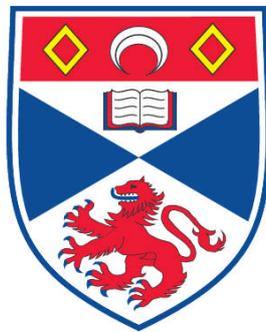


**A DISCUSSION OF PNEUMATOLOGY AND THE LINGUISTIC  
TURN TO PRACTICE, WITH REFERENCE TO KEVIN  
VANHOOZER'S CANONICAL-LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO  
CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY**

**Peter Bellenger**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of MPhil  
at the  
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A Discussion of Pneumatology and the Linguistic Turn to Practice, with Reference  
to Kevin Vanhoozer's Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology

MPhil Dissertation by Peter Bellenger

St Andrews University

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation assesses the pneumatological implications of Kevin Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology, in the context of the wider issue of recent interest in reconceiving the cultural-linguistic approach to theology through a description of Christian practice in directly pneumatological terms. I seek to welcome Vanhoozer's communicative-act description of the authority and identity of Scripture as God's written Word, and the way in which this description affirms the key insights of the linguistic turn to practice whilst maintaining the normativity of Scripture (as divine communicative action) to Christian practice (participation in that action). My concern is that Vanhoozer constructs his proposal around a Triune model of divine communicative action that I believe has pneumatological shortcomings. In particular, I think that the importance of God's *personal presence* by the Holy Spirit is hard to convey within Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic theology. I argue that this matters because answers to the epistemological and hermeneutical questions that Vanhoozer is seeking to address require a fully Trinitarian theology that draws upon the significance of God's indwelling presence by his Spirit. Such pneumatology is vital to the description of both the ontological distinction between God and creation and the divine-human relation in the economy of salvation centred upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It should be part of a fully Trinitarian theology that enables us to address questions of epistemology, hermeneutics and agency without making those concerns appear to determine the nature of salvation or the being of God. In making this argument, I draw in particular upon Colin Gunton's discussion of Karl Barth's triune model of divine self-revelation and Gordon Fee's exegesis of Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit.

I, Peter Bellenger hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately forty thousand words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September 2007 and as a candidate for the degree of MPhil in Divinity in September 2007; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2007 and 2008.

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This work is dedicated to Mum, Harry and Nicky with love and thanks for your love and for being there in every way throughout. I also want to thank Tomi and Jenn, Ben, and Mark and Cassandra so much for their steadfast encouragement and support and prayers. Without you all this dissertation would not have come to be.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- DD Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)
- FT Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002)
- IM Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998)
- GEP Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994)
- PSPG Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996. Reprinted in Great Britain by Hodder and Stoughton, London: 1997)

## Introduction

My basic thesis is that God's *personal presence* by his Spirit is perhaps insufficiently accounted for by theology structured by the 'linguistic turn to practice,' even if this is conceived in distinctly Christological-pneumatological terms. I will argue this in conversation with Kevin Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic theology.<sup>1</sup>

I have chosen Vanhoozer's work because he accepts Lindbeck's postliberal emphasis upon practice (the basic point of 'meaning is use'), whilst wanting to correct the problem that, in structuring doctrine around ecclesial practice, theology can become anthropologically determined. Vanhoozer's concern is for how Scripture uniquely normalises ecclesial practice and is our means of covenantal participation in divine practice. Hence, Vanhoozer's correction to the cultural-linguistic is one that emerges from the doctrine of Scripture (as Vanhoozer's term *canonical-linguistic* suggests). I am interested in the pneumatological implications of Vanhoozer's model. His correction of the cultural-linguistic approach is also a pneumatological one because canonical practice is 'Spirited practice'. The two aspects go hand-in-hand because, similarly to Karl Barth's integration of the doctrine of revelation into the doctrine of God, Vanhoozer integrates the doctrine of Scripture into the doctrine of God in a triune account of divine communicative action. This establishes an interesting comparison to the work of Reinhard Hütter who identifies the same problem with the cultural-linguistic but seeks to defend it by describing ecclesial practice as divine practice in directly pneumatological terms.<sup>2</sup>

Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach represents an extension of his work on biblical interpretation into an account of the overall nature of Christian theology and practice. It involves a *triune model of divine self-communicative action* that Vanhoozer has developed throughout his recent books. Vital to this development is Vanhoozer's

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), hereafter abbreviated DD.

<sup>2</sup> Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000)

appropriation of ‘speech-act’ philosophy within a theological framework. The basic thesis of speech-act philosophy is that saying is a form of doing.<sup>3</sup> Speech-acts are typically characterised using the terms locution, illocution and perlocution. Richard Briggs describes these as the act “‘of saying’ (locution), ‘in saying’ (illocution), and ‘by saying’ (perlocution).”<sup>4</sup> In *Is there a meaning in this text?*<sup>5</sup>, Vanhoozer employed speech-act theory to show how the authorial meaning of a text is determinate and yet also function of practice. It is the author’s ‘illocutionary’ action. For Vanhoozer, to be a faithful interpreter is to discern the illocutionary action as we attend to the locutions of the text. Scripture is God’s Word in that God is its ultimate author; the canonical illocutions of the locutions of Scripture is divine communicative action covenantally relating to us, through just these words, to salvation in Jesus Christ. Late on in *Is there a meaning in this text?* (and arguably not essential for his basic thesis), Vanhoozer introduces the concept that the locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary aspects of speech-acts can be thought in trinitarian terms.<sup>6</sup> He has become convinced that the triad of locution, illocution and perlocution is more than an analogy for the trinity of God.<sup>7</sup> In *First Theology*,<sup>8</sup> the trinitarian account of divine communicative action within the triune economy of salvation is developed and becomes essential to Vanhoozer’s linguistic integration of the doctrine of Scripture into the doctrine of God. It is this theological move – identifying the dynamics of communicative action (of Scripture) with the triune economy of salvation – that enables Vanhoozer’s account of ‘triune communicative action’ to incorporate the full scope of Christian theology-and-practice. This is the canonical-linguistic approach offered in the *Drama of Doctrine*.

The strength of Vanhoozer’s application of speech-act theory to the doctrine of Scripture is that it describes Scripture as God’s written Word in terms that address the

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<sup>3</sup> The classic works are J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962) and J. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). Vanhoozer’s use of speech-act philosophy is significantly influenced by W. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000)

<sup>4</sup> R. Briggs, ‘Speech Act Theory’ in D. Firth and J. Grant, *Words and the Word: Explorations in Biblical Interpretation and Literary Theory* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 88

<sup>5</sup> Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Is there a meaning in this text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), hereafter IM.

<sup>6</sup> IM 456-457

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), hereafter abbreviated FT, 168

<sup>8</sup> See especially FT chapters 5-7.

complex post/modern questions of authority and interpretation. It also has wider implications for theology and ecclesiology, giving a fresh perspective upon the Scripture-tradition relation. Whilst wishing to celebrate these insights, I want to assess the triune model of communicative action, which is vital to Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic conceptuality, and in particular the way that the person and work of the Holy Spirit is described. I shall begin in chapter 1 by outlining Colin Gunton's concerns about the mediatorial and pneumatological implications of Barth's triune self-revelation model. In chapter 2, I shall explore how this mediatorial and pneumatological issue is present in a modified form in Vanhoozer's integration of Scripture as divine discourse and the linguistic turn to practice. Issues of normativity in both Nicholas Wolterstorff's theory of divine discourse and George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory are resolved by this integration, as is the concern that Karl Barth's doctrine of revelation lacks a sufficient account of the semantic mediation of revelation through Scripture. But pneumatological problems remain: notably, is literary conceptuality doing theological work in place of or parallel to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit? Vanhoozer's 'Spirit Christology,' whilst securing the coherence of his approach, is central to this issue. Further, in rightly arguing that Scripture as divine communicative action should norm church practice (hence the *canonical*-linguistic approach), I shall ask if Vanhoozer unnecessarily loses hold of the apostolicity of the church as a 'manifest public' – a pneumatological rather than linguistic reference as such.

In chapter 3, I shall explore how the nature of the illocution – perlocution relation, when built into the triune model, leads to epistemological problems that relate to the foregoing pneumatological and mediatorial questions. Specifically, this concerns the nature of 'illumination' in Vanhoozer's account of divine self-communicative action. This involves the complex relations of faith, reason and will and how these are defined in his communicative hermeneutic. Again, the question is how semantic conceptuality relates to the Spirit's mediation of our relation to God through and in Christ. Vanhoozer's 'virtue epistemology' potentially requires a pneumatology that is in tension with the triune communicative action model in regard to the illocution-perlocution relation. My argument is that these complex epistemological questions stem from allowing epistemology to structure the more primary doctrines of salvation

and the trinity of God. The epistemological issues raised in chapter 3 lead towards asking how justification, sanctification and identity ‘in Christ’ are conceived in Vanhoozer’s approach. Chapter 4 considers how Vanhoozer conceives Christian identity as gifted by the atonement and tasked with ‘performing atonement’, and the theological issues that are at stake in regard to the Cross, the Spirit and the Christian life of prayer.

My focus, then, is the pneumatology within Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach to theology, and specifically his integration of the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Scripture in his account of ‘triune communicative action’. Good pneumatology should never suggest a separate economy of the Holy Spirit from salvation in Jesus Christ. The aim is always to develop a fully trinitarian theology. As mentioned, Vanhoozer values ‘Spirit Christology’ in this regard. Clearly, Christology is permeated by the Holy Spirit – any discussion of the person and work of Jesus Christ involves the trinitarian relations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus does everything in relation to the Father in and through the Spirit. (And, although ‘Spirit Christology’ could tend towards being adoptionistic, this certainly need not be the case.<sup>9</sup>) However, certain approaches to Spirit Christology seem to be structured in terms of using pneumatology as a kind of ‘solution’ within a modern framework of Christological issues in relation to agency and personhood. I do not think that this generates a fully trinitarian theology and overlooks a key aspect of pneumatology. I believe it is vital to the faithful and fruitful development of trinitarian theology that we attend to the reality of God’s *personal presence* by his Spirit, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the life of the church which exists through and in Christ. I am indebted to Gordon Fee’s biblical exegesis of Paul’s experience and understanding of the Holy Spirit, and to Lesslie Newbigin’s discussion of the Holy Spirit in his ecclesiological and missiological work, in my exploration of this topic.

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<sup>9</sup> Spirit Christology is well discussed by Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Del Colle distinguishes ‘classical’ and ‘revisionary’ trinitarian Spirit Christology in ‘Schleiermacher and Spirit Christology: Unexplored Horizons of *The Christian Faith*’, *IJST* 1(1999) 292-293.

Gordon Fee writes that Paul's epistles describe the Holy Spirit "as an experienced, empowering reality". He argues that historically, if this perspective has been lost, the church has often been brought back to it through movements of the Spirit. The risk is that these movements are misunderstood resulting in "individualistic spirituality [in which] the reality of the Spirit is sometimes merely experienced in the experience."<sup>10</sup> For Fee, describing the Holy Spirit as an *experienced* and *empowering* reality, requires that we attend to two further matters that "lie at the very heart of faith" for Paul:

First, the Spirit as person, the promised return of God's own personal presence with his people; second, the Spirit as eschatological fulfilment...who both reconstitutes God's people anew and empowers us to live the life of the future in our between-the-times existence – between the time of Christ's first and second coming.<sup>11</sup>

Central to this dissertation is my conviction that recent attention to pneumatology, particularly in 'post-Barthian' theology, especially by those interested in the 'turn to practice', has often addressed the second of Fee's pneumatological points (empowering agency) but not the first (God's personal presence). The result is theology that describes the *empowering agency* of the Spirit – addressing many of the (post)modern issues concerning the relation of divine and human agency – whilst demurring from the Holy Spirit as *personal presence*. However, "for Paul, the Spirit is not some merely impersonal 'force' or 'influence' or 'power.' The Spirit is none other than the fulfilment of the promise that God himself would once again be present with his people."<sup>12</sup> Underwriting practice with pneumatology may address the charge that "[m]odern Christians are largely content to be trinitarian in belief but binitarian in practice"<sup>13</sup>, but perhaps not fully address the Scriptural reality of the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence*. Thus, is such theology describing the Christian life fully, and is it fully Trinitarian?

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), hereafter abbreviated PSPG, xiv

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, xv

<sup>12</sup> Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), hereafter GEP, 845

<sup>13</sup> C. Pinnock, 'The Concept of the Spirit in the Epistles of Paul' (PhD.diss.,Manchester,1963)2. (GEP 828n2)

One of Newbigin's insights in *The Household of God* was to see that Catholic-Protestant 'tension' becomes mutually creative in the context of a third perspective – "the *living presence* of the Holy Spirit." He writes:

'What is the manner of our incorporation in Christ?'...[A]ll three answers which we looked at are true; we are made members in Him by hearing and believing the Gospel, by being received sacramentally into the visible fellowship of His people, and both of these only through the living presence of the Holy Spirit....The love which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, creating and sustaining faith and hope in us, is but the earnest of our full sharing in the love of God with all the saints – of our being perfected into one in the Father and the Son. But it is a *real* earnest. There is an actual sphere of redemption, of which the historical centre is Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended. From that centre the word of salvation goes out to all the earth, the nations are baptised, the Lord's table is spread, a real community is built up – all by the living sovereign working of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach and Hütter's 'evangelical-catholic' approach could be described as an outworking of Newbigin's thesis. However, these emerging approaches seem to 'subsume' the personal presence of the Spirit into the linguistic turn to practice in ways which do not sufficiently account for the "*real* earnest" that is "the living presence of the Holy Spirit". Vanhoozer's approach is the focus of my discussion because I think his commitment to the normativity of Scripture – the authority and identity of Scripture as God's Word – is vital and should not be lost, but rather supported, in what I hope to say concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>14</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London: SCM Press, 1953) 131

# Chapter One: Pneumatology and Mediation

## *Introduction*

This chapter sets out the pneumatological issue at the heart of my discussion of Kevin Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach to Christian theology – the way that the Holy Spirit mediates salvation through and in Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach is influenced by Karl Barth's integration of the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of God, but seeks to replace Barth's triune account of the divine self-revelation of the Word of God with an account of 'triune communicative action'. By replacing 'revelation' with 'communicative action', Vanhoozer's theological framework incorporates more fundamentally the way the actual words of Scripture are essential to God's self-revelation through and in Jesus Christ. By looking at the way Colin Gunton has highlighted a pneumatological limitation of Barth's theological model, I shall ask if Vanhoozer's account carries forward the same pneumatological issue, and perhaps turns it into a more significant problem.

In outlining what we need to attend to in writing good pneumatology, I shall expound the emphases of Gordon Fee in his exegetical work on the apostle Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit, and refer to Lesslie Newbigin's exposition of the importance of the Holy Spirit to theology and ecclesiology. I am interested in the importance that Fee and Newbigin place upon the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence*, which I think is vital to the question of whether theology can be fully structured by linguistic turn to practice, even with the advances of Vanhoozer's *canonical-linguistic* approach.

### ***A. Revelation and Pneumatology: Colin Gunton's Theology of Mediation and his Critique of Barth's Triune Model of Divine Self-Revelation***

In his Warfield Lectures, Colin Gunton outlines how epistemic issues should be related derivatively rather than immediately with God's saving action as we describe theologically how we come to know God through Jesus Christ. He argues that Barth's profound emphasis that God reveals God, may not fully describe the incarnational and pneumatological mediation of revelation.<sup>15</sup> It is basic to the Christian faith that "God the Father reveals himself personally through his Son and Spirit", but the crucial point is that this revelation is not an "unmediated experience."<sup>16</sup> Such immediacy stems from revelation becoming a 'first-order' concern – "a way of speaking of divine saving action" or at the very least assimilating that action within it.<sup>17</sup> This risks Jesus' humanity and, in turn, the words of Scripture appearing to be only the occasion for, rather than mediating, revelation. In love, the Creator God became flesh and dwelt among us for our salvation. Jesus Christ is the mediator of a new covenant – the gift of a personal relation with God through Christ and in the Spirit. This mediation is made through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The apostolic witnesses hand on this mystery, and, worded propositions, though not the relation itself, are vital to our coming into this relation. Gunton's concern is not to detract from "the priority revelation plays in our knowledge of God but to delimit such considerations from other central systematic topics, particularly perhaps soteriology."<sup>18</sup> This allows him to i) recover the importance of words, and specifically propositions, because ii) he has made revelation second-order to salvation. Taking the points in turn: i) "Propositions may not be revelation, but they may in a derivative sense be revelatory": "We address God as 'thou', through Christ and in the Spirit" but as we communicate our faith propositionally – for example, 'Jesus died for our sins' – others find "something revelatory of the fact that he indeed did, and lives to make intercession for us." In this sense, "revelation is a form of personal relation conveyed by forms of

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<sup>15</sup> Colin Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 5

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18

words.”<sup>19</sup> ii) The incarnational and pneumatological mediation that creates and gifts this personal relation is soteriological, and *consequently* epistemological. Since, “our primary relation to God is one of faith or trust, we are not speaking so much of revelation as of a form of present personal relationship, of a saving relationship.”<sup>20</sup>

Gunton argues that the approach exemplified by Ronald Thiemann of integrating revelation as a part of the doctrine of God,<sup>21</sup> influenced by Karl Barth’s work in *Church Dogmatics*,<sup>22</sup> avoids foundationalism by equating divine self-identification with divine saving action, but depends upon a category of narrative that maintains an aspect of ‘immediacy’.

Without a doubt, a doctrine of revelation centring on salvation does also centre on a narratively identified God. But if salvation is the redemption of the creation, the centre cannot be divorced from that which circles around it.<sup>23</sup>

Gunton argues that to properly avoid foundationalism we need to delimit revelation to take in the economy of creation (soteriologically established), because revelation “requires a trinitarian construction if it is to be satisfactorily understood”.<sup>24</sup> This approach to revelation enables Gunton say that the knowledge of God “is both a personal relation and something that can be conveyed through words.”<sup>25</sup> This does not collapse the personal relation into semantic communication whilst affirming the necessity of the latter. This is vital, and depends upon a fully trinitarian account of mediation. This brings us to the pneumatological aspect of the doctrine of revelation. In his concluding lecture, Gunton explores the centre of God’s revelation – the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – and the way the testimony of the gospels function.<sup>26</sup> Revelation is an eschatological category (God grants us to know in the midst of the ‘now’ a knowledge that will only be complete in the future), and yet the gospels are

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 105-106

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 110

<sup>21</sup> “A doctrine of revelation is an account of God’s identifiability.” Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985) 110-111

<sup>22</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956-1975)

<sup>23</sup> Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 112

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 111

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 119

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 109

revelatory in that they mediate a personal relation between the past and the present.<sup>27</sup> This brings the mediatory office of the Spirit to the fore. Gunton makes his point by comparing the Synoptic Gospels with John's Gospel. He argues that there is "no basic theological difference" between their approaches to revelation – both concern the mediation of eschatological glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but in John's Gospel the role of the Spirit is explicit while in the Synoptics it is implicit.<sup>28</sup> In John's Gospel the focus, as with the Synoptics, is upon the divine economy of salvation, and the knowledge of God in Christ is conveyed by narrative means, but, "in being centred on revelation from the point of view of the continuing church," it gives us a deeper pneumatological insight that points to the way in which "*revelation is treated relationally rather than merely narratively.*"<sup>29</sup>

Gunton expounds his argument in relation to Barth's influential account of God's self-revelation: the Father is Revealer, the Son is Revelation, and the Spirit is the efficacy of Revelation.<sup>30</sup> Gunton agrees this is a primary emphasis of the Synoptics – the Father reveals, makes known, the Son. But he argues we also need to say that the Son reveals the Father and this highlights an understating of the role of the Spirit in Barth's theology.<sup>31</sup>

Barth's tendency to underplay the significance of the humanity of Jesus...is accompanied by an equivalent failure to give due place and function to the Holy Spirit. For Barth, the Spirit is 'the subjective side in the event of revelation,'...[and this tends] to limit the Spirit's activity to the application to the believer of the benefits of Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Attending to this pneumatological deficit also suggests a better conception of mediation because revelation is an eschatological concept. Revelation is a gift of the Spirit, the agent of eschatological completeness and the one who perfects the creation. The Spirit enables an anticipation to take place, mediating revelation so that we may know God in the midst of time.<sup>33</sup> In John's gospel,

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 112-114

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 122

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 117 (my italics) i.e. what is true most obviously of John's Gospel is true of all the Gospels.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 1/1 448f.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 11.27 is an Synoptic instance of Jesus' telling his disciples that Son reveals the Father.

<sup>32</sup> Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 119-120

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 120

the author writes from the point of view of those who live after the giving of the Spirit....The synoptic Gospels show narratively that the disciples fail to understand what is before their eyes; there is revelation but not adequate apprehension. John explains the reason, the Spirit was not yet given, but now the Paraclete is with them (Jn. 7.39, cf. 12.16).<sup>34</sup>

Thus, John is able to show the glory of Christ at every moment in his life. The Paraclete leads the church into all truth (John 16:13). When we read ‘truth’ in John’s Gospel, we are reading about Jesus Christ – to be led into all truth means to be led to Jesus. But Gunton argues that this does not disqualify “a more universal meaning for the claim”: that is, that the Spirit is the mediator of revelation. The Spirit is revealed as one *from* whom rather than *to* whom we look; revealed as the “mediator of relation to God through Christ and *consequently* as the mediator of revelation.”<sup>35</sup> This means wherever there is revelation it is the gift of the creator and redeemer Spirit. But John’s primary concern remains that “revelation means glory, in the present, and it means Jesus.” The glory is centred upon the ‘lifting up’ of Jesus, the Son reveals the Father in self-giving love. Hence, the “trinitarian structure of revelation” is perhaps “better preserved in some such expression as the Son reveals the Father in and through the Holy Spirit.”

Such things certainly appear in Barth, but there is a tendency working against them suggesting that the Son reveals himself, with the result that the nature of the relation between Son and Father is obscured, and the work of the Spirit too closely located in the believer’s subjective appropriation of revelation.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up: Gunton’s concern, in outlining the trinitarian conception of mediation given by the biblical witness, is that ‘immediacy’ results from placing the doctrine of revelation in the same ‘order’ as the doctrine of God. However, is it possible address the semantic aspect of this ‘immediacy’ whilst leaving the basic ‘Barthian’ framework in place? This is what Vanhoozer’s triune communicative action model involves, and I think it structuralises a pneumatological limitation present (but perhaps not irretrievably so) in Barth’s theology.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 120-121

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 122

***B. Triune Communicative Action: The Use of Speech- Act Conceptuality to Integrate the ‘Scripture Principle’ with Karl Barth’s Triune Model of Divine Self-Revelation***

In his essay ‘God’s Mighty Speech Acts’,<sup>37</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer reconceptualises the ‘Scripture Principle’ using speech-act conceptuality based upon God’s Triunity and the covenantal nature of the economy of salvation. (This thinking is vital to *The Drama of Doctrine*.<sup>38</sup>) This is both a departure from, and continuation of, Karl Barth’s theological approach. He describes the ‘Scripture Principle’ as the orthodox view that the Bible is to be identified with the Word of God,<sup>39</sup> and suggests that difficulties with the ‘identity thesis’ arose in modernity, not for exegetical or historical reasons, but a theological misunderstanding that it necessarily “equates the human with the divine...identifying God with what is not God.”<sup>40</sup> He argues that whilst Barth’s Christocentric dialectical approach offers an ‘indirect identity’ thesis, it “is not clear how, or even whether, Barth accounts for the properly semantic moment of God’s self-disclosure.”<sup>41</sup> Vanhoozer addresses this by speaking of God’s self-revelation in terms of divine *communicative action*, whilst maintaining the triune structure of Barth’s doctrine of revelation. Thus, Vanhoozer integrates the doctrine of Scripture into the doctrine of God in a similar way to that in which Barth integrated the doctrine of revelation with the doctrine of God.

It is, of course, important not to lose sight of the personal reference of the Word of God to Jesus Christ. No one claims that the Bible is a part of the Godhead. What is being claimed is that the Bible is a “work” of God. While Christ is a fully human and fully divine agent, all we are claiming for Scripture is that it is a fully human and divine *act*. [Footnote] Moreover, God’s mighty speech acts work through and with the human speech acts of Scripture.<sup>42</sup>

Vanhoozer argues this accords with classical theism, because at the heart of speech-act philosophy is a concept that is theological in the first instance – covenant.

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<sup>37</sup> FT 127-158

<sup>38</sup> DD 63-71

<sup>39</sup> FT 127-128. The key aspects of this principle are propositional revelation, verbal inspiration, infallible authority.(FT 133-134)

<sup>40</sup> FT 139

<sup>41</sup> FT 148

<sup>42</sup> FT 153

[A] number of theologians, prompted largely by Barth, see biblical authority in functional terms, as instrumental in leading us to Christ. Truth would on this view be a matter of faith and practice. The focus on God's mighty speech acts is a bit broader...*covenantal efficacy* is the more comprehensive term to cover all the things that God does with and in and through the Scriptures.<sup>43</sup>

Barth would perhaps balk at some of Vanhoozer phrasing – for example, “As Austin put it: ‘Our word is our bond.’ God too, therefore, is ‘tied’ to these texts” – but Vanhoozer does not believe his approach limits divine freedom, but rather expresses the gracious freedom of God made known in covenantal action.

God is the agent who is true to his Word. “I will be your God and you will be my people” – such is the fundamental covenant promise. It is by keeping his word that God reveals himself to be who he is.<sup>44</sup>

Vanhoozer aims to “show how God's being in speech act is trinitarian” in a comparative way to how “Barth arrived at the doctrine of the Trinity by analysing God's self-revelation with the schema revealer-revelation-revealedness.”<sup>45</sup>

The Father's activity is locution. God the Father is the utterer, the begetter, the sustainer of words. He is the agent who *locutus est per prophetas* in former times, and who now speaks through the Son (Heb 1:1-2). ...

The Logos corresponds to the speaker's act or illocution, to what one *does* in saying. The illocution has content (reference and predication) and a particular intent (a force) that shows how the proposition is to be taken. It is illocutionary force that makes a speech act *count* as, say, a promise. What illocutionary act is performed is determined by the speaker; its meaning is therefore objective.

The third aspect of a speech act is the perlocutionary. This refers to the effect an illocutionary act has on the actions or beliefs of the hearer... The great benefit of this analysis is that it enables us clearly to relate the Spirit's relation to the Word of God.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, there is continuity with Barth. For Vanhoozer, Barth's “emphasis upon the self-revelation of God is faulty only in its neglect of the semantic means by which disclosure takes place.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, does this adoption of Barth's triune self-revelation model lead to a pneumatological weakness in Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach, along the

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<sup>43</sup> FT 132

<sup>44</sup> FT 154

<sup>45</sup> FT 154

<sup>46</sup> FT 154-155

<sup>47</sup> FT 157. This does not mean that theology for Barth was anything other than biblical exegesis: “Barth expected the Spirit to use *just these words* to disclose Jesus Christ.”(DD 5)

lines of Gunton's argument? By replacing Barth's dialectical framework with communicative-act conceptuality and semantic mediation, yet retaining his triune self-revelation (now triune communication action) model, Vanhoozer perhaps structuralises a pneumatological weakness, with the effect that semantic dynamics and literary conceptuality do the work of pneumatology. This may undermine the trinitarian description of the Creator-creature distinction and relation in Christ.

