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The Spirit as Plural Person

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Abstract: According to plural person theory, a group of close friends can act together not just distributively, as separate individuals all at once, but also corporately, as a nonmetaphorical plural person supervening on the friends. This article proposes that the Spirit is a plural person in precisely this sense. Modeling the Spirit as a plural person not only secures the Spirit's personhood and full divinity; it also provides a new conceptual scheme for interpreting the relationship between divine grace and human agency along non-competitive lines. What is more, it makes sense of existing Christian practices, including Ignatian contemplation, evangelical quiet time, and Quaker waiting worship.

Introduction

This article proposes a new model of the Spirit by addressing a puzzle about an old one. Western pneumatologies frequently view the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. This model has received a number of criticisms. Some can be easily dismissed: that the model is insufficiently biblical,[1] or that it depicts God as insular.[2] Yet an intractable problem remains: if the

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[1] Colin Gunton argues that bond-of-love pneumatologies lack scriptural support, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 30–55. But Susan Eastman identifies a scriptural precedent for bond-of-love pneumatologies, 'Oneself in Another: Participation and the Spirit in Romans 8', *'In Christ' in Paul: Explorations in Paul's Theology of Union and Participation*, eds. Michael Thate, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Constantine Campbell (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 103–25.

[2] Colin Gunton criticizes bond-of-love pneumatologies for failing to introduce a third party into the trinity who could interrupt the *égoïsme à deux* of Father and Son, *Theology through the Theologians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 105–28. Gunton's criticism projects the limitations of human love onto the trinity—a mistake that Linn Tonstad calls *corrective projectionism* in *God and Difference: The Trinity, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Finitude* (London: Routledge, 2016).

Spirit is a relationship between persons, how can the Spirit also be a person?[3] In the following pages, I suggest one possibility. According to plural person theory, a group of close friends can itself feel emotions, form judgments, value things, define and revise those values, and act. That is, a group of friends can act, feel, judge, and care not only *distributively*, as separate individuals all at once, but also *corporately*, as a real and irreducible *plural person*. Building on clues from prior bond-of-love pneumatologies—premodern (Augustine, Lombard, Richard of St. Victor), early modern (Jonathan Edwards), and modern (Karl Barth)—I argue that the Spirit is a plural person in just this sense.

My goal in making this argument is less to defend the truth of claims about the status of the Spirit in the eternal life of God and more to create a model that helps theologians think about how the Spirit works in the economy of grace.[4] Ironically, critics allege that bond-of-love pneumatologies leave the economic Spirit without much of a job—namely, informing humanity about Jesus's more important task of saving humanity.[5] On the contrary, the model I propose explains not only what the Spirit does (the Spirit indwells human beings, regenerates them, and incorporates them into the trinitarian life) but also how the Spirit does it (through friendship with them).

The benefits of modeling the Spirit this way, then, go far beyond solving a theological puzzle about the Spirit's personhood and deity. As I show, this pneumatology preserves the distinction between deity and deified within a theology of divinization. In other words, to model the Spirit as a plural person is ultimately to rethink the relationship between divine grace and human agency as one of *non-competitiveness*, meaning that the closer a human creature's relationship with their creator is, the brighter that creature's haecceity shines.[6]

A warning about the type of claims I make in what follows and the standards to which they are (and are not) liable: My argument is constructive. That is, instead of trying to get Augustine-as-subject-matter right (or Barth, and so on), I prefer to get Augustine's subject matter right (and Barth's, and so on). One might, then, accept my model as an adequate pneumatology without accepting it as an adequate reading of prior bond-of-love pneumatologies, just as one might accept it as an adequate reading of prior bond-of-love pneumatologies without accepting it as an adequate pneumatology in its own right. But I am prioritizing the former (an adequate model of the Spirit) over the latter (an adequate reading of prior thinkers).

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[3] See (e.g.) Robert Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', *Pro Ecclesia* 2 (1993), pp. 296–304.

[4] Hence, I will not discuss the *filioque* controversy.

[5] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 116–18.

[6] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 2–9.

