement of character and more emphasis on the miraculous powers and gifts for Christian service.<sup>9</sup> Though J. I. Packer, professor emeritus of Regent College and an Anglican theologian, considers that while every believer needs touches of the Spirit throughout his or her life, this does not occur in the form of a two-stage, two-level second blessing—an interpretation which has to be read into the text and not read out of it. Nonetheless, Packer observes that Spirit baptism intensifies Christians in their love for God, and that helps throughout Christians' lives, as professing the gospel is at times more mundane to an extent that Christians might come to forget the Spirit's presence.<sup>10</sup> Allan Loder, adjunct faculty member of Wycliffe College of the University of Toronto, argues that there is insufficient evidence to support that Spirit baptism in Acts of the Apostles teaches a normative Christian experience. While not denying Pentecostals' experience, Loder considers them to have misinterpreted the nature and purpose of that experience.<sup>11</sup> Most observers would acknowledge that the most important trait in Spirit baptism seems to be speaking in tongues. Paul Chappell,

senior pastor of Lancaster Baptist Church and president and founder of West Coast Baptist College and Lancaster Baptist School, describes tongues as a means developed by the Pentecostals to seek a more objective assurance, and this proclamation at its introduction was not well received even among the Pentecostals.<sup>12</sup> Packer doubts that the Pentecostals' inward experience is any different from Evangelical Christians if the tongues component is stripped away.<sup>13</sup> Greger Andersson, professor of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences at Örebro University, finds that this experience, once apprehended as inclusive and formative, has now become exclusive and problematic.<sup>14</sup> Clifton sees it as unfortunate, because the experience of spiritual gifts and missionary empowerment is lost in debates about evidential tongues.<sup>15</sup>

Having established the Pentecostals' viewpoints of Spirit baptism as a distinct

stage from water baptism, Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of baptism, which focuses on the role the Spirit plays in water baptism, will be explored. First, the Cappadocian Fathers emphasized the immaturity of humanity at creation. Baptism is a path where believers grow in maturity, as opposed to the general Western thought of baptism as a path where believers are justified and forgiven of their sins. Second, Basil of Caesarea stated that the liturgy of water baptism is important in confirming the divine status of the Spirit. This demonstrates that, during his time, the word "baptism" usually invoked the thought of water baptism, as some would even go to the extent of baptizing in the name of the Father alone. Nonetheless, even though Basil of Caesarea was writing to state the significance of the Spirit's divinity, he also found that baptism is not complete by baptizing in the name of the Spirit alone. The Trinity as a whole should be

### *For Further Reading*

*The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* by Donald G. Bloesch

*Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views* by Richard B. Gaffin Jr., Robert L. Saucy, C. Samuel Storms, and Douglas A. Oss

*Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*  
by J. I. Packer

the focus of baptism, rather than water as the element of baptism, since the water is merely a means of imitating Christ's death and symbolizing living in the Spirit and bearing fruit in holiness. If there is any grace in the water, it is not of the nature of the water, but of the presence of the Spirit.<sup>16</sup> Third, Gregory of Nyssa wrote to defend the divine status of the Spirit by stating that baptism secures participation in a life without death. Water is only a means of external ministry and contributes nothing to sanctification, as the life-giving power of water baptism comes from the Father, through the Son, operated by the Spirit, and received by faith alone.<sup>17</sup>

An overview of various theologians' interpretations of the Cappadocian Fathers' view reveals that the Spirit is the life-giving element of water baptism, and there is scant theological rationale for a separate sacrament of Spirit baptism. Bloesch states that Basil of Caesarea considered there to be an integral relationship between baptism and personal faith: Water baptism can be used by the Spirit to strengthen and confirm faith and impart faith where faith is lacking, and as a means of grace, it is not effective unless accompanied by faith. He finds Basil of Caesarea inclined to identify

the gift of the Spirit and baptism as external signs of an inward seal of grace.<sup>18</sup> Turcescu finds that Gregory of Nyssa taught that the Spirit is the one who leads believers to confess the lordship of Jesus. In Turcescu's view, this whole argument is yet another proof of how important relationality is in the definition of the Persons. In terms of support for the divinity of the Spirit, Turcescu finds that Gregory of Nyssa said that one could not claim to confess the Son to be divine without having to confess also that the Spirit is divine as well. According to Turcescu, Gregory of Nyssa declared that the Spirit is not only the element in which one is baptized, but a Person who facilitates the transmission of the life-giving grace in baptism.<sup>19</sup>