### **B.1. Application of Colin Gunton's argument to Vanhoozer's model**

In describing revelation in terms of the personal relationship established by the incarnate self-communication of God in Jesus Christ, mediated through the apostolic tradition of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, Gunton describes an *intrinsic* relation between the divine action in Jesus and the words of Scripture.<sup>48</sup> Inspiration and revelation are thus related. The words of Scripture are inspired by the Spirit "not only because they record revelation, but because their words are in some way revelation."<sup>49</sup> The Spirit not only inspires the authors but enables "their words to be the indispensable mediators of revelation" (c.f. 1 Cor. 2:13).<sup>50</sup> Hence, the Scriptures do not only become the written word of God in the moment of subjective appropriation by the reader. Revelation is "a personal relationship taking form at a particular time in human history"<sup>51</sup> through the incarnate life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, known by the apostles, and the Scriptures are indispensable for the mediation by the Spirit of this relationship to God through Christ. In this, Gunton affirms with a qualification T.F. Torrance's statement that "the objective and living Reality of Christ himself and his saving acts as they took the field in the form of the Word of Truth of the gospel...continuously begets the Church in history as the Body of Christ in the world." As it points to the intrinsic relation of the revelation that is Jesus Christ – the Truth – and the propositions in which the Christian faith is expressed – the truth of the faith –

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<sup>48</sup> Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 98-99

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 78n22

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

Gunton agrees.<sup>52</sup> His qualification concerns the ‘immediacy’ that could be implied if we do not specify that “the Word of Truth is mediated in the present by the Spirit of Truth. The one who realises – mediates – the truth of the gospel is the Spirit who enables Jesus to be known for who he is, the crucified, risen and ascended mediator of reconciliation with God.” Avoiding the problem of ‘immediacy’ requires two concomitant affirmations: the intrinsic relation between “the divine action in Jesus and the words in which scripture articulates it”; and the essential “place of the Spirit in mediating revelation”.<sup>53</sup> Because Gunton places the doctrine of revelation as ‘second order’ to divine saving action, he is enabled to speak of this intrinsic relation, delimiting revelation, and do so on the basis of stronger pneumatology. I think Vanhoozer’s model fulfils the first affirmation but is weak on the second. It is pneumatologically limited/deficient.

Vanhoozer’s account of Scripture as divine communicative action offers a groundbreaking way of articulating the aforementioned intrinsic relation between the words of Scripture and divine saving action. In speaking of divine ‘communicative action’ rather than ‘revelation’, Vanhoozer (like Gunton) is concerned that Barth’s doctrine of revelation neglects the semantic nature of the mediation of revelation through Scripture. However, maintaining Barth’s paradigm of divine self-revelation (albeit in terms of communicative action) would seem to raise two problems based on Gunton’s argument:

- i) Revelation, as communicative action, remains in first-order relation to divine saving action.
- ii) The Spirit is limited to the ‘subjective appropriation’ (efficacy) of divine communicative action and is not sufficiently the mediator of the personal relation established by God’s saving action through Jesus Christ.

Vanhoozer would argue that divine saving action is necessarily communicative, and personal relation necessarily involves communication. This is true. My question regards how communicative dynamics become operative in this triune model. Is speech-act conceptuality (‘semantic potential’ as such), rather than the personal

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 99

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 99,123

presence of God by his Spirit, carrying most theological weight in describing our knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, through the words of Scripture within the apostolic Church? Vanhoozer's communicative approach may suggest that the content of the illocutions of Scripture can be known 'immediately' in that the Spirit is only the efficacy of divine discourse, and the semantic potential of Scripture is the mediator of revelation (in the recognition of the illocution prior to perlocution). I shall outline how these issues might emerge based upon Gunton's argument.

Vanhoozer's approach shares Gunton's concern that revelation is *mediated*.

Divine communicative action is a Trinitarian event, but (*contra* Barth) this does not mean that God communicates only himself. In short, God is doing more in Scripture than simply 'revealing.' God's communicative acts include both deed-words like the cross and speech-acts like the canon....This is a key insight for rethinking the Scripture principle in a way that preserves Barth's basic insight yet at the same time goes beyond it.<sup>54</sup>

Vanhoozer's account of the textuality of action, and the action of textual speech, therefore allows him to theologically integrate the Incarnation and the canon as triune communicative action. "God's Word, incarnate and inscripturate, is God in communicative action."<sup>55</sup> Since 'triune communicative action' describes both divine saving action and its mediation through Scripture, Gunton's argument for the 'second-order' nature of revelation in relation to salvation would be hard for Vanhoozer's account to accommodate. For Gunton, revelation is the mediation of the personal relation established in the incarnate life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This mediation indispensably involves propositional forms of words, but the primacy of this personal relation ensures that divine saving action and revelation are not of the same order. If communion refers to the personal relation established by the divine saving action, and communication to the mediation of that relation, we could say communion and communication are not simply identified.<sup>56</sup>

Vanhoozer's theological underpinning of covenant is central to his thesis – his basis for describing God as a 'communicative agent' and the divine-human relation in

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<sup>54</sup> DD 66

<sup>55</sup> FT 157. "We can even go so far as to posit an *analogia missio*...between the incarnation of the Son and the inscripturation of the biblical texts."(DD 70)

<sup>56</sup> I think this is consistent with Gunton's argument (e.g. *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 109).

communicative terms. The biblical and theological importance of ‘covenant’ enables Vanhoozer to integrate communion and communication.

the divine *promissio* generates the subsequent divine *missio* of Son and Spirit. Scripture is similarly ‘missional’ to the extent that it is caught up in God’s triune communicative action.<sup>57</sup>

In describing ‘divine communicative action’ as *both* the divine saving action itself and its mediation through the words of Scripture, Vanhoozer is describing a covenantal word-act dynamic: divine action (Creation and Salvation through Jesus Christ) fulfilling and being divine word; divine word (Scripture) being and fulfilling divine action. Thus, Scripture communicates the reality of the new covenant.

When we speak of God on the basis of the Scriptures...we are engaging God in communicative action. And behind all the particular things God says and does in Scripture lies one overarching purpose: to communicate the terms, and the reality, of the new covenant. Scripture summons the church to be God’s covenant partner; Scripture communicates a share in the triune life.<sup>58</sup>

Undoubtedly, life through and in Christ, gifted by the Spirit, is one of new covenant, instituted by Christ – a life that accords to the Scriptures, which communicate the covenantal rationality of this life (e.g. Gal 3:29 and the letter as a whole). The thinking together of speech-act theory and the biblical account of covenant is fruitful. A problem arises, however, in Vanhoozer’s characterisation of the overarching nature of God’s covenant in terms of the Triune communicative action model. I think it is important theologically that communion is not ‘ordered’ by communication (as “Scripture communicates a share in the triune life” might imply) for similar reasons to Gunton’s argument that revelation is a ‘second-order’ doctrine to creation and salvation. The reality of the new covenant is first of all a personal relation gifted by God – “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14). Without God’s words, which are intrinsically related to God’s saving action through and in Jesus Christ, we cannot enter into (by hearing), understand or experience (in practice), this personal relation (c.f. Rom 10:13-17). Scripture is our essential rationality. But pneumatological difficulties emerge from identifying the dynamics of communicative action with God’s triunity. I shall continue this argument in chapter 2.

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<sup>57</sup> DD 71. This approach to covenant as the overarching term is perhaps consistent with Barth’s overarching doctrine of election.

<sup>58</sup> DD 67

Next, I shall introduce the epistemological implications of these pneumatological concerns (which are the subject of chapter 3). Finally, I will begin exploring the significance of this pneumatology to the wider question of the soteriologically established Creator-creation relation (which is the subject of chapter 4).

## **B.2. The epistemological issues related to the pneumatological weakness in Vanhoozer's model, and the wider issue of the Creator-creation relation**

There are epistemological issues raised by the integration of divine communication action and the triune economy of salvation. For Barth, the Bible “becomes” God’s Word in the event of revelation, “its being is in this becoming.”<sup>59</sup> As discussed, Vanhoozer replaces Barth’s dialectical approach, which describes Scripture as God’s Word in terms of the *analogia fidei*, with a divine communicative action approach that describes Scripture as God’s Word in an illocutionary sense. His aim is for the communicative act conceptuality to give “better purchase on Barth’s Trinitarian explication of divine revelation.” This discontinuity and continuity with Barth has implications for Vanhoozer’s treatment of the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of God – in particular, his pneumatology.

[T]he Bible is divine-human communicative action: its locutions and illocutions are the result of double agency...God’s word is really written. However, whereas human discourse relies on rhetoric to achieve the intended perlocutionary effects, Scripture’s perlocutionary effects depend on the Spirit’s agency.

Is the Bible a divine communicative act, then, if a reader fails to respond to its illocutions? This is a subtle query....The answer...depends on whether one includes the reader’s response (the perlocutionary effect) in the definition of “communicative act.”...Perhaps the solution is to affirm both that the Scripture *is* the Word of God (in the sense of divine locution and illocution) and that Scripture may *become* the Word of God (in the sense of achieving its intended perlocutionary effects).<sup>60</sup>

This solution is necessary for Vanhoozer to retain the Barthian framework whilst reconceiving it in communicative terms. I think this ambiguity is indicative of

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<sup>59</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/1, 110

<sup>60</sup> FT 155-156

problems he faces in retaining Barth's triune model. However, Vanhoozer sees the ambiguity as proper and helpful.

Barth divides his discussion of revelation into two parts: the first – the 'objective reality of revelation' – focuses on Jesus the Word; the second – 'subjective reality of revelation' – treats the Holy Spirit....The notion of a divine communication...is ambiguous; it could mean 'act' or 'effect'. For Barth, revelation always includes both components. Yet, given the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions, there is no reason why one could not speak of divine discourse *simpliciter* to refer to what God is doing in speaking (illocutions), whether or not it is received and understood (perlocutions). [Footnote] To use the traditional terminology, one can affirm the inspiration of the Bible by emphasizing the Spirit's 'objective' work in guiding the human authors. Illumination would then refer to the Spirit's work in bringing about the intended perlocutionary effects.<sup>61</sup>

There seem to be two pneumatological issues. Firstly, there appears to be a suggestion that "divine discourse *simpliciter*" (what God is doing in speaking) can be a present reference without the Spirit; the Spirit's agency is in the past (inspiration) and in the future (illumination) but not in the present. Thus, Vanhoozer's account of how Scripture *is* the Word of God (in illocutionary terms) seems to require a stronger pneumatology to say how this is so. Secondly, in describing how Scripture *becomes* the Word of God (in perlocutionary terms), Vanhoozer seems to make the Spirit simply the efficacy of the Word. Here, as I have already argued, Vanhoozer is perhaps susceptible to Gunton's critique of Barthian 'narrative theology' – that it carries an immediacy that stems from an inadequate pneumatology. Thus, the ambiguity that Vanhoozer sees as helpful may actually indicate a pneumatological problem. The ambiguity between Scripture being and becoming God's Word within Vanhoozer's model may result in the potentiality of language as such rather than the Holy Spirit carrying most theological weight in describing how we come to know God in Jesus Christ, through the words of Scripture and in the apostolic Church. I think replacing Barth's dialectics with communicative-act conceptuality and semantic mediation, yet retaining Barth's triune self-revelation model, risks undermining the Creator-creature relation and distinction. In chapters 3 and 4, I will consider the pneumatological aspects of this issue further.

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<sup>61</sup> DD 66&n31

### **C. God's Personal Presence by the Holy Spirit**

To build upon the themes introduced so far, we need to consider the scriptural emphases that call for a fully trinitarian theology. I think the significance in Scripture of the Holy Spirit as God's personal presence highlights a pneumatological deficiency present in Vanhoozer's model. Vanhoozer has a sophisticated pneumatology, but (as I shall argue in chapter 2) he uses a kind of 'Spirit Christology' that is problematic. The interest in Spirit Christology is growing, and some argue it is the way to establish a fully trinitarian theology that is truly pneumatological as well as Christological.<sup>62</sup> I cannot look here at the potential and possibilities for Spirit Christology. However, I want to argue that a Spirit Christology will be deficient if it undermines the biblical emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence*, which is key to fully trinitarian theology and ecclesiology.

Gordon Fee's work shows how the emphasis in Scripture and the experience of the church upon the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence* is central to Paul's understanding in his NT epistles. Fee argues that Paul, drawing upon OT Scriptures, understood the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as fulfilling three related expectations: (1) the association of the Spirit with the new covenant; (2) the language of 'indwelling'; and (3) the association of the Spirit with the imagery of the temple.<sup>63</sup> In these ways, God is present to his people by the Holy Spirit. So firstly, the Spirit's role in the new covenant. In his death, Jesus Christ made a new covenant between God and his people, which he had instituted in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). The gift of the Spirit fulfils three dimensions of the promise of this new covenant reality:

(a) that God would give his people a "new heart"...(Jer 31:31-33) – made possible because he would also give them "a new spirit" (Ezek 36:26). In Paul, this motif finds expression in 2 Cor 3:1-6, where the Corinthians are understood to be the recipients of the new covenant in that they are "inscribed" by "the Spirit of the living God" on "tablets of human hearts" (v.3)...(b) This "new spirit" in turn is none other than God's Spirit, who will enable his people to follow his decrees (Ezek 36:27). [In]...Rom 8:3-4 and Gal 6:16-25, the Spirit's fulfilment of this motif is

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<sup>62</sup> R. Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)

<sup>63</sup> PSPG 15

Paul's answer to the question of "what happens to righteousness" if one does away with Torah observance. (c) God's Spirit in turn means the presence of God himself, in that by putting "my Spirit in you...you will live" (Ezek 37:14). Again, Paul picks up this motif in 2 Cor 3:5-6... "The Spirit," Paul says in the context of the new covenant, "*gives life*."<sup>64</sup>

Fee argues that vitally related to this new covenant reality is Paul's description of the Spirit as 'dwelling' in or among the people of God. In 1 Cor. 14:24-25 and 2 Cor. 6:16, Paul cites OT texts "that speak of *God's dwelling* in the midst of his people, which Paul now attributes to the *presence of the Spirit*."<sup>65</sup>

Paul's language of 'indwelling' draws upon temple imagery. In Ephesians 2 the church is described as the "household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you are also built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (v19b-22,RSV). Fee notes that Paul also uses the temple imagery of the individual believer (1 Cor 6:19-20): the church, corporately and individually, is the place of God's own personal presence by the Spirit. This is distinctive of the God's people (cf. Exodus 33:15-16), and key to Paul's consternation over the behaviour in the church in Corinth.<sup>66</sup> Fee's overall conclusion is that, for Paul:

the Spirit is not some merely impersonal 'force' or 'influence' or 'power.' The Spirit is none other than the fulfilment of the promise that God himself would once again be present with his people....The Spirit is God's own personal presence in our lives and in our midst, who leads us into paths of righteousness for his own name sake.<sup>67</sup>

The danger in the emphasis upon presence is that one appears to be leaning upon 'manifestations' of the Holy Spirit in terms that risk returning, in a different form, the very 'immediacy' that we are seeking to avoid. This is where Fee's emphasis upon Paul's understanding of the Spirit as God's *personal* presence is vital. It is the personhood of the Holy Spirit (rather than impersonal 'agency'), which ensures that when we speak of God's 'presence' by his Spirit we do not make the theological and epistemological mistakes of such 'immediacy.'

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<sup>64</sup> GEP 843-844

<sup>65</sup> GEP 844

<sup>66</sup> Gordon Fee, *To What End Exegesis?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,2001) 275

<sup>67</sup> GEP 845

Fee is well known for his view that Paul's Christology and pneumatology indicate not only a 'functional' but something very close to 'ontological' trinitarianism.<sup>68</sup> He argues this is not anachronistic, and links the reticence within recent NT scholarship towards this view to a failure to recognise that Paul believed in the 'pre-existence' of Christ and the Holy Spirit as the 'personal presence' of God made possible by the mediation of Jesus Christ our Saviour. In regard to the Spirit, the problem emerged in a two-fold way: firstly, the argument that, because Paul most frequently speaks of the Spirit in terms of *agency*, we should not presume personhood; secondly, the argument towards 'Spirit Christology'. On the first point, Fee's argues that while the Spirit is frequently described in terms of agency, "the Spirit is the subject of verbs that presuppose personhood,"<sup>69</sup> and further, for Paul the gift of the Spirit is the gift of God's indwelling presence. Some of Paul's most profound words about the Spirit come in the context of his understanding of prayer in the Spirit. Fee writes of Romans 8:26-27 that Paul understands the Spirit as "both personal (the Spirit intercedes; God knows the Spirit's mind) and 'distinct from' God the Father."<sup>70</sup> This brings us to the second argument. Later in Romans 8 Paul speaks of the present intercessory activity of Christ on our behalf (v34), and Fee argues that this settles any notion that Paul identified the risen Christ with the gift of the Spirit; while the Spirit intercedes from 'within us' (see 8:9,15), Christ in his exaltation intercedes for us 'at the right hand of God'.<sup>71</sup> Further, the "remarkable grace-benediction of 2 Cor. 13:14" should "shut down all possibilities that Paul ever identified the risen Christ with the Spirit."<sup>72</sup> Fee is critiquing the kind of 'Spirit Christology' that builds upon the argument "that Paul's understanding of the Spirit is best viewed in terms of identification with the Risen Christ."

If by this one means that the Spirit is how the risen Christ is continually present with his people, there are no objections to be raised....But the language in the literature suggests far more than that, moving very close to full identification, so that 'distinct from' is almost totally lost in the rhetoric of identification.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Gordon Fee, *To What End Exegesis?* 349

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

<sup>70</sup> Fee, *To What End Exegesis?* 344

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 345

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 334n12 See also *Ibid.*, 218-239

<sup>73</sup> Fee, *To What End Exegesis?* 342

The carefulness of his argument requires noting.

The Spirit of God is also the Spirit of Christ (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19), who carries on the work of Christ following his resurrection and subsequent assumption of the place of authority at God's right hand. But some have pressed this relationship further...Based chiefly on three texts (1 Cor 6:17; 15:45; 2 Cor 3:17-18), Paul is understood to speak of the risen Lord in such a way as to identify him with the Spirit.<sup>74</sup>

Fee expounds the most striking of these references – ‘the Lord is the Spirit’ in 2 Cor 3:17-18 – in pneumatological rather than Christological terms. But this is not to the detriment of Christology; ‘high Pneumatology’ here supports the ‘high Christology’ of the passage as a whole.<sup>75</sup> As noted, Fee sees Romans 8 as a significant text pointing away from ‘Spirit Christology’: although one could argue for “identification in function” between Christ and the Spirit, Paul’s references are actually distinguishing the role of Christ and the Spirit in salvation: the Spirit indwells believers in order to help them in the weakness of their ‘already/not yet’ existence, interceding on their behalf; the risen Christ is ‘at the right hand of God, making intercession for us.’ This negates the idea that Paul identified the Spirit with the risen Christ, either ontologically or functionally.<sup>76</sup> Whilst rejecting ‘Spirit Christology’, Fee is clear that Paul assumes the same kind of close relationship between the Spirit and Christ as between the Spirit and the Father.

[Paul] moves easily from the mention of one to the other, especially when using the language of ‘indwelling’ (e.g. Rom 8:9-10, from “have the Spirit of Christ” to “Christ is in you”; c.f. Eph 3:16-17). Thus when Paul in Gal 2:20...speaks of Christ as living in him, he almost certainly means “Christ lives in me *by His Spirit*,” referring to the ongoing work of Christ in his life that is being carried out by the indwelling Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

The crucial point at which ‘Spirit Christology’ errs, then, is in eclipsing the Spirit as person. To emphasise Paul’s understanding of the Spirit as God’s personal presence is in no way to carve out a separate ‘economy’ of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is revealed as one *from* whom rather than *to* whom we look, the mediator of relation to God through

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<sup>74</sup> PSPG 31-32

<sup>75</sup> GEP 311. In *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), Fee revises his exegesis of 2 Cor. 3:17-18, but this does not change his argument with respect to the kind of ‘Spirit Christology’ he critiques (4, 116-8, 588).

<sup>76</sup> GEP 838

<sup>77</sup> GEP 838

Christ and *consequently* as the mediator of revelation.<sup>78</sup> Thus, this pneumatological point is vital to the unique incarnate presence of God in Jesus Christ; God's personal presence by his Spirit does not to compete with this foundational truth, but calls for a fully trinitarian account of salvation in Christ Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The question raised by this chapter is whether Vanhoozer's 'triune communicative action' model, whilst addressing some of the issues with Barth's triune self-revelation model in regard to mediation (specifically, the essential role of the words of Scripture and the unique significance of the Bible in mediating salvation in Christ), leaves in place and perhaps solidifies a potential pneumatological weakness in Barth's triune model. My argument is that attention to the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence* is vital to addressing this issue. I shall expand on this in the next chapter as I expound the details of Vanhoozer's thesis for canonical-linguistic theology. In particular, I shall consider the crucial role of Spirit Christology in maintaining Vanhoozer's 'triune communicative action' model. By referring to the work of Fee and Newbigin, I have attempted to show in this chapter how any kind of Spirit Christology is problematic if it is unable to reflect the personal presence of God in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is a vital part of the biblical witness to salvation in and through Jesus Christ. A 'high pneumatology' complements a 'high Christology'.

As mentioned, there are significant epistemological implications of the pneumatological issues raised, and I shall explore these in detail in chapter 3. At stake in a theology of mediation – and a reason why Karl Barth's profound contribution to theology can be critiqued but not dismissed – is the way Christology and pneumatology shape our description of the Creator-creature relation. This relation is founded upon our understanding of salvation through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Hence, chapter 4 will conclude this dissertation by considering how pneumatology is essential to the biblical

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<sup>78</sup> Gunton, *Brief Theology of Revelation*, 120-121

<sup>79</sup> Jesus Christ is Immanuel. See PSPG 23n7

witness to participation by faith in Christ crucified and risen. I shall discuss how Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach to the doctrine of atonement as 'gift and task' describes justification and sanctification, and the Christological and pneumatological account of the Creator-creature relation through and in Jesus Christ. My aim is to show why the Biblical emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as God's *personal presence* discussed in this chapter is so important to soteriology and a theology of mediation, and consider whether this pneumatology can be fully accommodated within a 'canonical-linguistic' approach to Christian theology.

## Chapter 2: Pneumatology and Communicative Action

### *Introduction*

This chapter explores how Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach reconceives 'postliberal' theology – the approach to theology characterised by Hans Frei's emphasis upon the narrative nature of Christian theology based upon the biblical witness,<sup>80</sup> and George Lindbeck's restructuring of theology around the linguistic turn to practice, a move inspired by the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.<sup>81</sup> My focus is the pneumatology involved in Vanhoozer's integration of speech-act philosophy and the hermeneutical philosophies of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, along with the literary theory of Mikhail Bakhtin. This integration is vital to Vanhoozer's argument for a linguistic approach that yet manages to retain the divine authority and identity of Scripture and Christian practice. I argue that this linguistic and literary conceptuality does the work that a stronger pneumatology should, and that the validity of Vanhoozer's use of Spirit Christology is pivotal. Comparison with the work of Reinhard Hütter highlights the issues that are at stake. Again, the Holy Spirit as God's personal presence is the vital point. I conclude with an indication of what is required by the biblical testimony to, and Christian experience of, life through and in Jesus Christ, in the gift of the Holy Spirit – a trinitarian ontology that defines, rather than is defined by, the questions of epistemology, hermeneutics and performance involved in describing the authority of Scripture and the identity of Christian witness. The prospect for this has been indicated by Thomas Weinandy in *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> H. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)

<sup>81</sup> G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1984); L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. 1958)

<sup>82</sup> T.G. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995)

## **A. The ‘Canonical-Linguistic’ Approach to Theology: Kevin Vanhoozer’s Thesis in The Drama Of Doctrine**

Vanhoozer affirms the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy that challenges the “modern premise of an autonomous knowing subject” by removing “legitimation for knowledge and truth outside language” on the basis that reason and experience are ‘language ridden.’ This is allied to “Wittgenstein’s insight that meaning is a function of use, and that linguistic usage varies according to the forms of life or practices – cultures – that users inhabit.”<sup>83</sup> However, Vanhoozer rightly asks: what *norms* practice? He sees the potential for ‘tradition-based rationality’ to renew the Scripture-tradition relation, but argues that postliberal theology leaves ambiguous the question of normativity. In *The Nature of Doctrine*, Lindbeck outlined the cultural-linguistic approach as an alternative to cognitive-propositional and experiential-expressive approaches to theology (representing the modern ‘foundations’ of reason and experience.)<sup>84</sup> However, Lindbeck’s complete embrace of the maxim ‘meaning is use,’<sup>85</sup> arguably generates a circular epistemology.<sup>86</sup> For Vanhoozer, the source of the problem is that Lindbeck’s critique of cognitive-propositional approach is valid but oversteps the mark, and what is required is a careful ‘rehabilitation’ of the propositional nature of Scripture, from which flows a norm for church practice.<sup>87</sup> Vanhoozer traces the impact of Lindbeck upon Frei (whose narrative theology, influenced by Karl Barth, in many ways establishes the context for postliberalism). Frei’s “instincts were to let the biblical narrative mean and claim truth on its own terms,” but his later work took on a cultural-linguistic correction such that the literal sense of text was determined by ecclesial use.<sup>88</sup> Hence, although postliberalism appears to “swing the pendulum of authority back to the biblical text,” the cultural-linguistic approach “relocates authority in the church.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> DD 9-10

<sup>84</sup> Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*

<sup>85</sup> Most famously in his discussion of the crusader uttering ‘Jesus is Lord’ to “authorize cleaving the head of the infidel”(Ibid., 64).

<sup>86</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress,1997) 141-143&73-74. Without the normativity of Scripture we are left with a “vicious circularity”.(DD 188-191,174)

<sup>87</sup> This shares Gunton’s concern that Lindbeck oversteps his critique of propositions.

<sup>88</sup> DD 10-11

<sup>89</sup> DD 10

Vanhoozer's *canonical-linguistic* approach retains the linguistic emphasis upon practice whilst not "conflating biblical authority with its ecclesial use."<sup>90</sup> This involves locating authority in Scripture as divine authorial discourse rather than in the use of Scripture by the believing community.<sup>91</sup> In the previous chapter, I outlined how Vanhoozer's triune communicative action model opens up the scope for such a 'canonical-linguistic' theology. For Vanhoozer, "*it is not the church's use but the triune God's use of Scripture that makes it canon...Canonicity is the criterion of catholicity, not vice versa.*"<sup>92</sup> Thus, Vanhoozer's approach shares Lindbeck's emphasis upon practice,<sup>93</sup> but offers a *canonical* reconception of practice as divine (triune communicative action). This marks the distinction and departure of canonical-linguistic approach from the cultural-linguistic approach.<sup>94</sup> Ecclesial practice is not normative as such but is scripturally directed participation in divine communicative action.

Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach therefore represents *an integration of authorial discourse interpretation and performance interpretation*. Vanhoozer proposes a 'theodramatic' incorporation of hermeneutics into soteriology, which encompasses this integration of authorial discourse and performance interpretation. In *The Drama of Doctrine*, he shows how divine communicative action calls for a 'dramatic' theory of doctrine based on the 'theo-dramatic' nature of salvation. Drama "*offers an integrative perspective within which to relate propositions, experience, and narrative.*"<sup>95</sup> Vanhoozer defines doctrine as "direction for the fitting participation of individuals and communities in the drama of redemption."<sup>96</sup> The dogmatic dimension depends upon the recovery of the propositional aspect:

To view doctrine as dramatic direction is to rethink the task of theology in terms of *performing Christian wisdom*. At the same time, this emphasis upon the performative aspect of theology does not forsake the proposition.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> His critique of David Kelsey.(DD 12)

<sup>91</sup> DD 11 This resonates with Nicholas Wolterstorff's thesis that interpreting 'authorial discourse' requires the engaged discernment of what the author intends in the act of discourse. N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: CUP,1995), especially chapters 8&14.

<sup>92</sup> DD 150

<sup>93</sup> DD xiii

<sup>94</sup> DD 150

<sup>95</sup> DD 100,101

<sup>96</sup> DD 102

<sup>97</sup> DD 103-4

Thus he defends his proposal against simple pragmatism:

Though doctrine's aim is pastoral – directing the church on what it means here and now to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ – this pastoral aim is grounded in a norm: the history of Jesus Christ, a history with a determinate propositional content (e.g. “He is risen”). Accordingly, the dramatic view of doctrine understands truth both in terms of “doing” and in terms of “corresponding”: doctrinal truth is a matter of theo-dramatic correspondence, of speaking and doing things that continue the action in fitting ways.<sup>98</sup>

Vanhoozer's point is that the drama and the script are divine communicative action and thus the action belongs to God. Our participation is pneumatological: “*Doctrine is a guide for the church's scripted yet spirited gospel performances*”<sup>99</sup>. Ecclesiology is shaped by a pneumatological ‘creative faithfulness’ to the Word of God. Vanhoozer's divine communicative action account of Scripture not only secures the propositional dimension but, because this is a triune account linking incarnation and inscripturation, it integrates the interpretation of Scripture into our incorporation into, and participation in, the body of Christ. The way Vanhoozer's describes canonical practice as the practice of Jesus, and the canon as ‘Spirited practice,’ is at the centre of this theology. It involves a covenantal and canonical communicative identification of Spirit and practice, and is supported by a certain kind of ‘Spirit Christology’. To assess Vanhoozer's thesis, I shall first look at the hermeneutical concerns that drive this model, before turning to the pneumatology that is integral to it.