To call my pneumatology a model is not, of course, to find it untrue. Theologians, like scientists and philosophers, use models to interpret the unfamiliar in terms of the familiar—as when Anselm speaks of God as a feudal lord, or Catherine of Siena speaks of the Spirit as a wet nurse.[7] I share Sallie McFague's critical realism about the truth of such theological models: all models are incomplete and relative, yet a good model discovers something about reality that prior models obscured, providing a new conceptual scheme that illuminates further dimensions of the human experience of God's love.[8] My pneumatology succeeds if it accomplishes these things.

Where the Spirit went

The Spirit has long puzzled Christian theologians. To Augustine, the puzzle looks something like this: God is one being, three persons. Three biblical characters who freely relate to one another, each in a unique and irreducibly personal way, are one divinity who indivisibly interacts with the world, creating, redeeming, and indwelling humanity. Yet as God acts inseparably in the economy of salvation, God reveals to human beings something of God's triune life, bringing each of the three characters to the fore at a different point in the divine-human drama of salvation history. Hence, to take just one example, only the Father sends the Son into the world (1 Jn 4:14), disclosing that only the Father begets the Son in God's triune life. God-talk, then, permits two kinds of predication. On the one hand, *substantial* properties describe God's being, meaning theologians may ascribe them to all three persons: God is simply great, not three great beings. A *relational* property, on the other hand, distinguishes one of the personal identities from the other two, meaning theologians may not ascribe such a person-defining property to the trinity: neither Father nor Spirit is begotten, so a theologian cannot call the trinity *Son*; neither Son nor Spirit begets, so a theologian cannot call the trinity *Father*. The puzzle is that, according to scripture, 'God is spirit' (Jn 4:24), ergo theologians may call the trinity *spirit*—but *Spirit* also names a personal identity in the trinity. What distinguishes the Spirit relationally if the trinity is spirit substantially? As I see it, the puzzle Augustine faces is not unlike trying to specify three irreducibly personal roles in a partner dance: lead, follow, and dancing. What could differentiate *dancing* from the other roles, given that the *lead* and the *follow* are dancing together?[9]

Augustine answers thus: Unlike the names *Father* and *Son*, the name *Spirit* betokens no identifying relation of origin. Scripture, though, describes this biblical character as the Father's and the Son's gift to humanity (Acts 8:20), the living river

[7] Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, trans. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), p. 292.

[8] Sallie McFague, *Metaphorical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), pp. 137–44.

[9] Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2015), 5.1–7.12, pp. 189–236.

of God's love that regenerates believers (Jn 7:37–39), carrying them into the triune life itself (1 Jn 4:16). According to Augustine, that the gift of this loving healer (Rom 5:5) comes not only from the Father (Jn 15:26) but also from the Son (Jn 20:22) attests to the Spirit's personal identity within God's triune life: the Spirit, given rather than begotten, is the Father's and the Son's mutual love, their *communio*. Using a name for this personal identity that also applies to Father and Son therefore makes sense, Augustine concludes. In the Spirit's case, a substantial predicate may double as a relational one, because *dancing* commits *lead* and *follow* to a gift unmistakable for either giver, a communion so unspeakably joyful that onlookers cannot help but join in.[10] This, in sum, is Augustine's bond-of-love pneumatology.[11]

Augustine's pneumatology worries theologians from East and West alike. To this day, Eastern Christianities reject it. If (as Augustine claims) the Spirit originates from the Son as well as the Father, the uniqueness of the Father's role as the originator of the other characters is compromised. Augustinians can get around this difficulty (Eastern thinkers note) only by attributing the Spirit's origin not to the Father and Son as unique persons but to their common being—which means construing the Spirit not as a gift but as an epiphenomenon of an impersonal process.[12]

Western critics, for their part, object that Augustine's answer gives the Spirit no 'personal distinctiveness'.[13] It remains unclear to them how *dancing* is not merely interchangeable with *lead* plus *follow*. The most trenchant version of this criticism comes from Robert Jenson. 'How', Jenson wonders, 'can the Spirit be the love between the Father and the Son and still be a personal identity along with the Father and the Son?'[14] According to Jenson, the problem comes to a head in Barth's theology, which portrays God's part in the divine-human salvation-historical drama 'as eternally actual in God'.[15] Barth's system thus closes the gap between God-in-Godself and God-with-humanity. As a result, interpretation of the immanent trinity governs analysis of God's triune economic activity to a greater degree than Western theologies usually allow—an approach wherein any fuzziness about who the immanent Spirit is will lead to fuzziness

[10] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.12, p. 199; 15.27–49, pp. 421–41.

