

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE MINISTRY OF  
JESUS CHRIST:  
A TRINITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

KEITH JOHNSON\*

The incarnation of the Son represents one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> Not only does the incarnation play a central role in accomplishing salvation but it also represents the primary means through which God's life as Trinity is opened to us.<sup>2</sup> Scripture teaches that in becoming a human being, the Second Person of the Trinity took upon himself the ordinary limitations of human life. How then, as a human being, did he heal the sick, enable the blind to see, cast out demons, and raise the dead? One popular explanation suggests that in accomplishing these acts, Jesus did not exercise his divine power as God. Instead, he depended on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.

While Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit was active in the life of Christ, the "Spirit-dependence" view referenced above is insufficiently Trinitarian because it cannot be reconciled with scriptural teaching regarding the unified agency of divine persons. The purpose of this essay is to explore, from a Trinitarian perspective, how we should understand the work of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus Christ. I will argue that any account of the Spirit's work in the life of Christ must incorporate a foundational element of the historic Trinitarian faith confessed by the church—namely, that the external works of the Trinity are undivided.<sup>3</sup>

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\*Keith Johnson is Director of Theological Education for Cru (formerly Campus Crusade for Christ) and guest Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida.

<sup>1</sup>For a helpful recent discussion of the incarnation, see Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

<sup>2</sup>"For when God designed the great and glorious work of recovering fallen man and the saving of sinners, to the praise of the glory of his grace, he appointed, in his infinite wisdom, two great means thereof. The one was the giving of his Son for them, and the other was the giving of his Spirit unto them. And hereby was way made for the manifestation of the glory of the whole blessed Trinity; which is the utmost end of all the works of God" (John Owen, *Pneumatologia* I.i, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, ed. William H. Goold [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862], 23). See also Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), especially chs. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup>External works represent actions of the divine persons in creation, providence, and redemption while internal works represent actions of one divine person toward another (e.g., the Father eternally begetting the Son).

My argument will proceed in four steps. First, I will present two examples of the Spirit-dependence view. Second, I will examine scriptural teaching regarding the unified work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Third, I will argue that the Spirit-dependence view is inconsistent with the undivided operation of the divine persons. Finally, in conversation with John Owen, I will commend an account of the work of Spirit in the ministry of Christ that reflects a Trinitarian understanding of divine agency.

I. THE SPIRIT-DEPENDENCE VIEW:  
TWO REPRESENTATIVE PROPOSALS

In his book *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ*,<sup>4</sup> Gerald Hawthorne claims that, in its eagerness to affirm the deity of Christ, the church has not adequately embraced the full humanity of Christ. Functionally, the church has fallen prey to a kind of “docetism” in which Jesus appears to be a human being yet acts by his own supernatural power.<sup>5</sup> Pneumatology offers the key to affirming the full humanity of Christ. In his state of humiliation, the Son never exercised his divine power as God but relied completely on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> Not only does this approach allow one to affirm the full humanity of Christ (without undermining his deity) but the dependence of Jesus on the Holy Spirit also provides a model for contemporary believers to emulate.

To substantiate his thesis, Hawthorne traces the work of the Spirit through the life and ministry of Jesus. The birth narratives (Matt 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–35) attribute the conception of Jesus to the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Although we know little of his childhood, there is evidence that even as a boy Jesus was dependent on the Spirit. For example, when Luke says that Jesus was “filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40), we should understand “wisdom” as referring to the work of the Holy Spirit. At the baptism of Jesus (Matt 3:13–4:2; Mark 1:9–13; Luke 3:21–22; 4:1–2; John 1:32), the Spirit anointed and commissioned him as Messiah.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Jesus possessed a new power within to heal, to teach, and to cast out demons.<sup>9</sup> Following his baptism, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness and strengthened by the Spirit amid temptation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Gerald F. Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power: The Significance of the Holy Spirit in the Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 25.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. Docetism is a heresy that taught that Christ only appeared to be human. It affirmed his deity at the expense of his humanity.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 53–96.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 132. Hawthorne claims that Jesus did not know he was Messiah prior to his baptism.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>10</sup>Jesus did not emerge victorious from this mortal struggle simply because of his own inner strength or because of the set determination of his will.... It was under

The gospels make it clear that Jesus did not perform miracles by his own divine power but rather by the power of the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit so fully motivated Jesus' speech and actions that the miracles he performed and the words he spoke he spoke and performed, not by virtue of his own power, the power of his divine personality, but by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work within and through him.<sup>11</sup>

Biblical evidence for the Spirit's work can be divided into two categories. First, several passages explicitly attribute the source of Jesus's power to the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:17-21, 28-29; Luke 4:14; 10:17-22; and John 3:34-35). The most important of these is Matt 12:28 where Jesus explains that it is "by the Spirit of God" that he casts out demons. A second collection of texts implicitly attributes the source of Jesus's power to the Spirit. These include references to "power" (e.g., Luke 1:17, 35; 4:14; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46) and "authority" (e.g., Mark 2:1-12). The Spirit strengthened Jesus as he went to the cross (Heb 9:14) and raised him from the dead (Rom 8:11).<sup>12</sup>

Reflecting on the implications of his study for evangelical Christology, Hawthorne characterizes his position as a "Kenotic Christology" in which the eternal Son, in taking on human flesh, "willed to renounce the exercise of his divine powers, attributes, prerogatives, so that he might live fully within those limitations which inhere in being truly human."<sup>13</sup> Divine knowledge and power were given to Jesus by the Holy Spirit. For example, it was the Spirit who revealed to Jesus that he was the Son of God.<sup>14</sup> No essential difference exists between the way Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit and the way other human beings depend on the Spirit. Consequently, "Jesus Christ becomes an object lesson, the source of tremendous encouragement and hope for every believer who studies his life and aspires to emulate him."<sup>15</sup>

In *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character*, Klaus Issler explores the dynamics of spiritual growth.<sup>16</sup> Issler wants to motivate believers to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit so they

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the Spirit's compulsion and by the Spirit's direction that Jesus went to meet Satan" (ibid., 139).

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 145-46 (italics added).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 179-98.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 216-17.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 291.

<sup>16</sup>Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012). See also Klaus Issler, "Jesus' Example: Prototype of the Dependent Spirit-Filled Life," in *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*, ed. Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 189-225. I will focus on Issler's argument in *Living into the Life of Jesus* since it represents his most recent treatment of the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ.

can be formed into the image of Christ.<sup>17</sup> Jesus Christ constitutes a key model for believers because he did not rely on his own power. Instead, he depended on the power of the Father and Spirit: “The main point is that Jesus predominantly relied on the divine resources of the Father and the Holy Spirit to accomplish his messianic mission.”<sup>18</sup> Only to the extent that Jesus lived a genuinely human life, in dependence on divine power, can he be an example for believers today.<sup>19</sup>

To bring greater clarity to his proposal, Issler outlines five possible options (see below).<sup>20</sup> Two assumptions shape these options.<sup>21</sup> First, when Jesus used his divine power, he did not use his human ability and *cannot* be an example for us. Second, when Jesus depended on the Spirit and/or Father, he did not use his divine power and *can* be an example for us.