## ***B. Participation in Triune Communicative Action***

### **B.1. Vanhoozer's integration of authorial-discourse and performance interpretation**

Vanhoozer sets the *canonical*-linguistic approach apart from other approaches referring to practice (even if pneumatologically conceived) by defining a distinction between Performance I and Performance II interpretation. Paralleling Heiko Obermann's

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<sup>98</sup> DD 105

<sup>99</sup> DD 102

nomenclature of Tradition I and II,<sup>100</sup> Vanhoozer distinguishes Performance I interpretation (Scripture is integral to the divine ‘performance’ of the theo-drama, and the ‘script’ of the church’s participative performance) and Performance II interpretation (‘performance’ refers to church’s act of interpretation, integrating Scripture’s meaning and authority with church practice). This allows him to affirm the turn to practice whilst critiquing the vast majority of ecclesial approaches to the interpretation of Scripture. The delineating factor is authorial-discourse interpretation, which he argues has always been problematic to postliberalism.<sup>101</sup> Performance I interpretation refers to interpreting for the divine communicative action of Scripture – what God is doing (illocution) in its communicative acts. Such interpretation, is faithful (fitting) participation in canonical practice; it constitutes an integration of authorial discourse interpretation and the linguistic turn to practice. Vanhoozer’s proposal represents a mediation of the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Paul Ricoeur’s hermeneutic philosophy. This is notable because Wolterstorff set his thesis in contrast to Ricoeur’s.<sup>102</sup> The issues this raises relate to the concerns regarding pneumatological mediation and its relation to the linguistic turn to practice.

Nicholas Wolterstorff argues “there is no such thing as *the sense of the text*, as Ricoeur and those in the general tradition of New Criticism understand that.”<sup>103</sup> (In view is Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of the ‘semantic autonomy’ of the text.) For Wolterstorff, that leaves two main alternatives: authorial-discourse interpretation or performance interpretation.<sup>104</sup> He sees Ricoeur’s attempt to assimilate authorial-discourse interpretation into his model as unsuccessful,<sup>105</sup> and argues that Ricoeur’s use of the analogy of seeing the text like a musical score which can be played in multiple ways is

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<sup>100</sup> Tradition II represents the view that tradition can *supplement* Scripture – i.e. an “innovative departure from the earlier patristic sense” of tradition as the handing on of Scripture.(DD 154)

<sup>101</sup> Vanhoozer argues that Frei never accepted it, and although Lindbeck perhaps has recently, he hasn’t explained how this “squares with his earlier proposal concerning the nature of doctrine”(DD 166-167)

<sup>102</sup> N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* chapters 8&10. It should be noted that Wolterstorff is writing prior to Ricoeur’s *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1995), which some argue is vital to understanding Ricoeur’s work from a Christian perspective. Vanhoozer’s use (in DD) of Ricoeur’s narrative conceptuality of self (*ipse-identity*) refers to *Oneself as Another*.

<sup>103</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* 171

<sup>104</sup> In Performance Interpretation: “Rather than trying to discern what the author was promising or asking or testifying to, by inscribing these sentences, we just imagine what someone might say with these sentences.”(Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* 181)

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 171

indicative of the adoption of performance interpretation.<sup>106</sup> Wolterstorff's proposal decouples 'discourse' and 'revelation.' His logic is that discourse has an "inherently *normative* character" because engaging in discourse involves taking up a "*normative stance*".<sup>107</sup> The interpreter's concern or otherwise for the author's 'stance' is crucial to Wolterstorff's distinction between authorial-discourse and performance interpretation.<sup>108</sup> And because Wolterstorff uses the term 'discourse' to refer only to illocution (and not also locution), he is able to argue for authorial discourse interpretation whilst accepting textual indeterminacy.<sup>109</sup> Merold Westphal argues that Wolterstorff cannot secure the distinction between authorial discourse interpretation and performance interpretation in the context of retaining textual indeterminacy.<sup>110</sup> However, Vanhoozer's approach differs from Wolterstorff's thesis in that he sees both the distinction and the indeterminacy overcome by an integration of authorial discourse and performance interpretation (made possible by his triune communicative action model).

This represents two significant departures. Firstly, Vanhoozer agrees with what Wolterstorff is critiquing as 'performance interpretation' in which *we* interpret the words ('Performance II interpretation') rather than seeking to discern what the author was doing with those words. However, Vanhoozer describes authorial discourse in performative terms – Scripture is divine communicative action integral to the 'theodrama' of salvation. Hence, 'Performance I interpretation' is faithful/fitting inspired participation in a performance inscripturated by God, centred on the incarnation of God.

[W]here Wolterstorff works with an either-or distinction between authorial discourse interpretation and performance interpretation, the present approach combines them, and this in two ways – (1) by seeing the canonical discourse as itself an instance of triune performance, and (2) by viewing the canon as a script that requires not merely information processing but ecclesial

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>108</sup> In this, Wolterstorff's thesis vitally focuses us towards interpretative questions about the "stance and responsibilities of agents" (by 'agents' he means both author and reader): "If so much boils down to issues of *stance*, this speaks volumes about the nature of God as One who speaks, and of human persons who both appropriate divine discourse and also, in turn, speak." A. Thiselton, 'Article Review: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*' *SJT* 50(1997):110.

<sup>109</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* 37.

<sup>110</sup> M. Westphal, 'Review Essay: Theology as talking about a God who talks' *Modern Theology* 13(1997):525-536

response. The canonical-linguistic approach advocates not Performance II, which unhelpfully confuses author and reader, but performance I, where interpreters respond to authorial direction.<sup>111</sup>

[T]he canon is itself a performance – an act of discourse – before being a script (a design for further performance)...Scripture may be self-interpreting, but it does not perform itself.<sup>112</sup>

Secondly, he affirms Wolterstorff critique of the ‘sense of the text’,<sup>113</sup> however, while for Wolterstorff this implies textual indeterminacy, in Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach the covenantal nature of discourse itself (perhaps implicit in Wolterstorff’s notion of ‘normative stance’) becomes of structural significance to the relations between locution and illocution. Vanhoozer’s understanding of Scripture as both a document of God’s covenantal action and part of that action itself, and the Christology and pneumatology involved, are central to his whole thesis. In both these modifications of Wolterstorff’s thesis Vanhoozer draws upon the work of Paul Ricoeur (making it a resource rather than source of concern) and Hans-Georg Gadamer. The biblical-hermeneutical developments they represent are vital to Vanhoozer’s triune communicative action model and central to the issue raised in chapter 1 – that Vanhoozer addresses semantic ‘immediacy’, but with an insufficiently pneumatological account of mediation.

Dan Stiver, like Vanhoozer, questions Wolterstorff’s critique of Ricoeur’s work. He argues that Wolterstorff needlessly sets his work apart from Ricoeur by reading Ricoeur as offering an incoherent notion of an ‘authorless text’:

Despite the complicated and what he calls “playful” relationship of the author to the work, this “does not imply the elimination of the author.” In fact, Ricoeur can speak of fulfilling the intent of Friedrich Schleiermacher’s desire to understand authors better than they understood themselves.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, he thinks Ricoeur’s ‘surplus of meaning’ accords with Wolterstorff overall thesis.<sup>115</sup> (Rather than the analogy of a text being like a musical score leading to “creative artistry”, Stiver argues it points to the “unavoidable fecundity of meaning of a

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<sup>111</sup> DD 184

<sup>112</sup> DD 152

<sup>113</sup> DD 127n37

<sup>114</sup> D. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 133-4

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 134-135

rich text.”<sup>116</sup>) However, I think there are issues with utilising Ricoeurian conceptuality. The view that Ricoeur can speak of the ‘semantic autonomy’ of the text without implying a disconnection from the author relies upon accepting Ricoeur’s hermeneutic/narrative philosophy. Stiver describes Ricoeur’s focus upon the public meaning of the text as a dynamic offering continuity to the authored “issue” of the text through what Gadamer called a fusion of horizons. This dynamic is “part of the nature of a text from the beginning”<sup>117</sup> – the ‘meaning potential’ of the text. However, in this account, our ‘personal relation’ to the author is subsumed into the dynamic of the text’s public meaning over time, rather than that ‘personal relation’ being prevenient – i.e. that which authorial discourse (and its interpretation) depends upon. The autonomy of the ‘critical moment’ is essential to Ricoeur’s account and this renders our relation to the author (in the post-critical ‘second naïvety’) an imaginative (cognitive-poetic) reality, which does not fully convey the personal nature of this relation. As we shall see, Vanhoozer tempers this by describing the Ricoeurian dynamic in terms of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but my concern is that the conceptuality risks depersonalising the Spirit, identifying the mediation of the Spirit with the appropriation of the ‘meaning potential’ of the text.

Vanhoozer may not endorse all of Stiver’s affirmations about Ricoeur, but the Ricoeurian dynamic discussed above is integral to Vanhoozer’s description of canonical practice (Performance I interpretation) as Spirited practice. I hope to show that a stronger emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as God’s *personal presence* allows us to avoid identifying communion and communication and describe how the mediation of the Spirit is not simply the appropriation of the ‘meaning potential’ of the text. Crucially, this emphasis upon the personal presence of God by the Holy Spirit *does not introduce a supplemental rationality to Scripture*. Vanhoozer rightly insists upon Scripture as our sole rationality, and I agree that rationality cannot be abstracted from practice. However, if the gift of personal relation to God in Christ, mediated by the Spirit, becomes identified with the dynamics of communicative practice, that mediation is rationalised. The words of Scripture are indeed in an intrinsic relation to God’s saving

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 134

action; but in such a way that revelation is ‘second order’ to salvation (and creation). My concern is that, by using Ricoeur’s narrative philosophy to underpin his covenantal and Trinitarian model, Vanhoozer allows the concept of the ‘meaning potential’ of the text to occupy the same place (‘order’) as the ‘personal relation’ mediated by the Spirit, upon which I believe that ‘meaning potential’ depends. To take away that dependence and identify the two together leads to a kind of ‘immediacy’.<sup>118</sup> We must not adopt an approach that bypasses the ‘meaning potential’ of the text with a Gnostic account of ‘spiritual knowledge’; that would be a result of seeing the mediation of the Spirit and rationality as in some kind of competitive tension. In a fully trinitarian account of mediation, the meaning potential of Scripture is mediated by the Spirit such that the words of Scripture are intrinsic to divine saving action. Yet, God’s personal presence by his Spirit cannot be circumscribed by God’s communicative action in and through Scripture; communion necessarily involves communication but cannot be fully characterised in semantic-linguistic terms.

Interestingly, in distinguishing ‘discourse’ from ‘revelation’ (in that discourse involves taking up a normative ‘stance’), Wolterstorff echoes Gunton’s conviction that if primacy is given to the doctrine of revelation, epistemology overly structures theology.<sup>119</sup> The problem in Wolterstorff’s account of divine discourse is that he is concerned with only illocution.<sup>120</sup> This allows him to describe how God speaks through Scripture today, but in a way uncomplicated by the involvement of the human authors of the locutions of Scripture in such divine discourse. Thus, the significance of this relation between God and human author to the way God speaks to us today through what he has spoken through these prophets and apostles is lost. Thus, he does describe how by the mediation of the Spirit we share a personal relation to God that unites us in the Spirit to the relation of apostolic authors to God, whilst yet being dependant upon

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<sup>118</sup> Thiselton highlights Wolterstorff’s belief that to “replace ‘authorial’ discourse by ‘presentational’ discourse reduces the reader into thinking that Frei’s ‘realistic narrative’ can shortcut all the intricacies of biblical scholarship and major on ‘impact’ through appropriation, when in practice the anchor has been shifted from that which the text witnesses to how the reader perceives what is perceived.” (‘Article Review: N. Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*’, 108) The risk is that if hermeneutics becomes all encompassing, our personal relation to God through the gift of the Spirit becomes a function of textual dynamics.

<sup>119</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* 36

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

their unique historical relation to the divine saving action and the canonical words which they wrote. Wolterstorff's focus upon illocution alone allows him to preserve the distinction between divine Author and human author, but leaves the human author's relation to the text in much the same status as Ricoeur's account.<sup>121</sup> Gunton's point is that the apostolicity of the human authors is vital to the intrinsic relation between the words of Scripture and divine saving action. In Wolterstorff's model, God could conceivably speak through any text, and this is true, but does not help us in describing the essential and unique significance of 'just these words' of Scripture in the mediation of the personal relation established by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In light of this, we can see why Vanhoozer is right to move beyond Wolterstorff's account, but also how Wolterstorff's thesis points (albeit imperfectly) to a problem for Vanhoozer. In discussing 'Has Scripture become a wax nose?' we see how Wolterstorff has conceded too much by focussing on illocution alone, and lacks an account of the intrinsic relation between the words of Scripture and divine saving action. However, insofar as his solution to the 'wax nose anxiety' relates to his decoupling of discourse and revelation, he makes a pertinent point:

The most important point remains: one minimizes the risk that Scripture is becoming a wax nose in one's hands by coming to know God better....[T]hough our knowledge of human beings comes in good measure from interpreting their discourse, it is also a fundamental prerequisite of interpreting a human being's discourse that one already know a good deal about that person.... So too for God: to interpret God's discourse more reliably, we must come to know God better. A hermeneutics of divine discourse requires supplementation with discussions of other ways of knowing God, and of ways of knowing God better. And engaging in the practice of interpreting texts so as to discern God's discourse requires engaging simultaneously in whatever practices might yield a better knowledge of God. Those practices will be practices of the heart as well as the head, of devotion as well as reflection.<sup>122</sup>

It is unclear how Wolterstorff relates the "other ways"/"practices" of knowing God to the divine discourse of the text. Further, describing them as 'practices' risks implying a supplemental rationality. I agree with Vanhoozer that there are no practices that are 'extra-canonical'. But excluding extra-canonical practices does not mean that the personal relation can be subsumed into communicative practice. Our life before God in

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<sup>121</sup> This is what perhaps opens him to Westphal's critique.

<sup>122</sup> Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* 239.

prayer, which is at the heart of Wolterstorff's point, is not about hearing 'another word' but rather about God graciously being *personally present to and amongst us by his Spirit* as we attend to the Scripture.<sup>123</sup> This underpins Wolterstorff's placement of interpreting authorial discourse in the context of personal relationship and relates to his conviction that revelation should not be identified with discourse, even though discourse enables revelation. In his terms, the 'stance' of discourse cannot be of the same order as revelation. The problem is that Wolterstorff does not say how this illocutionary 'stance' relates to the historical apostolic particularity of these locutions in relation to the words and actions of Jesus Christ crucified and risen.

Vanhoozer does describe this intrinsic relation between the words of Scripture and divine saving action. But while Vanhoozer's approach avoids the wax nose problem through a triune and covenantal link between locution and illocution, one could argue that his model may not be fully able to attend to the human author's relation to God 'behind the text' either, because God ultimately assumes the place of the human author in his supervenience model.<sup>124</sup> In Vanhoozer's model, what matters 'behind the text' is that God, through his saving action, acts covenantally towards his people, and that the writers of Scripture write words canonically communicating this covenantal action, enabling us to participate in it. The human author matters in that they are a scriptwriter of the theo-drama, but the particularities of their relation to God 'behind the text' are perhaps eclipsed. I agree that what matters is what God is saying through the Scriptures, but if the relation between God and the human 'behind the text' (God's grace in relation to the particularity and the identity of that person) has limited significance in meaning-making, the same will be true of its significance to the act of interpretation. This matters for our understanding of Scripture and also our understanding of human personhood. Richard Briggs makes a related point:

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<sup>123</sup> Wolterstorff quotes Gillian Evans who speaks of "the cultivation of a quiet receptiveness which allows the Holy Spirit to speak in a man's heart as it will, patient reflection upon every detail of expression" which were "the features of the 'holy reading' (*lectio divina*) of monastic life." (Ibid., 239)

<sup>124</sup> Supervenience is a scientific concept regarding how real properties 'emerge' at the level of the whole, how the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (see FT 106-107). Vanhoozer uses the concept of 'supervenience' to support his account of God as the 'generic' author (at the canonical level) of Scripture. See also FT 96-124.

[I]t is important not to move too fast with the claim that a divine illocutionary act relocates the focus of the interpreter on to a supposed ‘world in front of the text,’ where God deals with the theologically envisioned narrative world the text displays....Anthony Thiselton picks up this point...‘to fail to look ‘behind’ the text of 1 Corinthians, or ‘behind’ *as well as* ‘within’ the world of the Gospels would fatally detach text from the extra-textual world of reality’.<sup>125</sup>

Vanhoozer does not detach the text from reality – he is profoundly concerned to understand the text in terms of the key to reality: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But his triune communicative action model has a certain kind of ‘immediacy’ (i.e. pneumatological deficiency), one aspect of which is the lack of mediatorial significance given to the witness of the human author, which is a properly theological concern because this person lives and writes in relation to God in Christ by the Spirit.

## **B.2. Authority and identity in the Scripture-tradition relation and the public witness of the Church**

I shall now consider how the foregoing argument (that the personal relation to God ‘behind’ and ‘in front of’ the text is pneumatologically mediated and cannot be subsumed into a primarily linguistic dynamic) applies to the ‘authority’ and ‘identity’ of Scripture and the Church.

### **Authority**

The Acts 8 account of the Ethiopian coming to faith is paradigmatic for Vanhoozer in answering the question, “Is the church the author of the gospel, or is the gospel the author of the church?” The Ethiopian is reading from Isaiah 53 and Philip proclaims to him that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of this text. Vanhoozer writes,

It will be objected that Isaiah 53 did not and could not mean what Philip said it meant. But why not? Isaiah, like the other prophets, was a spokesperson for God; might he not have said more than he could (explicitly) know? What the divine author intends in Isaiah 53 is seen in the new light of the gospel.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Briggs, ‘Speech-Act Theory’ 96.

<sup>126</sup> DD 119

I agree. However, this appeal to the ‘meaning potential’ of Scripture (Isaiah tells more than he knows) seems, in Vanhoozer’s account, to risk taking the place of the personal relation of human author and human reader to God.

With regard to Old Testament prophecy, we would do well to amend Michael Polanyi’s account of tacit knowledge: it is not so much that the prophets ‘know more than they can tell’ but rather that they *tell more than they can know*. The prophets’ testimony, when appropriated by the Evangelist, is disambiguated.<sup>127</sup>

For Polanyi, all personal knowing involves a ‘tacit dimension’ – an a-critical act of commitment to a way of relating to reality – that establishes a fiduciary framework upon which our critical comprehension and agency functions. For Vanhoozer, canonical interpretation involves semantic potentiality (‘tell more than they can know’) *that seems to be in tension with* semantic limit (‘know more than they can tell’). However, we need both points and the tension is only inevitable if we try to identify communion and communication. I agree that prophecy concerns human words through which God speaks about the present and the future (and certainly telling more than the prophet can know). But the prophet speaks in the context of a *personal relation* to a God they worship and know (through God’s saving action and presence) as Lord. They are indeed bearers of more than they can know and this is *because* they know more than they can tell – they know God (by which I mean they are in personal relation to God.)<sup>128</sup> This point concerns God’s transcendence of words and the conviction that personal identity is not linguistic all the way down.

Vanhoozer could argue it is what God is *doing* (illocution) in divine communicative action that is significant; and, since God’s being is in act, the so-called ‘tacit dimension’ is identified with semantic ‘meaning potential’. However, in Acts 8, we see reference to more than the ‘meaning potential’ of Scripture. We see Philip as a witness, anointed by the Holy Spirit. I am not referring to ecclesial practice but the manifest public of the Church – the gathering of God by the presence of the Holy Spirit. While the *practice* of

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<sup>127</sup> FT 305

<sup>128</sup> Hence, the ‘personal relation’ of prophecy is a-critically prevenient to, rather than a competing rationality to, the ‘meaning potential’ of God’s words. To critique Vanhoozer’s communicative-act approach as “too restricted to words, and too likely to see drama as a means of transmitting an inherently verbal message” (Samuel Wells, *Improvisation* (London:SPCK,2004) 61) is valid but requires a logic such as this to avoid positing a supplemental practice/rationality to the canon.

authority is linguistic (rational) – and I agree with Vanhoozer that Scripture is our sole rationality – the actuality/existence of the community that participates in this practice of authority is prevenient; it is created through Christ by the Spirit in an act of sovereign grace. Those in Jesus Christ are “new creation”. To identify the gift of the Spirit with practice as such, leads to either making church practice authoritative *as such* (as we shall see in Reinhard Hütter’s identification of the Spirit with church practice), or (as in Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach) making the authoritative normativity of the Scripture ‘immediate’ rather than involving the creation of a people gathered by God’s indwelling personal presence – the Holy Spirit who is the mediator of revelation, the One through whom the presence of the kingdom of God in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ becomes manifest.

Vanhoozer rightly corrects a ‘cultural-linguistic’ reading of Acts 8 that suggests it is *Philip’s use* of Isaiah 53 (i.e. church practice), rather than *God’s use*, of Isaiah 53 within the canonical context (divine communicative action) that is determinative. Philip’s practice is the extension of Jesus’ practice (e.g. in Luke 24). This canonical-linguistic theology powerfully unites dogmatic and hermeneutical concerns. I agree it “is the *text*, read in a certain canonical way and in a canonical context, that occasions understanding”<sup>129</sup>. But this communicative *dynamic* cannot define/circumscribe the personal presence of God by the Holy Spirit who mediates the divine saving action of God through and in Jesus Christ. Philip’s practice is participation in the divine communicative action of the canon, and the words of Scripture are essential to the Ethiopian’s conversion; Scripture is the authoritative norm of Philip’s practice and the sole rationality of the proclamation of the gospel.<sup>130</sup> However, we must also say that this conversion takes place because of God’s *personal presence* through the Spirit, indwelling his people, the church, of whom Philip is one. The significance of Philip is not only in terms of practice (Philip’s faithful practice is canonical – participation in what God is saying-doing through these words) but to the indispensability of Philip as a witness, one anointed by the Holy Spirit. This cannot be a simply linguistic reference – it is a reference to God’s indwelling personal presence by his Spirit indwelling his

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<sup>129</sup> DD 118

<sup>130</sup> This would be true even if Scripture wasn’t to hand in any proclamation and reception of the gospel.

people that he is gathering. The Scripture and the canonical practice of Philip mediate the truth of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. What I am highlighting is the prevenient aspect of this moment: the personal presence of God by his Spirit, indwelling Philip as a member of the Church, the ‘body of Christ’, the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ and the ‘household of God’ (to use some of the Pauline descriptions). I shall return below (C.4) to the significance of the church as ‘manifest public’ and how it relates to this point.

### **Identity**

For Vanhoozer, the nature of Christian practice as canonical is integral to the Scripture-tradition relation. His treatment of tradition is thoroughly missiological: “Christian identity *is* Christian mission, and hence transmission.”<sup>131</sup> It is the *translatability* of the Gospel into new cultures, across continents and centuries, which is indicative of its ultimate truth, the universal reality of the Incarnation and the gift of redemption in Jesus Christ. This oneness in difference is already present within the canon of Scripture itself: “Truth is one, but its unity is pluriform.”<sup>132</sup> Vanhoozer rightly describes this reality in pneumatological terms – he speaks of the ‘Pentecostal plurality’<sup>133</sup> of Scripture, and of tradition as canonical performance. But my concern centres upon the way Vanhoozer establishes canonical-linguistic identity by bringing pneumatology together with Ricoeur’s narrative conceptuality of the *ipse*-identity of self.<sup>134</sup> The “canonical-linguistic claim” is that “church tradition and the development of doctrine are examples of *ipse*-identity,” because “the constancy of tradition lies in its being the work of the self-constant Spirit who keeps his “Word”.”<sup>135</sup> Further, the sense of keeping God’s

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<sup>131</sup> DD 129

<sup>132</sup> DD 290

<sup>133</sup> IM 415f.

<sup>134</sup> “*Idem*-identity is *sameness*, best construed in terms of a ‘what’ (e.g., unchanging substance) rather than a ‘who’”, a “‘hard identity,’ where ‘hard’ connotes immutability”. *Iipse*-identity is the “‘soft’ identity of a self. This kind of sameness partakes more of *narrative* than of numeric identity.” (DD 127) “Ricoeur acknowledges two kinds of permanence through time that are appropriate to persons (and, as we shall see, to doctrines as well). The first is ‘character’: ‘the set of lasting dispositions by which a person is recognized.’ As Ricoeur acknowledges, *idem* and *ipse* never come closer to converging than in the notion of character: ‘Character is truly the ‘what’ of the ‘who’.’... Ricoeur posits a second aspect of *ipse*-identity, another model of permanence through time, besides that of character: ‘It is that of keeping one’s word in faithfulness to the word that has been given.’ The continuity of character is one thing, the constancy of a reliable self another.”(DD 127-128)

<sup>135</sup> DD 128 and n44

Word “is entirely, and especially, compatible with the covenant pattern of promise and fulfilment that characterizes the relation of the Old Testament and New Testament, and hence the unity of the canon.”<sup>136</sup> Thus, Vanhoozer is relating the Ricoeurian concept of personal identity with textual interpretation,<sup>137</sup> and doing so based on the Spirit being the *ipse*-identity of canonicity.<sup>138</sup> The *ipse*-identity conceptuality gives the divine communicative action of Scripture a ‘self-like’ quality that which implies a kind of ‘immediacy’ because, although Vanhoozer identifies this identity with the Spirit, it is a narrative identity linked to the form of the text. This has implications for our understanding of the Spirit in relation to Christian identity, and to the nature of divine identity. Firstly, Christian identity.

Canonical-linguistic theology shapes Christian identity in new situations by looking to the canon as both catalyst and criterion for “creative fidelity” and “ruled spontaneity.” *The directions drawn by Scripture’s normative specification of the theo-drama enable the church to improvise, as it were, with a script.*<sup>139</sup>

I agree Scripture is the norm of church practice and understanding, but in Vanhoozer’s triune communicative action model the way the Spirit gifts Christian identity is rationalised – a matter of participation in the rationality (divine communicative action) of the script. The gift of the Spirit appears to be only perlocutionary and not also prevenient.<sup>140</sup>

Then, divine identity. Vanhoozer makes a strong argument for the canonical-linguistic approach to identity by relating the concept of ‘translation’ to both the Incarnation and Scripture. In this, he offers an account of theism similar to Robert Jenson’s narrative Trinitarian theology. He compares the *ipse*-identity model to Jenson’s theology, arguing that “God’s identity is a function not merely of the aseity of an indeterminate entity but of the ipseity of a self” – the story of God’s relations show who God always was, is and will be. He argues this does not undermine divine aseity, or suggest that God ‘acquires’ an identity as history develops.<sup>141</sup> However, I think Francesca Murphy’s

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<sup>136</sup> DD 128

<sup>137</sup> DD 127n38

<sup>138</sup> DD 350

<sup>139</sup> DD 129

<sup>140</sup> “The canon’s power is the power of truth, which in turn is a matter of word (the gospel), imagination, and persuasion (the Spirit).”(DD 144)

<sup>141</sup> FT 66&n92

concern applies to Vanhoozer's theodramatic use of Ricoeur's *ipse*-identity conceptuality:

Many Christians have come to consider that the fullest and most immediate way of speaking about the Triune mystery is, as a brilliant young theologian [David Cunningham] puts it, 'to tell the story of God'. Narrative theologians are those who do so methodically and systematically. This seems to entail that God *is* a story. Why should describing the relations between God and humanity as 'story' implicate one in *equating* God with a story? It does so because the driving force of narrative theology, the method itself, slides into the place of content or subject matter.<sup>142</sup>

She argues that 'story Barthianism' and 'grammatical Thomism' are readings of Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas in which method becomes the content of their theology,<sup>143</sup> and that they converge paradigmatically in Robert Jenson's 'story Thomism'.<sup>144</sup>

Vanhoozer's basic point – that the one Spirit makes the one Lord Jesus Christ known through the different voices of Scripture and the diverse contextualisations of the gospel in the apostolic Church across ages and cultures – is excellent. Further, the continuity between the 'Pentecostal plenitude' of Scripture itself and this contextualisation of the gospel in mission is profoundly important – regarding both the nature of truth and the recognition that the gospel is the 'prisoner' and 'liberator' of culture (to use Andrew Wall's terms). However, we need a fully trinitarian account of mediation (of the kind offered by Gunton) to describe this significant pneumatological point. I think Vanhoozer's account risks confusing the potentiality of literary form in his triune communicative action model with the personal relation given by the presence of God by his Spirit. We see this in his use of 'Spirit Christology' to secure the canonical-linguistic approach.