[11] NB: Augustine does not use the phrase *bond of love*. Rather, he describes the Spirit as the 'communion or fellowship of Father and Son', and (following Eph 4:3) the bond of peace, or 'that by which the two are joined each to the other, by which the begotten is loved by the one who begets him and in turn loves the begetter', *The Trinity*, 5.12, 6.7, pp. 199, 210.

[12] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), pp. 57–8. For an Orthodox affirmation of Augustine's pneumatology, see Christopher Iacovetti, '*Filioque*, *Theosis*, and *Ecclesia*: Augustine in Dialogue with Modern Orthodox Theology', *Modern Theology* 34 (2018), pp. 70−81.

[13] Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, p. 51.

[14] Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 [hereafter *ST*] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 158.

[15] Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', p. 299.

about what the economic Spirit does. Because Barth follows Augustine's obnubilating interpretation of the Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son,[16] says Jenson, the Spirit disappears in Barth's analysis of the salvation drama. On Jenson's reading of Barth's theology, Father and Son address one another from all eternity as *someone*, signing a pact together to love Jesus in the same way they love one another; the Spirit is their pact, *something* rather than *someone*, not a signatory like them. That Barth sees the immanent Spirit as the eternal principle on which the Father and the Son commit themselves to Jesus rather than one of the persons so committed effectively prevents him from assigning the economic Spirit a prominent role. Barth instead renders the Spirit an impersonal capacity of the other characters—the power with which the Father raises the Son,[17] or the power with which the Son unites the Christian community to himself.[18] 'How', Jenson asks, 'is the Spirit at once one who has power and that power itself?'[19]

One could reply with Eastern theologians that the Spirit ought to stay anonymous—that (to quote Eugene Rogers) theologians like Jenson 'seek to know too much',[20] for the Spirit's facelessness is a 'virtue' rather than a 'flaw'.[21] The virtue, Rogers contends, is twofold. For one thing, human persons are fundamentally opaque to one another—they elude reduction 'to a function or formula', and they experience the 'very attempt' at such explanation as an 'insult'.[22] The Spirit is therefore 'inaccessible not because' the Spirit '*lacks* the qualities of a person' but 'because' the Spirit '*has*' them.[23] For another thing, appreciating the Spirit's anonymity is an apophatic practice that, purifying the mind, leads one to the only place where one can experience the Spirit's personhood—into God's triune life itself.[24]

16 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [hereafter *CD*], 14 vols., ed. and trans. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–1975), I/1, p. 470.
17 *CD* IV/1, pp. 303, 308.
18 *CD* IV/1, pp. 149–51; *CD* IV/3.2, pp. 759–60.
19 Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', p. 304. Nor (according to Jenson) does Barth's preference for referring to the trinitarian identities as modes rather than persons get him off the hook—for Barth 'nevertheless speaks freely of the personal immanent intercourse of the Father and the Son' while 'the Spirit is condemned by' Barth's Augustinian approach 'to remain a *modus* only', pp. 301–2. For a favorable assessment of Barth's mode-talk, see Bruce McCormack, 'Trinity', *The Oxford Handbook of Karl Barth*, eds. Paul Dafyyd Jones and Paul Nimmo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 227–45.
20 Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), p. 27.
21 Rogers, *After the Spirit*, p. 24.
22 Rogers, *After the Spirit*, p. 46.
23 Rogers, *After the Spirit*, pp. 53–4 (emphasis Rogers's).
24 Rogers, *After the Spirit*, pp. 28, 46.