Option A: Jesus exclusively used his own divine ability, never depending on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and never using his human ability.

Option B: Jesus predominantly used his own divine ability, infrequently depending on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and infrequently using his human ability.

Option C: Jesus used his own divine ability about half the time (not using his human ability), and for the other half he depended on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit (on these occasions he used his human ability), thus balancing/alternating an equal use of both abilities.

Option D: Jesus infrequently used his own divine ability, and predominantly depended on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit and also predominantly used his human ability.

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<sup>17</sup>In a footnote, Issler explains that Gerald Hawthorne’s book “was a key factor in launching me on my own continuing investigation of Jesus’ humanity and example” (*Living into the Life of Jesus*, 120).

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 110. Issler departs from Hawthorne on two points. First, he acknowledges that Jesus may occasionally have used his own power—but affirms this was not the norm (hence the language “predominantly”). Second, he suggests that Jesus was not merely dependent on the Holy Spirit but also on the Father.

<sup>19</sup>“As was mentioned before, if Jesus mainly engaged his own divine ability rather than his human ability for his life and ministry, then Jesus did not enter into the normal human experience—which would contradict other scriptural teaching. Further, if this was the case, then we humans cannot possibly follow Jesus’ example” (*ibid.*, 113).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>21</sup>“In presenting these five options, I will make the following two assumptions: (1) Jesus’ human ability is unnecessary and unused on those occasions when he’s using his own divine ability. On these occasions, Jesus cannot be an example for mere humans like us. I will argue that Jesus rarely or infrequently used his own divine ability. (2) When Jesus depended on the Father’s and the Spirit’s divine ability for life and ministry, then Jesus did not use his own divine ability but rather used his human ability. On these occasions, Jesus did engage an authentic human experience to qualify him for his messianic priestly role and also as an example for us in matters common to our humanity” (*ibid.*, 113).

Option E: Jesus never used his own divine ability and exclusively depended on the divine resources of the Father and Holy Spirit while he exclusively used his human ability.

Scriptural teaching about Jesus's dependence on the Holy Spirit and the Father rules out option A. Option B does not cohere with what Scripture says about Jesus living a genuinely human life to qualify as our sinless high priest. While option C is logically possible, it suffers from the same weaknesses as option B. Option E (Hawthorne's position) cannot be correct since there are occasions where Jesus exercises his divine power (e.g., Matt 17:2; Mark 9:3; Luke 9:29). Option D—that Jesus relied predominantly on the Father and Spirit—makes the most sense of the scriptural portrayal of Jesus's life.

In support of option D, Issler adduces three lines of biblical evidence. First, he points to texts affirming that Jesus was dependent on the Father (e.g., John 5:19–20; 14:10; 15:9–10; 16:32; 17:7–8; 18:11; Luke 22:42; 23:34, 36). Second, he cites texts in which Jesus is presented as exercising faith and trust in God (e.g., Heb 12:1–6; Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Mark 9:23; Luke 8:39; 17:6).<sup>22</sup> Finally, he appeals to texts showing that Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit (e.g., Matt 10:19–20; 12:28; 26:41; Mark 3:28–30; Luke 4:16–21; 8:46; 23:46; John 7:37–38). Summarizing the evidence, Issler explains, "The explicit and implicit biblical data offer sufficient cumulative evidence of Jesus' authentic human experience, empowered by the Father's and Spirit's divine resources for his life and ministry."<sup>23</sup> As a result, believers not only imitate Jesus's character but also his dependence on the Father and the Spirit.

## II. THE UNIFIED AGENCY OF THE FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

As we evaluate these proposals, it is not adequate merely to consider how they cohere with scriptural teaching regarding the person of Jesus Christ (i.e., two natures forever united in one person, as expressed in Chalcedonian definition). We must also consider how they fit with scriptural teaching regarding the agency of the triune God. It is my contention that the proposals outlined above are insufficiently Trinitarian because they do not cohere with scriptural teaching regarding the unified agency of the divine persons. To better understand the nature of this problem, we need to reflect on biblical teaching regarding the work of the divine persons in creation, providence, and redemption.

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<sup>22</sup>To this list, Issler also adds Paul's use of *pistis Christou*, understood as a subjective genitive, "faith of Christ," in Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:20, 26; 3:22; Eph 3:12; Phil 3:9 (ibid., 116).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 120.

When Christians speak about the work of the divine persons, they frequently divide actions among the persons (e.g., the Father creates, the Son redeems, and the Spirit sanctifies).<sup>24</sup> Scripture, however, presents a more nuanced account of the agency of the triune God. Consider creation. Was it the case that only one divine person (e.g., the Father) created all things? By no means. Scripture affirms that all three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1; Ps 33:6; Rom 11:36; John 1:1–3; Eph 4:6; Col 1:16; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:2).<sup>25</sup> Because Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, they always act in unison. No action is ever performed by one divine person apart from the involvement of the other two. To express scriptural teaching regarding agency of the divine persons, Christian theologians have historically taught that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act “inseparably.”<sup>26</sup> Inseparable operation means that all the divine persons are involved in every act of creation, providence, and redemption and that Father, Son, and Spirit share one will and execute one power.<sup>27</sup> Inseparable operation is a direct implication and economic expression of intra-Trinitarian unity (i.e., monotheism).<sup>28</sup>

An irreversible order also marks the agency of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although the divine persons act inseparably, they do so in an ordered way. For example, Scripture teaches the Father created *through* the Son (Heb 1:2; John 1:1–3; 1 Cor 8:6–8; Col 1:16). Nowhere in Scripture do we read about the Son creating through the

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<sup>24</sup>A popular belief among Christians divides the work of God between the three Persons, giving a specific part to each, as, for instance, creation to the Father, redemption to the Son, and regeneration to the Holy Spirit. This is partly true but not wholly so, for God cannot so divide Himself that one Person works while another is inactive. In the Scriptures the three Persons are shown to act in harmonious unity in all the mighty works that are wrought throughout the universe” (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God* [New York: Harper and Row, 1961], 23).

<sup>25</sup>More specifically, the Father created all things through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. For more on Trinity and creation, see John Webster, “Trinity and Creation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12 (2010): 4–19.

<sup>26</sup>In a summary of teaching about the Trinity, Augustine explains, “Just as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably” (Augustine, *De trin.* 1.7, in Saint Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill [Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991], 70). In medieval theology, inseparable operation is expressed through the Latin axiom *opera ad extra trinitatis sunt indivisa* (“the external works of the Trinity are undivided”).