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<sup>142</sup> Francesca Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: OUP, 2007) 1

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6

<sup>144</sup> "Exegetes of the contents of Barth's theology are unlikely to agree on whether Jenson's 'storification' of the Triune God is built upon the *Church Dogmatics*, or, conversely 'departs from Barth on one crucial issue, God's being in Time'[C. Wells]"(*Ibid.*, 22-23) Murphy argues that Jenson 'cinematizes' the Trinity, and that what is at stake "is an essentialist or conceptualist idea of the three Persons, rather than an excessively historical perspective."(*Ibid.*)

## **C. Assessment of the Pneumatological Dimension of Vanhoozer's Thesis**

### **C.1. Pneumatology and the linguistic turn to practice**

Pneumatology has become the focus for some theologians working to appropriate the linguistic turn to practice whilst accepting the critique that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach risks idealising human agency and making the truth of the gospel a human rather than divine reference.

Reinhard Hütter's work suggests that Lindbeck's 'postliberal' theology was viable but lacked a sufficient pneumatology to explain how ecclesial practice can be a reference to divine agency.<sup>145</sup> For Hütter, the core practices of the church

must ultimately be interpreted with the aid of the concept of 'enhyposstasis,' a concept borrowed from Christology and applied analogously here. That is, they subsist enhyposstatically in the Spirit. Whereas person and work are certainly to be distinguished in the case of human beings, precisely the opposite is the case with regard to the person and work of the Spirit. The salvific-economic mission of the Spirit cannot be distinguished from the trinitarian being of the Spirit. The *poiemata* of the Spirit, however, the core church practices, inhere in the salvific-economic mission of the Spirit.<sup>146</sup>

Reinhard Hütter is an important conversation partner for Vanhoozer. I hope to show how both make important points, and also highlight a problem their approaches share. Vanhoozer and Hütter both value the linguistic turn to practice, and also the core concerns of Karl Barth's theology while seeking to go beyond his dialectical approach. But Vanhoozer rightly questions Hütter's identification of church practice with the work of the Spirit in regard to normativity: How do we identify the Spirit's presence and action unless we have a firm hold upon the authority and normativity of Scripture?<sup>147</sup> This firm distinction between the canonical-linguistic and the cultural-linguistic approach (even under Hütter's profound pneumatological reconception) is pivotal to

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<sup>145</sup> R. Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) and *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Hütter is central to an emerging 'catholic and evangelical' approach laid out in J. Buckley and D. Yeago eds. *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) 17.

<sup>146</sup> Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things*, 133, 248-250n135.

<sup>147</sup> DD 98-99

Vanhoozer's thesis,<sup>148</sup> defining his distinction between 'Performance I' and 'Performance II' interpretation. However, Hütter represents the closest possible approach on the other side of the divide Vanhoozer makes.

This is because Hütter and Vanhoozer are both making similar moves pneumatologically: that of conceiving practice (ecclesial or canonical respectively) as divine, 'Spirited practice'. What separates them is that, for Vanhoozer, ecclesial practice is Spirited practice when it is canonical practice.<sup>149</sup> For Vanhoozer, the *sola scriptura* principle brings the work of the Spirit and church practice together. To affirm the practice of *sola scriptura* is to affirm "the ministry of the Spirit 'as the primary Actor in the church's *actus tradendi*, the living transmission and acceptance of the apostolic message in the body of Christ.'"<sup>150</sup> His concern with Hütter is that hermeneutics structured by ecclesial practice, directly identified with the Holy Spirit, leads to a hermeneutics of 'pneumatic reception'. He quotes Frederick Bauerschmidt's critique of John Milbank's theology to make this point:

The Spirit is the supplement at the origin that makes it impossible to conceive of the Word as possessed of a stable, given meaning...This leads Milbank to speak of a relationship of 'retroactive causality,' in which the Spirit-enabled response of the church is *constitutive* of the Word/Son.<sup>151</sup>

To reinforce the argument and show how his approach avoids this problem, Vanhoozer places the point in terms of his communicative act understanding:

Perlocutions – the *effects* we produce in our hearers by saying something – necessarily follow from illocutions...One cannot define illocutions – what a speaker does in saying something – in terms of the effect produced upon the hearer or reader. There is no place for retroactive causality in the analysis of speech-acts. A promise is a promise whether or not anyone recognises it as such...Consequently, the response of faith enabled by the Spirit is constitutive neither of the Son nor of the Scriptures. It is important not to collapse the act of authoring (*logos*) into the church's act of reception (*pathos*).<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> DD 190-191.

<sup>149</sup> Vanhoozer recognises that Hütter speaks of the normativity of the gospel proclaimed and taught, but argues that Hütter does not accord supremacy to the canon.(DD 191)

<sup>150</sup> DD 189(Quoting D.H.Williams)

<sup>151</sup> F. Bauerschmidt, 'The Word Made Speculative? John Milbank's Christological Poetics', *Modern Theology* 15(1999):417-32.(cited DD 192)

<sup>152</sup> DD 192-193

This brings Christology together with Vanhoozer's normativity point. "*Jesus is both the material and the formal principle of the canon: its substance and its hermeneutic.*"<sup>153</sup> Faithful church practice is fitting canonical practice, the practice of *sola Scriptura*. The canon is "*Christ's own Spirit-borne commissioned testimony to himself.*"<sup>154</sup> This Christological-canonical model, central to Vanhoozer's thesis in *The Drama of Doctrine*, is key to what I am exploring in this chapter. Whilst Vanhoozer rightly conveys the normativity of Scripture in Christological terms, I think the structure of this account simply identifies the Spirit with canonical practice, and depends upon a 'Spirit Christology', establishing the theological relation between the canonical-linguistic turn to practice and pneumatology, that is problematic.

Vanhoozer is right to critique the ecclesial hermeneutics of 'pneumatic reception' and 'retroactive causality'. The Holy Spirit points us to Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. But I agree with Gunton that we need a fully trinitarian account of mediation and do not believe the Spirit should be identified primarily as the efficacy of the subjective appropriation of the Word. Whilst agreeing with Vanhoozer's critique of Hütter's insufficient attention to the way Scripture norms Church practice, I think Hütter's emphasis upon the Church as distinctive 'public' points to a weak aspect Vanhoozer's thesis. Hütter writes:

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit's activity stands for this overwhelming and transforming 'publicity' of God's mighty deeds, the effective communication of the gospel. This event...creates and characterises the church as a public in its own right. Yet while the public nature of the church and the Holy Spirit's publicity are intricately interrelated, they are not identical. The church as public is constituted by the Holy Spirit in and through the mediating forms, doctrine and the core practices. It is through these that the church participates in the Holy Spirit's publicity.<sup>155</sup>

Whilst Vanhoozer's work points to a valid concern with Hütter's work regarding norms, this emphasis of Hütter's regarding the church as 'public' given by God's presence by his Spirit is lacking in Vanhoozer's account. I think *both* Scripture as 'authoritative

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<sup>153</sup> DD 195

<sup>154</sup> DD 194

<sup>155</sup> R. Hütter, *Bound to be Free* 39. Although Hütter rejects a simple identification of the Spirit with ecclesial practice – and thus church doctrine and practice do not 'manage' the Spirit (39,23 In67) – he is prepared to speak of the core practices of the church as 'enhypositized' in the Spirit.

norm' (Vanhoozer's priority) and Church as 'manifest public' (Hütter's priority) are necessary. These emphases only compete if the person of God's Spirit is basically identified with/by practice (as in Vanhoozer's canonical practice and Hütter's ecclesial practice). This creates a kind of 'immediacy' in that the personal presence of God by his Spirit is simply known in canonical/ecclesial practice. For Hütter, because knowing God through church practice is 'immediate' in this sense – his pneumatology describes the core church practices as enhypostatic – the importance of Scripture as *authoritative norm* is undermined. For Vanhoozer, because knowing God through canonical practice is also 'immediate' in this sense – the Spirit is the efficacy of divine communicative action in Christ through Scripture – the importance of the Church as *manifest public* (i.e. the visible gathering of God by the gift of God's personal presence by his Spirit) is undermined. Comparing Vanhoozer and Hütter reflects the problems of each other's theology because they are both trying roll soteriology and epistemological concerns together, and using pneumatology to retain the divine authority and identity of the linguistic turn to practice. If we maintain the distinction that Gunton makes, the knowledge of God through practice (canonical and ecclesial) is seen as 'second-order' and this actually *delimits* the significance of 'these words' and 'this community'. The Holy Spirit creates knowledge of God through Jesus Christ in the particular words of Scripture and the particular gathering of the God's people, the Church. To describe this we need a fully trinitarian theology. I shall discuss next why Vanhoozer's particular use of Spirit Christology may not enable this.

## **C.2. Vanhoozer's use of Spirit Christology**

We have seen that by integrating authorial discourse and performance interpretation, Vanhoozer secures the divine authority of Scripture and its normativity to Christian faith and practice; and this involves describing divine communicative action in terms of the triunity of God who creates and redeems us through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer's warrant for linking the divine illocutionary action of Scripture to God's incarnate action in Jesus Christ, and thus speaking of canonical practice as divine performance, depends on an ongoing relation of Jesus Christ to the canon.

Jesus is not simply the point of origin of a new practice that continues beyond and without him. On the contrary: the person and practices of Jesus, together with his words, are what norm Christian faith.<sup>156</sup>

The point Vanhoozer makes is that its *Jesus*' understanding of Scripture rather than the church's that makes it authoritative.<sup>157</sup> In theo-dramatic terms the "canonical script" is "the transcript of what God has done in Christ" which "becomes, in turn, the 'script' for what God is now doing in the church."<sup>158</sup> The Spirit is Christ's presence enabling this scripted participation.

The Son "performs" what God the Father scripted, making God known in human form. The Son is also at the center of the Spirit's performance in Scripture, for the Spirit's work is to minister Christ...The Spirit is the active presence of Christ, enabling and empowering performances that participate in the prior performance of the Word made flesh.<sup>159</sup>

Vanhoozer affirms Vladimir Lossky's belief that the church is founded upon a twofold economy of Christ and the Holy Spirit,<sup>160</sup> and he pre-empts the critique that he is subordinating the Spirit to the Word by referring to 'Spirit Christology'. He cites Heribert Mühlen's account of the work of the Spirit in the church as the continuation of the salvation-historical anointing of Jesus with the Spirit,<sup>161</sup> to argue that "from the perspective of such Spirit Christology, we must say not only that Jesus enables the Spirit's coming but that the Spirit enabled Jesus to be who he was and to do what he did."<sup>162</sup> This point seems good. Yet there follows an odd logic at a crucial point in Vanhoozer's thesis: in defending his 'Spirit Christology' against the critique that it subordinates the Spirit,<sup>163</sup> Vanhoozer describes a temporal juxtaposition between the Spirit's ministry of Christ (post-Pentecost) and the Spirit's ministry to Jesus prior to his resurrection. Arguably this risks implying the Trinitarian relations were different before and after Jesus' ascension.

The Spirit ministered to the incarnate Son; the Spirit ministers the risen Word. The riddle of the New Testament is not simply a matter of the proclaimer becoming the proclaimed, as Bultmann

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<sup>156</sup> DD 193

<sup>157</sup> DD 195

<sup>158</sup> DD 189

<sup>159</sup> DD 189. There is a hint in this quote that "what God the Father scripted" defines the Trinity in a way that perhaps develops a 'Barthian' doctrine of election in more radical way, linking it to Scripture.

<sup>160</sup> DD 187

<sup>161</sup> DD 194.

<sup>162</sup> DD 194

<sup>163</sup> A strong reading of the *Filioque* clause is of structural importance to Vanhoozer's theology, as I'll discuss in chapter 3.

thought. It is rather a matter of *how the one ministered to by the Spirit during his earthly ministry becomes, in his exalted state, the one whom the Spirit ministers*. It is the same Jesus who is conceived by and anointed with the Spirit who also sends the Spirit to the church after the resurrection.<sup>164</sup>

To interpret the New Testament witness in this way raises some complex trinitarian questions, and leads as we will see to a Spirit Christology of the kind critiqued by Gordon Fee – confusing (post-Pentecost) the person and presence of the Spirit with the presence of the risen Christ.<sup>165</sup> But it allows Vanhoozer to describe the Spirit’s ministry of the risen Word to the church in terms of the prophetic office of Jesus as Messiah:

Jesus’ conception by the Spirit equips him for his messianic task; the later anointing of Jesus by the Spirit is a public confirmation of this fact... Calvin views Jesus’ saving activity in terms of the three-fold office of prophet, priest and king. It is the prophetic office that is of special interest here. According to Calvin, Christ is anointed prophet by the Spirit in order to preach and teach the gospel: ‘When [the Messiah] comes, he will proclaim all things to us’ (John 4:25).<sup>166</sup>

Vanhoozer thus uses Spirit Christology to describe the canon as Christ’s own Spirit-borne commissioned testimony to himself: Jesus is the material and formal principle of the canon – its substance and its hermeneutic.<sup>167</sup>

A Christocentric approach to theology is vital insofar as it refers to there being one economy of salvation, centred on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Arguably, however, Vanhoozer’s ‘Spirit Christology’ conflates the presence of the Risen Christ with the Holy Spirit. Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic model seems to require this conflation in order that the Spirit is the efficacy of Scripture – the agent of the ‘meaning potential’ of the text. This seems a reduction of the Spirit as God’s personal presence – the One who mediates revelation, involving indispensably the communicative action of Scripture (and thereby not agent of Performance II

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<sup>164</sup> DD 194

<sup>165</sup> Tom Smail argues from the biblical witness for an ecumenical approach to the *Filioque* clause involving “a mutual interdependence of Spirit and Son on each other”. He argues the relationship of Son and Spirit “is better described in terms of coordination than of subordination”; the Spirit “proceeds from the Father *through the Son*” and the Son “is eternally begotten of the Father *through the Spirit*” (‘The Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity’, in C.R.Seitz ed., *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids:Brazos,2001) 164-165). I think Vanhoozer’s temporal juxtaposition goes further than this in order to support his Spirit Christology and structural use of the *Filioque* clause.

<sup>166</sup> DD 194

<sup>167</sup> DD 194-195

interpretation)<sup>168</sup>. Fee argues that Paul's understanding of the Holy Spirit as God's personal presence problematises 'Spirit Christology', yet Vanhoozer seems to suggest such a Spirit Christology is Pauline:

Perhaps the key pneumatological issue concerns the extent to which the Spirit is his own person. ... Paul sees the Spirit as the earthly presence of the exalted Lord. In one sense, then, the Holy Spirit is not his own person... The Spirit *is* his own person because he is a fully divine agent who makes an essential contribution to God's work. Calvin suggests the following division of Trinitarian labor: the Father is the source of all action; the Son is the wisdom of God, arranging all action wisely; the Spirit is the power, that is, the source of the *efficacy* of this action. The Spirit is the 'hand of God' who leads believers to the truth, enables believers to walk the way, and bestows on believers the gift of life.<sup>169</sup>

Arguably, Calvin's description of the Spirit as the giver of life is more than the limited Barthian concept of the efficacy of the Son's action, which Vanhoozer's triune communicative action model adopts. In any event, this account suggests not only that our discernment of the Spirit is regulated by Scripture (which is true) but also that the divine person of the Spirit is regulated by Scripture.

The Spirit's role is to not go beyond Scripture... The Spirit is the efficacy of canonical discourse, the indispensable means through which the triune communicative action achieves its goal in the lives of believers: right relatedness to God. ... *The canon is the Spirit's chosen means to mediate the covenant and foster the communion that obtains between Christ and the church.* ... The Spirit's special role is to make Christ's communicative action – in particular, the commissioned canonical testimony of the apostles – efficacious, transforming communication into a species of communion.<sup>170</sup>

The problem (with parallels to Gunton's argument) is that describing communication as a species of communion risks making communion a form of communication – not necessarily, but because Vanhoozer describes communicative action in triune terms. The identification of communication and communion seems to be embedded in Vanhoozer's Spirit Christology. He describes the Spirit as

mediating the personal presence of Christ through the words that testify to him to bring about union with Christ. The Spirit thus brings about a mutual indwelling of canonical script and

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<sup>168</sup> Vanhoozer rightly critiques 'Performance II interpretation' that gives primary authority to the practice of the ecclesial community, even if pneumatologically conceived.

<sup>169</sup> DD 197-198

<sup>170</sup> DD 199

performing community, incorporating us not only into the drama of redemption but into the actor who stands at its very heart.<sup>171</sup>

I agree the Spirit makes Christ known through the Scriptures and is the giver of life through the gift of communion. But I disagree with the way that divine communicative action and divine presence (the indwelling personal presence of God by his Spirit) seem to be identified. The personal presence of the Holy Spirit – who identifies us with Christ our Lord and Saviour (so that we can know God as Father) and gives us a life that indeed cannot be heard about or known/experienced without God’s written Word – seems to become ‘textual-personal’. Vanhoozer’s Spirit Christology underwrites this. It seems to be the outcome of rightly making the semantic mediation of Scripture essential to salvation but assuming that this can be correlated with Barth’s Trinitarian structuring of revelation (using the triad of locution, illocution and perlocution such that the Spirit is the efficacy of triune communicative action). Without a strong sense of God’s personal presence by the Holy Spirit, Vanhoozer’s dramatic model risks confusing God’s presence and God’s communication within the conceptuality of canon. Next, I argue that Vanhoozer utilises hermeneutic philosophy and literary theory profoundly, but in a way that sustains this deficit and issue.

### **C.3. The ‘commingling of language and life’: The significance of Spirit Christology to Vanhoozer’s hermeneutic theology, drawing upon the work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer**

Jesus said, “It is written man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach excellently describes how God communicates through the written Word and how we live through the written Word. The question is the degree to which semantics and ontology are being identified when we describe the Bible (rightly) as God’s living Word in relation to Christ, the divine Logos. How we relate divine communicate action to the Triune economy is therefore key, and I think much depends on the theological significance of the Holy Spirit as God’s *personal presence*. For this, we need the biblical account of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus and in the New Testament church,

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<sup>171</sup> DD 210

fulfilling the Old Testament promises. For Vanhoozer, God’s life giving presence – the Spirit of Christ – comes to us primarily in and through the *communicative form* of the written Word. He agrees that Christians learn of God by participating in the Christian community, but he rightly makes the point that we should not confuse the ecclesial ‘logic of discovery’ and the canonical ‘logic of justification.’<sup>172</sup> This is a good critique of the cultural-linguistic, but is his canonical-linguistic in danger of doing something similar in integrating communication and the divine-human relation (in creation and salvation)?

Vanhoozer writes, “God’s speech, and God’s speech only, is *literally* creative and vivifying: God spoke, and there were forms of life”<sup>173</sup>. He refers to Mikhail Bakhtin to speak of a “commingling language and life”.<sup>174</sup> This perhaps confuses, within a communicative dynamic, the *gift* of life (creation, and new creation, ‘ex nihilo’) and living of life (the rationality of creation and new creation). The linguistic turn is hugely significant in linking rationality and practice. But I think this should not necessitate the personal relation between God and humanity in Christ, mediated by the Spirit – the gift of our being created and redeemed by God, in and through Christ – being subsumed into a narrative identity. Vanhoozer quotes David Yeago, “Christianity came into the world not as an ‘experience’ only subsequently ‘expressed’ in textual monuments but precisely as a *new* textuality.”<sup>175</sup> His critique of ‘experience *simpliciter*’ is important, however, the Pentecostal reality of God’s *personal presence* by his Spirit should lead us to question describing Christianity ‘coming into the world’ precisely as ‘textuality’. Vanhoozer’s characterisation of the Spirit’s *creative* ministry as “first and foremost” ‘canonical’, using a ‘Spirit Christology’ framework, is my key concern. Vanhoozer writes,

[T]he Spirit is the literary executor, as it were, of the word of Jesus Christ. [footnote:] This “of” is both objective and subjective: it is ultimately *Jesus’* word, and it is also the word *about* Jesus. As such, the Spirit is the word’s empowering presence.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> DD 211

<sup>173</sup> DD 220 (emphasis added)

<sup>174</sup> DD 215. I’ll discuss Vanhoozer’s use of Bakhtin in the next chapter.

<sup>175</sup> D. Yeago, ‘The Bible’ in Buckley and Yeago eds., *Knowing the Triune God*, 59n14.(cited DD 226)

<sup>176</sup> DD 228&n.58

Holy Scripture is the means through which the Spirit creates and sustains a covenant community, the medium through which the Spirit impresses Christ upon us....

Hütter rightly reminds us that it is the Spirit's *poiesis*, or creative work, that is primary; the church's activity is passive or secondary by comparison. Whereas Hütter locates the Spirit's *poiesis* primarily in the church, however, the present proposal locates the Spirit's creative work first and foremost in the communicative practices of the canon.<sup>177</sup>

Vanhoozer's critique of Hütter regarding normativity is good. But he seems to imply we can identify the Spirit's creative work in primarily linguistic (communicative practice) terms. Surely, the "Spirit's creative work" is "first and foremost" that of mediating the Father's gift of life through the incarnate Son, Christ crucified and risen? Without attention to this prevenience, the "communicative practices of the canon" (which are indeed inspired by the Holy Spirit), construe the personal relation between God and humanity through Christ in primarily linguistic terms, and rationalise the personal presence of the Spirit. The reality of God's personal presence by his Spirit indwelling the church – the fully trinitarian reality of mediation – is vital not only to our description of God's triunity, but also to our understanding of human identity. It is because of this mediation of the Spirit that Paul can speak of his identity as one with Christ and yet still say 'I'. (The 'I' of Gal. 2:20 is not a self-positing subjectivity but neither is it simply a narrative self.)

Vanhoozer's engagement with Gadamer and Ricoeur is integral to these issues. He recognises that Gadamer's recovery to post-enlightenment philosophy of the importance of tradition could support the emergence of ecclesiology as 'first theology'. However, he sees Gadamer's hermeneutics as uniquely true of the Bible (I shall discuss later how he argues this has implications for general hermeneutics).

The Bible is not like other texts; it has been commissioned by Jesus and prompted by the Spirit. It is part and parcel of God's communicative action that both summons and governs the church....To put it in terms of hermeneutical theory (and to paraphrase Gadamer), the church "suffers" the Spirit-enabled historical effects of the word.<sup>178</sup>

Vanhoozer integrates Gadamer's fusion of text and history, justified in pneumatological terms, with Ricoeur's narrative concept of *ipse*-identity.

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<sup>177</sup> DD 229

<sup>178</sup> DD 202

We are now in a position to identify the central character in the narrative of Christian tradition. It is, of course, the Holy Spirit, understood in terms of his *ipse-identity*: *the Spirit is the one who keeps his, which is to say Christ's word*. Better: the Spirit is the one who keeps the Word who is Christ, the one who keeps ministering that Word to us. Who, then, is the Spirit? Not some ambiguous Spirit in reception [a reference to John Thiel's work] but rather the Spirit who enables the church's reception of the word written.<sup>179</sup>

The Spirit makes known Jesus Christ using the Scriptures, but is this to say with Vanhoozer that the church is therefore “a Spirit-induced ‘effect of the text’?”<sup>180</sup> This seems to be saying something more than that Scripture is normative of the practice of the church in the power of the Spirit.

*The church in the power of the Spirit is nothing less than the efficacy of the canonical word, rightly understood and rightly appropriated.* The Spirit ministers the word that communicates Christ, the word that relates us to Christ, the word that enables communion with Christ. But the Spirit is only the assistant professor. The real teacher of the church is Jesus Christ: “[L]isten to him” (Matt. 17:5).<sup>181</sup>

I am not persuaded that the identity of Scripture as God's written Word, which I wholeheartedly affirm (and welcome the usefulness of speech-act theory in describing), requires identifying communion and communication. Doing so results in ontological problems akin to those raised by Francesca Murphy in relation to describing a narrative identity of the Triune God. Our relation to God is in Christ through whom we are created and redeemed, but without a fully trinitarian account, such that the Spirit is not simply the ‘effectiveness’ of the canonical word but the Lord the giver of life, the infinite qualitative distinction between Creator and creation is undermined.

Describing the “turn to performance” as a “paradigm revolution,” Vanhoozer writes:

Just as hermeneutics has displaced epistemology by calling attention to the importance of the knower's finite situatedness, so ‘performance’ is said to supplant hermeneutics by calling attention to the ways in which written texts underdetermine interpretation/performance.<sup>182</sup>

Whilst not allowing hermeneutics to be supplanted by ‘our’ performance in a ‘Performance II’ manner, Vanhoozer accepts the progression in his ‘Performance I’

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<sup>179</sup> DD 202

<sup>180</sup> This seems less than fully Trinitarian: “Neither the church nor the Spirit can improve upon what God accomplished in Jesus Christ.”(DD 201) Was not the Spirit involved in what God accomplished once and for all in Jesus Christ, even as the Spirit makes that reality eschatologically manifest?

<sup>181</sup> DD 208

<sup>182</sup> DD 159&n.37

model, because the canon is identified with the practice of Jesus, made present by the Spirit, the 'Executor of the Word'. A recognition of the Holy Spirit as God's personal presence should make us cautious about the progression, even though the divine terms in which Vanhoozer expresses it avoid the anthropocentric problems of cultural-linguistic theology. If knowing, interpreting and acting coalesce in the way Vanhoozer allows, I think this risks a 'communicative actualism'. Relating to God seems more like being caught up in a process of communicative action than a personal relationship, which surely the Incarnation held out to us and Pentecost gives us a foretaste of, while we await the day when we will see and know God "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12). The Scriptures are our grammar for knowing, interpreting, and acting, but that should not mean the reality of our personal relation to God is circumscribed by communicative act potential. The pure gift of being a creature and a son of God (justified by faith; the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit) is a personal divine-human relation that gifts rationality, rather than being identified with/by it. Vanhoozer's use of Spirit Christology and Ricoeur's narrative identity appear to allow God's 'sheer being' and the pure gift of our contingent being to be linguistically conditioned.

For Vanhoozer, the presence of God by his Spirit is the efficacy of God's communicative action through the Son, Jesus Christ. He rightly centres theology upon the person and act of Jesus Christ for our salvation, the rationality of which is given by the canon of Scripture. However, to recognise the Spirit as God's personal presence in salvation and creation is to see the Spirit as *the mediator of the relation to God in Christ upon which communication depends*, as well as the one in whom we respond to that communication (perlocution). This high pneumatology does not compete with a high Christology, or with the normative authority of Scripture as a Christological axiom. It is consistent with the ministry of the Spirit in the life of Jesus. *Jesus* is our Saviour; the Spirit also rests upon *Jesus* at his baptism. It is *Jesus* who acts in the power of the Spirit. The personal presence of God by his Spirit does not 'supplement' Jesus' ministry and who He is from his conception in the power of the same Spirit. But it is in the presence of the person of the Spirit resting upon the person of Jesus, the Son of God,

that the eschatological promise/hope for humanity is made manifest.<sup>183</sup> This fulfilment is the action of *Jesus* in obedience to the Father. The Spirit does not supplement this; the ‘performance’ and ‘rationality’ belong to Jesus (my agreement with Vanhoozer.) But the personal presence of God by his Spirit (Jesus is the ‘Anointed One’) is vital. The Holy Spirit is the Creator Spirit. Creation is made and redeemed (“new creation”, 2 Cor. 5:17) by the Father through the Son in the presence of the Spirit, “the Lord, the Giver of Life”. Without the Spirit, creation would cease to be (Job 34:14-15). By becoming incarnate God dwelt among us in the Person of the Son, made flesh in the power of the Spirit, *and anointed by the Spirit*. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we live *in and through the Son in the personal presence of God by his Spirit*.