Jenson dismisses this sort of reply as 'mere resignation'.[25] Rather than simply declaring the Spirit's relation of origin anonymous, Jenson's solution to the problem of the Spirit's personhood is to throw out relations of origin altogether and distinguish the triune personal identities narratively, inferring these intra-trinitarian narrative relations from the 'plot lines' of the Gospels.[26] What Jenson comes up with is a veritable docusoap, a season of *Real Housewives of the Trinity* in which a stepmother Spirit empowers an emotionally distant father to show his kid more affection: the Spirit, writes Jenson, 'liberates' the unfathomable Father 'from himself' and teaches the Father 'to be fatherly' and to love his Son 'actively'; the Spirit helps the Son recognize that his Father is not just the deity's inscrutable origin but also an 'available and loveable Father'.[27] Jenson identifies the Spirit, in other words, as the divine person who intentionally 'liberates Father and Son to love each other'.[28] The trouble with this solution is that, in tasking the Spirit with fixing the Father's and the Son's 'deficient' love, it projects human fallibility onto the trinity.[29]

My aim in rethinking the Spirit is (as I said at the start) to illuminate further dimensions of the human experience of God's love. Accordingly, I sympathize with Rogers's claim that one can experience the Spirit's personal identity only by entering God's triune life through intimacy with the Spirit. But neither this intimacy nor, consequently, the Spirit's personhood completely resists characterization. After all, when human persons deal with one another, they give one another some inkling of who they are. A pattern emerges—not exhaustive, occasionally deceptive, nevertheless distinctive. What's more, loving a human person typically involves discovering the pattern of their personal identity at increasing granularity, which is to say (with apologies to W. H. Auden) intensity of attention.[30] And it involves refreshing one's sense of their personal identity when they change (as human beings tend to do) rather than scrupulously emphasizing their opacity. It is not much different with the Spirit, and despite all the arguments against bond-of-love pneumatologies, there are intimations within them of why. Below, I clarify and expand on these intimations with the aid of plural person theory, the philosophical insight that the mutual love between friends is not merely an interpersonal connection, but a person.

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25 Jenson, *ST*, p. 148.
26 Jenson, *ST*, p. 158.
27 Jenson, *ST*, pp. 156, 158.
28 Jenson, *ST*, p. 156.
29 Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), p. 75.
30 W. H. Auden, *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse 1926–1938*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 43.

Plural person theory

To fault bond-of-love pneumatologies for dissolving the Spirit's personality in God's impersonal substance assumes that terms like *person*, *self*, or *autonomy* apply only to individuals. The idea that two or more human beings could together be one person is just a metaphor (so the assumption goes), a legal fiction that (e.g.) gives companies the right to free speech. By the same token, if love is the generic divinity particularized by each triune personality (1 Jn 4:16), then trying to identify one of those personalities as the love between the other two cannot get a theologian far.

However, this individualist assumption gets both personhood and love wrong. As the philosopher Bennett Helm has shown, the preconception that a person must be an individual prevents philosophers from adequately explaining what Aristotle calls a *friendship of virtue*, or what Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman (describing their own friendship) call a *big friendship*—an intimate yet expansive bond in which two or more human beings make one another into 'another self' as they 'tell a joint story about' the kind of life they value living together, co-create this life, and thus feel 'inextricable' from one another.[31] Philosophers tend to describe friendship in passive terms—as a mirror revealing one's character or a lockbox containing one's secrets.[32] But the reciprocal, dynamic, and enduring emotional attachment typical of big friendship suggests that a group of close friends can act, feel, judge, and care as an irreducible and nonmetaphorical plural person supervening on the friends. (I italicize first-person plural pronouns in what follows to denote plural persons.) Close friends forge such a plural person, distinct from their individual identities, when each of *us* loves *us* in the manner of self-love, determining the kind of life worth *our* living, reliably sensing what matters to *us*, and pursuing it for *our* sake, the same way an individual figures out their own priorities and tries to measure up to them not least because they value the irreplaceably particular person they are. A plural person thus exercises

[31] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol 2., ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1166a30−33, p. 1843; Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman, *Big Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2021), p. 41.