<sup>27</sup>For further discussion of inseparable operation, see Kyle Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together: Defending the Historic Doctrine of the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 781–800; Gilles Emery, *The Trinity: An Introduction to Catholic Doctrine on the Triune God*, trans. Matthew Levering (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 159–94; Keith E. Johnson, “Trinitarian Agency and the Eternal Subordination of the Son: An Augustinian Perspective,” *Them* 36 (2011): 7–25; and Adonis Vidu, “Trinitarian Inseparable Operations and the Incarnation,” *Journal of Analytic Theology* 4 (2016): 106–27.

<sup>28</sup>Implicit in the doctrine of inseparable operation is the recognition that divine persons are not agents in the same way human beings are. God’s actions possess a unique unity for which no human analogy can easily be offered. Inseparable operation should not be confused with “modalism.” Modalism (or Sabellianism) is a Trinitarian heresy that denies the hypostatic distinctions among the divine persons.

Father. A similar pattern can be seen in the redemption of humanity. The Father sends the Son (Matt 10:40; Luke 4:43; 10:16; John 3:16; 5:23–24, 30–47; 6:38–44, 57; 7:16, 28–29; Gal 4:4–6) and the Father and Son together send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 15:26). In the work of the divine persons we see a recurring pattern: divine actions proceed from the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, a scriptural explanation of divine agency must include two elements. On the one hand, the operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the inseparable work of the three.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, in exercising a single causal agency, the divine persons work in a way that reflects their eternal mode of subsistence. The Father acts inseparably with the Son and Spirit according to his mode of being “from no one” (unbegotten). The Son acts inseparably with Father and Spirit according to his mode of being “from the Father” (generation). The Spirit acts inseparably with the Father and Son according to his mode of being “from the Father and the Son” (procession).<sup>31</sup>

John 5 provides a helpful window into the undivided work of the Father and Son. In response to criticisms of his Sabbath-healing, Jesus explained, “My Father is working until now, and I am working” (5:17).<sup>32</sup> Jesus directly equates his Sabbath-healing activity with the work of the Father. He invites his opponents to see in his healing the unified agency of the Father and Son.<sup>33</sup> This narrative is

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<sup>29</sup>As Gregory of Nyssa explains, “We do not learn that the Father does something on his own, in which the Son does not co-operate. Or again, that the Son acts on his own without the Spirit. Rather does every operation which extends from God to creation and is designated according to our differing conceptions of it have its origin in the Father, proceed through the Son, and reach its completion by the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that the word for the operation is not divided among the persons involved. For the action of each in any matter is not separate and individualized. But whatever occurs, whether in reference to God’s providence for us or the government and constitution of the universe, occurs through the three Persons, and it not three separate things” (Gregory of Nyssa, “An Answer to Ablabius: That We Should Not Think of Saying There Are Three Gods,” in *Christology of the Later Fathers*, LCC, ed. Edward R. Hardy [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1954], 261–62).

<sup>30</sup>Drawing on a distinction between “action type” and “action token,” Adonis Vidu explains that it is not merely the case that the divine persons perform the same kinds of actions (action types). Rather, the divine persons perform the same action token (see Vidu, “Trinitarian Inseparable Operations and the Incarnation,” 106).

<sup>31</sup>“The three persons act in one same action, but each perform this action in the distinct mode of his personal relation, that is, according to his proper ‘mode of existing’ in accordance with the Trinitarian order. The Father acts as the source of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, the Son acts as Word of the Father, the Holy Spirit acts as Love and Gift of the Father and Son” (Giles Emery, *Trinity, Church and the Human Person: Thomistic Essays* [Naples: Sapientia, 2007], 138).

<sup>32</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all biblical citations will be taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>33</sup>As Hilary explains, “He speaks that we may recognize in him the power of the Father’s nature employing the nature that has that power to work on the Sabbath. The Father works in him while he works. Without doubt, then, Jesus works along with the working of the Father” (Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 9.44, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament*, vol. 4a, John 1–10, ed. Joel C. Elowsky [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 186).

followed by a lengthy discourse in which Jesus appeals to the unique relation he shares with the Father to defend the appropriateness of his Sabbath-healing activity (5:19–47). For our purposes, it will be sufficient simply to focus on v. 19. “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.” The reason the Son does nothing on his own is not because of some inferiority on the part of the Son. Rather, it is because the Father and Son perform the same work, yet the Son’s work is *from the Father*.<sup>34</sup> For example, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son raises the dead and gives them life (John 5:21). It is not as if the Father raises half the dead and the Son raises the other half by “watching” the Father. The Father and Son indivisibly raise the dead. Thus, we see two dimensions of Trinitarian agency in John 5. On the one hand, the Son and Father work inseparably (John 5:17, 19). On the other hand, their unified working reflects their personal mode of subsistence: just as the Son is eternally *from* the Father (John 5:26),<sup>35</sup> so his temporal working is also *from* the Father (John 5:19).

A second window into the undivided agency of Father and Son can be found in John 10:28–30:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.

In this text, Jesus claims that he has power to grant eternal life to his sheep (10:28). To substantiate this claim, Jesus appeals to his relationship with the Father. First, he explains that no one can snatch his sheep from the Father’s hand (10:29). Next, Jesus appeals to the essential unity he shares with the Father (“I and the Father are one,” 10:30) to explain why no one can snatch them from *his* hand. In vv. 28–30 we see both unity of nature (in the affirmation that Father and

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<sup>34</sup>Patristic commentators rightly point out that equality of work implies equality of essence. Commenting on this text, Cyril of Alexandria explains, “Since he is able to accomplish the works of God the Father and to work in concert with the One who begot him, he reveals the identity of his essence. For things that have the same nature with one another will work alike. But for those who do not share a common nature, their mode of working will not be the same. Therefore, as true God of true God the Father, he says that he can do those things equally with him” (Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John 2.6*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 4a:189). Commenting on the same passage, Augustine explains, “Now we understand that the Father does not do something separately, which, when the Son has seen it, he, too, does after having examined the work of the Father.... Rather, with the same power the Son does the very same things that the Father does when the Father does them through the Son” (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John 21.2*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary*, 4a:190).

<sup>35</sup>For an explanation and defense of the eternal generation of the Son, see Scott Swain and Fred Sanders, eds., *Retrieving Eternal Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, forthcoming).

Son are one) and undivided operation (i.e., Father and Son both granting eternal life to Christ's sheep) with unity of nature constituting the basis for inseparable working. Because Father and Son share one "hand," they also act with a single "hand."<sup>36</sup>

A third window into the unified agency of the divine persons can be found in John 14:8–11.<sup>37</sup> In response to Philip's request ("Show us the Father, and it will be enough for us"), Jesus offers a startling response: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (14:9b). On what basis does Jesus make this claim? First, he points Philip to the mutual indwelling of the Son and Father: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (14:10a).<sup>38</sup> A second reason the person who sees Jesus sees the Father is because the work of Jesus is the work of the Father: "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works" (14:10b). We see two elements of Trinitarian agency reflected in these verses. On the one hand, because the Father and Son mutually indwell one another (14:10a, 11a), they perform a single work (14:10b). On the other hand, an irreversible order marks the working of the Father and Son: the Father works all things through the Son ("the Father who dwells in me does his works," 14:10b). The Son's eternal mode of subsistence is reflected in his temporal mode of operation (i.e., the Father working in him, 14:10b).

