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UN CORPO IN TENSIONE: DISSENSO E SINODALITÀ NELLA CHIESA/1

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Summary

The article analyses some tensions in Christology that are closely related to pneumatology. Three areas are examined: the history of Jesus as the site of his “becoming” the Son of God; the interpretation of ancient Christology between Spirit and Logos Christology; the anointing of Christ in the Spirit at the Jordan. In each of these three areas the presence of polarities is emphasized. These polarities are found in Scripture, appear in the Fathers and reappear in various ways in contemporary theology. The conclusions stress the need to maintain certain hermeneutical tensions in contemplating the mystery of Christ in order to avoid simplification.

Sommario

Sulla cristologia pneumatologica. Tensioni interpretative e guadagni derivati

L'articolo analizza alcune tensioni presenti in cristologia, in stretta relazione con la pneumatologia. Gli ambiti di indagine sono tre: la storia di Gesù come luogo del “divenire” Figlio di Dio; l'interpretazione della cristologia antica tra *Geistchristologie* e *Logoschristologie*; l'unzione di Cristo nello Spirito al Giordano. In ciascuno dei tre ambiti viene evidenziata la presenza di polarità riscontrabili fin dalla Scrittura, che emergono nei Padri e si ripresentano, in vario modo, nella teologia contemporanea. Nelle conclusioni si sottolinea la necessità di mantenere alcune tensioni ermeneutiche nel considerare il mistero di Cristo, al fine di evitarne la semplificazione.

Paolo Brambilla *

ON SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY

Interpretative tensions and derived gains **

SUMMARY: I. INTRODUCTION – II. THE “BECOMING” OF THE SON IN HISTORY THROUGH THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT: 1. *A tension already present in the Scriptures*; 2. *Jesus adopted as the Son of God at his baptism*; 3. *Jesus, Son of God, born of Mary*; 4. *Jesus, the eternal Son called to be the Son in history* – III. THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE INCARNATION: 1. *Between the Spirit Christology and Logos Christology*; 2. *Recent Perspectives* – IV. THE ANOINTING OF THE SON BY THE HOLY SPIRIT: 1. *In the Scriptures*; 2. *In Patristics*; 3. *In dogmatic reflections* – V. CONCLUSIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to outline some of the tensions in Christology, with particular reference to the role of the Holy Spirit. Three areas have been chosen, corresponding to the following paragraphs, in each of which a polarity will be highlighted.

We will begin with a specific Christological question, that of the eternal Son of God who “becomes” Son in history (§ II). With regard to Jesus’ filial relationship with the Father, we will show the tension between eternal identity and filial history realised under the guidance of the Spirit.

We will then discuss the role of the Spirit in the incarnation (§ III), highlighting the dialectic between the *Geistchristologie* and *Logoschristologie*.

Finally, we will consider the anointing of Jesus by the Spirit (§ IV), a theological perspective that heralds several competing views on both the quality and the timing of the anointing received by the Saviour.

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In the following three sections we will, as far as possible, show the multiple testimonies of these tensions: in the New Testament (hereafter NT) and in theological reflection, from patristics to contemporary thought.

At the end of this itinerary, we will try to highlight some of its benefits (§ V) by pointing out two hermeneutical polarities that emerge from the journey undertaken and that, in our opinion, are necessary to access the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

II. THE “BECOMING” OF THE SON IN HISTORY THROUGH THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The first part of our study focuses on the possibility of affirming that Jesus “becomes” the Son of God in history. In the following analysis we will note where the Spirit is mentioned.

The tension could be expressed in a question: is Jesus the Son of God from the beginning of his earthly existence, or does He become fully the Son of God in the course of his life? In some ways, traces of this polarity can already be found in the NT.

1. A tension already present in the Scriptures

On the one hand, the affirmation of Jesus’ filial identity seems strong and repeated. We think of certain passages in the Fourth Gospel¹ or in Luke’s annunciation: the child to be born of Mary will be called «Son of God» (Luke 1,35) or «Son of the Most High» (Luke 1,32)².

On the other hand, there are significant texts which seem to point to the event of the Resurrection as a constitutive passage of the Sonship. Indeed, in the same Lucan literature we find that the ancient promise of God is fulfilled for us «by raising (*anastēsas*) Jesus; as also it is written in the second psalm, *You are my Son; today I have begotten you (sēmeron gegennēka se)*» (Acts 13,33). The words of Paul are similar, where the Son is «costi-

¹ Cf John 1,34: «I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God»; 11,27: «Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God». Cf also John 1,14.18.49; 3,16-18.35-36; 5,19-27; 10,36.

² We should not be naive about the meaning of expressions in the NT. Some, rather radically, maintain that the term Son of God, referring to Jesus, was, at least for the Judeo-Christians, not a term to be associated with participation in the divine life, but a generic expression indicating the adoption and presence of God through His Spirit; cf W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus - God and man*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia (PA) 1968, 117.

tuted³ (*oristhentos*) to be Son of God with power (*en dunamei*) according to the Spirit of holiness (*kata pneuma agiōsunēs*) by resurrection from the dead (*ex anastaseōs nekrōn*)» (Rom 1,4).

2. *Jesus adopted as the Son of God at his baptism*

One way of looking at the Nazarene's status as the Son of God was through the lens of adoptionism. This term, introduced in the 19th century by von Harnack⁴, refers to the theological idea that Jesus, a holy man endowed with divine charisms, was "adopted" as the son of God at his baptism in the Jordan. Adoptionist ideas are found in various heretical movements.

For the Ebionites, Jesus, a simple man, son of Mary and Joseph, went to the Jordan and was chosen by God as his son. The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus brings about a true and proper generation: the Spirit descended on many other prophets, but only He is the beloved son of God: through the work of the Spirit He will be able to perform divine actions. His holiness before divine adoption is not specified⁵.