[32] See, for example, Dean Cocking and Jeanette Kennett, 'Friendship and the Self', *Ethics* 108 (1998), pp. 502–27; and Laurence Thomas, 'Friendship', *Synthese* 72 (1987), pp. 217–36.

joint autonomy at the group-level, defining and revising what matters to *us* as part of loving *our* irreplaceably particular life.[33]

Defending plural person theory as I have just defined it requires an excursus on personhood—that thick concept which originated in ancient Greek theater (where it denoted the mask actors wore to represent characters in a play) and entered theology via fourth-century conciliar debates (as a metaphor for the triune identities). That is, explaining why friendships count as persons requires a rough-and-ready account of personhood as it applies to individuals. Not only that, but resolving the problem of the Spirit's personhood via a theory about human personhood—as I will do in sections 3 and 4—also requires a plausible account of personhood that fits human beings and the trinitarian identities alike.

Such considerations rule out nineteenth-century expressivist theories of interiority, according to which a person consists of a ghostly inner dimension (a center of immediate conscious experiences) plus an external dimension that communicates the inner ghost (through speech and action). Positing three such centers of consciousness in the Godhead is tantamount to tritheism. Expressivist theories also misconstrue human personhood. Insofar as they identify a human being's so-called real self with their inner episodes, these theories turn human beings inside out. In actuality, one can know one's own inner states only from the outside in, so to speak, using public concepts.[34] Furthermore, the self to whom certain thoughts and impressions appear as *mine* is not itself one of these inner episodes; neither is it the totality of these episodes; nor is it a highlights reel thereof. Like an eye and its visual field, the self is a condition for the possibility of the mineness of one's consciousness, not an item that shows up within it. It is a transcendental dimension, not an inner dimension symbolized by an external one.[35] Thus, as Phillip Cary points out, one knows one's closest friends not by piercing through their outer shells to their 'inmost' ghosts (there are no such ghosts), but by 'letting' oneself 'be the object of a lifetime of' their 'loving'.[36] Likewise, human beings know God

[33] The philosophical literature on group agents is vast. Unlike plural person theory, most models of group agency seek to describe a broad range of social phenomena, from flash mobs to marriages to multinational companies. Consequently, these other models leave intimacy, caring, and the emotions out of their accounts of group agency, an omission that Bennett Helm explicitly critiques in 'Plural Agents', *Noûs* 42 (2008), p. 36. I touch briefly on the distinction between plural persons and other models of group agency—and the difference this distinction makes for my argument—in section 5.

[34] This is one upshot of the Myth of Jones with which Wilfrid Sellars kills the Myth of the Given in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[35] This is one way of reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1974), 5.631–5.641, pp. 57–8.

[36] Phillip Cary, 'On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism: A Critique of Rahner', *The Thomist* 56 (1992), pp. 396, 399.

not by piercing through the economic skin to the immanent self, but by experiencing God's love. The immanent creator in whom creatures live and move and have their being is infinitely ontologically close to creation—the condition for the possibility of its existence, not an item that shows up within it. Only in the economy of grace, then, where God assumes creaturely forms and perforce occupies the kind of distance from others that creaturely existence imposes, can human beings encounter God.[37] To put all this in terms of bond-of-love pneumatologies: Whatever being drawn by the Spirit into God's triune fellowship might mean, it cannot mean plumbing the fathomless depths of the immanent trinity.

In short, describing human and trinitarian personhood alike requires a non-expressivist conceptuality. One such defensible and sufficient option, the conceptuality I use in the pages that follow, has its roots in the bond-of-love model of the Spirit, specifically, in that of Richard of St. Victor. Richard's dogmatic treatise on the trinity defines a *person* as an absolutely unsubstitutable *someone* (as opposed to a fungible *something*),[38] a unique *who* (rather than a generic *what*) with their own values, loves, preferences (and so on).[39] Persons come in two kinds, human and divine.[40] Every *someone* particularizes that *something* or *what* which is common to their kind: for human persons, humanity; for triune persons, divinity. *Humanity* is finite, dependent, and composite, consisting of a 'corporeal' element and an 'incorporeal' one,[41] or (put in a more Kantian vein) an empirical level of description (physical causality) as well as an ineliminable normative one (the logical space of reasons).[42] *Divinity*, by contrast, is infinite, unoriginate, and