#### **C.4. The Holy Spirit as Person: Why the New Testament emphasis upon the Holy Spirit as God’s *personal presence* is so important to theology**

I have argued that fully trinitarian theology cannot be structured in an altogether linguistic manner, which stems in Vanhoozer’s account from describing divine-human communion and communication co-inherently. We can now return to the point that this raised concerning the existence (not practice) of the church as ‘manifest public’ – the visible and particular people gathered by God through the gift of the Spirit indwelling them at Pentecost. Lesslie Newbigin writes:

The Church...first of all exists as a visible fact called into being by the Lord Himself, and our understanding of that fact is subsequent and secondary. This actual visible community, a company of men and women with ascertainable names and addresses, is the Church of God. ... It derives its character not from its membership but from its Head...It is God’s gathering.... It is God’s Church and its whole character derives from that fact. The moment you begin to think of it as a thing in itself, you go astray. The God whose gathering it is may never, even for temporary purposes of thought or argument, be excluded from the picture. But at the same time it is a real gathering. God is really working. Therefore there is a real congregation. It is these people here whom He has gathered.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> In this regard there has been recent interest in Syriac sources. e.g., Killian McDonnell, *The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as Universal Touch and Goal* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003).

<sup>184</sup> Newbigin, *Household of God*, 27-28

In distinguishing canonical-linguistic from cultural-linguistic theology, Vanhoozer is making a very similar dogmatic point – our focus is *God's* practice: the canonical-linguistic is an account of divine performance (theo-drama) in which we participate in the action of Christ by his Spirit, and the divine communicative action of Scripture is essential to that participation. However, Newbigin highlights an aspect that Vanhoozer is weak on: the significance of the visible, public, fact of the church; its *existence*, which is prevenient to its practice. This existence is an act of God – it is God's gathering through and in the person and action of Jesus Christ. Vanhoozer's thesis certainly accords with this. But if this act is a creative and soteriological act that is of a prior order to our understanding – i.e. it is that which makes understanding possible – it cannot be structured by the rationality/practice of communicative action. Considering Reinhard Hütter's pneumatological description of the church as 'public', helps clarify my argument here.

Hütter argues that the dynamics of advanced modernity (postmodernity) risk construing faith as private gnosis or experience made 'relevant' through subject-related activities, or, alternatively, increasingly objectified forms of faith such as fundamentalist biblicism or traditionalist ecclesiasticalism. In both alternatives "the church as a genuine 'public' is eclipsed."<sup>185</sup> In seeking to move "Beyond Objectivism and Subjectivism," Hütter refers to the Peterson-Barth exchange.

While Peterson seems to look for a clearly identifiable 'object' of theology, Barth insists that this 'object' is inexhaustibly present as subject, agent – as God the Holy Spirit. Theology takes place in the presence of God and is shaped by and in God's presence.<sup>186</sup>

Whilst affirming "Barth's constructive pneumatological response to Peterson," Hütter argues that the questions Peterson posed Protestantism were left unanswered because "Barth failed...to interpret the concrete mediating forms in a way that showed their ecclesiological relevance."

Barth's understanding of theology is pneumatologically sophisticated yet ecclesologically deficient precisely because the relationship between Spirit and church is far from clear.

[footnote] [T]his problem might lie in a pneumatological deficiency inherent in Barth's Trinitarian theology, namely, that the Spirit is only the relationship between the Father and the

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<sup>185</sup> Hütter, *Bound to be Free*, 19

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 25

Son....One result would be that the *Spiritus Creator's* work can never be fully spelled out in relation to the church.<sup>187</sup>

For Hütter, the church as 'public' refers to concrete practices of the church that are the work of the Spirit ('suffered' by the church). This overcomes, he argues, Barth's 'transcendental ecclesiology'.<sup>188</sup> Hütter understands these practices in terms of Luther's marks of the church, noting that Luther saw them as 'holy things' (*Heiltümer*): "Instead of pointing as witnesses to the Holy Spirit's activity, these practices rather embody the Holy Spirit's work." Hütter argues that Luther's 'pneumatological ecclesiology' points an "undialectical and concretely embodied catholicity", and he speaks (with David Yeago and Joseph Mangina) of a "concrete pneumatology" in which "the Spirit has an economy in his own right, to which the church's constitutive practices are central".<sup>189</sup> The result is a proposal in which the Spirit creates church practice and is identified by those practices.

[I]t is God the Holy Spirit at work bringing about God's *oikonomia* who is both origin and objective of the church....The church as public is constituted by the Holy Spirit in and through the mediating forms, doctrine and the core practices. It is through these that the church participates in the Holy Spirit's publicity.<sup>190</sup>

Hütter sees this as an affirmation of Lindbeck's work,<sup>191</sup> giving the pneumatology required to sustain it and rebutting the claim it is sectarian:

[T]he Holy Spirit's publicity goes beyond the church's limits, in that the Spirit creates new things and can act as a critic of the church from both within and without. At the same time, the Holy Spirit's activity clearly becomes public in and through the church's practices of proclamation and witness....The Spirit can do a "new thing," guide the church into all truth (John 16:13), only if there is a binding set of doctrines and practices in the church. Only in such a context can something new be discovered, minds and practices changed, and a new aspect of God's *oikonomia* emerge as a newly binding practice or doctrinal formulation.<sup>192</sup>

This is a powerful model, and might illumine what is lacking in Vanhoozer's account.<sup>193</sup> But Vanhoozer rightly argues that Hütter's epistemology remains circular without

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 28&n21

<sup>188</sup> Hütter (Ibid., 90-1) refers to Nicholas Healy's influential critique, 'The Logic of Karl Barth's Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment, and Proposed Modifications,' *Modern Theology* 10(1994):253-270.

<sup>189</sup> Hütter, *Bound to be Free* 91-92

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 38-39

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 249n53

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 39

<sup>193</sup> Section C.1. above.

Scripture as normative reference.<sup>194</sup> Vanhoozer's concern with normativity is properly built upon the need to ground practice in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Our participation is 'in Christ' through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the 'new thing' that the Spirit brings is not 'supplemental' to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The fact that Hütter speaks of the Spirit having "an economy in his own right," is an issue. Even though Hütter points to a very real pneumatological issue concerning Barth, his correction leads into Trinitarian difficulties of its own. A quote from Joseph Mangina illustrates the point. Mangina (like Hütter) believes the "critiques of Barth on temporality" are "better stated as a *pneumatological* worry...about the role played by the church in the economy of salvation. In brief, is the church merely a human echo or analogy of Christ's completed work, as in Barth? Or is it also somehow the herald of a new activity in which God is engaged between now and the eschaton?"<sup>195</sup> I think Hütter and Mangina make a vital point about Barth's pneumatology but have not paid sufficient attention to the connection between Jesus' baptism and Pentecost as they address this 'pneumatological deficit'. What is 'new' about Pentecost is that it is the beginning of the fulfilment of God's eschatological promise to dwell with his people. God is personally present in a way that Barth's 'transcendental ecclesiology' arguably did not convey. Yet, the Spirit received by the church is the Spirit who rested upon Jesus at his baptism. The church lives in and through Christ and we receive the Spirit of sonship that we may know God as Father (Romans 8). Hütter argues that his understanding of "distinct economy" is supported by Eastern Orthodox understandings of the Spirit.<sup>196</sup> I share Hütter's enthusiasm for an ecumenical Trinitarian theology, however, I wonder if his identification of the core practices of the church as subsisting enhypostatically in the Spirit leads towards this.

I think the basic problem is one of making 'practice' equivalent to 'person' in pneumatology and ecclesiology. Hütter recovers the theological importance of the pneumatological reality of the church as 'public' and 'new creation' (which is arguably insufficiently conveyed by Vanhoozer because of his lack of reference to the Spirit as

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<sup>194</sup> DD 191

<sup>195</sup> J. Mangina, 'Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas' *SJT* 52(1999):282

<sup>196</sup> Hütter, *Bound to be Free*, 235n24.

God's personal presence)<sup>197</sup>. However, for Hütter, the 'publicity of the Spirit' (and thus the church) is entirely a reference to practice.<sup>198</sup> This also (like Vanhoozer's theology) involves a certain kind of 'Spirit Christology'.

[I]t is crucial to differentiate between the gospel (*doctrina evangelii*) and doctrine (*doctrina definita*). The gospel, in its core, is nothing other than Christ's own presence in the promise. Received in faith, Christ thus becomes faith's 'form.' [In this he is following the reading of Luther by the 'Helsinki School'.]<sup>199</sup> Traditionally put, in Christ as the 'form of faith' both the content of faith (*fides quae creditur*) and the act of faith (*fides qua creditur*) are inseparably one. Faith's form, Christ's presence, realizes both together. This is the fundamental *pathos* of Christian existence fully identical with the saving knowledge of God. What is most crucial is that faith's 'form' cannot be isolated from the church's core practices or from doctrine, since such an attempt would mean to abstract Christ's presence in the believer from the Spirit's work, from the Spirit's means of conveying and enacting this qualification that *is* the gospel proclaimed and taught.<sup>200</sup>

Hütter's proposal addresses key questions of divine-human agency in cultural-linguistic theology, doing so with a profound recognition of the importance of the Holy Spirit to these questions, but it is theologically problematic to identify the linguistic turn to practice with the triune economy in the way I think this entails. The biblical witness to the *personal presence* of God by the Holy Spirit – confirming the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour to the glory of God the Father – requires theology that does not locate experience outside narrative, while offering a fully trinitarian ontology that cannot be contained by a linguistic framework. This should renew our attention upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus, and the significance to Pentecost and the life of the church, within our witness of salvation and the trinity of God.

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<sup>197</sup> See section C.1. above.

<sup>198</sup> Hütter (*Ibid.*, 235n23) speaks of the Spirit as a distinct Trinitarian *hypostasis* but, by locating his account in the core practices of the church, Hütter describes the personal presence of God by his Spirit in terms of the "Spirit's work" as if that is not a reduction of what it means to speak of the Spirit as Person (*Suffering Diving Things*, 133).

<sup>199</sup> Hütter, *Bound to be Free*, 236n35&272n5

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 51

#### **D. Trajectories**

The way the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost incorporates us into Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection calls for attention to the significant relation of Jesus' baptism to Jesus' incarnation. Raniero Cantalamessa argues that the 'anointing' of Jesus by the Spirit at his baptism was deemphasised in the Patristic period due to the emphasis upon the 'anointing' of the incarnation (Matt. 1:18-20, Luke 1:35), and a proper concern for securing a high Christology.<sup>201</sup> Jesus is the Christ (the Anointed One), the Son of God, from the moment of his conception, and the anointing of Jesus at his baptism is *not* an ontological event. But the result in Western theology has perhaps been to lose the full significance of Jesus' anointing by the Spirit at his baptism. This more than a revelation of God as Father, Son and Spirit. It certainly is that, but *because* the Holy Spirit makes manifest, mediates, the eschatological reality of Jesus' presence as mediator of salvation sent from the Father. Jesus' public ministry, which includes the proclamation and demonstration of the kingdom of God that comes with his presence, begins after his baptism. Jesus' anointing by the Spirit at his baptism calls for the recognition that the action of Jesus is a participation of fully human and fully divine agency that requires a trinitarian relationality and ontology to describe. The action of Jesus is his (the person of Son of God incarnate fully assuming our humanity) and yet one with the Father, and made manifest by the Spirit.

In *The Father's Spirit of Sonship* Thomas Weinandy draws upon the gospel narratives and New Testament proclamation as a whole to describe a trinitarian ontology.

[T]he Father is Father in that he begets the Son in the Spirit. The Father spirates the Spirit in the same act by which he begets the Son, for the Spirit proceeds from the Father as the fatherly Love in whom or by whom the Son is begotten. The very nature then of the Father's paternity demands that he beget the Son in Love and so the Holy Spirit naturally and necessarily proceeds from him as the Love in whom the Son is begotten.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> R. Cantalamessa, *Come, Creator Spirit: Meditations on the Veni Creator* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003) 152-8

<sup>202</sup> T. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995) 69-71

This liberates trinitarian ontology from Aristotelian epistemology in which something cannot be loved before it is first known.

While in human beings something must first be known before it is loved, in God the knowing and loving are simultaneous – the begetting and spirating come forth from the Father as distinct, but concurrent, acts. The Father does not, even logically, first beget the Son and then love the Son in the Spirit.<sup>203</sup>

Weinandy's thesis is hugely significant in an ecumenical sense, but also points us to the importance of the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the active nature of this personhood.

Each person of the Trinity is *active, including the Holy Spirit*, and so constitutive of the subjectivity of the other two as they mutually subsist as distinct persons in relation to one another. Moreover, it is this personalism that is the fundamental and constitutive basis of our own relationship, we who are persons, with the Trinity.<sup>204</sup>

It is significant, then, whether 'Spirit Christology' can secure the active personhood of the Holy Spirit, given the importance of this aspect of trinitarian ontology to the relation between us, as persons, and the Trinity.<sup>205</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Vanhoozer's integration of authorial discourse interpretation and performance interpretation, secures the divine authority of Scripture within a hermeneutics of performance, but arguably describes our relationship to God within a narrative/semantic ontology. Clearly, the actual words of Scripture are essential to the mediation of our personal relation to God in Jesus Christ. But beginning with the biblical narrative does not require that we adopt a narrative ontology. Vanhoozer's Spirit Christology is vital to his use of Paul Ricoeur's concepts of semantic potentiality and narrative identity of

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 71-72. For Weinandy's discussion of Aristotelian epistemology see 10,72-77,94.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 121(my italics)

<sup>205</sup> Ralph Del Colle argues for "an enhypostasis of human persons in the Spirit" and "also a double enhypostasis of Christ's sacred humanity in the Son and in the Spirit": "We share only in the second because of the mediation of that grace by the first, namely the incarnation of the divine Son as Jesus Christ." ("The Holy Spirit: Presence, Power, Person" *Theological Studies* 62(2001) 337) Notably, Del Colle concludes that in this fully trinitarian Spirit Christology "the Spirit is entirely passive" (339). I wonder if this undermines the personhood of the Spirit. Weinandy (whose thesis does not dismiss the *filioque* – a factor in Del Colle's claim that the Spirit is passive – but offers an ecumenical reconception) argues that "[e]ach person of the Trinity is active" (*The Father's Spirit of Sonship* 121, 79-80).

self within the description of our relationship to God in Christ (encompassed within triune communicative action). This limits the work of the Spirit within a linguistic framework, and overly-identifies communion and communication. I have argued that this undermines the biblical testimony and Christian witness to the Holy Spirit as the personal presence of God, and conveys the presence of the Spirit in a somewhat textual-personal way. The hermeneutical significance of the eschatological foretaste of union with Christ that the Holy Spirit brings is a reality in which communion exceeds communication. This centres upon the 'manifest public' of the church, which is not an appeal to the practice of the church but God's personal presence by the Holy Spirit, gathering a people though and in the person and work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Using pneumatology to address the theological issues of authority and identity that are raised by the linguistic turn to practice tends towards identifying the person and work of the Spirit with church practice: either directly (in the case of Hütter) or indirectly (in the case of Vanhoozer – for whom church practice is the perlocutionary aspect of the divine communicative action of Jesus Christ through Scripture). This makes the person of the Spirit defined by practice rather than being God's indwelling personal presence that inspires practice. The trajectory of this argument is that these issues might be addressed by a trinitarian ontology given by Scripture, which would create a distinctively Christian account of epistemology, hermeneutics and the dynamics of human performance, counteracting the problems of structuring theology around prior epistemological assumptions. I shall turn to the epistemological detail of Vanhoozer's model, the pneumatological implications, and use of Spirit Christology.

## Chapter 3: Pneumatology and Understanding

### *Introduction*

This chapter concerns the epistemology that Vanhoozer develops within his triune communicative action model. I begin with the intentional ambiguity that Vanhoozer adopts in his integration of the ‘Scripture Principle’ and the triunity of God, using speech-act conceptuality. In chapter 1, I outlined the importance of this integration for Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach. Here, I consider how the illocution-perlocution relation within it – corresponding in his triune model to the relation of Christ and the Spirit – shapes his epistemology, and specifically his characterisation of ‘illumination’ and ‘understanding’. This has implications for his description of faith, reason, and the relationship of divine and human agency in regard to sin and redemption. The third section of this chapter considers Vanhoozer’s Christological correlation of hermeneutics and the action and presence of God – in particular, his description (that emerges in *The Drama of Doctrine*) of the canon as ‘Christotope’: “the ‘place’ where Christ makes himself ‘present’”<sup>206</sup>; “reconceiving the theme of the contemporaneity of Christ”<sup>207</sup>. My interest concerns the pneumatological implications of his use of Spirit Christology allied to speech-act dynamics and literary conceptuality. The final section of the chapter considers Vanhoozer’s recent essay on these issues in which he combines Barth’s *personal* description of *Sache* and Gadamer’s *hermeneutical* description of *Sache*, enabling the Christological ‘Matter’ of Scripture to generate a Christological conception of the gift of understanding in general. This development of his thesis is fascinating regarding the ‘common grace’ of understanding, yet I think pneumatological issues remain.

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<sup>206</sup> DD 347

<sup>207</sup> DD 346n132

## **A. The Epistemological Problem Carried Within Vanhoozer's Model**

### **A.1. The introduction of an intentional ambiguity**

In his Triune communicative action model, Vanhoozer describes how Scripture both is, and may become, the Word of God. His discontinuity and continuity with Karl Barth's theology is focussed here. Scripture *is* divine communicative action in an illocutionary sense (the Bible objectively *is* God's written word regardless of our response), and it can *become* divine communicative action in a perlocutionary sense as we participate and are transformed, subjectively appropriating it through faith, by the Holy Spirit. The way Vanhoozer employs the important speech-act distinction and relation between illocution and perlocution is key to his reconception of the 'Scripture Principle' within a Barthian Triune framework. However, there are epistemological difficulties concerning Vanhoozer's application of this illocution-perlocution relation to the doctrine of Scripture and doctrine of God, especially regarding pneumatology.

### **A.2. The pneumatological implications of the asymmetry of the illocution-perlocution relation in speech act theory upon Vanhoozer's conception of 'illumination' and 'understanding'**

The nature of the illocution-perlocution relation in communication is debated by speech-act theorists. Vanhoozer agrees with those who posit an asymmetric relation: whilst perlocution flows from illocution, illocution *is* a communicative act regardless of whether or not there is perlocution.<sup>208</sup> This allows one to make the point that what one does in saying something does not depend upon the hearer's response, and this is important to the stability of communicative agency. Vanhoozer appropriates this speech-act relation within his triune communicative action model, and his theological

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<sup>208</sup> "For Alston the distinction is clear-cut. It is the difference between *having performed an action* and *being understood to have performed that action*. ... [C]ommunication theorists remind us [that we] do not know if we have communicated until we receive the appropriate feedback. To this Alston replies yes and no: if you didn't hear or understand my question, then yes, on one level my communicative purpose has been frustrated. But – and this is all-important – *it does not follow that I did not ask you*." (FT 185-186)

account of hearing the gospel, and the gift/response of coming to faith, through Word and Spirit. As argued earlier, regarding Vanhoozer's 'is/becomes' account of Scripture as God's Word, the risk for Vanhoozer is that the asymmetric illocution-perlocution relation (albeit valid in speech-act terms), when placed within the economy of Triune communicative action, potentially posits a present reference to 'divine discourse *simpliciter*' (what God is doing in speaking) in which the Spirit seems absent.<sup>209</sup> I shall now expand upon this. Vanhoozer writes,

The notion of a divine communication...is ambiguous; it could mean 'act' or 'effect'. For Barth, revelation always includes both components. Yet, given the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions, there is no reason why one could not speak of divine discourse *simpliciter* to refer to what God is doing in speaking (illocutions), whether or not it is received and understood (perlocutions). [Footnote] To use the traditional terminology, one can affirm the inspiration of the Bible by emphasizing the Spirit's 'objective' work in guiding the human authors. Illumination would then refer to the Spirit's work in bringing about the intended perlocutionary effects.<sup>210</sup>

The key terms are 'understanding' and 'illumination'. In the quote above these seem to be perlocutionary terms. Yet, communication requires that discourse is understood (recognised), as illocution, prior to perlocution. Indeed Vanhoozer considers understanding to be the one effect that belongs to illocutionary action:

Authors often wish to accomplish something by their discourse. The author of the Fourth Gospel, for instance, wants to elicit readers' belief that Jesus is the Christ by telling Jesus' story. The question is whether this extra effect – eliciting belief – should count as part of the author's communicative action. I think it should not. Alston is right: an illocutionary act may well produce perlocutionary effects, but it does not *consist* in such effects. The only effect that properly belongs to the author's illocutionary act is *understanding* – the recognition of an illocutionary act for what it is.<sup>211</sup>

Thus, 'understanding' seems to be used by Vanhoozer in two senses that we might distinguish as 'recognition/comprehension' (illocutionary understanding) and 'personal understanding' (perlocutionary understanding).<sup>212</sup> The vital question concerns the

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<sup>209</sup> Chapter 1, Section B.2.

<sup>210</sup> DD 66&n31

<sup>211</sup> FT 179

<sup>212</sup> Hence, whilst writing that the "only effect that properly belongs to the author's illocutionary act is *understanding* – the recognition of an illocutionary act for what it is"(FT 179), he also speaks of a deeper perlocutionary, personally appropriated, understanding: "The most profound kind of understanding...has to do with the cultivation of the ability to follow the Word of God, not just in our reading but in personal response to what we have read."(FT 228).

nature of our recognition/comprehension of ‘divine illocution *simpliciter*’ (illocution with an integrity regardless of perlocution) in relation to the Holy Spirit. Is this recognition/comprehension illumined and, if so, isn’t this problematic to Vanhoozer’s Triune communicative action account given this model describes the Spirit’s agency in perlocutionary terms? If the self-illuminating nature of ‘divine discourse *simpliciter*’ is a Christological reference (which it rightly is for Vanhoozer), the danger is that although he is appropriating Barth’s understanding of Christ and the Spirit as ‘object’ and ‘subjectivity’ of the triune revelation, because of the integrity of divine illocution *simpliciter* (in the absence of perlocution), he allows a separation between Christ and the Spirit that Barth never did.<sup>213</sup>

To sustain the integrity of ‘divine discourse *simpliciter*’ within the ‘Barthian’ triune model, Vanhoozer has to identify the content of an illocutionary act solely with its cognitive component. In describing how illocutionary acts ‘supervene’<sup>214</sup> on locutions, and have integrity apart from perlocutions, Vanhoozer writes:

The attempt to say just what a communicative act is may be helped by reversing the polarities in order to think of action as a form of speech. For actions have speech act attributes. In the first place, the doing of an action corresponds to the locution. Second, actions have propositional content (e.g., ‘S performs act y on the ball’) and illocutionary force (e.g., kicking). Finally, actions too may have perlocutionary effects (‘S scores a goal’). [Footnote:] Alston’s analysis is slightly different. For him the ‘content’ of an act includes object and performance: ‘kicking the ball’. With regard to illocutionary acts, this means that for Alston the content of the act includes both its propositional component and its illocutionary force. For Searle (and usually me) ‘content’ refers primarily to the propositional component of the illocutionary act.<sup>215</sup>

Vanhoozer regards the difference as “largely terminological” but I think it is more significant. Using Alston’s asymmetric illocution-perlocution relation, yet departing from it by isolating the illocutionary content from the illocutionary force, Vanhoozer describes ‘divine discourse *simpliciter*’ in cognitive terms separable from the affective illocutionary force. Thus, he can appropriate the illocution-perlocution relation within the Triune model, describing the Spirit in perlocutionary terms, with the effect that the

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<sup>213</sup> If Vanhoozer’s Spirit Christology conflates the presence of the risen Christ with the gift of the Spirit, this may potentially mitigate the problem but, as argued, this would be problematic exegetically and for Trinitarian doctrine.

<sup>214</sup> See footnote 124 above

<sup>215</sup> FT 177&n40

illocutionary force of the Spirit is directed towards perlocution but decoupled from the recognition of the cognitive content of the illocutionary act, so that it is comprehensible as a proposition separate from its force.

The *Filioque* is Vanhoozer's basis for limiting the Spirit's ministry to perlocution in this way.

The asymmetrical dependence of perlocutionary on illocutionary acts defended by Alston has a theological counterpart in the idea that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* – the celebrated *Filioque*.<sup>216</sup>

[T]he Spirit of Understanding is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit may blow where, but not *what*, he wills. The Spirit is subordinate to the Word. Perlocutions “proceed from” illocutions.<sup>217</sup>

I would argue that Alston's asymmetric illocution-perlocution relation, whilst proper in speech-act terms (and notably involving an integrity of the cognitive and affective aspects of illocutionary action), when modified by Vanhoozer and identified with the relation of Christ and the Spirit, leads to an account of Scripture as God's written Word that helpfully prevents 'perlocutionary interpretation' (i.e. the author's meaning being dependent upon the effect of the discourse upon the reader), but does so by positing divine illocution *simpliciter* as a Christological reference that is not also pneumatological. This is problematic in trinitarian terms. If Vanhoozer's argument is that the 'objective' aspect of the Spirit's ministry is in the inspiration of Scripture, I would agree but argue that his reference to 'divine discourse *simpliciter*' is to more than the locutions of the text, it is the illocutionary action *towards and involving us here and now* (whether we respond or not) and recognisable as such (whether we respond or not). This necessarily requires reference to the Spirit as the mediator of revelation, but this illocutionary role of the Spirit seems hard to locate within Vanhoozer's triune model. We seem to be left with a choice between Christological illumination that is insufficiently mediated by the Spirit, or recognition/comprehension taking place without illumination (which would be idealistic and insufficiently attending to the problem of our fallenness). I shall next discuss how Vanhoozer's epistemology shows signs of these issues.

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<sup>216</sup> FT 200

<sup>217</sup> FT 233

Thus, the difficulty of appropriating speech-act conceptuality within Barth's Triune revelation model, such that Scripture both is and becomes God's written Word (which is a sound point in itself), is this: The integrity of 'divine discourse *simpliciter*' (the illocutionary action of Scripture) requires reference to presence of the Spirit, but Vanhoozer's Triune model identifies the present agency of Spirit with perlocution. As a result, to refer to the Spirit in relation to illocution risks identifying being and becoming (in a similar fashion to Barth) which is problematic to Vanhoozer's triune communicative action model for two reasons. Firstly, it would collapse the integrity of illocution (regardless of perlocution), which is important communicatively if we are to avoid 'perlocutionary interpretation' (such as 'reader response' methods).<sup>218</sup> Secondly, Barth could identify being and becoming in his dialectic model, but Vanhoozer's more semantically mediated model cannot. Hence, Vanhoozer describes 'divine discourse *simpliciter*' as self-illuminating in Christological terms that are insufficiently pneumatologically mediated. Vanhoozer's semantic concept of the 'meaning potential' of the text seems to take on this role, or is, at best, identified with the Spirit's agency, rather than this potential being created by the eschatological presence of God by his Spirit.

### ***B. The Pneumatological Issues in Vanhoozer's Characterisation of Faith, Reason and the Relationship Between Divine and Human Agency***

I think the aforementioned pneumatological issue causes a degree of rationalisation of the fiduciary character of knowledge and of sin. This relates to an overall concern regarding the relationship between divine freedom and contingent human agency in Vanhoozer's divine communicative action framework.

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<sup>218</sup> Thus, I agree that the asymmetric illocution-perlocution relation is vital communicatively, but argue it should not determine the relation between the Son and the Spirit. I think the *Filioque* should not be interpreted as underwriting this kind of asymmetry.

## B.1. Faith seeking understanding

Vanhoozer describes the ‘postfoundational’ nature of canonical-linguistic theology in terms of ‘faith seeking understanding’.