Gnostic Christology is also adoptionist. Despite the complexity and diversity of the doctrines, we can at least mention the necessity of a double-triple baptism. First, the Son must receive the baptism of the Spirit in the *Pleroma*, a kind of divine prehistory: He needs the Spirit to contemplate God the Father and to be fully divine⁶. Then, when we come to the *Kenoma*, or history, we have to consider a double baptism: that of the old economy, given in water for the remission of sins in favour of the *psychics*, and that of the new economy, with the outpouring of the Spirit in favour of the *pneumatics*. The baptism received by Jesus includes both. He is not simply a man, but the virginal son of Mary, who unites in himself two

³ Here «constituted» replaces the more usual «declared», according to another possible translation.

⁴ Cf A. VON HARNACK, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte. Erster Band*, Mohr, Freiburg 1886, 568ff.; it does not seem to have appeared earlier. For a recent critical reinterpretation of the category, see J. COOGAN, «Rethinking adoptionism. An argument for dismantling a dubious category», *Scottish Journal of Theology* 76/1 (2023) 31-43.

⁵ Cf A. ORBE, *La teologia dei secoli II e III. Vol. II. Temi neotestamentari*, Piemme - Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Casale Monferrato (AL) - Roma 1996, 165-168.

⁶ Cf A. ORBE, *La teologia dei secoli II e III*, 169-170.

“human” natures, the psychic and the pneumatic: in a single act He is purified from ignorance and receives the Spirit and gnosis⁷.

Adoptionist theories were also spread in Rome by Theodotus the Clobber, followed by his disciple Theodotus the Banker, and later by Artemone⁸. Traces of adoptionism can be found in the monarchist doctrine of Paul of Samosata⁹ in which, however, baptism does not seem to play a role according to the fragments that have been preserved¹⁰. The same is true of Photinus of Sirmium¹¹.

Finally, some adoptionist overtones can be detected in the Arian doctrine¹². Although the theology of reference tends to be very different – monarchial for the Adoptionists and derived from the Logos theology for the Arians – the reception of the Spirit could, in both theologies, confirm the inferiority of the Son in relation to the Father¹³.

3. *Jesus, Son of God, born of Mary*

Ecclesiastical reflection in the early centuries, stimulated by the response to adoptionism, Arianism and the more divisive approaches to the two natures of Christ (Nestorianism), came to express clearly the identity of Jesus. At Ephesus it was affirmed that Mary was the *Theotokos*, the

⁷ Cf A. ORBE, *La teologia dei secoli II e III*, 171-172.

⁸ Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo* (= *Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum* 44), Augustinianum, Roma 1993, 190-191.

⁹ Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, 321-323.

¹⁰ Cf G. BARDY, *Paul de Samosate. Étude historique* (= *Spicilegium sacrum Lovaniense. Études et documents* 4), Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense - Honoré Champion, Louvain - Paris 1923, 372.

¹¹ Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sull'arianesimo* (= *Verba seniorum* 5), Studium, Roma 1965, 135-159.

¹² Cf A. GRILLMEIER, *Christ in Christian tradition. Vol. 1. From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, John Knox Press, Atlanta (GA) 1975², 228.

¹³ Cf for example ATHANASIUS, *The orations of S. Athanasius against the Arians* (= *The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature*), Griffith Farran Okeden & Welsh, London - Sydney 1889, I,37, pag. 50: «If Christ was exalted and received grace, and was anointed, is not this a reward of His using His will aright? But if He must needs make use of His freewill, then He must have a nature liable to change», and therefore is not equal to the Father. On the accusation of a certain adoptionism levelled at the Arians cf *ibid.*, I,5, pag. 14-15; I,38-39, pag. 51-53; II,41, pag. 130-132.

Mother of God, in order to declare that He who was born of her was the second person of the Trinity.

As the great Christological Councils teach¹⁴, Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father and, according to his divine nature, was born of the Father before all time, God from God. At the same time, however, this same divine Person, the Son, is truly human and, according to his human nature, was born of his mother at a very specific time in history. Thus, in the faith of the Church, it is firmly and unquestionably established that the identity of the man Jesus is, from the moment of his conception, that of the second person of the Trinity, the Son. There is no humanity in Jesus that is not also the humanity of the Son of God.

Jesus does not become the Son at a certain moment in his history; there is no question of adoption, but, as Augustine affirms, the humanity of Christ is created when the Son of God takes on human flesh¹⁵.

4. Jesus, the eternal Son called to be the Son in history

The dogmatic determination of the hypostatic union and the divine and filial identity of Jesus did not interrupt the reflection on his being the Son in humanity: if humanity is always given historically, Christ's filial humanity must also be re-read in its history.

We point out that the development of Christ's human capacities is not taken into account here. The statement that «Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature» (Luke 2,52), and more generally the whole Gospel account, has opened up debates – which we leave aside here – on the development of Christ's science, self-knowledge, freedom and holiness.

The perspective here is more radical and concerns the filial relationship itself. Theology, even with the idea that Jesus is the Son of God from conception, has focused on the filial quality of Christ according to his

¹⁴ Especially when the Alexandrian influence was stronger, as at Ephesus in 431 and at Constantinople II in 553.

¹⁵ Cf AUGUSTINE, «Answer to the Arian Sermon», in Id., *Arianism and other heresies* (= The works of Saint Augustine I/18), New City Press, Hyde Park (NY) 1995, VIII, pag. 145: «the one Christ is always by nature the Son of God, and he is by grace the Son of Man who was assumed in time. Nor was he assumed in such a way that he was first created and then assumed; rather, he was created in being assumed».

humanity. If He is truly human, and if humanity is realised in time, can his filial relationship be conceived as constituted in time?