37 Cary, 'On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism', p. 403.

38 Richard of St. Victor, *On the Trinity*, trans. Ruben Angelici (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 4.7, pp. 147–8. I gloss Richard's notion of *incommunicable existence* or *incommunicable property* as *absolute unsubstitutability*, a term from David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, vol. 1 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), pp. 387–91. Human beings are (in principle) *substitutable* with respect to roles they fill (e.g., teacher, surgeon, actor), but (always) *unsubstitutable* with respect to their individual identities (i.e., the unequivocal sense in which a particular human being's life can be ascribed only to them). Richard's *incommunicable existence* sounds expressivist, but it means something more like *absolute unsubstitutability*.

39 This is my way of construing Richard's 'individual existence of rational nature', or 'singular mode of rational existence', *On the Trinity*, 4.23–4.24, pp. 164–5.

40 Richard offers a constructive definition of *person* that balances the 'technical' theological use of the word with the 'common' or 'unlearned' use (which by Richard's time had lost its theatrical connotation and could refer to a human being *simpliciter*). He thus provides an account of personhood applicable to human beings as well as the trinitarian identities, *On the Trinity*, 4.1, pp. 141–2; 4.4, p. 144; 4.5, pp. 145–6.

41 Richard, *On the Trinity*, 4.10, pp. 149–50.

42 For an elegant defense of the ineliminability of the normative, see Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp. 48–115.

non-composite.[43] One does not have to understand *what* divinity is to know *who* God is, any more than one needs a medical understanding of human anatomy to befriend a human being.[44] But by Richard's lights it should be clear that worrying about tritheism is a category mistake, for on his analysis of personhood, the number of *somethings* particularized by *someone* (on the one hand) and the number of *someones* who particularize *something* (on the other) are logically independent.[45] A human *someone* particularizes two *somethings*: the normative element and the empirical element. Three divine *someones* particularize the selfsame *something*: the Father 'possesses' divinity 'by', 'from', or 'according to' paternity; the Son, according to filiation; and the Spirit, as I argue in this article, according to friendship.[46]

Richard's conceptuality of personhood is especially compelling, not just because it renders human and divine personhood explicable in non-expressivist terms, but because it does so without excluding any human beings from personhood. Richard, that is, treats *person* as a practical concept the significance of which arises in a community of recognition. When one sees a blurry shape in the distance, Richard writes, one asks '*what* is that', and the appropriate answer is on the order of *barn*, *tumbleweed*, or *smoke*; but if the shape approaches near enough for one to see it is a human being, one always asks '*who* is that', never '*what*', and the appropriate answer is on the order of 'Matthew or Bartholomew'.[47] Simply put, in their concrete dealings with one another, human beings regard one another as someones rather than somethings. All someones are persons, so all human beings are persons—not only neurotypical adults, but also infants, young children, patients in comas, and human beings with severe cognitive disabilities. To insist otherwise locates personhood in the wrong place, in a generic *what* (rationality or self-consciousness) rather than a unique *who* (Matthew or Bartholomew, say, whether they particularize humanity in an eminently rational way or not).[48]

This, then, is roughly how I use the words *person* or *self*: an absolutely unsubstitutable someone with a say, however nascent or diminished, in defining what matters to them—with, that is, a capacity for *autonomy*. This usage explains why a doll is not a person, yet the child who loves it is: the doll does not particularize humanity or divinity; it is a replaceable piece of porcelain or

[43] Richard, *On the Trinity*, 4.16, pp. 155–6.
[44] Cary, 'On Behalf of Classical Trinitarianism', pp. 399–400.
[45] Richard, *On the Trinity*, 4.8–4.9, pp. 148–9.
[46] Richard, *On the Trinity*, 4.19, p. 158.
[47] Richard, *On the Trinity*, 4.7, p. 147 (emphasis Richard's).
[48] Regarding the claim that all human beings are persons—which deserves more attention than I can give it here—see Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference Between 'Someone' and 'Something'*, trans. Oliver O'Donovan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 236–48.