A final window into the agency of the divine persons can be seen in John 16:13–15:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Divine truth is linked to all three persons in this text (Spirit, Son, and Father).<sup>39</sup> In language strikingly similar to John 5:19 ("the Son can do nothing of his own"), Jesus explains that the Spirit "does not speak

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<sup>36</sup>"Hand" refers metaphorically to the common power of the Father and Son. As Augustine explains, "If by hand we understand power, the power of the Father and the Son is one, even as their Godhead is one.... Hand signifies the power of the Father and the Son" (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 48.6–7, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament*, 4a:358).

<sup>37</sup>"Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves'" (John 14:8–10).

<sup>38</sup>That the divine persons mutually indwell one another reflects their unity of essence (cf. John 1:1; 10:30).

<sup>39</sup>For more on the relationship between Trinity and truth, see Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

on his own"<sup>40</sup> but glorifies the Son by speaking what he hears from the Son (16:13-14). We see two dimensions of Trinitarian agency. On the one hand, the Spirit works inseparably with the Son in bringing truth to the church. On the other hand, an ordered agency marks their unified work. The Spirit communicates the truth he receives from the Son—truth that finds its ultimate source in the Father ("All that the Father has is mine," 16:15). A parallel exists in this passage between the Spirit's temporal mode of operation and his eternal mode of subsistence: he speaks as one who is from the Son and the Father.<sup>41</sup>

In response to this argument, one might raise the following question: "It is fine to assert that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work inseparably in creating and maintaining the universe but didn't everything change when the eternal Son took on human flesh?" This is an important question. Merely to cite biblical material showing that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit inseparably created the universe is not sufficient. Nor is it adequate merely to cite material showing that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit jointly willed the salvation of human beings. The question in this essay is not about the agency of the divine persons in general but rather the agency of the divine persons in the ministry of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. It is important, therefore, to note that all four examples cited above (John 5:18-26; 10:28-30; 14:8-11; 16:13-15) pertain to the ministry of the incarnate Son in his state of humiliation. These passages demonstrate that the Son continues to work jointly with the Father and the Holy Spirit following the assumption of a human nature.

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<sup>40</sup>The ESV translates the Greek phrase οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ as "he will not speak on his own authority." It should be noted, however, that Greek equivalent for "authority" is not found in the original. The inclusion of "authority" represents an interpretive judgment by the translators of the ESV.

<sup>41</sup>Reading this text alongside John 15:26, Augustine explains that the reason the Holy Spirit does not "speak on his own" is because, like the Son, he is not "from himself." Rather, the Holy Spirit speaks as one "proceeding from the Father" (Augustine, *De trinitate* 2.5, 100). Similarly, Thomas Aquinas explains, "If the Holy Spirit will teach them, it seems that he is greater than Christ. This is not true, because the Spirit will teach them by the power of the Father and the Son, for he will not speak from himself, but from me, because he will be from me. Just as the Son does not act from himself but from the Father, so the Holy Spirit, because he is from another, that is, from the Father and the Son, will not speak from himself, but whatever he will hear by receiving knowledge as well as his essence from eternity, he will speak" (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary of the Gospel of John, Chapters 13-21*, trans. Fabian Larcher and James A. Weisheipl [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010], 142). Commenting on John 16:14 ("He will glorify me"), Aquinas explains, "Now we see the reason why the Holy Spirit will glorify Christ: it is because the Son is the principle of the Holy Spirit. For everything which is from another manifests that from which it is. Thus the Son manifests the Father because he is from the Father. And so because the Holy Spirit is from the Son, it is appropriate that the Spirit glorify the Son. He says, he will glorify me, for he will receive from me. However, the Holy Spirit does not receive in the same way creatures do" (*ibid.*, 144).

## III. INSUFFICIENTLY TRINITARIAN

Having explored the agency of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are now in position to see more clearly the Trinitarian problem besetting the proposals of Hawthorne and Issler.<sup>42</sup> This problem comes sharply into focus in their explanations of the exercise of divine power in the miracles of Jesus. Both assume that one divine person (e.g., the Holy Spirit) can act apart from other divine persons when supernatural power is manifested in the ministry of Jesus.<sup>43</sup> Neither discusses the possibility that all three divine persons might be involved and that the divine power exercised is the undivided power of three.

Notice how Hawthorne explicitly contrasts the divine power of the incarnate Son from the divine power of the Holy Spirit in the following explanation:

The Spirit so fully motivated Jesus' speech and action that the miracles he performed and words he spoke, he spoke and performed, *not by virtue of his own power, the power of his divine personality, but by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work within him and through him.*<sup>44</sup>

According to Hawthorne, Jesus was aware that his power to heal the sick, give sight to the blind, and overcome the forces of Satan, "lay not in the strength of his own person, but in God and in the power of God mediated to him through the Spirit."<sup>45</sup> As the God-man, Jesus certainly possessed the power to do everything we read in the gospels. Nevertheless, "he did not use his own power."<sup>46</sup>

Similarly, when Issler introduces his discussion of five ways of accounting for divine power in the ministry of Jesus, all five options seem to assume that divine power can be predicated of one person to the exclusion of another. This judgment is confirmed by the

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<sup>42</sup>The proposals of Hawthorne and Issler also raise substantial christological questions. For a discussion of these issues, see Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 395–420.

<sup>43</sup>Why is it problematic to distinguish one Trinitarian person from another in the exercise of divine power? Simply put, "power" is not a personal property like paternity, filiation, or spiration. Divine power is always the undivided power of the three. Thus, to speak about Jesus Christ, as God, exercising "his own divine power" in contrast to another divine person is problematic both at the level of divine agency and divine ontology because it suggests three natures.

<sup>44</sup>Hawthorne, *The Presence and the Power*, 145–46 (italics added). Hawthorne makes a similar distinction in his explanation of the authority by which Jesus forgives sins in Mark 2:1–12. "It can be inferred from the narrative that in this instance Jesus' authority to forgive sins was not an intrinsic authority but a delegated authority, not one inherent in him by virtue of his own divine nature, but one given him by God, an authority that was his by virtue of a prophetic gift bestowed on him, the gift of the Holy Spirit to him" (ibid., 157–58).