This question has recurred at various times in theological thought. One example is the so-called Spanish adoptionism of the 8th century, promoted by the bishops Elipandus of Toledo and Felix of Urgell. They argued that Jesus, as a man, should not be regarded as the natural son of God, but as an adopted son. The dual nature gave rise to two different expressions: according to the divinity, the only Word is the natural and proper Son of the Father; according to the humanity, however, He is a Son by grace and will, accepted and adopted¹⁶:

the Son of God in communion with man is called the adopted Son, and also the son of man united with the Word [...]; the Son of God suffered, but only in adopted man; and was buried the Son of God, but only in adopted flesh¹⁷.

Among contemporary theologians, F.-X. Durrwell emphasised the perspective of a filiation realised in time through the work of the Spirit¹⁸. Starting from a historical-salvific point of view rather than an ontological one, in his proposal filiation appears as an ongoing process that finds its fulfilment in the Resurrection: «the resurrection is fulfilled filiation»¹⁹, so much so that one can say that «Jesus is born at the end of his life»²⁰. His birth (as Son) is an «eternal» birth: Christ does not go beyond the resurrection, but «abides forever in his resurrection»: whoever enters into his life, at any point in history, is made alive with him²¹.

¹⁶ Cf H. QUILLIET, «Adoptianisme. I. Adoptianisme au VIII^e siècle», in A. VACANT - E. MANGENOT - É. AMANN (edd.), *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique. Vol. III: Aaron-Angelus*, Letouzey et Ané, Paris 1930, 403-413. For the doctrine see *ibid.*, 408 and *DH* 612-615. The article continues with E. PORTALIÉ, who cites some theological positions of the 14th century, including that of Duns Scotus, for whom it is possible to speak of an adoptive filiation according to humanity for Christ.

¹⁷ ELIPANDUS TOLETANUS, *Epistula IV ad Albinum*, 16, in *PL* 96, 879B, transl. by us.

¹⁸ Cf M. GAGLIARDI, «Sulla cristologia pneumatologica (seconda parte)», *Alpha Omega* 26/3 (2023) 437-487: 456-461. More in-depth is R. PALTRINIERI, *Il nesso Trinità e Chiesa nella Pasqua di Cristo. In dialogo con F.-X. Durrwell e H.U. von Balthasar*, Glossa, Milano 2017, 139-170.

¹⁹ F.-X. DURRWELL, *La résurrection de Jesus, mystere de salut*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 1976, 110, transl. by us.

²⁰ F.-X. DURRWELL, *La résurrection de Jesus*, 114.

²¹ F.-X. DURRWELL, *La résurrection de Jesus*, 114.

W. Pannenberg takes up this position and suggests that the life of the Son should be considered and reflected upon from the resurrection. Jesus did not become the Son by rising from the dead, but in some way «the resurrection event has retroactive power»²², so that what is Jesus is constituted, also ontologically, from there, where it is possible, among other things, to clearly re-read the role of the Spirit (think of Rom 1,3-4; 8,11).

Let's not go any further. Let's just recall that opinions on the idea of sonship have multiplied throughout history, especially in non-Catholic circles; Pannenberg's study reports opinions that we would probably have considered adoptionist in the early centuries²³.

III. THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE INCARNATION

We now move on to illustrate a second tension, concerning the function of the Spirit in the incarnation²⁴. Patristic scholarship has highlighted an interpretive dialectic for early Christian theology, that between the Christology of the Spirit (*Geistchristologie*) and the Christology of the Logos (*Logoschristologie*).

1. *Between the Spirit Christology and Logos Christology*

Logoschristologie refers to Christian theological thought that interprets the identity of the second person of the Trinity in harmony with the idea of the Greek *logos*: Jesus would be, as the Fourth Gospel suggests, the *Logos* of God who takes flesh (John 1,1.14). *Logoschristologie* draws mainly on concepts from Middle Platonic thought, with Alexandria in Egypt as its ideal centre. It first appears in Justin, Tatian, Theophilus and Athenagoras,

²² Cf W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus - God and man*, 135.

²³ Cf W. PANNENBERG, *Jesus - God and man*, 135-137, where W. Künneth is mentioned, who speaks of the divinity conferred on Jesus only with the Resurrection, and W. Lohff, who sees the divine sonship as something imparted to Jesus in stages.

²⁴ The role of the Spirit is fully demonstrated in the Easter events, but there are important traces regarding the beginning of the earthly life of the Son of God; cf N. MADONIA, *Cristo sempre vivo nello Spirito. Per una cristologia pneumatologica*, EDB, Bologna 2005, 23-92, where the texts of the New Testament are studied.

and then becomes fully established with Clement, Origen and Athanasius²⁵.

It is in tension with *Geistchristologie*:

the ancient Christological understanding that defined the divine component of Jesus, that is, the pre-existent Christ, as spirit (*pneuma*). Destined to be replaced by the other understanding, which preferred the term Logos (and more sporadically Wisdom) for the pre-existent Christ, this archaic theology left conspicuous traces throughout the 3rd and 4th centuries, especially in the West²⁶.

Simonetti uses the term *Geistchristologie* in a technical sense, limiting it to authors who use the term *pneuma* to refer either to the divine nature of Christ or to the pre-existent Christ, sometimes called the Holy Spirit²⁷. This Christological approach constitutes «a Christological scheme rather than a doctrine in the strict sense»²⁸. Defined in this way, it seems to indicate only an archaic Christological doctrine, and one that must somehow be overcome, although the author himself maintains that this theology is not exclusively linked to binitarianism²⁹.