Comparing the Pentecostals and the Cappadocian Fathers' views of baptism reveals that the Cappadocian Fathers would not have endorsed the Pentecostals' introduction of Spirit baptism. As Hill points out, the Cappadocian Fathers were major contributors in determining the deity status of the Spirit through their influence in the First Council of Constantinople in shaping the Nicene Creed; thus their discussion of the Spirit should be most comprehensive for their time.<sup>20</sup> Yet the Cappadocian Fathers' writings

focused on the role the Spirit plays in water baptism, and they did not mention anything that remotely resembled Spirit baptism. Further examination of their key principles regarding baptism is helpful and can be found as follows. First, for the Cappadocian Fathers, baptism is for maturity, that is, deification, and not for empowerment from Spirit baptism or a mark of repentance from water baptism. Second, Basil of Caesarea stated blatantly that baptizing in the name of the Spirit is not sufficient, and the Cappadocian Fathers did not mention tongues as a means of denoting Spirit baptism. Third, the Cappadocian Fathers stated that it is not the water but the Spirit that is grace and life giving. Water baptism is the only sacrament that is involved in bringing the Spirit to the believer rather than having a second tier of Spirit baptism. Gregory of Nyssa argued that the source of life in baptism comes from the Trinity, and as such, it infers that baptism as a symbol brings forth life that Spirit baptism is intended to bring. Spirit baptism, as coined by the Pentecostals, refers to the experience of the overwhelming infilling Spirit in life. However, the Spirit should have entered a believer at water baptism—however undetectable and uneventful the experience was. Throughout life experience,

and through a maturing relationship with God, Christians will experience the Spirit more, but there is no reason to make it a separate level which differentiates people between “have” and “have not.” The Pentecostals’ emphasis on Spirit baptism as not being a second blessing seems like an attempt to bridge their understanding of Spirit baptism, which is core to their denominational identity, and their relatively newfound theological understanding that spiritual infillment is actually a matter of daily renewal rather than of two-level spiritual advancement.

In conclusion, unlike the Pentecostals, the Cappadocian Fathers did not separate a form of Spirit baptism from water baptism as two distinctive stages. This has been proven through comparing the statements from the Pentecostals with the writings of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa on the Spirit. This issue is significant because, when Evangelicals hear of the Pentecostals claiming their tradition goes back to apostolic times, it is easy to question whether the Evangelicals’ current practice leaves much to be desired. Through this discussion, Evangelicals can hopefully gain a better perspective of their denominational position, neither discriminating

against the Pentecostals for experiencing what they have not experienced, nor feeling inadequate with their own church tradition. Packer points out that the Pentecostals' idea of the apostles' experience at Pentecost as a normative pattern of transition from lower level to higher level Spirit-filledness lacks both biblical and experiential justification. Through the developments reflected in Assemblies of God's position papers, it can be observed that the Pentecostals are making constructive moves to explain their experience without fostering spiritual superiority, a direction that helps in ecumenical movement. Packer's suggestion is helpful: rather than focusing on the difference between Pentecostals and Evangelicals, Christians should focus on and celebrate God's work of deepening their assurance and sense of communion with their redeemer.<sup>21</sup>

## Endnotes

- 1 Paul G. Chappell, "Tongues as the Initial Evidence of Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective," *Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 41-54.
- 2 The focus will be on Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa's works on the Holy Spirit. Gregory of Nazianzus' *Fifth Theological Oration* will not be explored.
- 3 G.W. Bromiley, "Baptism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).
- 4 Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 279-85.
- 5 Assemblies of God, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Adopted by the General Presbytery in Session August 9-11, 2010," accessed August 14, 2015, [http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position\\_papers/pp\\_downloads/PP\\_Baptism\\_In\\_the\\_Holy\\_Spirit.pdf](http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position_papers/pp_downloads/PP_Baptism_In_the_Holy_Spirit.pdf), para. 1-2.
- 6 Assemblies of God, "The General Council of the Assemblies of God Statement of Fundamental Truths," accessed August 14, 2015, [http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG.org%20TOP/Beliefs/SFT\\_2011.pdf](http://agchurches.org/Sitefiles/Default/RSS/AG.org%20TOP/Beliefs/SFT_2011.pdf), para. 6-8.
- 7 Assemblies of God, "Baptism in the Holy Spirit," para. 6-13.
- 8 Shane Clifton, "The Spirit and Doctrinal Development: A Functional Analysis of the Traditional Pentecostal Doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit," *Pneuma* 29 (2007): 5-23.
- 9 R. E. O. White, "Baptism of the Spirit," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001).
- 10 J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nottingham, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 76-77, 144.
- 11 Allan Loder, "The Classical

- Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit-baptism: Some Exegetical Considerations," *Didaskalia* (Spring 2002): 73-88.
- 12 Chappell, "Tongues as the Initial Evidence," 41-54.
  - 13 Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 159-70.
  - 14 Greger Andersson, "To Live the Biblical Narratives: Pentecostal Autobiographies and the Baptism in the Spirit," *PentecoStudies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 112-27.
  - 15 Clifton, "The Spirit and Doctrinal Development," 5-23.
  - 16 Basil of Caesarea, "De Spiritu Sancto," accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3203.htm>, para. 26-68.
  - 17 Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Holy Spirit: Against the Macedonians," accessed August 14, 2015, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2903.htm>, para. 2-21.
  - 18 Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit*, 279-85.
  - 19 Lucian Turcescu, *Gregory of Nyssa and the Concept of Divine Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1588-678, Kindle edition.
  - 20 Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Story of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World as We Know It Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 60-77.
  - 21 Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 180-82.



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