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 170. In the immediate context, Hawthorne is discussing Matt 12:28.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 218. Prior to the incarnation, the Son of God "chose that all his intrinsic powers, all his attributes, would remain latent within him during the days of his flesh" (ibid.).

following explanation: "When Jesus depended on the Father's and the Spirit's divine ability for life and ministry, then Jesus did not use his own divine ability but rather used his human ability."<sup>47</sup> The problem is not with his assumption that, as a human being, Jesus performed actions in which divine power was not exercised. Rather, the problem concerns the way Issler explicitly contrasts the power of the incarnate Son with the power of the Spirit (or Father).

Contra Hawthorne, divine agency in the ministry of Christ cannot be reduced to the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Hawthorne's proposal fails to take into account the full scope of biblical teaching concerning the work of the divine persons. In marshaling a case for the exclusive dependence of Jesus on the Spirit, Hawthorne largely ignores the testimony of the Gospel of John (with its focus on the Father/Son relation) and concentrates instead on the Synoptics (which emphasize the Son/Spirit relation). He also ignores biblical texts attributing the exercise of divine power directly to the Son *qua* Son (e.g., Mark 2:1-12; John 11:43).

Hawthorne's discussion of the resurrection brings the exegetical and theological limitations of his proposal approach sharply into focus. What power, he asks, raised Christ from the dead? Although two passages seem to suggest that the Son raised himself from the dead (John 2:19-21 and 10:17-18), Hawthorne explains that we must interpret these passages in light of broader NT teaching that unambiguously affirms that "God raised Jesus from the dead" (1 Cor 15:14-18; 1 Pet 1:21).<sup>48</sup> How did God do this? Answer: by the Holy Spirit.<sup>49</sup> Although no NT text explicitly affirms that the Holy Spirit was the power by which Jesus was raised from the dead, Hawthorne explains that this represents the most reasonable inference.<sup>50</sup> This interpretation of divine agency substantially distorts the witness of Scripture. Contra Hawthorne, Scripture attributes divine agency in the resurrection to all three persons (more about that below). Hawthorne ignores the testimony of two texts explicitly teaching that the Son will raise himself from dead and then reinterprets biblical teaching about the role of the Father in the resurrection so

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 185-87. Hawthorne explains that references in John to Jesus raising himself from the dead simply reflect John's concern to affirm Christ's deity. He also notes that these sayings are qualified by surrounding material like John 2:22, which uses the passive voice in speaking about Christ's resurrection.

<sup>49</sup>"In light of the discussion contained in the previous chapters concerning the Holy Spirit, who was everywhere and at all times present and at work in the life and even in the death of Jesus, it is possible to infer that the Holy Spirit was that power by which God the Father raised up Jesus from the dead and gave him life again" (ibid., 187).

<sup>50</sup>"One might wish for an explicit statement such as, 'God raised Jesus from the dead by the Holy Spirit,' but it does not exist in the New Testament. Nevertheless, lacking such, the wording of texts just now examined is sufficiently clear so as to leave no doubt that God's agent effecting the resurrection of Jesus was God's Spirit, the power of God" (ibid., 194). Hawthorne spends eight pages defending the legitimacy of his claim that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead.

that these passages are understood to refer exclusively to the Holy Spirit.

Mindful of the exegetical limitations of this approach, Issler rightly parts company with Hawthorne on this point. He affirms that the Son was predominantly – but not exclusively – dependent on the Spirit (and Father). While this move represents an *exegetical* improvement, it does not constitute a *theological* improvement over Hawthorne’s proposal. Issler still operates with the assumption that one divine person (e.g., the Holy Spirit) can act apart from the involvement of the other two when supernatural power is manifest in the ministry of Jesus. Is there a better way to understand the work of the Spirit in the life of Christ?

#### IV. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

In an effort at faith seeking understanding, I will briefly sketch an alternative account of the agency of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus that reflects the unified work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Any explanation of the work of the Spirit in the life of Christ needs to account for the following:

- P1. The subject of the incarnation is the eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity.
- P2. The divine and human natures of the incarnate Son remain distinct and the Son acts distinctly through his divine and human natures.<sup>51</sup>
- P3. The incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, lived a genuine human life (e.g., born, suffered, and died like other humans).
- P4. Scripture (especially the Synoptics) presents the Holy Spirit as playing an active role in the life and ministry of Jesus.
- P5. Scripture (especially the Gospel of John) presents the Father as playing an active role in the life and ministry of Jesus.
- P6. Scripture attributes divine agency to the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, and presents this action as evidence of his deity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>There is a twofold operation in the incarnate Son. As Thomas Aquinas explains, “Therefore in Christ the human nature has its proper form and power whereby it acts; and so has the Divine. Hence the human nature has its proper operation distinct from the Divine, and conversely. Nevertheless, the Divine Nature makes use of the operation of the human nature, as of the operation of its instrument; and in the same way the human nature shares in the operation of the Divine Nature, as an instrument shares in the operation of the principal agent” (*Summa Theologiae* III, Q.19, a.1, in St. Thomas Aquinas, *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica*, vol. 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981], 2126).

<sup>52</sup>Scripture does not merely affirm that Christ performed miracles by divine power (like OT prophets). It claims that the divine power by which he performed these miracles *was his own*. This is why Christ’s miracles reveal his divine identity. For example, when Jesus turned water into wine (the first of his “signs”), John doesn’t tell

P7. Because they are one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit act inseparably in a way that reflects their eternal mode of subsistence.

P8. Scripture attributes (or appropriates) divine actions, or the results of divine actions, to one divine person without excluding the others.<sup>53</sup>

P9. Scripture presents the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ, as a model for believers to imitate.

How do we hold all these points together?

Theologian John Owen (1616–1683), helps point a way forward. In his massive volume on the Holy Spirit (*Pneumatologia*), Owen discusses the work of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>54</sup> I want to draw attention to five themes that emerge in Owen’s discussion. First, he reminds readers that to think rightly about the work of the Spirit, they must first reflect on the agency of all divine persons.<sup>55</sup> According to Owen, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

are undivided in their operations, acting all by the same will, the same wisdom, the same power. Every person, therefore, is the author of every work of God, because each person is God, and the divine nature is the same undivided principle of all divine operations; and this ariseth from the unity of the persons in the same essence (P7a).<sup>56</sup>

Yet in their undivided work, distinctions among the persons are not lost. The “order of operation” reflects the eternal “order of subsistence” (P7b).<sup>57</sup> The Father acts as the one who is from no one, the Son acts as the one who is eternally begotten of the Father, and

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his readers that this miracle manifested the glory of the Spirit but rather that it “manifested his own [i.e., Christ’s] glory” (John 2:11). Later in the same chapter, Jesus says, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). He doesn’t say, “Destroy this body and the Spirit will raise it up.”

<sup>53</sup>For a discussion of the doctrine of appropriation, see Emery, *The Trinity*, 161–68; and Keith E. Johnson, “Who Does What? The Trinitarian Doctrine of Appropriation” (paper presented at the 68th meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, TX, 17 November 2016).