Madonia has taken up the dialectic between the two Christologies. He explains that he uses the term *Geistchristologie* in the manner of Simonetti, to refer to the patristic pneumatic Christology that follows the biblical

²⁵ For an overview of Logos Christology in the Patristic writings, see P. BERNARDI, *Il logos teandrico. La «cristologia asimmetrica» nella teologia bizantino-ortodossa* (= Collana di teologia 77), Città Nuova, Roma 2013, 43-63.

²⁶ M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, 23, transl. by us.

²⁷ Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, 24-25. He later states: «I think that [...] this term [*Geistchristologie*] should be used only where *pneuma* specifically indicates the divine person of Christ (*ibid.*, 47).

²⁸ M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, 24, transl. by us.

²⁹ Cf M. SIMONETTI, *Studi sulla cristologia del II e III secolo*, 46-51. A note on terminology: the juxtaposition of “Spirit” and “Christology” leads to expressions that have different meanings. Basically, *Geistchristologie* refers to the patristic theological approach that calls the divinity of Christ the Spirit (*Geist*), as opposed to *Logoschristologie*. On the contrary, when we speak of pneumatic or Spirit Christology, we are not proposing an alternative Christology to the classical one, but we are trying to show the role of the Spirit in the human life of the Logos. However, the terms are used rather fluidly; for example, Madonia, as will be explained later in the text, uses the term *Geistchristologie* to refer first to the most ancient patristic approach and then, when referring to Athanasius, to an incipient pneumatic Christology. For a recent discussion of this topic, see L.A. SÁNCHEZ, *T&T Clark Introduction to Spirit Christology*, T&T Clark, London - New York - Dublin 2022, 1-32.

one, which, according to the author's description, seems more mature than the later reflection:

The New Testament Spirit Christology considers the dynamic relationship between Christ and the Spirit, taking into account the interdependence of the two divine subjects which, while remaining distinct, reach the fullness of their being and function precisely in relation to each other. Patristic *Geistchristologie*, on the other hand, considers the ontology of Christ in a static way, considering the Spirit as a pre-existing divine element or divine dimension of Christ, while it doesn't even make a distinction between Christ and the Spirit³⁰.

Madonia suggests a process of progressive ontologisation of biblical Christological thought, first expressed in the *Geistchristologie* and then sharpened in the *Logoschristologie*. The transition from one to the other was caused by the fear of falling into adoptionism³¹. Three moments can be identified: an archaic *Geistchristologie*, with the Epistles of Clement, Ignatius of Antioch and Justin; a developed *G.*, with Irenaeus, Hippolytus and Tertullian; finally a *G.* in a Trinitarian context, with Clement, Origen and Athanasius³².

2. *Recent Perspectives*

At this point it seems reasonable to ask what tension should be maintained between *Geistchristologie* and *Logoschristologie*: if they were mutually exclusive, we would not be able to recognise the presence of both Christologies in the same authors. The tension between the two perspectives has been considered in various ways and is still a source of study and debate. Let's compare just two important interpreters, looking at Schoonenberg's proposal and Ladaria's response.

Both recognise how the two Christological perspectives mentioned above go hand in hand with the two Christologies found in the NT, namely the Christology from below or ascending and the Christology from above

³⁰ N. MADONIA, *Cristo sempre vivo nello Spirito*, 97, transl. by us.

³¹ Cf N. MADONIA, *Cristo sempre vivo nello Spirito*, 97. Here note 5 indicates the 4th century as the moment of transition.

³² Cf N. MADONIA, *Cristo sempre vivo nello Spirito*, chapters I-II-III of the second part.

or descending³³. This tension, however, is handled differently by the two authors, who wish to maintain both poles of reflection.

In Schoonenberg's proposal, *Logos Christology* describes the doctrine of the incarnation of the Logos, while *Spirit Christology* is the perspective that recognises Jesus as a man «filled with the Holy Spirit»; both are present in the NT³⁴. In post-biblical theology, the former has become central for the whole Church, to the detriment of the latter, which he seeks to revive³⁵.

The Dutch theologian therefore concentrates on the description of the divine economy, which includes both the work of the Logos-Wisdom and that of the Spirit, wondering whether the distinction between the Logos and the Spirit belongs to Revelation or is only a subsequent theological reflection³⁶. He also finds this dual presence in the life of the man Jesus³⁷ and goes so far as to affirm, almost by analogy with the ancient *Geistchristologie* described by Simonetti, that

Both Logos and Spirit penetrated Jesus in his entire human reality; hence we can identify the pre-existing Christ with both Logos and Spirit, without however fully identifying them with each other³⁸.

For Schoonenberg, therefore, *Logos Christology* and *Spirit Christology* coincide, and any arbitrariness in the work of the Spirit is eliminated³⁹. However, his theology is very original, often in a negative sense, and in many respects tends towards unorthodox positions⁴⁰.

³³ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», *Bijdragen* 38/4 (1977) 350-375: 350; L.F. LADARIA, «Cristologia del Logos y cristología del Espíritu», *Gregorianum* 61/2 (1980) 353-360: 356.358.

³⁴ He also recognises a third Christological point of view, that of the immediate relationship with the Father, in which Jesus is the Son; cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 350.

³⁵ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 350-351.353.360.

³⁶ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 371-374.

³⁷ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 364.

³⁸ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 374.

³⁹ Cf P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 374.

⁴⁰ He does not believe that Jesus is the divine person of the Word who assumed a true human nature, but a human person (see P. SCHOONENBERG, «Spirit Christology and Logos Christology», 365-366); Logos and Spirit are not divine persons, but «extensions» of the one person of God (see *ibid.*, 367-368); «Jesus' human person was pervaded by the Lo-

Ladaria, on the other hand, following a more traditional theology, emphasises that the two christologies are not alternatives but complementary, capable of being integrated⁴¹. The NT shows that Jesus is identifiable with the Logos, while it is the Spirit who gives life to his human life. It can therefore be affirmed that the Son is the complete response to the self-revelation of the Father, where the revelation of the Spirit does not encounter resistance; indeed, through the action of the Spirit, his humanity becomes paradigmatic and salvific⁴².