*A fiduciary framework is the beginning of knowledge.* Lesslie Newbigin (and Augustine) are right: knowing always takes place within the context of prior belief. To grow in knowledge, one must make at least provisional commitment to a framework of thought, to accept something as “given” on trust and then go on to test it. Theology’s “given,” as Barth never tired of insisting, is the self-giving of the triune God: God in christocentric (and we might add, *canonical*) self-presentation. Only God can make God known; hence the “given” of God’s word-act in Christ “cannot form part of any worldview except one of which it is the basis” [Newbigin]. Knowledge of God begins with trust in what we have been told about God by God, and this means taking the canon as the beginning of theological knowledge, the interpretative framework for understanding God, the world, and ourselves.<sup>219</sup>

The vital epistemological issue concerns the nature of this trust in relation to understanding. What is the role of the Spirit in relation to “what we have been told about God by God” such that we can believe in order to understand? I have argued that ‘divine discourse simpliciter’ is Christological *and mediated by the Spirit*, but that Vanhoozer isolates the ‘content’ of divine discourse (Scripture) as an illocutionary act as such from this pneumatological dimension for fear of perlocutionary interpretation. I believe that the Spirit’s sanctifying agency is indeed perlocutionary, but the Spirit is not limited to perlocution. Divine illocution has an affective force that cannot be abstracted from its cognitive content, but this does not mean that perlocution necessarily follows. This is to say that divine illocution is *towards us and involves us*; therefore, it indeed has integrity to prior to perlocution, but we should be cautious about describing “what we have been told about God by God” in a cognitive way that is prior to our personal involvement.<sup>220</sup> I shall argue this involvement requires us to distinguish our ‘a-critical’ commitment (personal dependence upon God) from our critical commitment (rationality in the context of this dependence). For Vanhoozer, rationality seems to be co-inherent with, rather than contingent upon, belief.

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<sup>219</sup> DD 295

<sup>220</sup> As discussed in the previous section.

Vanhoozer is concerned to avoid an irrational fideism, and so adopts Paul Helm's account of 'belief policy' to argue that the evangelical truth claim – the message of Christ crucified – calls for a fideistic as well as 'juridical' epistemology.

fideism is a matter of belief policy where one decides that accepting certain forms of evidence – apostolic testimony, to be exact – is a rational, intellectually virtuous knowledge-producing act.<sup>221</sup>

To say "I know" is to say "I *believe*, rationally." Better: to say "I know" is to say "I believe in reason, and I reason in belief." *I believe in reason*. As we have seen, reason is a God-designed cognitive process of forming and criticizing beliefs, a discipline that demands virtuous habits of the mind. *I reason in belief*. Reasoning – forming beliefs, giving warrants, making inferences, analysing critically – does not take place in a vacuum but in fiduciary frameworks, in canonical frameworks of belief.<sup>222</sup>

Thus, for Vanhoozer, reason and belief seem to be co-inherent (of the same order): beliefs are formed rationally, in frameworks of belief. However, Michael Polanyi (who, interestingly, is cited by Vanhoozer) argued that rationality takes place within fiduciary frameworks to which we commit a-critically.<sup>223</sup> He saw the power of scientific discovery resting upon a Christian reality, summed up by Augustine's dictum '*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*.'<sup>224</sup> For Polanyi, belief concerns personal relations of commitment upon which the practice of rationality is contingent. In the act of knowing we are personally committing ourselves to the reality of that which we seek to know (personally identifying ourselves with its truth) and to the community of others who share this rationality (upon whom we depend to hand it on to us). Rationality (criticality) is 'second order' to these personal relations (a-critical commitments). This is subtly different to Vanhoozer's position. Rationality and personal relation appear to be co-inherent – our relationship to God in Christ is mediated by the canonical-linguistic in a way that is identified with, rather than contingent upon, the presence of the Spirit. Canonical practice is Spirited practice. Our commitment to the reality of God communicated by Scripture, and our dependence upon the community who hand on this rationality, seems to be bound into this canonical-linguistic participation. We

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<sup>221</sup> FT 358-359

<sup>222</sup> DD 304

<sup>223</sup> He argues that there is an a-critical, tacit, *personal* commitment to the truth proposed in the act of understanding it. Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) 60, 264, 303.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 266

must believe and trust actively in the canonical Scriptures in order to know – the Bible provides our rationality – but this faith involves a prevenient dependence upon the mediation of the Spirit whose presence is a ‘real earnest’<sup>225</sup> and made ‘public’ in God’s gathering of the church of Jesus Christ (i.e. a personal relation and so not a supplemental/extra-canonical rationality).<sup>226</sup> Vanhoozer’s account seems to suggest that the illocutionary content of the canon can be recognised (and so trusted rationally) prior to this dependence upon the Holy Spirit. The illocutionary action of Scripture is mediated by the words of Scripture in an ‘immediate’ sense (lacking the Spirit’s mediation) because the *recognition* of meaning of the words seems to be a Christological moment without present pneumatological reference. The rationality of Scripture appears self-supporting rather than integral to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Vanhoozer suggests that a ‘map’ is “an apt metaphor for a postfoundationalist rationality that strives to hold on to the ideal of objective truth while acknowledging the provisional and perspectival nature of human subjectivity.”<sup>227</sup> This way of expressing how the Bible is authoritative in the objective reality it communicates whilst also vitally subjective in its authoring (God’s word written by human beings) such that the subjective human reader can ‘follow’ it (in terms of comprehension and practice). Interestingly, Vanhoozer notes the necessity of a compass if a map is to become our means of finding our way in the reality it charts.

To walk the Christian way is to employ the biblical maps so that they direct one to Christ. Note that we need a compass because a map can be read and followed only if one is rightly oriented. Maps are of no use to those who are lost if they cannot determine the way north. Similarly, biblical exegesis gets disorientated when it loses the ability to relate the text to its canonical compass, God’s speech-act in Christ.<sup>228</sup>

The need for a compass refers to the way in which the map can indeed be the articulation of everything we need to know, our sole rationality, yet still require us to be in a relation (orientation to north) that places us in the same relation in which the map was written and upon which the rationality of the map depends if it is to communicate reality to us. The compass does not provide a supplemental rationality but neither is the

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<sup>225</sup> Newbigin, *The Household of God* 131

<sup>226</sup> Chapter 2, Sections C.1. & C.4.

<sup>227</sup> DD 297

<sup>228</sup> DD 297

relation to the north simply given to us ‘immediately’ in our reading and following the map. Indeed we cannot truly relate to the reality it communicates and so read and follow it without being given a relation/orientation to the north. In the above quote, Vanhoozer’s compass for the text is “God’s speech-act in Christ”. This is a reference to the canon: “The canon is a unique compass that points not to the north but to the church’s North Star: Jesus Christ. Such was the thrust of Jesus’ conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24.” This would appear to suggest that the compass is internal to the rationality of the map. However, because canon is “God’s speech-act in Christ”, Vanhoozer would perhaps also say he is referring to how divine illocutionary action (the practice of Christ borne by the Spirit) supervenes upon the locutions of Scripture. But at best, he is claiming that the compass is an ‘emergent’ (supervenient) property of the map. This brings us back to the difficulty of the ‘meaning potential of the text’ somehow including the role of imparting for us the relation to God in Christ that the Spirit mediates. The canon as Spirited practice seems to be a self-orienting rationality, a compass-map. Vanhoozer’s divine communicative action concept of canon as Spirited practice seems to linguistically identify relation and rationality such that they are co-inherent, rather than rationality being contingent upon relation. I believe that the personal presence of God by his Spirit does not supplement the rationality of the text, but does orientate us rightly and personally. Vanhoozer’s ‘extended cognition’ account brilliantly incorporates the depth of linguistic knowledge, and thus conveys this aspect of personal knowing, but it does not capture the fact that all personal knowing (which is always linguistic, rational, knowing-in-practice) depends upon a personal relation of commitment that is non-linguistic. This relation cannot be linguistically imparted because it is that upon which linguistic rationality/practice depends.

## **B.2. Sin and human agency in relation to divine communicative action**

I will now explore the nature of freedom in relation to communicative understanding. For Vanhoozer, the “success of *communicative* action wholly depends on bringing

about this one effect: understanding.”<sup>229</sup> Using Habermas’ theory of communicative action, Vanhoozer writes:

Actions that aim to produce an effect on the reader *other than understanding*, or *other than by means of understanding*, count as strategic, not communicative, actions. An emphasis on perlocutions can become pathological: (1) by aiming to produce effects on the reader independently of illocutions or (2) by defining illocutions in terms of the effect produced on the reader.<sup>230</sup>

I agree with his rejection of (1) and (2). But I think framing the discussion with Habermas’ communicative theory is problematic. How is it pathological for communicative action to cause any effect, yet not the effect of understanding, unless we are working with a strong mind-body dualism? Rather, we should say that the ‘content’ of an illocutionary act is necessarily cognitive *and affective*, and *as such* can either compel violently/coercively (*denying freedom* by using communicative agency/power to narrow or claim our hearer’s agency) or, by the grace of God, compel lovingly (*gifting freedom* by using communicative agency/power to serve our hearer’s agency). This requires a fully theological account of human agency and sin.<sup>231</sup> Vanhoozer certainly does not overlook the impact of sin:

Humans are...created with the capacity to understand discourse. However...this cognitive equipment has been affected by sin. It is often in the sinner’s interest wilfully to misunderstand, or at least not to respond to what has been understood. If understanding involves a movement of personal appropriation, that is, if understanding includes the perlocutionary effect, then we can agree with Barth that the Spirit is the “Lord of the hearing.”<sup>232</sup>

However, sin does not just affect our will to understand and/or respond to “what has been understood”, but hinders our understanding itself (making us ‘blind’ without grace). Sin is the ultimate surd – disrupting the integrity of knowing, volition, will and action. I think Vanhoozer’s proper concern with ‘reader response’ is being tackled wrongly due to a view that human agency ‘possesses’, to a degree, an autonomous and universal rationality, along Habermas’ pragmatic lines. He uses Habermas’ theory to argue that in communicative acts we “modify cognitive environments” with the *aim* of

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<sup>229</sup> FT 184-185

<sup>230</sup> FT 185

<sup>231</sup> See Alistair McFadyen’s treatment of sin and human willing in *Bound to Sin* (Cambridge: CUP,2000), esp.180-199.

<sup>232</sup> FT 232n93

modifying “the natural or social environment,”<sup>233</sup> but that the former can occur without the latter (i.e. he separates cognitive and affective).

Communication succeeds when the speaker’s communicative intention becomes mutually known. The reader need not believe or obey what is said in order to understand it. The reader’s role in the covenant of discourse is nothing less than to seek understanding.<sup>234</sup>

I agree that the ‘covenant of discourse’ is nothing less than to seek understanding, but surely its more? If the reader can enter into discourse, yet walk away without alteration other than his mind being informed, is that communication? Is it realistic? Vanhoozer is right that illocution cannot be defined by perlocution; to collapse the distinction would undermine our personal responsibility in the event of hearing the gospel and God’s judgement upon unbelief would have no meaning. But this should not be secured by making the affective aspect of illocutionary action simply serve its cognitive content. Rather, we should describe how the content of an illocutionary act is cognitive and affective, and how this either enables or constrains the freedom of the perlocutionary response, depending upon whether the act is a loving and self-giving, or sinful and self-serving, one. This is supremely true of divine communicative action in which the Spirit graciously mediates God’s communication through Scripture convicting us of, and incorporating us into the freedom of, the love of God in Christ.

### **B.3. Vanhoozer’s Three-fold Epistemology**

Vanhoozer’s epistemology – a ‘three-stranded cord’ of reliablism, fallibilism and intellectual virtue – is undoubtedly careful and systematically coherent.<sup>235</sup> My focus is upon the way cognitive competence relates to the mediation of the Spirit in Vanhoozer’s triune communicative action model. Vanhoozer draws upon Romans 12:1-2 to argue:

[T]he rational person must be a person of intellectual virtue....[V]irtue requires a renewing not only of the mind but of the whole being; it requires a work of transforming grace, a reorientation to the truth...According to [virtue epistemology], knowledge is less a matter of following correct procedures (e.g., the scientific method) than of becoming the right sort of person, a person of

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<sup>233</sup> FT 187

<sup>234</sup> FT 180

<sup>235</sup> DD 302-305

intellectual virtue. An intellectual virtue is a disposition of heart and mind that arises from the motivation for knowledge, a cognitive habit that is conducive to obtaining true beliefs.<sup>236</sup>

Thus, Vanhoozer speaks of the necessity for a renewing of our whole being by grace. But, although he rules out secularist scientific rationalism, he describes true beliefs being obtained through conducive habits,<sup>237</sup> rather than true beliefs – a relation of faith and the gift of the Spirit – being conducive for renewed cognitive habits. If believing is the result of virtuous cognitive practice, this risks describing justification in linguistic terms.<sup>238</sup> Vanhoozer may consider this acceptable in that the canonical-linguistic is *divine practice* in which we participate (i.e. he does not advocate ‘works righteousness’). This brings us to Vanhoozer’s use of ‘form’ in describing canonical participation in Christ.

### ***C. The Justification of Vanhoozer’s Canonical-Linguistic Approach Using the Concept of the Canon as ‘Christotope’***

Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach accepts the linguistic turn to practice yet advocates the propositional content/nature of Scripture that Lindbeck’s ‘cultural-linguistic’ approach underdetermined. Vanhoozer’s defence of the propositional nature of Scripture is crucial. His cognitive-poetic rehabilitation of propositions replaces the models of Charles Hodge and Carl Henry with an ‘aspectival realism’ that avoids ‘pluralistic perspectivism’.<sup>239</sup> But Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic approach combines Christology with literary conceptuality in a pneumatologically limited way. Vanhoozer speaks of the literary forms of Scripture merging into forms of life so that ‘*seeing as* translates...at the limit, into *being as*’ because the “the literary forms of Scripture mediate the ‘form’ of Jesus Christ”.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> DD 303-304

<sup>237</sup> DD 255-256

<sup>238</sup> I am not suggesting that justification can exist without leading to sanctification. The Bible’s key role in “training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16) is in no way supplemental, but rather integral, to salvation.

<sup>239</sup> DD 265-291

<sup>240</sup> DD 285, 250-251

Twentieth-century hermeneutics has shown us the historical nature of human understanding. God's truth is eternal, but theology is written by particular people in historical contexts. Time and place affect the language spoken and the forms of conceptuality utilised.<sup>241</sup> Vanhoozer develops this point with Bakhtin's literary notion of 'chronotope':

Bakhtin believes (1) that there are different kinds of chronotopes, different forms of spatiotemporal thinking and experience; (2) that these diverse forms can be inscribed in literature.<sup>242</sup>

Vanhoozer describes the canon as 'Christotopic': the diverse sense of time and space in the canon and its Christological theo-dramatic wholeness brings together the universal significance of Christ to all time and space in a way that can be practised throughout history in every locality. It is a "concrete universal":

The canon contains many different chronotopes. [Vanhoozer mentions the space-time of the patriarchal narratives oriented toward the divine promise, the sense of *kairos* in the Gospels and the sense of utopian *telos* in Revelation]. [T]he canon reincorporates and connects these distinct times and spaces...and makes of them a *Christotope*: the "place" where Christ makes himself "present." ...[W]hat God is doing in the history of Jesus Christ is significant for *all* times and places...What is of universal significance...is not a moral principle or system of propositional truths but a dramatope: *just these words and acts, in just these times and places, embody the divine judgements that continue to be authoritative and helpful for every space-time situation.*<sup>243</sup>

Vanhoozer notes that to "think chronotopes and Christology together is to reconceive the theme of the contemporaneity of Christ."<sup>244</sup> But is this somehow subsuming God's personal presence by the Holy Spirit into a linguistic/textual concept of 'form'? The 'Spirit Christology' that I have critiqued seems to facilitate this literary and linguistic conceptuality.

Vanhoozer is keen his conception of canonic universals is not seen as simply following Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons,' which he argues is monologic. However, his departure from Gadamer is not from his hermeneutic framework as such, but in the emphasis that the Holy Spirit rather than 'historical consciousness' transcends the horizons.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> DD 345

<sup>242</sup> DD 345

<sup>243</sup> DD 347-348

<sup>244</sup> DD 346n132

<sup>245</sup> DD 330

Vanhoozer writes that it “is thanks to the ‘real presence’ of a text’s meaning potential that it enjoys transcultural significance.”<sup>246</sup> What does this ‘real presence’ of a text’s meaning potential describe? My concern is that this Christotopic point is based upon a convergence of the concepts of Ricoeur, Gadamer and Bakhtin that leads to a Christological canonical ‘immediacy’ – Christ is present in the illocutionary action of Scripture and the Spirit is the efficacy of this divine communicative action.

I believe that , through the Holy Spirit, the unique and particular words of Scripture are essential to knowing God in Christ Jesus. These words communicate the gospel to us no matter what our culture because of the Spirit’s mediation – the Spirit who is the Creator Spirit, the one by whom all of the diversity created by God through Christ becomes manifest and is sustained.<sup>247</sup> Hence, the Spirit *creates* semantic ‘meaning potential’ – as mediator of revelation – and so the action of the Holy Spirit cannot be identified with the phenomenon as such, or worse, limited to perlocution.

Vanhoozer’s recent development of his approach provides helpful clarification on these issues.

#### ***D. Vanhoozer’s Recent Development of His Model: The ‘Miracle’ of Understanding and the ‘Matter’ of Scripture***

The focus of this chapter is the nature of understanding in relation to the divine-human relation, and in particular the nature of ‘illumination’ in recognising the illocutionary action of Scripture, which also concerns the nature of understanding in general (our noetic condition in relation to being creatures and being redeemed in Christ). Vanhoozer addresses this in a recent essay – ‘Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and

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<sup>246</sup> DD 353

<sup>247</sup> Vanhoozer uses Bakhtin’s literary concept of ‘outsiderness’ to carry much of the weight of this transcultural point.

the ‘Miracle’ of Understanding.’<sup>248</sup> He draws upon Philippe Eberhard’s ‘middle voice’ approach to agency.

Understanding is a ‘middle voice’ phenomenon, neither wholly active nor wholly passive: ‘In the middle voice, as opposed to the active, the subject is within the action which happens to him or her *and* of which he or she is subject.’ The interpreter is...caught up in a larger process; understanding is both ‘happening’ and ‘doing.’...

Whereas Gadamer views understanding as something that happens to us ‘over and above our willing and doing,’ Eberhard recalls Paul’s comment in Philippians 2:13 that ‘God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’. Christian faith does not only seek understanding; it *mediates* it: ‘Faith as an object of our knowledge and faith as a gift from God are exclusive alternatives only as long as one keeps thinking in terms of subject and object instead of subject and verb.’ Faith, then, is not something one merely does or merely has but a *Sache* the subject gets involved in but never controls: ‘Interpreting faith as *Sache* allows one to understand it as something we do while it happens to us.’ One’s (ontological) location in the process is the key: ‘Hermeneutics says that we are conversation; from a Christian perspective we are in Christ.’<sup>249</sup>

Does this description of faith as *Sache* (gift and object of our knowledge) answer my concern – that Vanhoozer’s reference to ‘divine discourse *simpliciter*’ is Christological but insufficiently pneumatological because his triune model limits the Spirit to perlocution (due to the asymmetric illocution-perlocution relation and abstraction of illocutionary cognitive content from its affective force)?

Vanhoozer’s description of ‘*Sache*’ mediates Barth’s and Gadamer’s uses of term. Whereas Descartes treated reason as “a scope that contains the source of its own light” such that understanding is “a by-product of the active subject’s agency upon the matter,” Gadamer argued that it is “the *matter* that enlightens the subject.”<sup>250</sup> Vanhoozer argues that, although for Gadamer “the *Sache* appears in, and *as*, language, not as something extralinguistic,”<sup>251</sup> his rendering of *Sache* is not sufficiently *corporeal*.<sup>252</sup> Therefore, Vanhoozer seeks to combine Gadamer’s hermeneutical (but

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<sup>248</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer, ‘Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the ‘Miracle’ of Understanding’ *IJST* 7(2005):5-37

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 19,33

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 35

<sup>252</sup> Despite Gadamer’s notion of ‘incarnation’ the “actual text assumed by the *Sache* is not the locus of the miracle, as was Christ’s flesh. Rather the miracle concerns the self-presentation of the *Sache* through the veil of textual flesh to those caught up in the contemporary conversation about it.”(*Ibid.*,29)

impersonal) account of *Sache* with Barth's personal account of *Sache* in his hermeneutics of Scripture.

It is sheer mystification to say that the process itself...*does* something to bring about understanding...Neither 'history' nor 'language' nor 'play' or 'conversation' are subjects, and it is difficult to see how an impersonal process could have the ability to disclose truth. The persuasiveness of Gadamer's account would seem to depend on the extent to which the analogy is not simply notional but operational. The *Sache* itself does *not* literally speak or show itself to us, *except* when the subject is the sovereign speaking God (so Barth).<sup>253</sup>

Vanhoozer's argument centres upon this combination of Barth's account of *Sache* (the divine person of the Word) with Gadamer's account of *Sache* (that which hermeneutically transcends historical-linguistic horizons).<sup>254</sup> Vanhoozer's description of *Sache* as the 'sovereign *speaking* God' is key: it unites Barth's personal *Sache* and Gadamer's hermeneutical *Sache* in Vanhoozer's triune communicative action model. Hence, this argument uniquely applies to Scripture – God's personal presence is identified with the Bible: "no other book has the self-communicating presence and action of God as its *Sache*."<sup>255</sup> The development upon Barth's theology is that God's presence has become identified with the *Sache* of Scripture in *personal-semantic* terms. The development upon Gadamer is that his secular 'effective historical consciousness' is replaced by "effective pneumatic consciousness."<sup>256</sup> Thus, the personal communicative presence of God is the *Sache* of the discourse of Scripture – Triune communicative action. In bringing Christian ontology together with hermeneutics, Vanhoozer emphasises that "the miracle of understanding is not reduced to one's mystical union with Christ":

No, a robust doctrine of incarnation demands that we reject the notion of disembodied discourse and give due attention and respect to *corporeal* discourse: what someone in a particular time and place and language says to someone about something. While I agree with Barth and Gadamer that understanding is not to be identified with (or reduced to) coming to know the conditions behind authorial discourse – the reasons why an author said what he said – the question remains whether we can understand textual discourse without also understanding *what the author*

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>254</sup> Vanhoozer is not comfortable with Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' but retains his hermeneutic structure by replacing this unity with a dialogical, *plural* unity using Bakhtin's concept of 'outsideness'. (Ibid., 33) This is how he introduces linguistically an 'otherness in relation' between the horizons. (This addresses linguistically the problem of 'immediacy' in revelation.)

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 35-36

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 32

*said/did* with respect to the matter of the text. No *Sache*, except the living *Logos*, is self-presenting; on the contrary, what we understand in discourse is someone's *witness* to the *Sache*.<sup>257</sup>

In this reference to *Sache*, Vanhoozer secures greater purchase upon the significance of author behind the text as witness. But does this essay mark a pneumatological development from *The Drama of Doctrine*? The pneumatological implications in regard to mediation are apparent as Vanhoozer elucidates how his appropriation of Barth's and Gadamer's approaches allow them mutually amend each other.

Vanhoozer notes how Barth considered the nature of biblical interpretation to be paradigmatic for general hermeneutics. Vanhoozer argues that by bringing this together with the Gadamerian insight that "hermeneutics is a matter not merely of methods but of ontology, which is to say *anthropology*," Barth's insight can be appropriated and amended resulting in a general ontology. By linking the ontology of understanding to the uniqueness of Scripture as the one text which is truly self-revealing (in that its *Sache* is the divine person of the Word), Vanhoozer creates a general hermeneutical principle: the 'matter' of general understanding is contingent upon Christ, who is the *Sache* of Scripture.

We can follow Augustine and make the Christological categories to which philosophical hermeneutics appeals not merely notional but *fully* operational...Christ is the light in, by, and through whom all intelligible things are illumined. Illumination is the operative term. Yet it need not imply that human subjects are merely passive recipients. Augustine suggests that the human mind *participates* in the divine light. ...

'I am illumined' and 'I understand' are thus middle-voiced terms. The miracle of understanding is not that the interpreter is either simply active or simply passive before the object of understanding, but rather that the interpreter is located in an all-encompassing process (or rather *person*?) in which he or she is nevertheless active. Described in Christian categories, this process is conformity to Christ.<sup>258</sup>

Vanhoozer's argument is that Christ illumines: illumination concerns the "self-presenting" *Logos*; faith in Christ is given through hearing and receiving the discourse of Scripture (triune communicative action). To participate in divine discourse involves an "effective pneumatic consciousness". The Spirit sanctifies us cultivating interpretive

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 36-37

virtues such as openness and humility, making us better able to hear the gospel.<sup>259</sup> Because the interpreter is thus “located in an all-encompassing process”, and Vanhoozer retains a Barthian sense of the objective and subjective aspects of revelation as relating to ministry of Christ and the Spirit respectively, the ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ of Scripture as triune communicative action come together. But Vanhoozer maintains that the corporeality of discourse ensures that the miracle of understanding is not to be directly equated to our mystical union with Christ.

However, does this ‘all-encompassing process’ include the Holy Spirit mediating the illocutions of Scripture as well as effecting perlocution? It seems Vanhoozer thinks not. This creates a tension in his account because the gifted nature of understanding requires a description (in the light of the trinitarian mediation of salvation) of how general understanding is mediated. Vanhoozer’s argues that

hermeneutics after Gadamer has become ontology, and Christians have something distinctive to say about the human condition – including human noetic functions such as understanding – in light of creation, the fall, and redemption. No description of the human hermeneutical condition is complete if it mentions only finitude and not fallenness besides. Significantly enough, there is a special theological category to account for why those who lack Christian faith may nevertheless understand: common grace. Because Christians are *simul justus et peccator*, they too need the Spirit’s sanctifying work in their lives in order better to cultivate the interpretative virtues such as openness and humility. Nonetheless, those who lack faith will find it harder to understand those things that come closest to challenging their denials, both theoretical and practical, of God and the gospel.<sup>260</sup>

Thus, the ‘common grace’ of general understanding seems to be a work of sanctification understood in terms of interpretive virtues gifted by the Spirit prior to Christian faith. My concern is not with the mediation of the Spirit in relation to creation, but the conceptualisation of this in terms of virtue and the Spirit’s work of sanctification. On the one hand, I think Vanhoozer’s account may ambiguatize finitude and fallenness. We cannot abstract one from the other, but neither should we confuse the nature of our dependence upon God in each case. The ‘common grace’ of human agency, continually gifted by God in creation, and the saving grace of redeemed (and being redeemed) human agency through and in Christ crucified, gifted by God in salvation, should not be

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 34,36

confused.<sup>261</sup> There is a discontinuity as well as continuity between the divine-human relation in creation and redeemed creation in Christ ('new creation'). This is vital to my concern with the problem of linguistically structuring theology, even if described in directly Christological and pneumatological terms. On the other hand, I wonder how pneumatological Vanhoozer's 'common grace' reference is. If illumination is Christological and the Spirit is perlocutionary – i.e. the efficacy of the Word received by faith – is general understanding Christological but not fully mediated by the Spirit? This is the concern regarding 'divine discourse *simpliciter*' being 'immediate.' The reference to faith as *Sache* which is both gift and object of our knowledge seems to address the concern of 'immediacy' in regard to the corporeality of discourse but not to the role of the Spirit in mediating that corporeality – i.e. the Creator Spirit who mediates creation and new creation through and in Christ, as in Gunton's call for a fully Trinitarian theology.

I think these tensions pull us towards subsuming justification into sanctification, not in terms of 'works righteousness' but in terms of a communicative ontology. Conviction and conversion cannot be subsumed linguistically into sanctification without undermining our historical and personal subjectivity in the judgement and death of Jesus Christ. I will argue in the next chapter that the 'judgement of grace' ensures we speak of the ontological distinction between God and creation whilst describing our relation to God in Christ. This requires a continuity-discontinuity relation in our description of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our cruciform participation in this reality – i.e. between our subjectivity in relation *to* the death of Christ (as one for whom He died while we were still sinners, Rom 5:8) and our subjectivity *in* the death of Christ (as one who dies with Him in our lives, Phil 3:10-11, 2 Cor 4:10f.) This is vital to the hope of our salvation in the resurrection of Christ. The 'middle voice' interplay between passivity and activity may express exactly this reality of gift and participation, justification and sanctification. But my concern is that the linguistic conceptuality ends up construing justification and sanctification co-inherently, with sanctification

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<sup>261</sup> We need to distinguish the 'grace' of creation and the grace of salvation ('new creation') as we describe the trinitarian mediation of both. See Cantalamessa, *Come Creator Spirit*, 43, who cites Augustine and Bonaventure.

becoming the basic dynamic.<sup>262</sup> Whereas ‘post-critical’ theology maintains that we are ‘ever beginning’ at the Cross, in the gift of the Spirit (Gal 2:20, 3:1-5).