<sup>54</sup>John Owen, *Pneumatologia in The Works of John Owen*, vols. 3 and 4, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862).

<sup>55</sup>“Intending to treat of the operations of the Holy Ghost, or those which are peculiar unto him, some things must be premised concerning the operation of the Godhead in general, and the manner thereof; and they are such as are needful to guide us in many passages of the Scripture, and to direct us aright in the things in particular which now lie before us” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* I.iv, *Works*, 3:92–93). For a helpful discussion of John Owen’s understanding of inseparable operation (especially in response to scholars like Alan Spence who claimed that Owen departed from the classical understanding of inseparable operation), see Tyler R. Wittman, “The End of the Incarnation: John Owen, Trinitarian Agency and Christology,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15 (2013): 284–300; and Claunch, “What God Hath Done Together,” 781–800.

<sup>56</sup>Owen, *Pneumatologia* I.iv, *Works*, 3:93.

<sup>57</sup>“On this depends the order of his operation; for his working is a consequent of the order of his subsistence” (*ibid.*, 3:92).

the Spirit acts as the one who proceeds eternally from the Father and Son.<sup>58</sup> Owen suggests that three persons seeing by one eye represents an analogy for the inseparable work of the Trinity.<sup>59</sup>

While works like creation cannot be assigned exclusively to one divine person,<sup>60</sup> they can be “eminently” ascribed to a divine person when a special property of that person is reflected in that action or when a work terminates on one divine person (P8) – for example, the Son taking on a human nature.<sup>61</sup> To understand why specific works can be attributed to one divine person, we must consider how that work reflects the relations that exist among the divine persons (i.e., the order of subsistence).<sup>62</sup> Because the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity who proceeds eternally from the Father and Son, “concluding, completing, perfecting acts” are ascribed to him.<sup>63</sup>

Second, Owen claims that the Holy Spirit played a vital role in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ (P4). Interestingly, his Socinian opponents argued that if the eternal Son truly took on human flesh,

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<sup>58</sup>“And this ariseth from hence, that in the whole economy of the Trinity, as to the works that outwardly are of God, especially the works of grace, the order of the subsistence of the persons in the same nature is represented unto us, and they have the same dependence on each other in their operations as they have in their subsistence. The Father is the fountain of all, as in being and existence, so in operation. The Son is of the Father, begotten of him, and, therefore, as unto his work, is sent by him; but his own will is in and unto what he is sent about. The Holy Spirit proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and, therefore, is sent and given by them as to all the works which he immediately effecteth; but yet his own will is the direct principle of all that he doth—he divideth unto every one according to his own will” (ibid.).

<sup>59</sup>“Whereas, therefore, they are the effects of divine power, and that power is essentially the same in each person, the works themselves belong equally unto them: as, if it were possible that three men might see by the same eye, the act of seeing would be but one, and it would be equally the act of all three” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* II.vi, *Works*, 3:162).

<sup>60</sup>“The reason, therefore, why the works of God are thus distinctly ascribed unto each person is because, in the undivided operation of the divine nature, each person doth the same work in the order of their subsistence; not one as the instrument of the other, or merely employed by the other, but as one common principle of authority, wisdom, love, and power” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* I.iv, *Works*, 3:93).

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 3:94.

<sup>62</sup>“The beginning of divine operations is assigned unto the Father, as he is *fons et origo Deitatis*—‘the fountain of the Deity itself’: ‘Of him, and through him, and to him, are all things,’ Rom. xi. 36. The subsisting, establishing, and ‘upholding of all things,’ is ascribed unto the Son: ‘He is before all things, and by him all things consist,’ Col. i. 17. As he made all things with the Father, so he gives them a consistency, a permanency, in a peculiar manner, as he is the power and wisdom of the Father. He ‘upholdeth all things by the word of his power,’ Heb. i. 3. And the finishing and perfecting of all these works is ascribed to the Holy Spirit, as we shall see. I say not this as though one person succeeded unto another in their operation, or as though where one ceased and gave over a work, the other took it up and carried it on; for every divine work, and every part of every divine work, is the work of God, that is, of the whole Trinity, inseparably and undividedly: but on those divine works which outwardly are of God there is an especial impression of the order of the operation of each person, with respect unto their natural and necessary subsistence, as also with regard unto their internal characteristic properties, whereby we are distinctly taught to know them and adore them” (ibid.).

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

there would be no need to posit a work of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus because, as God, Christ could have accomplished everything necessary for redemption.<sup>64</sup> Owen rightly rejects this sub-Trinitarian assumption.

Third, Owen explains that “[t]he only singular immediate act of the person of the Son on the human nature was the assumption of it into subsistence with himself.”<sup>65</sup> It was the Son *alone* who became incarnate (P1) – even though the work of the Son becoming incarnate was the undivided work of the three (P7). The only “necessary consequent” of the Son assuming a human nature “is the personal union of Christ, or the inseparable subsistence of the assumed nature in the person of the Son.”<sup>66</sup> The human nature of the Son was not infused with divine properties when the Son took on human flesh (P2).<sup>67</sup>

Fourth, the work of the Holy Spirit in the human nature of Christ reflects his eternal mode of subsistence (P7b, P8). Because the Holy Spirit is “the immediate, peculiar, efficient cause of all external divine operations,” he is “the immediate operator of all divine acts of the Son himself, even on his own human nature.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, “whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon the human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit, as he is the Spirit of the Father.”<sup>69</sup> After stating this, Owen reminds his readers that because the divine persons work indivisibly, the work of the Spirit does not exclude the Father and Son.<sup>70</sup> Agency is ascribed to the Spirit by way

<sup>64</sup>“And this seeming difficulty is vehemently pressed by the Socinians, who think to entangle our whole doctrine of the blessed Trinity and incarnation of the Son of God thereby” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* II.iii, *Works*, 3:160).

<sup>65</sup>Ibid. Owen’s use of the term “act” for the singular work of the Son is somewhat ambiguous. See Vidu, “Trinitarian Inseparable Operations and the Incarnation,” 119.

<sup>66</sup>Owen, *Pneumatologia* II.iii, *Works*, 3:160.

<sup>67</sup>“That all other actings of God in the person of the Son towards the human nature were voluntary, and did not necessarily ensue on the union mentioned; for there was no transfusion of the properties of one nature into the other, nor real physical communication of divine essential excellencies unto the humanity.... The human nature, therefore, however inconceivably advanced, is not the subject of infinite, essentially divine properties; and the actings of the Son of God towards it, consequential unto its assumption, and that indissoluble subsistence in its union which ensued hereon, are voluntary” (ibid., 3:161). That communication between Christ’s two natures was “voluntary,” can be seen in Christ’s temptation or lack of knowledge of future events (Mark 13:32).