IV. THE ANOINTING OF THE SON BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

We now move on to the third area of investigation, which in a way reactivates the questions present in the two previous areas of tension. If the Son of God is indeed called to be such in his history (§II), if there is a role for the Spirit in the incarnation (§III), then theology can ask itself about the specific action of the Spirit in the human history of the Son of God. This has been re-examined through the category of the anointing of Christ, which we will now consider.

1. *In the Scriptures*

Before proceeding with the theological-dogmatic analysis, it is good to make some biblical observations. As I. de la Potterie⁴³ points out, when we speak of the anointing of Christ, it is important to remember, on the one hand, that Christ etymologically means “anointed” and, on the other hand, that Scripture speaks explicitly of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in relation to His baptism:

You know the word which [...] was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed

gos and the Spirit as extensions of God’s person, so that the Christ in his divine-human reality is only one person» (*ibid.*, 368).

⁴¹ Cf L.F. LADARIA, «Cristologia del Logos y cristología del Espíritu», 356-358.

⁴² Cf L.F. LADARIA, «Cristologia del Logos y cristología del Espíritu», 357-359.

⁴³ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L’onction du Christ. Étude de Théologie Biblique», *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 80/3 (1958) 225-252. From this we derive the biblical data which we will summarise below.

(*echrisen*) Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power (*pneumati agiō kai dunamei*) (Acts 10,36a.37-38a).

The Old Testament mentions several types of anointing. First, there is the royal anointing (at least 1 Sam 10,1; 16,13; 1 Kgs 1,39), which makes the king the anointed of the Lord. Then there is the priestly anointing, first reserved for the high priest and then, it seems, for all priests. There is only one mention of the prophetic anointing, which Elisha receives from Elijah (1 Kgs 19,16)⁴⁴. Finally, the theme of anointing must be understood in a messianic perspective: Judaism would call the expected liberator of Israel the Messiah or the Anointed One.

In NT there are four references about the anointing of Christ: Luke 4,18; Acts 4,27; Acts 10,38; Heb 1,9.

In the first three passages attributed to Luke, the anointing of Christ is linked to his baptism, the beginning of his public ministry and the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit⁴⁵. De la Potterie points out, however, that the anointing of Jesus at the Jordan is presented as a prophetic anointing and not exactly a messianic one: only with the ascension is the Lord exalted as Christ (Acts 2,36; similarly in Hebrews 1,9⁴⁶), and no evangelist uses the term Christ in the context of baptism⁴⁷.

Thus, at least in the work of Luke, the two themes, that of Jesus as the Messiah-Christ-Anointed of the Lord and that of the anointing received by Jesus in the context of baptism, develop independently: the first is linked to the exaltation at the right hand of the Father, while the second is linked to the event at the Jordan⁴⁸. It can therefore be said that in Scripture the anointing of the Son is accomplished in baptism, while his ministry is inaugurated⁴⁹.

⁴⁴ According to I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 225-226, the reference is only metaphorical and does not correspond to a material anointing.

⁴⁵ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 226-239: 226.235.

⁴⁶ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 248-249.

⁴⁷ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 238-239.

⁴⁸ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 241-242. From Acts 4,27, it is therefore possible to establish a link between the anointing and the obedience of the Servant Jesus, but it must be recognised as an afterthought to the idea of the prophetic anointing of Christ.

⁴⁹ Cf I. DE LA POTTERIE, «L'onction du Christ», 250-251.

2. *In Patristics*

Patristic theology, at least until the 4th century, almost unanimously – with the sole exception of Origen – maintains the same perspective as the NT: the anointing of Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit takes place at the moment of his baptism⁵⁰.

One of the most important perspectives is that of Irenaeus of Lyon:

the Word of God – who is the Saviour of all, and the ruler of heaven and earth, who is Jesus, as I have already pointed out, who did also take upon Him flesh, and was anointed (*unctus*) by the Spirit from the Father – was made Jesus Christ⁵¹.

And he continues

as the Word of God was man from the root of Jesse, and son of Abraham, in this respect did the Spirit of God rest upon Him, and He has been anointed (*unguebatur*) to preach the Gospel to the lowly⁵².

The Jordan event appears as the moment of anointing or consecration, and the one on whom the Spirit habitually rests is said to be anointed. Contrary to the perspective of the NT, which reserves the term Christ for the one who ascends to the right hand of the Father, Irenaeus attributes the messianic role to the baptismal anointing⁵³.

⁵⁰ Cf R. CANTALAMESSA, «“Incarnatus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine”. Cristologia e pneumatologia nel simbolo costantinopolitano e nella patristica», *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum. Atti del Congresso teologico internazionale di pneumatologia* (= Teologia e filosofia VI), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1983, 101-125: 119. For the development of this part of the discourse, see the conclusions of A. ORBE, *La Uncion del Verbo* (= Analecta Gregoriana 113), Università Gregoriana, Roma 1961, 629-656, and the reflections of M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito* (= BTC 82), Queriniana, Brescia 1995, 234ff.

⁵¹ IRENAEUS OF LYONS, «Against Heresies», in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. I*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids (MI) 1885, 315-567, III,9,3, pag. 423 (SChr 211, pag. 108).

⁵² IRENAEUS OF LYONS, «Against Heresies», III,9,3, pag. 423 (SChr 211, pag. 110), transl. modified.