plastic on which the child can project preferences, but which lacks any preferences of its own.[49]

With this concept of personhood at my disposal, I can now outline plural person theory, a resource for rethinking the Spirit. According to the theory, which I adapt from Bennett Helm,[50] loving oneself is key to being a person—a someone with a say in defining what matters to one. Furthermore, getting clear on the role of self-love in the personhood and autonomy of individuals makes plain how a bond of love between multiple individuals can be a real person capable of joint autonomy.

To begin, then, with individual persons: their agency characteristically involves emotions and desires, not just goals and strategies for achieving them. Hence, a chess-playing computer like Deep Blue employs only true-false reasoning (Is Be5 a legal move?) and means-end reasoning (will Be5 lead to a win?), but a person like Gary Kasparov additionally employs reasoning about import (is chess fun? why does winning matter? should I retire?).[51] Something has import to one if one reliably responds to it with certain conceptually interlinked emotions, desires, and judgments suggesting one finds it worth one's attention and action—if, that is, one feels (or would feel) the relevant emotions, has (or would have) the relevant desires, and does (or is ready to do) the relevant actions, in actual (or counterfactual) situations affecting it. So, if I care about my prayer plant (for example), I will place it in bright indirect sunlight, mist it regularly, desire to keep my cat from eating it, and feel delighted when its leaves fold up at night, pleased when it grows, sad when it droops (and so on); the plant (in Helm's terminology) is the *focus* of a pattern of *felt evaluations* and *evaluative judgments* on my part. Consistently failing to feel, desire, or do what the relevant circumstances call for would, then, discredit my belief that I care about the plant (although an isolated failure, like static in a mostly clear radio broadcast, would not). Likewise, reasoning about import involves a practical mastery of what matters, not a discursive understanding of it, so caring about something does not presuppose the ability to articulate that care, and the focus of one's cares can remain implicit in the pattern of emotions and desires constituting its import to one (similar to how one can take a basic derivative without being able to explain what calculus has to do with real life or why its rules work).

Of the things that have import to one, some are more central to who one is, meaning one finds them indispensable to the kind of life worth one's living. With

[49] One could, however, expand this account to include non-human animal and synthetic kinds of personhood—an expansion that is beyond the scope of this article.

[50] This outline relies heavily on Bennet Helm, *Love, Friendship, and the Self: Intimacy, Identification, and the Nature of Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[51] This example is not meant to rule out the possibility of a computer that reasons about import and therefore counts as a person.

respect to these deeper *personal values*, the structure of practical reasoning about import differs slightly: the focus of the pattern of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments constituting one's personal values is ultimately oneself. More simply, a commitment to the import of such values is a commitment to one's personal import. Thus, I might not care very intensely about owning houseplants, while I might view writing and rock climbing as central elements of the kind of life worth my living. In that case, whatever I feel, desire, believe, or do for the sake of writing or climbing, I also feel, desire, believe, or do out of solicitude for my well-being as this person, a writer and a climber, which is to say, as part of loving the irreplaceably particular self I am. That the pattern of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments structuring personal values is reflexive, only subfocused on the values yet ultimately focused on oneself, is evident from the degree to which one's sense of self is at stake in any emotions belonging to the pattern—such as (to continue my example) feeling pride when I write a fine poem (or regret when I procrastinate) and self-assurance when I choose to climb a new route (or self-doubt when I bail). Each pattern of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments constituting a personal value marks a specific element of the kind of life worth one's living. But all such patterns, because of their common focus on oneself, connect in a wider coherent network of priorities that (static notwithstanding) constitutes one's personal identity or *evaluative perspective* (as Helm terms it). Therefore, one does not sense the import of a single personal value in isolation from whatever else one values. Rather, whether putting off my writing calls for guilt, or taking on a new climbing project calls for stoke, depends on the context of these values in my overall evaluative perspective.