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 3:162.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>“To clear the whole matter, it must be yet farther observed that the immediate actings of the Holy Ghost are not spoken of him absolutely, nor ascribed unto him exclusively, as unto the other persons and their concurrence in them. It is a saying generally admitted, that *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. There is no such division in the external operations of God that any one of them should be the act of one person, without the concurrence of the others; and the reason of it is, because the nature of God, which is the principle of all divine operations, is one and the same, undivided in them all. Whereas, therefore, they are the effects of divine power, and that power is essentially the same in each person, the works themselves belong equally unto them: as, if it were possible that three men might see by the same eye, the act of seeing would be but one, and it would be equally the act of all three. But the things we insist

of “eminence” (or in the language of medieval theology, “appropriation”).<sup>71</sup>

Owen traces the work of the Spirit through the key events in Christ’s life. Although all three persons were involved in the Son becoming incarnate, the “immediate divine efficiency in this matter was the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>72</sup> As a result of the incarnation, the Son possessed a complete human nature and grew up like other human beings (P3).<sup>73</sup> The Spirit anointed Christ with the gifts necessary to carry out his Messianic task (Isa 61:1). The fullness of these gifts was received at Christ’s baptism (Luke 4:1). Christ performed miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:22; Matt 12:28; Luke 4:36).<sup>74</sup> Of course, for Owen, this power represents

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on are ascribed eminently unto the Holy Ghost, on the account of the order of his subsistence in the holy Trinity, as he is the Spirit of the Father and the Son; whence, in every divine act, the authority of the Father, the love and wisdom of the Son, with the immediate efficacy and power of the Holy Ghost, are to be considered. Yea, and there is such a distinction in their operations, that one divine act may produce a peculiar respect and relation unto one person, and not unto another; as the assumption of the human nature did to the Son, for he only was incarnate” (ibid.).

<sup>71</sup>Appropriation for Owen includes not only undivided actions but also essential attributes. Because they are one God, essential attributes belong to all three persons – yet they are attributed by way of eminence to one divine person. For example, in *Christologia*, Owen appropriates goodness, wisdom, and power to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: “The properties of the divine nature principally and originally considerable [*sic*], in all external operations, (as we have newly observed,) are goodness, wisdom, and power. In this great work, divine goodness exerted itself eminently and effectually in the person of the Father – the eternal fountain and spring, as of the divine nature, so of all divine operations. Divine wisdom acted itself peculiarly in the person of the Son; this being the principal notion thereof – the eternal Wisdom of the Father. Divine power wrought effectually in the person of the Holy Spirit; who is the immediate actor of all divine operations” (John Owen, *Christologia* XVI–XVII, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1, ed. William H. Goold [New York: T&T Clark, 1862], 182). Owen appropriates goodness, wisdom, and power differently from earlier medieval theologians. Medieval theologians associated power with the Father because he is the source of divinity, wisdom with the Son because he is the wisdom and image of the Father, and goodness with the Holy Spirit because he is the source of good gifts (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I. q. 39, a. 8).

<sup>72</sup>This work is also assigned to the Father by way of authority (Heb 10:5), to the Son in terms of voluntary assumption (Heb 2:14–16) “but the immediate divine efficiency in this matter was the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost: Matt. i. 18; Luke i. 35” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* II.iii, *Works*, 3:163).

<sup>73</sup>“His divine nature was not unto him in the place of a soul, nor did immediately operate the things which he performed, as some of old vainly imagined; but being a perfect man, his rational soul was in him the immediate principle of all his moral operations, even as ours are in us.... The human nature of Christ was capable of having new objects proposed to its mind and understanding, whereof before it had a simple nescience” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* II.iv, *Works*, 3:169).

<sup>74</sup>“It was in an especial manner by the power of the Holy Spirit he wrought those great and miraculous works whereby his ministry was attested unto and confirmed. Hence it is said that God wrought miracles by him: Acts ii. 22, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him’; for they are all immediate effects of divine power. So when he cast out devils with a word of command, he affirms that he did it by the ‘finger of God,’ Luke xi. 20 – that is, by the infinite divine power of God. But the power of God acted in an especial manner by the Holy Spirit, as is expressly declared in the other evangelist, Matt. xii. 28; and,

the undivided power of the three. Nevertheless, it is eminently attributed to the Holy Spirit (P8). The Spirit “guided, directed, comforted [and] supported” Christ throughout his ministry.<sup>75</sup> In his death on the cross, Jesus offered himself to God through the “eternal Spirit” (Heb 9:14).<sup>76</sup>

Owen’s discussion of the resurrection brings together all the dimensions of Trinitarian agency we have discussed. He begins by pointing out that the resurrection of Christ is “assigned distinctly [in Scripture] to each person in the Trinity” (the Father in Acts 2:24; the Son in John 10:17–18; and the Holy Spirit in 1 Pet 3:18).<sup>77</sup> There are two reasons Scripture assigns the resurrection to each of the divine persons. First, the external works of Trinity are “undivided.”<sup>78</sup> Second, the resurrection is attributed to each divine person on “account of their especial respect unto and interest in the work of redemption.”<sup>79</sup> Scripture relates the resurrection to the Father because of his role as supreme judge removing the sentence of the law (Acts 2:24). Scripture relates the resurrection to the Son because of his role as mediator (John 10:17–18).<sup>80</sup> Scripture relates the resurrection to the Holy Spirit because of the Spirit’s efficacy in reuniting the soul and body of the incarnate Son (1 Pet 3:18; Rom 1:4; 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16).

Fifth, as he discusses the work of the Spirit in sanctification,<sup>81</sup> Owen commends Jesus Christ as a model for believers to imitate: “There is peculiar force and efficacy, by the way of motive, in the example of Christ, to incline us unto the imitation of him, that is not to be found in any other example, on any occasion whatever” (P9).<sup>82</sup> Although the Spirit of God is the “immediate efficient cause of all

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therefore, on the ascription of his mighty works unto Beelzebub, the prince of devils, he lets the Jews know that therein they blasphemed the Holy Spirit, whose works indeed they were, verses 31, 32” (ibid., 3:174).

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 3:176. Owen (rightly) argues that “eternal Spirit” in Heb 9:14 refers not to the human nature of Christ but to the Holy Spirit. The graces of the Holy Spirit in his death included (1) love toward sinners for whom he would die, (2) zeal for God’s glory, (3) obedience to the will of God, and (4) faith in God.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 3:181.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>So, also, although the Father is said to raise him from the dead by taking off the sentence of the law, which he had answered, yet he himself also took his life again by an act of the love, care, and power of his divine nature, his living again being an act of his person, although the human nature only died” (ibid., 3:182).

<sup>81</sup>Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly: It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ” (Owen, *Pneumatologia* IV.ii, *Works*, 3:386).