⁵³ Cf also IRENAEUS OF LYONS, «Against Heresies», III,12,7, pag. 433 and the commentary by A. ORBE, *La Uncion del Verbo*, 504. On the basis of a passage in *Epideixis*, 47, Orbe identifies for Irenaeus another anointing that took place before the ages (*ibid.*, 501-503), which he also recognises in Justin (*ibid.*, 65) and Eusebius of Caesarea (*ibid.*, 578-579). The author insists that this anointing should be understood in the Trinitarian immanence, in the same context as the generation of the Word, beyond the humanity of Christ (*ibid.*, 630). However, the individual texts seem to us to be allusive rather than

Baptism thus appears as an event in favour of the man Jesus, and at the same time, precisely because it is in Jesus, as an event of salvation for humanity: it is revealed as a *mystery of the life of Christ*⁵⁴. Irenaeus links the eschatological gift of the Spirit to the anointing: pentecost is possible from the baptism of the Nazarene. In fact, with reference to the Holy Spirit, Irenaeus claims that God

promised, that in the last times He would pour Him [the Spirit] upon [His] servants and handmaids, that they might prophesy; wherefore He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God⁵⁵.

This perspective, of which Irenaeus is the prime example, is more or less shared by many Greek and Latin Fathers⁵⁶.

It will lead to interpretive tensions if it is understood in an exclusive way: Jesus receives the Spirit *only* in baptism, and only then does He become the Anointed of God. In the course of patristic reflection, the interpretation of the anointing of the Saviour was thus modified, moving it from the moment of baptism to the incarnation, but running the risk of superimposing the anointing on the hypostatic union⁵⁷. Bordoni believes that this shift was made with an anti-heretical perspective, in order to avoid

demonstrative. In fact, we believe that such an interpretation presupposes a question of divine immanence that is too mature for the theological context; cf Z. CARRA, *Veritas de terra orta est. Fondamenti di gnoseologia teologica nell'Adversus haereses di Ireneo di Lione* (= Dissertatio. Series Romana 67), Pontificio Seminario Lombardo - Glossa, Roma - Milano 2022, 781-784.

⁵⁴ Here we mean, according to the classical definition: a historical event in the life of Christ in which the work of the Triune God is revealed and realised, and which, precisely because it was experienced by the man Jesus, has a salvific meaning for us.

⁵⁵ IRENAEUS OF LYONS, «Against Heresies», III,17,1, pag. 444. Similarly, in *ibid.*, III,9,3, pag. 423: «Therefore did the Spirit of God descend upon Him [...] so that we, receiving from the abundance of His unction (*de abundantia unctionis eius*), might be saved» (SChr 211, pag. 112).

⁵⁶ For a patristic dossier, see M. BORDONI, *Gesù di Nazaret. Signore e Cristo. Saggio di cristologia sistematica. 3. Il Cristo annunciato dalla Chiesa. Tomo 1*, EDB, Bologna 2018, 278-285.

⁵⁷ Cf M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 236-237.

being open to adoptionist interpretations, originally Gnostic and Monarchian, but still present in Arianism⁵⁸.

We believe that theological exploration should be added to the reasons of this shift: it has been made clear that Jesus was always guided by the Holy Spirit, even before his baptism⁵⁹.

Gregory of Nazianzus is often identified as the one who authoritatively marked the abandonment of a Trinitarian view of the anointing of Christ⁶⁰: the anointing is no longer seen as a gift of the Spirit from the Father to the incarnate Son, but is realised in the incarnation, when the divine nature of the Word anoints the humanity of Jesus⁶¹, somehow relegating the Spirit's action on the Nazarene to the background.

But even if the idea of the anointing is traced back to the incarnation and therefore to the hypostatic union, the presence of the Spirit in Christ is not forgotten. In fact, if the concept of the anointing and some of the theological reflections connected with it are somehow neglected, the idea of the Holy Spirit given to the man Jesus does not disappear. We would like to show this with two texts, one Eastern and one Western.

Cyril of Alexandria speaks of humanity having lost the original gift of the Spirit through sin and being called to receive it again as a gift from Christ. In fact, He is the first of those who receive it and precisely in baptism

⁵⁸ In addition to the reference in the previous note, see M. BORDONI, *Gesù di Nazaret*, 316-317.941.

⁵⁹ This is also the opinion of Y. CONGAR, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, Crossroad, New York 1997, 20. R. CANTALAMESSA, «“Incarnatus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine”», 122-123, adds, among the reasons, the ontologisation operated by the Fathers, which he believes can reduce the importance of the story of Jesus.

⁶⁰ So says R. CANTALAMESSA, «“Incarnatus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine”», 118: «Such an explanation passed from Gregory Nazianzen to Cyril of Alexandria, John Damascene and Maximus the Confessor, and from Augustine to the whole Latin West, until it became the only known patristic explanation of the relationship between the incarnation and the anointing»; transl. by us.

⁶¹ Cf GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, «The fourth theological Oration» (Orat. XXX), in *A Select library of Nicene and post-Nicene fathers of the Christian church. Second series. Vol. VII*, Grand Rapids (MI), Eerdmans, 1955, 309-318: II, pag. 310; XXI, pag. 317. Cf also ID., *Select Orations* (= The Fathers of the Church 107), The Catholic University of America Press, Washington (DC) 2003: Orat. X,4, pag. 28-29.

God the Father began to give again the Spirit, and Christ first received the Spirit as First-fruits of the renewed nature. For *John bare record saying, I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven and It abode upon Him*⁶².

Obviously it's a question of the way of his reception, in relation to the truth of the gospel text.

Was it then as not having? we say not so, God forbid. For the Spirit is the Son's Own, and not supplied from without, as the things from God come to us from without, but inexists in Him naturally even as in the Father, and through Him proceedeth to the saints, apportioned by the Father as beseems each. But He is said to have received, in that He became Man, and it beseemed man to receive⁶³.

The Spirit is 'natural' in Christ in that He is the divine Word, one with the Father and the Spirit. He receives it as a man.