## **Conclusion**

Vanhoozer requires an ambiguity between Scripture ‘being’ and ‘becoming’ the Word of God in order to maintain the importance for speech act conceptuality of illocution being independent of perlocution. I think a result of this is that the present recognition/comprehension of Scripture is a Christological but not pneumatological reference, which is not fully trinitarian.<sup>263</sup> I have argued that this correlates with a potential rationalisation of the fiduciary character of knowledge and idealisation of human agency gifted by God (regard to our contingency in creation – the ‘grace’ of the Creator-creation relation – and our need for redemption from the bondage of sin – the grace of salvation in Christ.)<sup>264</sup> In considering Vanhoozer’s emerging thinking,<sup>265</sup> I have argued that his description of the canon as ‘Christotopic’ – and his recent account of epistemology founded upon a Christological identification of hermeneutics and ontology reflecting the presence of God in the communicative/transformational action of Scripture – remain pneumatologically limited. Vanhoozer’s theological model is trinitarian from the perspective of a certain kind of Spirit Christology. But I believe this Spirit Christology limits the personhood and agency of the Spirit, and I have argued that these limitations undermine a fully trinitarian description of human agency in relation to God. This raised a question concerning how Vanhoozer’s model accounts for the pneumatological dimension of justification. This is important to the next chapter, as I consider Vanhoozer’s pneumatology in relation to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our participation in Christ by faith.

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<sup>262</sup> This is not to suggest that there can be justification without sanctification. Indeed, Fee argues that Paul uses the term ‘sanctification’ in relation to conversion to Christ. (PSPG 93)

<sup>263</sup> Vanhoozer would reject this critique based upon his Spirit Christology. n.b. I am not arguing that Vanhoozer’s model risks Christomonism, but that the kind of Spirit Christology he offers isn’t *fully* trinitarian.

<sup>264</sup> See footnote 261 above

<sup>265</sup> Kevin Vanhoozer will further develop this thinking in *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) .

## Chapter 4: Pneumatology and Life in Christ

### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I consider Vanhoozer's account of the Doctrine of Atonement and his ecclesiology in his account of our participation in Christ. In this part of *The Drama of Doctrine* we see most clearly how his 'theodramatic' categories apply to his canonical-linguistic approach. The church participates in the divine performance (God's covenantal action centred upon salvation in Christ) by following the script (the Bible) – a Christological participation, and script, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The atonement made possible through and in Christ is thus both 'gift and task', Vanhoozer's uses the concept of 'mimesis' to describe how the church is given this gift and task of 'performing atonement' in Christ. I shall consider whether there is a linguistic 'rationality' of Christ crucified that can be imitated in this kind of way. Specifically, I'll argue that while the 'cruciform' nature of Christian identity is characterised by a 'narrative spirituality' of the cross of Christ,<sup>266</sup> this should not imply a narrative ontology. This argument involves a pneumatological point regarding how justification, by grace through Christ's death and resurrection, is received by faith and mediated to us by the Holy Spirit. I shall consider this in relation to Paul's understanding of life 'according to the Spirit'. I shall suggest that the Christian life of prayer, arguably the paradigmatic example of Christian practice, exemplifies the divine-human relationship, and highlights the foregoing issues.

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<sup>266</sup> Michael Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001)

## **A. Vanhoozer's Canonical-Linguistic Description of the Atonement and Christian Identity**

### **A.1. The Cross of Christ and Theo-dramatic Performance**

In the final part of *Drama of Doctrine*, Vanhoozer shows how a canonical-linguistic approach to the doctrine of atonement integrates the “canonically bounded Pentecostal plenitude of images of the saving significance of the Cross” to develop a mutually “creative understanding” – one enabling the contributions of ‘penal substitution’ and ‘relational restoration’ theories to be equally important and ultimate.<sup>267</sup>

*“Jesus’ death saves because it is the necessary and sufficient condition for restoring ‘right covenantal relations’ between God and humanity. ‘Right’ preserves the basic insight of the penal substitution view, ‘relations’ that of the relational restoration view. And ‘covenantal’ qualifies them both.”*<sup>268</sup>

Vanhoozer’s emphasis upon covenant and aim (as we shall see) to connect his account of theo-drama with Irenaeus’ profound description of ‘recapitulation’ are excellent. But I think Vanhoozer’s performance conceptuality may develop an account of atonement that glosses the discontinuity of the Cross. He uses improvisatory concepts of ‘reincorporation’ (in which improvisation repeats a theme through a performance bringing it to bear on the whole) and ‘overacceptance’ (in which the improviser not only accepts the free involvement of other players but enables their performance to become part of the ultimate story) to describe the atonement in theo-dramatic perspective as a ‘wondrous improvisatory exchange’: *“The cross, then, is the historical outworking of an eternal improvising by which the triune God loves the ungodly creatively while remaining himself.”*<sup>269</sup> ‘Recapitulation’ becomes improvisatory ‘reincorporation’: *“the cross was God’s creative response to a new situation (Israel’s rejection of the Messiah) that was at the same time entirely in keeping with what had gone on before (the covenant with Israel)”*; the “death of Jesus saves because it is the means by which God ‘overaccepts’ sin, taking its guilt, shame, and power upon himself in order to overcome it”; and therefore we can say that Jesus’ willing obedience “is our salvation because

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<sup>267</sup> DD 385-387. These theories of the atonement become exclusive when they are ‘dedramatised’.

<sup>268</sup> DD 390-391

<sup>269</sup> DD 389

Jesus is 'God keeping his word'.<sup>270</sup> Vanhoozer is right that the character of God does not change, but in using Ricoeur's *ipse*-identity (narrative identity of 'keeping one's word'), he locates the Cross and Resurrection within a rationality rather than being creative of rationality. Rowan Williams describes the divine judgement of the Cross of Christ and the faith that it creates as gift, *ex nihilo*, in the resurrection.

Easter faith is what there is beyond that faith and hope that exists prior to or apart from the cross of Jesus; what there is left after the judgement implied by the cross upon human imagining of the work of God aside from the *ex nihilo* gift of the risen Christ.<sup>271</sup>

The discontinuity that the death of Christ places within history, and the subsequent new beginning of the resurrection, is essential to the utter destruction of sin and death, and flows from the infinite love and sheer identity of God. Vanhoozer is right to express the non-competitive relationship between true ways of understanding the atonement. My concern is that his means of integration in the triune communicative action model uses an overarching theo-dramatic performance conceptuality. It enables his description of the atonement in performative terms to linguistically integrate our participative performance. But how well does this express the way human agency is related to and transformed by God, in Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection? How well does it describe the mediation of salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection in relation to Jesus' humanity and the gift of the Spirit?

## **A.2. Human agency and identity in relation to the judgement and grace of the cross of Christ**

Christian identity in relation to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ involves both judgement and gift.<sup>272</sup> These cannot be merged (or separated) because the gift depends upon the finality of the judgement. This is also to say that whilst there is no justification that does not lead to sanctification, we cannot confuse the two. This is vital to the mediation of the Spirit, which relates to justification as well as sanctification. Oliver O'Donovan writes,

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<sup>270</sup> DD 387-391

<sup>271</sup> Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 83

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92

The Holy Spirit brings God's act in Christ into critical opposition to the falsely structured reality in which we live. At the same time and through the same act he calls into existence a new and truer structure for existence. He gives substance to the renewed creation in Christ, giving it a historical embodiment in present human decisions and actions, so that it becomes partially visible even before its final manifestation. We speak of two *aspects* of the Spirit's work, not of two works. It is perilous to draw too sharp a line in particular items of experience between repentance and moral learning, between justification and sanctification, between conversion and instruction....Yet the distinction is fundamental to our understanding. When the opposition of death and resurrection is collapsed, neither death nor resurrection remains.<sup>273</sup>

This distinction between the Spirit's ministry of conversion and instruction is hard to secure in Vanhoozer's triune communicative action model because the ministry of the Spirit is seen in perlocutionary terms – our response to the divine communicative action of the Word. O'Donovan, like Vanhoozer, follows Barth in describing the Spirit as the 'subjective mode' of divine action, but argues this involves complementary assertions: firstly, that the Spirit makes the reality of redemption *present* and *authoritative* and, secondly, that the Spirit evokes our *free* response to this reality as moral agents.<sup>274</sup> Vanhoozer lacks a sufficient account of the first emphasis because he does not want to involve the Spirit in making *present* the authoritative divine illocutions of Scripture.

The importance of distinguishing the two aspects is that the reality of redemption is '*in Christ*' – our participation in that reality is only in the gift of the Spirit, who makes the eschatological reality 'then' present 'now'.<sup>275</sup> Life 'in Christ' is in opposition to the sinful patterns of this world. O'Donovan argues that the Spirit's office of conviction (John 16:8-11), in ministering to the world the truth "which judges even as it enlightens," is contrasted with the Spirit's ministry in guiding the church. He hastens to add that this contrast is within *one* reality, redemption 'in Christ'.

Are we to contrast this missiological service of the Spirit with the ecclesiological service, of which we read a few sentences later (again, with special reference to the apostle's ministry), that 'he will guide you into all truth'(16:13)? Only to the extent that the ministry to the world is typically critical, that to the church typically constructive. But it is always understood that criticism leads to reconstruction, conviction opens to guidance. Even at the moment of criticism, the moment of confrontation and illumination, it is not only sin, but also righteousness and

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<sup>273</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order* (Leicester: Apollos, 1994) 104-105

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 102

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 103

judgement that are given as ‘conviction’. There is already present in that moment the call to live life in a continuing sequence of decisions which will embody Christ’s exalted life and anticipate his final triumph over this world’s ruler.<sup>276</sup>

Vanhoozer’s performance I and II distinction arguably makes a similar point regarding the priority of the gospel to ecclesial interpretation. But I think his triune communicative action model limits the Spirit’s role in the office of conviction. The Spirit’s ministry is focussed upon the gift of the interpretative virtue to recognise and participate in divine communicative action of Scripture. This risks either subsuming justification within sanctification or describing Scripture as self-illuminating (as discussed in chapter 3). In turn, the doctrine of atonement is described in performative terms that translate to our participation in Christ as ‘performing atonement’ in a way that cannot fully attain the opposition of death and resurrection. It is because the “Spirit brings God’s act in Christ into critical opposition to the falsely structured reality in which we live” as He “gives substance to the renewed creation in Christ” that we are free to respond and be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Structuring theology too closely to the linguistic turn to practice, and defending against the anthropocentricity by identifying the Spirit’s mediation with (canonical or ecclesial) practice as such, may undermine this twofold reality of judgement and recreation. It makes the distinction and relation of divine identity and human subjectivity in our participation in Christ is hard to maintain: our subjectivity and agency is either absorbed into divine performance or not sufficiently brought through death into new life.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, our subjectivity and agency is neither lost nor is it left as it was. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”(Gal 2:20) To convey this, we need a fully trinitarian account of life ‘in Christ’ drawing upon the significance of the Spirit as God’s *personal presence*. We see the strength of O’Donovan’s account in this regard as he turns to the second of his complementary assertions. The Spirit “restores us *as moral agents*, which is to say, *as the subjects of our actions*, not as divorced subjectivity which subsists in its own self-awareness.”

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 106

In confirming us as subjects, he teaches us how, within this age of eschatological judgement, we may act. To do this he does not take over our subjecthood; he enables us to realize it... God is present to man-as-subject, God the Holy Spirit attesting God the Son and evoking human attestation of him in human will and deed.<sup>277</sup>

Thus, O'Donovan cautions against the pneumatological and ecclesiological error of describing the Holy Spirit in terms of a "communal subjectivity".

It is no more acceptable to speak of the church as possessing a semi-divine subjectivity than it is to speak of an individual believer doing so...[The Holy Spirit] is not ambiguously 'I' and 'Thou' to the church, but always 'Thou' to it, as it is to him. He addresses it, 'Set aside for me Paul and Silas', and it addresses him, 'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire!'<sup>278</sup>

The strength of this account is that our subjectivity and agency (individual and communal) is wholly dependent upon the recreative work of the Holy Spirit without confusing or simply identifying the person of the Spirit with the subjectivity and agency of the church. The indwelling presence of God's Spirit is the gift of life 'in Christ', and this secures our identity as creatures as well as our identity as one with God in Christ.

### **A.3. Atonement and *Mimesis*: Vanhoozer's ecclesiology and account of participation in Christ**

I have argued that Vanhoozer's theodramatic approach to the atonement and ecclesiology involves a performance conceptuality that linguistically encompasses the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and our contingent participation. However, two clarifications are necessary. Firstly, Vanhoozer does not confuse the indicative and imperative nature of the gospel. Christian identity is "both gift and task." Doctrine helps us to know our identity in Christ (our vocation or 'role') so we may participate fittingly in the theodrama of redemption, becoming who we are through grace by faith in Christ. Vanhoozer uses the doctrine of atonement as his example.

Doctrine clarifies the nature of the gift (union with Christ) and prepares us for the task (becoming like Christ). In this regard, the doctrine of atonement trains us to think, imagine, even *feel* that who we are is a matter of our having died and been raised with Christ.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 106

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>279</sup> DD 392

Vanhoozer compares how doctrine performs this function in relation to sanctification with the way Constantin Stanislavski's conceived character formation in his 'Method acting'. Stanislavski spoke of a 'magic if': the actor dedicates her/himself to embody the role 'as if' s/he were the character. For Vanhoozer, the same is true of the Christian except that we speak of an "eschatological 'is'."<sup>280</sup> Doctrine helps us exegetically to play our part 'as is'. Having helped us understand the theo-dramatic action, doctrine helps us "learn our roles", our calling/vocation.<sup>281</sup> This "literal 'character' formation" is not 'play-acting' but "*pneumatic*": we participate in the theo-dramatic missions through union with Christ, a union "wrought by the Spirit yet worked out in history by us."<sup>282</sup> The Holy Spirit "uses doctrines to make disciples spiritually fit [for fitting theo-dramatic participation] by inculcating virtuous intellectual and imaginative habits."<sup>283</sup> Secondly, Vanhoozer does not confuse divine and human identity. While doctrine "locates Christian identity 'in Christ,' it does not confuse the disciple with his or her Lord" – we are "imitators of Christ not because we need to complete his mission but in order to witness to its *finality*."<sup>284</sup>

Amidst my appreciation for Vanhoozer's vital emphasis upon Scripture as God's *living Word*, which we are called *live out*, my concern is that his conceptuality leads to describing the Spirit in terms of the 'narrative character' of Christ's performance rather than God's personal presence.

What the Spirit communicates to those in Christ is not his essential nature but his *character*, that is, his characteristic mode of activity – his *spirit*. Christians have not only their own human spirits but the indwelling "Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11). It is this 'mystic *is*'...that finally clarifies the identity of the disciple: a person "in Christ."<sup>285</sup>

The Spirit of Christ seems to be less person and more narrative character: "The Spirit's role is to personalize and contextualize Jesus' life in us."<sup>286</sup> Our participation in Christ

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<sup>280</sup> DD 374

<sup>281</sup> Vanhoozer wonderfully emphasises the personal address of God to us in Christ. To "be a human person is ultimately to respond to the call of God and others."(DD 367) Whether this leads to a communicative ontology of personhood (as "ultimately" implies) is another matter.

<sup>282</sup> DD 366

<sup>283</sup> DD 378

<sup>284</sup> DD 396-397

<sup>285</sup> DD 393

<sup>286</sup> DD 397

seems to refer in a primary sense to a pattern of performance (the ‘drama of Christ’) that mediates the divine-human relation.

It is the Spirit who prompts human actors to transform their lives into ‘legible patterns’ of Jesus Christ...This is how we follow the drama of Christ’s life...repeating it so as to continue the through line of the Word’s communicative action in order to incarnate the same basic ‘idea’ (i.e. the knowledge of God) and action (i.e. the love of God) under different conditions.<sup>287</sup>

I have discussed how, in the triune communicative action model, this pattern of performance seems to be identified with (rather than contingent upon) the Spirit’s mediation of our relation to God in Christ. My point here is that the ‘discontinuity’ of the Cross (the opposition of death and resurrection) presses against this description because the death and resurrection of Jesus is both judgement and grace, and this too concerns the Spirit’s mediation. Human agency is redeemed as ‘new creation’ – participation in Jesus’ resurrected humanity, mediated to us eschatologically by the Spirit.

The crucial issue concerns Vanhoozer’s ecclesiology – how he links the gift of the atonement and the task of ‘performing atonement’. The operative conceptuality is ‘mimesis’ drawing upon Paul’s words, “Be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1):

The form of the church’s fitting participation in the drama of redemption is precisely that of mimesis: of Paul, of God, of Christ. To be sure the church does not literally replicate Christ’s work....Jesus’ person and work are singular, unique, and thus unrepeatable. The Christian vocation is rather that of *creative imitation*, a nonidentical participation in the missions of the Son and Spirit.<sup>288</sup>

Central to Vanhoozer’s ‘mimetic’ ecclesiology is an excellent exposition of the cruciform nature of our participation in Christ. “When the church...embodies the gospel, it exhibits the cross.”<sup>289</sup> To be a disciple of Christ, bearing witness to him, is to share in his sufferings (e.g. Phil 3:10, Rom 8:17). Paul sees his narrative so identified with that of Jesus’ that his own personal identity is inseparable from that of Christ.<sup>290</sup>

The question is how this ‘cruciformity’ – our participation in Christ – is related to the uniqueness of Jesus’ death and the giftedness of our salvation. It is a question of

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<sup>287</sup> DD 397

<sup>288</sup> DD 401

<sup>289</sup> DD 428-429.

<sup>290</sup> DD 393

mediation. For Vanhoozer, to be a disciple of Christ is to act in a way that theodramatically corresponds to the form of Christ.<sup>291</sup>

There is nothing especially Christian about suffering as an individual; but suffering as ‘a Christ for others,’ suffering in order to participate in the sufferings of Christ and so to make the reality of Christ visible to others – that *is* distinctly Christian...A martyriological mimesis, then, must know when and how to imitate Christ. [To] theodramatically correspond to the form of Christ, we need to exercise *phronesis* – perception and perspective – in order to determine “whether the conforming action is one of ‘incarnation’ (affirmation and co-operation), ‘crucifixion’ (judgement and rejection) or ‘resurrection’ (bold creativity and newness)”<sup>292</sup>

To speak of conformity to Christ in terms of deciding whether to adopt the action of ‘incarnation’, ‘crucifixion’ or ‘resurrection’ seems to imply a transcendent conceptuality categorising these events in such a way that we can rationalise ‘how they work’ and adopt them as paradigmatic ‘ways of being’ in relation to the world. This centres upon Vanhoozer’s use (within his understanding of *mimesis* and *phronesis*) of theodramatic ‘form’ in the mediation of the canonical rationality of Christian practice through faith by the Spirit. Jesus said that those who would come after him must deny themselves take up their cross and follow him (Mark 8:34 and parallels). Imitation is profoundly central to discipleship, and real participation in Christ. To know Jesus as Lord is to follow his way, and this requires that we hear his words and put them into practice. Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic brilliantly shows how Scripture is divine communicative action through which we know God and through which God directs our practice. My point is simply that this practice is gifted by God through and in Christ in a way that means we cannot assume an overarching linguistic framework – Jesus is both *God for me* as well as *one with me*. The point is one of mediation. Jesus’ death is unique: he *created* the way for us to follow. Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant (Hebrews 9:15), the author and perfecter of our faith (12:2), and the Spirit bears witness to this reality (10:12-25), making it manifest in our lives. I can only imitate God because Jesus has gone before me, creating the way, and God now continually makes that way through and in Christ manifest by the Spirit. The Spirit is more than the efficacy of divine communicative action.

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<sup>291</sup> DD 433

<sup>292</sup> DD 433(citing Larry Rasmussen).

Vanhoozer writes, “*The church participates in and performs the doctrine of atonement when it indicates what God was doing for the world in Christ and thus what we must now be doing if the world is what the gospel declares it to be.*”<sup>293</sup> He gives central examples – reconciliation, practicing forgiveness, love of neighbour – and they are profoundly described.<sup>294</sup> My questions concern the role of the Spirit in gifting and enabling us to adopt these practices and discern their specific shape in particular lives and communities. Regarding the practice of forgiveness, Vanhoozer is clear it is gifted by God, and that the Spirit helps us understand our new roles as forgiven and forgiving people. To be forgiven by God, is *know* the reality of forgiveness in a participative sense, not just intellectually apprehend it – ‘Whoever does not love does not know God’ (1 John 4:8)”<sup>295</sup> Vanhoozer, referring to Gregory Jones’ excellent book *Embodying Forgiveness*,<sup>296</sup> describes how the church *embodies* forgiveness through habits and practices that give a distinct and specific form to the church’s historical witness to the present and eternal reality of God’s forgiveness.<sup>297</sup> Discerning this specificity involves an “exercise of the theo-dramatic imagination”: forgiving others is a theo-dramatic “canonically scripted, doctrinally mandated, and Spirit-enabled practice.”<sup>298</sup> What this account arguably lacks is the way the Spirit is more than the enabler of practice.

The presence of the Spirit brings, through the message of the gospel, ‘God’s act in Christ into critical opposition with the falsely structured reality of our world’ (to repeat O’Donovan’s words). Gregory Jones’ work highlights this point. The Spirit ministers the reality of God’s forgiveness as a “judgement of grace....enabling our repentance, by shaping in us new habits and practices of forgiven-ness and repentance as we seek to be transfigured into holy people.”<sup>299</sup>

[T]he Spirit of Christ is at work in human life, bringing people to judgement and forgiveness so that our lives can once again be marked by communion. As John Zizioulas has described it,

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<sup>293</sup> DD 433

<sup>294</sup> DD 435-442. “*The church does not have to achieve reconciliation so much as display and exhibit the reconciliation already achieved through the death of Christ...The church strives to model social and ethnic and racial reconciliation, not primarily because society considers it moral but in order to correspond to the contours of the new creation.*”(435)

<sup>295</sup> DD 436

<sup>296</sup> L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1995)

<sup>297</sup> DD 436

<sup>298</sup> DD 437

<sup>299</sup> Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 162

‘The Spirit as ‘power’ or ‘giver of life’ opens up our existence to become relational, so that he may at the same time be ‘communion’ (*koinonia*, cf. 2 Corinthians 13:13).’ Indeed, the Spirit is at work throughout God’s Creation, seeking to open up spaces where forgiveness can interrupt our tendencies toward self-destructive judgement and thereby create space for communion.<sup>300</sup>

This mediation of the Spirit – which is described by Lesslie Newbigin’s phrase, the ‘prevenience of the Kingdom of God’<sup>301</sup> – is vital to Christian practice. The Spirit not only enables canonical practice but eschatologically mediates the present reality of that practice, making manifest its rationality. The Spirit is the personal presence of God who preveniently affects the reality and communication of the gospel, ‘publicly’ gathering and recreating the people of God through and in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. Jones quotes Rowan Williams: “the bridge connecting our forgiven-ness with the commission to forgive...is to be found in the presence with believers of the Spirit.”<sup>302</sup> It follows that we are dependent upon the Spirit in discerning what the word of God means for our practice of forgiveness in a particular situation.

[W]hile recognizing the priority of God’s forgiveness to our repentance, we also need to be guided, judged, and consoled by the Spirit as we seek to discern what that forgiveness means, and what repentance is called for, in relation to the narratives of our own and each others’ lives.<sup>303</sup>

The gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and risen is the rationality for every act of faithfulness to God – entrusting our lives to the faithfulness of God who raised Christ from the dead, bearing witness to his infinite love. We *depend* upon the Spirit to make this reality and rationality manifest to us through the apostolic words of Scripture. We cannot refer to the content of the divine illocutions of Scripture in the absence of the Spirit whose presence is vital to the rationality of the gospel. While the gospel is always communicated in human words and actions, the message of the cross is opposed to any kind of self-referential human wisdom (1 Cor. 1:18-2:16).

I’ve argued earlier that Vanhoozer’s triune communicative action model limits the Spirit’s ministry in the mediation of revelation. My point here is that Paul’s description of the wisdom of the cross, as a reality only comprehensible in the proclamation of the

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., 132

<sup>301</sup> L. Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (London: SPCK, 1995) 56f.

<sup>302</sup> Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness* 129

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 157

gospel by the empowering presence of the Spirit, perhaps represents the locus of the debate exegetically. This does not undermine Vanhoozer vital point that Scripture alone normalises the church's communication of the gospel. But this can be said without identifying the triune economy of salvation with semantic dynamics. We should speak of 'cruciformity' in narrative terms, highlighting Paul's self-understanding in terms of the narrative of the cross, and in thus describe the Christian life in terms of 'nonidentical repetition', a "living exegesis of the story".<sup>304</sup> But should this mean that our participation in Christ by the Spirit is linguistically defined?

## **B. The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life**

Central to the foregoing discussion was the eschatological nature of the Christian life mediated by the Spirit. Our dependence upon the Spirit raises issues concerning the Christian life in relation to the commandments of God (ethical imperatives) and how the Cross and the gift of the Spirit characterise divine and human agency. Gordon Fee grounds these concerns in Paul's eschatology, and specifically, the way the cross of Christ and the gift of God's presence by his Spirit shaped Paul's understanding of the Torah, life 'in the flesh,' and prayer.

### **B.1. Life 'according to the Spirit' in the New Testament letters of Paul**

Paul's ethical teaching in relation to Torah-observance is obviously a complex topic. My hope is to highlight some key issues surrounding Paul's description of life '*kata pneuma*'. The Spirit does not invalidate the importance of the commandments of God. Paul's words "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; what counts is keeping the commandments of God" (1 Cor 7:19) highlight that he did not consider righteous living as optional in terms of believers' relation to God's character. Fee argues that a discontinuity and continuity exists with respect to Torah is because the "gift of the eschatological Spirit" has "rendered Torah observance obsolete, but...at the

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<sup>304</sup> Gorman, *Cruciformity* 385

same time made possible the ‘fulfilment of the righteous requirement of Torah’.<sup>305</sup> (c.f. Romans 8:4) The Spirit is thus vital to Pauline ethics.

[F]or Paul there is no such thing as ‘salvation in Christ’ that does not also include righteousness on the part of God’s people. They are not saved by ‘doing righteousness’ – indeed that is unthinkable in Paul, since righteousness in the form of behaviour is the product of the Spirit’s empowering, and thus there can only be the working out of salvation by the same Spirit who has appropriated to their lives Christ’s saving work in the first place.<sup>306</sup>

This does not undermine the indispensable role of the words of Scripture in the mediation of salvation.<sup>307</sup> The issue is one of agency and living in the eschatological reality of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Fee’s point regarding righteousness and the Spirit is not that we do not need the written Word of God (‘keeping the commandments of God’ clearly refers to the articulated commands of the Lord), but that we are dependent upon the Spirit to hear, believe, know, love, and obey. The eschatological reality of our relation to God in Christ, into which we come through hearing the written Word of God, is mediated at every point by the Spirit of God. Thus,

the ethics of eschatological salvation in Christ starts with a renewed mind (Rom 12:1-2; cf. Col 1:9; Eph 1:17), because...only by such a renewed mind may one determine how best to love....Only dependence upon the Spirit can enable us to know what is pleasing to God.<sup>308</sup>

Fee’s exegesis supports much of Vanhoozer’s approach in which canonical practice is Spirit-ed practice. The distinction is that the Spirit is not only the source of canonical efficacy, empowering our living out God’s will, but vital to understanding God’s ways in the first place, and this matters because the mind renewed by the Spirit is in a crucial sense opposed to ‘human wisdom’. This raises an issue for theology structured by the linguistic turn. However, making these points requires great care. We must not confuse finitude (sustained by the Spirit) and fallenness (opposed by the Spirit). Such a confusion risks irrationalism and dualism, and a danger that we react against these by diminishing the eschatological *novum* of life in the Spirit, which we are seeking to

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<sup>305</sup> GEP 877

<sup>306</sup> GEP 878

<sup>307</sup> By these words we come to know God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We should also be clear that the words of the Torah are not done away with by Jesus’ ministry (Luke 16:17 and v.29,31).