<sup>82</sup>Owen, *Pneumatologia* IV.vi, *Works*, 3:512.

gospel holiness,"<sup>83</sup> it is Christ who is the "exemplary cause of our holiness" (Rom 8:29).<sup>84</sup> The Father sent the Son not only as our savior but also as our model.<sup>85</sup> Thus, "We are obliged to profess that the life of Christ is our example."<sup>86</sup>

Owen succeeds in offering a robustly Trinitarian account of the work of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Christ.<sup>87</sup> His explanation possesses four strengths. First, Owen holds together the Synoptic and Johannine portraits of divine agency in the ministry of Christ, the latter emphasizing the Father/Son relation (P5) and the former emphasizing the Spirit/Son relation (P4). Second, Owen offers a way to affirm a substantial role for the Spirit in the ministry of Christ (P4) in the context of the undivided operation of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (P7). He does not pit the agency of one divine person against another in a zero-sum game (where more involvement by one person means less for another). The agency of the Spirit is understood in terms of appropriation (P8). Third, the incarnate Son *qua* Son remains the subject of divine actions like healing or exorcisms (P6).<sup>88</sup> This is true even of actions that are appropriated to the Holy Spirit (P8). Because the Son and Spirit are one, "all the works of the Holy Spirit are [the Son's] also."<sup>89</sup> Finally, Owen affirms

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 3:523. As Owen explains, "There is an immediate work or effectual operation of the Holy Spirit by his grace required unto every act of holy obedience, whether internal only in faith and love, or external also; that is, unto all the holy actings of our understandings, wills, and affections, and unto all duties of obedience in our walking before God" (ibid., 3:472).

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 3:509. Through his mediation, Christ is also the "procuring cause" of our holiness (ibid., 3:506).

<sup>85</sup>"One end why God sent his Son to take our nature upon him, and to converse in the world therein, was, that he might set us an example in our own nature, in one who was like unto us in all things, sin only excepted, of that renovation of his image in us, of that return unto him from sin and apostasy, of that holy obedience which he requireth of us" (ibid., 3:510).

<sup>86</sup>Owen continues, "This, in the first place, are we called unto, and every Christian doth virtually make that profession. No man takes that holy name upon him, but the first thing he signifies thereby is, that he makes the life of Christ his pattern, which it is his duty to express in his own; and he who takes up Christianity on any other terms doth woefully deceive his own soul" (*Pneumatologia V.v, Works*, 3:649).

<sup>87</sup>In making these points, John Owen is not unique. Similar explanations can be found among other post-Reformation scholastics as well as medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>88</sup>Oliver Crisp suggests a tension exists for Owen concerning the way the Holy Spirit mediates between the person of the Son and the human nature of Christ: "Owen's Spirit Christology fails to give an adequate account of the way in which God the Son remains the agent whose intentional actions are brought about in his human nature. And it fails to pay sufficient attention to the fact that God the Son must maintain the hypostatic union (not God the Holy Spirit), because it is a Trinitarian act that terminates on the Son" (*Revisioning Christology: Theology in the Reformed Tradition* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011], 106). For a response to Crisp's concerns regarding Owen on this point, see Vidu, "Trinitarian Inseparable Operations and the Incarnation," 120-22.

<sup>89</sup>Owen continues, "As his works were the works of the Father, and the works of the Father were his, all the operations of the holy Trinity, as to things external unto

that the incarnate Son (P1) lived a genuine human life (P3) and commends the life of Christ a model for believers to imitate (P8).<sup>90</sup> By carefully distinguishing between “exemplary” and “efficient” causes of sanctification (appropriated respectively to the incarnate Son and Holy Spirit), Owen affirms the imitation of Christ without needing to restrict imitation to those actions of Christ in which no divine power was involved.<sup>91</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION

In becoming a human being, the Second Person of the Trinity took upon himself the ordinary limitations of humanity to accomplish our salvation. How then, as a human being, did Christ heal the sick, enable the blind to see, cast out demons, and raise the dead? One popular explanation suggests that Jesus did not draw upon his divine power as God. Instead, he depended exclusively (or predominantly) on the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Proponents of this view wrongly assume that when divine power is manifested in the ministry of Jesus, that power belonged exclusively to the Son, exclusively to the Spirit, or exclusively to the Father—but not all three.

To think rightly about the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of Jesus Christ, we need a proper Trinitarian framework.<sup>92</sup> Because Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, they enact a single agency.

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their divine subsistence, being undivided; so is the work of the Holy Spirit in the consolation of the church his work also” (*Pneumatologia* VIII.i, *Works*, 4:358).

<sup>90</sup>For a helpful overview of biblical teaching about imitation, see Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

<sup>91</sup>It is important to note that the biblical call to imitation is not limited to actions of the incarnate Son in which no divine power was involved. For example, the mercy Jesus displayed in exercising divine power to heal is something we can and should imitate. From a different angle, Scripture also calls us to imitate the actions of divine persons who never became incarnate. For example, in the context of our status as image bearers, we are called to imitate the holiness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by living holy lives (Lev 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16). Jesus exhorts us to imitate the Father’s providential care for the just and unjust by loving our enemies (Matt 5:44–45). The apostle John invites us to imitate the Father’s love, demonstrated in sending the Son, by loving one another (1 John 4:7–11). Finally, the apostle Paul exhorts us to imitate the forgiveness God the Father has extended to fallen human beings by forgiving those who sin against us (Eph 4:32). Many more examples could be cited. If we take the position that only actions involving no exercise of divine power can be imitated (e.g., Hawthorne’s and Issler’s position), then we cannot account for the biblical material cited above. A better approach would be to recognize that the incarnate Son is our example without worrying which actions might have involved the exercise of divine power. In this alternative approach, we simply focus on those aspects of Christ’s life Scripture calls us to imitate (recognizing there are many aspects of his earthly life and mediatorial work we do not imitate). See Keith E. Johnson, “*Imitatio Trinitatis: How Should We Imitate the Trinity?*” *WTJ* 75 (2013): 317–34.

<sup>92</sup>In this essay, I am focusing on the “Trinitarian” framework. Nevertheless, there is also an important “christological” element to a proper account of the agency of the Spirit in the life of Christ. See Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate*, 395–444.

The Spirit never acts “alone” but always works inseparably with the Father and Son in a manner that reflects his personal mode of subsistence. The inseparable working of the divine persons does not come to an end with the incarnation. The incarnate Son acts through his human and divine natures to accomplish salvation. As our covenant representative, Jesus Christ obeys the Father as a human being but also works inseparably with the Father and Holy Spirit as God. The agency of the Son reflects his eternal mode of subsistence: he acts from the Father (emphasized in John) and through the Holy Spirit (emphasized in the Synoptics). The Spirit is involved in every facet of the ministry of Jesus—but never to the exclusion of the Son himself. Consequently, divine power in the ministry of Jesus cannot be attributed exclusively to the Spirit. Rather, in the language of John Owen, it is “eminently” attributed (or appropriated) to the Holy Spirit.