Let's now turn to Augustine, who expresses himself in a similar way to Cyril. First, on the presence of the Spirit in Christ before baptism:

It is very foolish of us to believe that He received the Holy Spirit when He was already thirty years old [...]; but we believe that as He came to the Baptism without any sin at all, so He was not without the Holy Spirit⁶⁴.

And a little further on, he removes any doubt about the reception of the Spirit by basing his explanation on the dual nature of Christ:

in what was also written of Him that He received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, and that He poured forth this Spirit, His two-fold nature was revealed, that is, human and divine, for He received (*accepit*) as man, but He pours forth as God⁶⁵.

However, Augustine rejects the idea that the anointing of the Holy Spirit took place at the baptism of Jesus. According to him, on that day there was only a prefiguration of the gift that would be given to the Church, because

⁶² CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John. Vol. I. John I-VIII*, James Parker, Oxford 1874; V,2, on John 7,39, pag. 547.

⁶³ CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, *Commentary on the Gospel according to S. John*, V,2, on John 7,39, pag. 547.

⁶⁴ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity. Books 8-15* (= Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2002, XV,26,46, pag. 218.

⁶⁵ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, XV,26,46, pag. 218.

He was then anointed by that mystical and invisible anointing when the Word of God was made flesh⁶⁶.

As we can see, the Fathers do not deny the gift of the Spirit to Jesus, but they question the nature and quality of this gift. It is not considered possible that Christ received the Spirit only at baptism: He was always guided by the Spirit. The valorisation of the baptism of Jesus and the anointing that took place through the work of the Spirit is not in line with their theology, which focuses on understanding the theological-trinitarian identity of Christ from the moment of his conception.

3. *In dogmatic reflections*

The different theological perspectives present in patristics are reflected in the subsequent differences of interpretation. To illustrate this, let's look at the tension between a very classical perspective, such as that of Thomas Aquinas, and M. Bordoni's proposal to recover the richness of the anointing in the 20th century⁶⁷.

Aquinas takes up the legacy of the second patristic school, characterised by the idea that Jesus, as the Word made flesh, was holy and anointed from the beginning of his earthly life.

Christ did not need spiritual baptism, since He was filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit from the beginning of His conception⁶⁸.

Baptism confers grace, forgives sins and acts as a spiritual remedy, almost like a medicine; in this sense it was not necessary for Christ⁶⁹. It should be noted, however, that Thomas does not deny the descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus at the moment of baptism, but only attributes to it an epiphanic-revelatory value:

⁶⁶ AUGUSTINE, *On the Trinity*, XV,26,46, pag. 217.

⁶⁷ For a comparison of the two christologies, see G. RIZZI, *La cristologia di Marcello Bordoni e la teologia dell'incarnazione di san Tommaso d'Aquino. Analisi - confronto - prospettive*, Cittadella, Assisi 2022. For the theme under study, see *ibid.*, 126-132.485-506.

⁶⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae. Tertia Pars, 1-59* (henceforth *STh*, III), Aquinas Institute, Green Bay (WI) 2017, q.39, a.2, Resp, pag. 408-409.

⁶⁹ Cf *STh*, III, q.39, a.2, ad.2-3, pag. 409.

the Holy Spirit descended visibly, under a bodily shape, on Christ at His baptism, in order that we may believe Him to descend invisibly on all those who are baptized⁷⁰.

To understand the presence of the Spirit in the humanity of Christ, Thomas describes the grace of hypostatic union and habitual grace. If the end of grace is the union of the creature with God, the summit of grace is that given to Jesus⁷¹ in which humanity and divinity find a hypostatic union. According to the order of nature and reason, this grace is followed by habitual grace, that is, sanctification, which is given together with the gift of charity: its principle or cause is the Holy Spirit, whose mission – in the order of salvation – comes after the mission of the Son⁷².

In a certain sense, then, the presence of the Spirit in Christ is linked to the fact that He is the Word made flesh, the One who, together with the Father, gives the Spirit. It should be noted that, for Thomas, one cannot speak of an “increase” of grace: «no greater grace can be or can be thought than that of which Christ was full»⁷³.

Bordoni’s approach is different, as is the pneumatic Christology of the twentieth century in general, in which we can see the intention to respect the value of the anointing of the Spirit, which, as Scripture indicates, took place at the moment of baptism. Not only does it have an epiphanic value, revealing the truth of Christ and his mission, but it is an event that «really happened to Jesus at that moment»: the anointing of Christ takes place at the Jordan⁷⁴.

In fact, it is a question of

shedding light on the realism of Jesus’ baptism, both as «an event of the Spirit that took place in him» (Christological-pneumatological aspect) and as «an event that signifies the power of the Spirit working in him in relation to the Church for the universal salvation of the world» (Pneumatological-ecclesiological aspect)⁷⁵.

⁷⁰ *STh*, III, q.39, a.6, ad.3, pag. 416.

⁷¹ Cf *STh*, III, q.7, a.12, Resp, pag. 99-100.

⁷² Cf *STh*, III, q.7, a.13, Resp, pag. 101.

⁷³ *STh*, III, q.7, a.12, contra, pag. 99.

⁷⁴ Cf M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell’orizzonte dello Spirito*, 238.

⁷⁵ M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell’orizzonte dello Spirito*, 238, transl. by us.

Bordoni understands the concern of theology, that is cautious «to think that the Incarnate Word can achieve in baptism something that was not already given at the moment of the incarnation»⁷⁶. And he responds to this by recalling his idea of the incarnation as a historical event that concerns the whole life of Christ⁷⁷, of which the conception is certainly the first and fundamental moment. That is to say, there is a pneumatic dimension to the incarnation, expressed on the one hand in a more static and traditional way, in which the Spirit «shapes and tames this humanity in its perfect openness to receive the hypostatic assumption of the Word»⁷⁸. On the other hand, however, according to a dynamic and historical perspective, the Spirit presides

in his work of consecration, also presides in a special way over that aspect of the human nature of the Redeemer through which the assumed humanity actively lives, in its appropriation of the filial being, the very movement of the eternal being of the Son. Thus, in the incarnation, there is no loss of human freedom; on the contrary, man reaches his maximum free activity in the full realisation of his identity as “Son-Man”⁷⁹.