<sup>308</sup> GEP 878

describe. This requires engagement with the controverted Pauline topic of the Spirit/flesh dichotomy.

For Fee, Paul intends in πνευματικός (Col. 1:9) a contrast to ‘fleshly’ wisdom – “wisdom and insight that is merely of this present world, ‘earthly’ in this pejorative, fallen sense” (as in Col. 2:8,23) and not ‘earthly’ as in belonging to the earth in a material sense – which is opposed to “knowing God’s ways by means of the wisdom the Spirit gives.”<sup>309</sup> Fee translates Gal. 5:16: ‘But I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.’ This is “Paul’s basic ethical imperative.”<sup>310</sup> What ‘walk by the Spirit’ means is vital to how we relate the gift of the Spirit to Christian practice. Fee argues that the combination of the imperative ‘walk’ with the dative ‘by the Spirit’ means that “[e]thical life is still a matter of ‘walking in the ways of God,’ but for Paul this is empowered for God’s new covenant people by God’s empowering presence in the person of the Spirit.”<sup>311</sup> The nuance of the dative is not obvious – it could be ‘instrumental’ or ‘locative of sphere’. Fee accepts this formula (in the light of v.18) is probably primarily instrumental, but he argues that “even though one is to walk by means of the Spirit, one does so because one is also to walk in the sphere of the Spirit, that is, in the arena of the Spirit’s present life and activity.”<sup>312</sup> Thus, Gal. 5:16 is *promise* – the Spirit is sufficient for our righteousness in a world in which the perspective of the flesh is still dominant.<sup>313</sup> Gal. 5:16 is both promise and imperative because the Spirit is in opposition to the flesh (v17). We are not simply powerless against the flesh, as underlined by the imperative – ‘so that you may not do whatever you wish’. But in this imperative our agency is ever-always gift and never possession – the Spirit is “*God’s enabling power over against the flesh.*”<sup>314</sup> This must not lead to an over-realised eschatology or body/Spirit dualism. The framework is Paul’s already / not yet eschatology. Fee emphasises this, expounding three Pauline metaphors for the gift of the Spirit: down payment, first-fruits and seal.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> GEP 642

<sup>310</sup> GEP 429

<sup>311</sup> GEP 430

<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> PSPG 110n10

<sup>314</sup> GEP 435

<sup>315</sup> PSPG 49-59

## B.2. Application to the concerns of this study

Paul's pneumatology concerning being 'led by the Spirit' (Gal. 5:18) does not undermine Vanhoozer's emphasis upon Christ-centred canonical practice and proper rejection of 'perlocutionary interpretation' under the auspices of a Spirit-led hermeneutic. As Fee writes:

Although at the popular level 'being led by the Spirit' is sometimes understood to refer to direct guidance by the Spirit, Paul's concern lies elsewhere. In context it functions as the other side of the coin to the imperative 'walk by the Spirit'. That is, believers who walk by the Spirit do so because they are following where the Spirit leads; and the Spirit leads in the 'law of Christ'[Gal 6:3], in ways that both reflect and pattern after Christ himself – whom Paul has earlier described as 'the one who loved me and gave himself for me'(2:20).<sup>316</sup>

However, Fee's exegesis presses against Vanhoozer's conceptuality concerning how the way of Christ, as eschatological 'new creation', subverts the continuities in the nature of human agency implied by linguistically structured theology (even though Vanhoozer's *canonical*-linguistic approach differs radically from the cultural-linguistic approach). In a recent essay on divine and human agency in Paul, J. Louis Martyn writes that in the gospel of Christ (for Paul, an event), God does not leave the human agent "alone at the road fork" but "meets both the incompetent, enslaved agent and the powers that enslave him in their own orb."<sup>317</sup> He argues that this meeting involves much more than God's holding out to the 'Adamic agent' a new possibility/option, because the meeting is centred in God's active, new-creative power. God meets us

in the *logos tou staurou*, the totally strange word-event that shatters 'the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning', thus destroying prior images of the human agent as well as old-age images of God (1 Cor. 1.18-19). And in that meeting the divine agent does something unheard of. Destroying old-age images of the human agent, God *changes* human agency itself! That is to say, meeting the incompetent and enslaved human agent in the gospel of his Son, God creates *the corporate, newly competent and newly addressable agent*, forming this new human agent in the image of the crucified Son *Christos estaurômenos*, by sending the Spirit of the Son into its heart (Gal 4.6; Rom. 8.29).<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> GEP 438

<sup>317</sup> J. Louis Martyn, 'Epilogue: An Essay in Pauline Meta-Ethics', in J. Barclay and S. Gathercole eds., *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and his Cultural Environment* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008) 180

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

I do not take this newly created ‘corporate agent’ to imply what O’Donovan critiqued as a semi-divine subjectivity of the church, but rather new humanity in Christ. Martyn is clear that the church is still made up of individuals, and there is no suggestion that the Spirit is anything other than ‘Thou’ to the church. His point is that our created agency enslaved by sin is crucified with Christ. By the Spirit we (as individuals) become one in Christ crucified, and participate in the corporate eschatological agency of the Spirit. (From this perspective, we see our old individuality as, actually, a participation in an opposing corporate agency, *sarx*.)<sup>319</sup>

The contrast/opposition between *kata pneuma* and *kata sarka* is therefore pivotal, and we must be clear what this means in order not to confuse finitude and fallenness. Fee argues for a distinction between Paul’s neutral references to life ‘in the flesh’ (“simply humanity in its creatureliness vis-à-vis God”) and morally pejorative references to life ‘according to the flesh’ (*kata sarka*), which denotes *fallen* creatureliness opposed to life in the Spirit. He argues that translating *kata sarka* as ‘sinful nature’ can imply that it is “anthropological without adequately recognizing that for Paul it functions in a principally eschatological way.”<sup>320</sup> The importance of this is that “[n]owhere does Paul describe life in the Spirit as one of constant struggle with the flesh.” Since *kata sarka* is an eschatological distinction from *kata pneuma*, and not an anthropological term as such, the terminology “does not reflect some kind of *internal struggle in the believer* between these two kinds of existence.”<sup>321</sup>

I would support Fee in this significant exegetical and theological debate, but with a qualification that centres upon the pneumatology at stake. Fee is opposing J.D.G. Dunn’s reading that, in Gal. 5:16-17, ‘flesh’ and ‘Spirit’ refer to two dimensions of the believer’s present existence. Dunn believes that Rom 7:14-25 and 8:1-9 represent the two sides of the eschatological tension; the believer is “involved on both sides of the cosmic struggle...‘I’ in Adam and ‘I’ in Christ.”<sup>322</sup> While I favour Fee’s exegesis, I

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<sup>319</sup> C.f. Ibid., 180n26 and 183n30

<sup>320</sup> GEP 819

<sup>321</sup> GEP 817,820. See PSPG 132-136 for Fee’s justification of this argument in relation to Rom. 7:13-25 and Gal. 5:17.

<sup>322</sup> J.D.G.Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,1998) 481

think Dunn’s critique of Fee raises an important issue. Dunn argues that Fee’s reading of Rom 8:4-6 suggests that the flesh is “passé as a factor in the life of the believer”, and thus asks how Fee can also accept that believers can and do succumb to the flesh.<sup>323</sup> He also argues that Fee seems to forget Romans 8:12-13 when Fee argues that the flesh-Spirit contrast in Paul never appears in a context concerned with ‘how to live the Christian life’.<sup>324</sup> I don’t think Fee’s believes the flesh is passé,<sup>325</sup> but rather that because of the Spirit the believer can live according to a reality totally opposed to the flesh, which is not a life set apart from the body, and thus still involves suffering as a consequence of sin. Tom Weinandy’s work supports Fee’s exegesis, but helpfully addresses this issue of suffering because of sin in a way that gives us a means of engaging with Dunn’s point. Weinandy’s incarnational theology emphasises that while Jesus never sinned personally nor had an inner propensity to sin, “yet his humanity was that of fallen Adam.”<sup>326</sup> Jesus’ death and resurrection transformed this humanity establishing “a whole new salvific order...The Son of God is still incarnate, though now incarnate as a risen and glorious man.” This new salvific order arises from Jesus’ redemptive work and “is founded upon and discovered within the eschatological presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>327</sup> To enter into it is to become a new creation in Christ through the indwelling Spirit.<sup>328</sup> Weinandy gives an overview of the biblical texts,<sup>329</sup> and argues that “the new life in the Spirit brings about changes in kind and not simply degree”<sup>330</sup>: “Christians are still men and women, but now they have been radically transformed...their sinful nature has died [through Jesus’ death (c.f. Rom 6:2-11)], and they have become, through the Holy Spirit, new men and women in Christ.”<sup>331</sup> However, whereas Fee’s account leaves us slightly perplexed by the ongoing struggle Christians face with regard to sin, Weinandy speaks of the “ardent act of the will” required to “oppose the sin that lies deep within one’s heart so as to put it to death – to

<sup>323</sup> GEP 817; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 480n86

<sup>324</sup> GEP 821; Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 480n86

<sup>325</sup> ‘*kata sarka*’ and ‘*kata pneuma*’ describe “the essential characteristics of the two ages, which exist side by side in unrelieved opposition in our present already but not yet existence.” One is “condemned and on its way out” the other is “the real life of the Spirit.”(PSPG 130)

<sup>326</sup> T. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark,2000) 212

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 234

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*, 236

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-241

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 241&n32

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 238

crucify it in Christ”<sup>332</sup> (c.f. 1 Cor. 9:26-27, Heb. 12:1). Rather than undermining the reality of our being ‘new creation’ in Christ,<sup>333</sup> this is part of Weinandy’s account of suffering *in relation to redemption in Christ*.<sup>334</sup> Crucially, Weinandy shares Fee’s concern that human weakness should not be confused with sin, lest life *kata pneuma* be confused with life *kata sarka*.<sup>335</sup> Life in Christ is true freedom not to sin – fully human agency, not immune from the fallen nature of our world, yet truly free as we fully depend upon God in Christ through the indwelling Spirit.

These points from Dunn and Weinandy help us build upon Fee’s account of the nature of agency in Paul’s eschatological perspective – not so as to depart from his basic thesis but to deepen our understanding of the transformation wrought by God in the human condition. For Fee, the flesh-Spirit contrast is not to do with ‘how to live the Christian life’, because Paul is using it in the context of appealing to those “who have entered into the new eschatological life in the Spirit” to not “return to the old aeon, to live on the basis of Torah observance, which for Paul is finally another form of life ‘according to the flesh’.”<sup>336</sup> Hence, life according to the Spirit, a total dependence upon what God has done in and through Christ crucified, is a way of being that places no weight upon what we can do, as we yet do what previously we could not – follow God’s commandments (‘walk by the Spirit’). Life *kata pneuma* does not overlap with life *kata sarka*.<sup>337</sup> Fee focuses upon Paul’s theological perspective in context, but we can consider how this engages modern questions of agency. God’s saving action in Christ creates a new humanity, through the indwelling of the Spirit. Since this pneumatology avoids the

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid., 267

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., 268

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., Chapter 10, ‘Suffering in the light of Christ’, especially the section ‘A Radical Departure’ 261-262. Weinandy’s argument, centred upon the cross and resurrection, is that God suffers impassibly in Christ, and this includes that the Risen Christ shares in present human suffering.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 268 (c.f. GEP 818n35,822-826).

<sup>336</sup> GEP 821. This does not mean that “God’s people cannot be ‘overtaken in a fault’ (Gal 6:1). The resolution of such between-the-times trespassing of God’s righteous requirement is for the rest of God’s Spirit people to restore such a one through the Spirit’s gentleness.”(PSPG 136)

<sup>337</sup> Karl Barth secures this pneumatological point in speaking of the subjective aspect of Christ’s objective work, but my aim is to do so with a stronger pneumatology that avoids the ‘immediacy’ Gunton finds in Barth’s model.

confusion of finitude and fallenness,<sup>338</sup> the cognitive and affective nature of our finite existence is not bypassed but renewed eschatologically. We are freed to be *bound to love* instead of *bound to sin*. The way Paul applies the flesh-Spirit dichotomy in his arguments over Torah-observance cannot simply be transferred to debates concerning the linguistic turn to practice in contemporary theology. However, the theology is relevant because the flesh-Spirit dichotomy is vital to Paul's understanding of the recreation of human agency by the cross of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. Clearly, we must not overstep into an over-realised eschatology – that would be foreign to Paul's whole discourse. Paul's understanding of 'power in weakness' and the nature of 'prayer in the Spirit' brings these issues of agency and the linguistic turn into clearest relief.

### **B.3. The Spirit and power in weakness: Prayer as a paradigmatic 'practice' of life in the Spirit, and how it exceeds a linguistic framework**

Central to Fee's emphasis upon the eschatological nature of the Spirit/flesh dichotomy is his concern that to read Paul differently can lead to confusing "the term 'weakness' i.e., life *in* the flesh, with life 'according to the flesh'". Such a confusion causes us to misunderstand Paul's description of how the Spirit assists us in our weakness (Rom 8:26), and his consequent rejoicing in weakness, in either 'defeatist' terms (in which 'weakness' includes the flesh-Spirit struggle) or 'triumphalist' terms (in which weakness is rejected as inherently evil). Fee emphasises that, for Paul, the Spirit is *experienced* in the life of the church, including visible manifestations of the Spirit's power,<sup>339</sup> but that in this manifest indwelling presence of God Paul closely correlates the Spirit's power with present weakness.

Rom 8:17 and 2 Cor 12:9 indicate that the Spirit is seen as the source of empowering in the midst of affliction and weakness. In Paul's view, 'knowing Christ' means to know *both* the power of his resurrection *and* the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings (Phil 3:9-10)...The future had truly broken into the present, as verified by the gift of the Spirit...Thus present

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<sup>338</sup> The eschatological Spirit *sustains* us in God's creation and *indwells* us in salvation through Jesus Christ, giving us a foretaste and guarantee of our resurrection in Christ crucified, thus *opposing* the sin that binds fallen humanity.

<sup>339</sup> GEP 824-825; see also Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 426-434

suffering is a mark of discipleship, whose paradigm is our crucified Lord. But the same power that raised the crucified One from the dead is also already at work in our mortal bodies.<sup>340</sup>

This eschatological reality – God’s power in our weakness – leads to a paradox that Fee suggests creates “difficulties for moderns”, but is established by the cross and resurrection of Christ and given by the presence of the Spirit as *evidence* of the ‘already’ and *guarantee* of the ‘not yet’. We do not oscillate between experiences of the old and the new order; by the Spirit we live in the reality of the new order in the midst of the old. This life in the Spirit is a life of faith, entrusting our suffering to God (c.f. Hebrews 11:32-38) and trusting in what we do not yet see, but experiencing the ‘real earnest’ of God’s personal presence – new birth into a sure and living hope (Heb. 11:1, 1 Pet. 1:3). Prayer exemplifies this present reality of human agency in Christ.

Personal prayer is at the heart of Paul’s eschatology and understanding of the nature of the Christian life. Paul clearly prayed before his conversion to Christ, but Fee argues that, for Paul, prayer has been transformed by the coming of the Spirit.<sup>341</sup>

The beginning of Christian life is marked by the indwelling Spirit’s crying out “*Abba*” to God (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). ‘On all occasions,’ Paul urges everywhere, ‘pray in/by the Spirit’...With prayer in particular the Spirit helps us in our ‘already/not yet’ existence.<sup>342</sup>

Romans 8:26-27 describes how the Spirit empowers us in our weakness. Although we don’t know what to pray for, God, who searches our hearts, knows the mind of the Spirit who indwells us and makes intercession for us according to God’s will. This profoundly expresses the way the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit transforms the relation of divine and human agency, as we participate in the life of God through and in Christ. Praying in the Spirit is also vital to Paul’s account of the ongoing struggle against the authorities and powers of this world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph 6:10-20). The word of God is the ‘sword of the Spirit’ – the only offensive weapon mentioned alongside the armour of God. The proclamation and application of God’s written word is our sole sufficient weapon for our struggle, and prayer in the Spirit is essential to this task.

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<sup>340</sup> GEP 825

<sup>341</sup> GEP 866(my emphasis); see also Gordon Fee, ‘Some reflections on Pauline Spirituality’, J.Packer and L.Wilkinson, *Alive to God* (Downers Grove: IVP,1992) 96-107

<sup>342</sup> GEP 866-867

It is God siding with his people and, by his own empowering presence, the Spirit of God himself bringing forth prayer that is in keeping with his will and his ways....It is evidence of our utterly dependent status; as it is also evidence of our continuing in the present in recognized weakness.<sup>343</sup>

This emphasises the eschatological relation of divine and human agency that prayer in the Spirit characterises. For Paul, prayer ‘in the Spirit’ is not so much about ‘ecstatic’ experience as about the greater reality as whole – how prayer had been transformed by Christ crucified and the gift of the Spirit into a relation of sonship to God in Christ. Paul experienced ecstatic moments, presumably in the context of prayer, but as Fee points out they are not his public focus lest they detract from the reality that God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:1-10). Life in the present involves being conformed to Christ’s death through the power of the resurrection.

Vanhoozer speaks of the profound importance of prayer as a canonical practice.

While each canonical practice requires its own specific response, the appropriate global response to the Scriptures is to *pray*...Prayer is that canonical practice whereby we do not merely envision the theo-drama but *indwell* it and assume a speaking part.<sup>344</sup>

As a canonical practice, prayer links us to the practice of Jesus. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to God as *Abba*, and Paul takes this up, regularly writing of “our God and Father” and employing the term *Abba* in Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6. Vanhoozer emphasises that calling God ‘Father’ identifies God as “a communicative agent who speaks and acts, a personal being with a name and an identity.”<sup>345</sup> Prayer is a canonical practice called forth and enabled by Scripture: Jesus’ life death and resurrection communicates to us a relation to God as *Abba*; the canon is “our logic of justification” for this and “the *norm* of Christian prayer.”<sup>346</sup> It is in this discussion of prayer that Vanhoozer cites David Yeago, “‘Christianity came into the world not as an ‘experience’ only subsequently ‘expressed’ in textual monuments but precisely as a *new textuality*.”<sup>347</sup> Whilst agreeing with the critique of ‘experience simpliciter,’ I think this

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<sup>343</sup> PSPG 147

<sup>344</sup> DD 224

<sup>345</sup> DD 225. Vanhoozer recognises that prayer bears witness to our contingency and our life in the Spirit: “To pray is to acknowledge God as Lord, oneself as contingent, and the filial relationship made possible by the Son of God and the Spirit of adoption.”(Ibid.)

<sup>346</sup> DD 225

<sup>347</sup> DD 226

makes ontology and hermeneutics co-inherent and overly-textualises the ‘experience’ of prayer, which exemplifies Paul’s understanding of eschatological agency (a corporate and personal relation to God in Christ mediated by the Spirit), and which is limited by thinking the gift of the Spirit and textual dynamics too closely together.

Prayer in the Spirit is not a parallel, supplemental or prior rationality to the canon; Scripture norms liturgical, corporate, and personal prayer. But prayer depends upon God’s personal presence by his Spirit, who creates a personal relation to God our Father in Christ Jesus. Our practice is contingent upon this presence, this relation to God in Christ by his Spirit. In 1 Cor 6:19-20 and 2 Cor 2:14-4:6, Fee argues we find the key to Paul’s personal piety – the presence of the Spirit as a personal and corporate reality. By the Spirit’s presence we behold God’s glory in Christ and are being transformed into God’s likeness:

the personal dimension cannot be set aside. Indeed the first location of God’s presence in the new covenant is within his people...We now bear his image in our present ‘already but not yet’ existence. This is not the only thing Paul believes the Spirit to be doing in our present world, but it is very significant, and we miss Paul by a wide margin if we do not pay close attention to it.<sup>348</sup>

My argument is that Christian prayer and worship reveal the eschatological nature of Christian practice and theology. What Paul describes is *experienced* – not the ‘experience simpliciter’ rightly rejected by postliberalism, but the experience of God’s *personal presence* by his Spirit. This requires a ‘yes and no’ to Lindbeck’s critique of experiential-expressivism. Vanhoozer’s ‘yes and no’ to Lindbeck’s critique of cognitive-propositionalism enables him to ‘rehabilitate propositions’. I think we also need to ‘rehabilitate experience’ post-liberalism and indeed post-postliberalism.<sup>349</sup>

Paul’s description of prayer in the Spirit supports the importance of understanding what God is doing in our world (given by Scripture) and knowing what to pray for, yet places our prayerful relationship to God in Christ, mediated by the Spirit, as a reality upon

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<sup>348</sup> PSPG 21-22

<sup>349</sup> Fee notes that ‘Spirit Christology’ became dominant in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of “Gunkel’s seminal work on the Spirit in Paul”, by which “he ‘felled the giant’ of nineteenth-century liberalism, wherein the Spirit had been identified with consciousness.”(GEP 832&n9). Arguably, it’s because of the prevalence of this ‘Spirit Christology’ that Lindbeck’s critique of experiential-expressivism has not met the same scrutiny as his critique of propositions. Vanhoozer’s Spirit Christology allows him to follow Lindbeck on this point regarding experience without the scrutiny it also requires.

which epistemic and hermeneutical capacity is founded rather than co-inherent – i.e. the gift of a new rationality (the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, life in the Spirit). Further, the ‘agency’ of Christian prayer is radically new, whilst not setting aside temporal human agency. Prayer in the Spirit is ‘God siding with his people and, by his own empowering presence, the Spirit of God himself bring forth prayer that is in keeping with his will and his ways.’ This utter dependence upon God in no way bypasses our mind and will but rather renews us by the Holy Spirit through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as both judgement and grace. Our freedom and subjectivity are newly created, by the communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit, such that there is a continuity-discontinuity relation with regard to linguistic practice and identity – the ‘I, yet not I’ of Gal 2:20.

Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic theology describes practice in an utterly theocentric way. It is a vital contribution and I am excited about the project. My aim has been to show how a stronger pneumatology is required, which would offer more of a corrective to the important linguistic turn in theology. The reality of God’s personal presence by his Spirit creates an eschatological reality that is under-realised by identifying the Spirit in perlocutionary terms. In terms of divine communicative action, perlocution should be contingent upon illocution. The problem is of making ‘divine communicative action’ an overarching framework for theology and identifying the Triunity of God with the dynamics of temporal communication. In this chapter, I have sought to centre this argument upon the cross and resurrection, and show its applicability to one of the most central canonical practices – prayer. Prayer is indicative of the new agency. Prayer in the Spirit is no mere ‘experience’ (as defined by modern epistemology), but the experienced gift of new life in the Spirit – God’s empowering personal presence; the life in Christ that is the foretaste of ‘new creation’ (2 Cor. 5:17).

### **C. Trajectories**

Based upon the concerns of this chapter, I think we can say that a fully trinitarian ontology, centred upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, involves a distinctively Christian account of freedom, rationality, and relationship to God and creation, in and through Christ crucified in the empowering presence of the Spirit – God’s power made perfect in weakness.

### **Conclusion**

I have drawn upon the work of Oliver O’Donovan to emphasise the work of the Spirit in the vital distinction (and equally vital integrity) of justification and sanctification in Christ. This is centred upon the way the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ establishes a twofold reality of judgement and recreation – a discontinuity and continuity with respect to the Creator-creature relation through and in Jesus Christ. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, our subjectivity and agency is neither lost nor left as it was (Gal 2:20). To convey this, we need an account of our life ‘in Christ’ that is fully trinitarian, reflecting the way that “God *changes* human agency itself”<sup>350</sup> and drawing upon the significance of the Spirit as God’s *personal presence*.

I’ve asked whether the performance conceptuality in Vanhoozer’s canonical-linguistic description of the atonement as ‘gift and task’ involves a rationality that problematically assumes an overarching continuity in the nature of human agency. His description of “literal ‘character’ formation” as “pneumatic” – an “eschatological *is*” in place of Stanislavski’s ‘magic if’ – establishes the agency of the Spirit within his canonical identification of the linguistic turn to practice. However, I think this pneumatology is limited – it does not fully convey that the indwelling personal presence of God in the Holy Spirit changes the ‘rationality’ of human subjectivity and agency, and therefore the dynamics of Christian practice. I share Vanhoozer’s commitment to the ‘cruciform’

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<sup>350</sup> J. Louis Martyn, ‘Epilogue’, 180

nature of Christian practice, but think he allows that rationality transcends the cross by locating our participation in the cross of Christ within a performative conceptuality, via an overarching linguistic framework.

Vanhoozer is certainly not advocating any kind of eclipse of the importance of the presence of the Holy Spirit by the vitality of the written Word of God, and I am absolutely not interested in the reverse of that eclipse. The issue is the way we describe the integrity of the personal presence of God by his Spirit with the transformative communication of the gospel of Jesus Christ in and through his written Word. My concern is that Vanhoozer's use of literary 'form' tends towards a transcendent reference that does the work theologically that I believe the New Testament attributes to the personal presence of the Holy Spirit.

The personal presence of God by the Holy Spirit is vital to the theological concerns that Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic approach addresses. I have considered the importance of Paul's antithesis between life '*kata pneuma*' and life '*kata sarka*' to our theological description of the relation between divine and human agency. Further, Paul's understanding is that life according to the Spirit is an experience of divine power made perfect in human weakness. This provided a means of exploring whether the Christian life can be fully described within a linguistic framework. Paul's description of prayer in the Spirit – most notably in Romans 8 – exemplifies the point and is paradigmatic of Christian practice. This calls for a fully trinitarian ontology built from the biblical witness.

## Concluding Summary

Kevin Vanhoozer uses speech-act conceptuality to describe the authority and identity of Scripture as the written Word of God (divine communicative action), and brilliantly applies this to the issue of normativity in theology structured by the linguistic turn to practice. There are difficulties, however, insofar as Vanhoozer's canonical-linguistic theology is founded upon identifying locution, illocution and perlocution with the Triunity of God. Addressing the semantic deficiency in Barth's doctrine of revelation, yet retaining Barth's triune model of divine self-revelation, leads to epistemological problems centred upon an insufficiently pneumatological account of mediation. The integration of authorial discourse and the linguistic turn to practice establishes a theodramatic account of triune communicative action (incarnate and inscripturate) that addresses the semantic nature of the mediation of salvation through and in Jesus Christ, and profoundly locates the hermeneutical task as flowing from, rather than a challenge to, the normativity of Scripture. However, the 'triune communicative action' model exacerbates the pneumatological limitation in Barth's account of divine self-revelation. I have argued that this emerges in the 'Spirit Christology' Vanhoozer's model uses, and sought to show this with Gordon Fee's exposition of Paul's witness to the Spirit as God's personal presence, eschatologically indwelling and empowering his people.

The personal presence of God by his Spirit is vital to the authority, identity and normativity of Scripture, and to the nature of the Church as 'manifest public'. The Spirit as 'person' is significant because the presence of the Spirit is creative of, but can not be defined by, communicative and ecclesial practice. (My argument involved questioning the use of Ricoeur's narrative concept of self to describe identity and participation in Christ.) Underwriting the linguistic turn to practice with pneumatology may address (post)modern issues of epistemological, hermeneutical and performative agency in relation to the divine grace of participation in Christ. But my concern regards how the ontological distinction between God and creation, and the relation of God's being to the economy of salvation, is conceived in such linguistic approaches. I have sought to show that participation in Christ is 'cruciform' (the narrative of the Cross

shapes our self-understanding as we seek to obey Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow him), yet argue that the gospel reality of Jesus Christ crucified and risen cannot be fully identified in linguistic terms without collapsing justification into sanctification. The New Testament witness to life according to the Spirit is essential to this point, and especially evident in Paul's understanding of the Christian life of prayer in the Spirit. This points towards a fully Trinitarian theology that sustains a 'high Christology' and 'high pneumatology' and supports the profound insights of the linguistic turn in theology, yet defends against the sheer identity of the Triune God being defined by it. Such an approach, based upon a fully trinitarian ontology, would I believe be creative of an understanding of the relation of divine and human agency centred upon our Lord Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father.

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