From this point of view, Bordoni argues that the baptism of Jesus is, on the one hand, an «event of the totality» of his life: what is shown in the Jordan always takes place in his life. On the other hand, it is an «event of singularity»: the Spirit is given at that particular and unique moment in the life of Christ, that is, at the beginning of his prophetic ministry⁸⁰.

We can say, then, that in the event of baptism the gift of the Spirit is both manifested and realised: the Spirit is given to the one who has always been filled with it.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The theological analysis carried out has given rise to several questions which we propose to address in a further study. Within the limits of the present research, it seems at least useful to point out that the polarities

⁷⁶ M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 239.

⁷⁷ Cf M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 205-230: 224-230.

⁷⁸ M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 227.

⁷⁹ M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 227-228.

⁸⁰ Cf M. BORDONI, *La cristologia nell'orizzonte dello Spirito*, 240.

described are inhabited by tensions that are not resolved by theology. In other words, there are tensions that should perhaps be considered in some way necessary for a correct understanding of our faith, without undue reduction⁸¹.

In this sense, among the many tensions highlighted, we conclude by stressing two hermeneutical polarities.

The first is that between identity and history, which can be seen in the unfolding of Jesus' filial relationship with his Father. As seen in § II, theological reflection seeks a way to describe the eternal Son made man in a precise tension. On the one hand, He is the second person of the Trinity from the first moment of his earthly existence; on the other hand, his relationship with the Father is realised in history.

There is an irreducible polarity between a "static" view of Jesus, which focuses attention on his eternal identity, and a "dynamic" view, which seeks in the unfolding of events the profound meaning of his sonship, which can only be realised in history⁸². Note that this tension is similar to the presence of the Spirit in the man Jesus (§ IV.3): the Holy Spirit was always present in Christ and is at the same time truly received in history⁸³. Both poles are necessary for a correct understanding.

To remain with the filial relationship, one could say that «He who is the Son from all eternity is the Son who is humanly constituted throughout history»⁸⁴, or that

⁸¹ In this sense, it seems significant to recall the well-known perspective of irreducible poles expressed by R. GUARDINI, *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*, Matthias-Grünwald, Mainz 1925, 89-92.

⁸² Guardini dealt with this – not with reference to Christ, but to all life – in the comparison between action and structure, presented as the first categorical polarity (cf R. GUARDINI, *Der Gegensatz*, 37-46). The polarity is then taken up again as the prime example of all, affirming that the opposition is in reality a unity that exists in the same opposition (cf *ibid.*, 88-92).

⁸³ With regard to this aspect, to which we hope to return, it seems a viable option to interpret the gift of the Spirit to Jesus in baptism according to the category of mission; cf Y. CONGAR, *I believe in the Holy Spirit*, 15-16.

⁸⁴ O. GONZÁLEZ DE CARDEDAL, *Cristología* (= Sapiencia fidei), Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid 2001, 407; transl. by us.

What is revealed in Jesus is realised throughout the duration of his event: each man becomes in time what he is. In the case of Jesus, a man (this man of Nazareth) humanly realises his divine-filial identity in time⁸⁵.

Going one step further, we could say that the polarity between identity (“static”) and history (“dynamic”), present in the life of Christ, can help us to “ascend” to the divine immanence, where the same tension is found. The eternal Son, in his filial identity, in his being the subsisting relationship of filiation⁸⁶ (according to the “static” logic of persons and relationships), is at the same time the One who eternally receives himself from the Father in eternal generation, that is eternally in action (according to the “dynamic” logic of eternal processions). Despite their complexity, the two elements must be considered as co-present for a correct view of the Trinitarian life. This conceptual polarity, present in eternity, is revealed and realised in history: the story of Jesus is thus presented as the story of God-with-us, capable of revealing the most intimate features of the eternal relationship of the Son with the Father. In this sense, the economic Trinity reveals the immanent Trinity.

The second aspect concerns the articulation of the action of the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation, dealt with in §§ III-IV. It seems to us that there is an irreconcilable tension between two elements: on the one hand, the centrality of the event and the person of Christ and, on the other, the presence of the whole Trinity in the history of Jesus. First of all, it is necessary to say that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the second person of the Trinity; it is not a question of the person of the Father or that of the Spirit. The story of Jesus is the human story of the Son.

Together, however, and this is a second aspect, the man from Nazareth, as a true creature, is subject to all the laws of creation, including the theological one, in which the three divine persons are at work in every action of God towards the world. The incarnation, the anointing, the concrete choice of the good, the offering of his life on the cross: all these elements of the life of the man Jesus cannot but include the presence of the Father who sent him and of the Spirit who, like the Son, was sent and is at work

⁸⁵ A. Cozzi, *Conoscere Gesù Cristo nella fede. Una cristologia*, Cittadella, Assisi 2014, 556; transl. by us.

⁸⁶ We use here the language of Thomas Aquinas: the divine person can be described as a *subsistent relation* (cf *STh*, I, q.29, a.4, Resp) and this relation is, for the Son, filiation (cf *STh*, I, q.28, a.4, Resp).

in his history, so much so that Jesus can be said to be “anointed” by them. Theology will always have to take into account both aspects without any reduction.

These observations are sufficient to show the importance of certain tensions in approaching the mystery of God from a complex and non-simplistic perspective.

18th March 2025