Indeed, loving oneself—upholding one's identity as the particular person one is—requires figuring out how to proceed when one's multiple values put conflicting demands on one's attention: Do I take a break from climbing to meet a writing deadline? Do I temper my long-term writing goals to make more time in my life for climbing? One settles such conflicts within one's evaluative perspective. Of course, as one encounters new things to care about (including values that imply one was previously wrong about what is important in one's life), one's evaluative perspective evolves. What ties this evolving network of priorities to the same person is self-love: the ongoing (often implicit) practical reasoning that at once creates and reflects the import one has to oneself. One's personal identity is thus (to use Helm's analogy) like a house that one is constantly remodeling according to an evolving blueprint. And the apparent circularity of this account, where personal identity depends on self-love, is not vicious but holistic, since in a developing person, the capacity for autonomy or defining what matters (on the one hand) and the reflexive patterns of emotions and desires constituting an identity (on the other) emerge simultaneously.

So much by way of explaining individual personhood and autonomy. I have spent considerable time unpacking these concepts so that I can dispel the assumption that a person must be an individual, for (as I will now show) what

is relatively uncontroversial at the level of individuals is also true of certain groups, namely, big friendships.

Among such friends, patterns of emotions, desires, and judgments with a common focus on *us* interlink in a network of priorities constituting a joint personal identity. *Our* love of *us* transforms some of what each of *us* cares about individually into things *we* care about for *our* sake, such that each of *us* reliably senses the import of these things, not from separate individual evaluative perspectives, but from one joint evaluative perspective in which *we* determine the kind of joint life worth *our* living. Each of *us* tells and answers to *our* story (and sees the rest of us as telling and answering to *our* story) out of solicitude for *our* well-being as the particular plural person *we* are. Neither the (ongoing) joint story nor the (evolving) joint self precedes the other: as *we* grow closer, *our* capacity for joint autonomy and the reflexive patterns of emotions and desires constituting *our* identity emerge simultaneously and holistically (again, static notwithstanding). That said, a plural person's reasoning about import, like an individual's, involves a practical mastery of what matters, not a discursive understanding of it. Consequently, the self-love that ties this evolving network of priorities to the same plural person does not require keen powers of articulation. *Our* love of *us* is implicit in the interlinking patterns of emotions, desires, and actions that at once create and reflect the import *we* have to each of *us*. For example, as the *Confessions* recount, Augustine and a few 'like-minded' friends, including his mother Monica, 'made a holy agreement to live together'. During this time, Augustine and Monica grew so close that 'there had been but one life, woven out of mine and hers'. *Our* affection for *us* instilled in *us* a joint sensitivity to what would conduce to *our* well-being or harm it: *we* felt disappointment when war foiled *our* plans to return to Hippo, joy when *our* 'colloquy' on 'the eternal life of the saints' turned into a joint mystical experience of it, discontent when *our* beatific vision ended and '*we* left the first-fruits of *our* Spirit captive there'. Crucially, the joint evaluative perspective from which a plural person senses the import of things does not destroy anyone's individual evaluative perspective. A plural person's members are also individuals with lives outside the friendship. Part of *our* evaluative perspective is *our* joint sense of the place of this plural person in each member's life relative to their other priorities. A member of a plural person might even feel one way about something by their own lights and at the same time feel differently about it by *our* lights—as did Monica, who on her own 'no longer' took 'pleasure' in any of life's meretricious 'charms', including her colloquy with Augustine, yet as one of *us* felt *our* joy in it. Monica's individual evaluative perspective calls for world-weariness, which she expresses to Augustine; *ours* calls for excitement, which she also displays in this scene, panting and sighing as one of *us*. Joy, here, is a joint

emotion, *ours*, not hers.[52] The upshot is that a plural person is irreducible to the individuals on whom the plural person supervenes.

A friendship need not be exceptionally harmonious to count as a plural person, just as an individual need not be exceptionally unified to count as a person. No individual person is always at one with themself: their multiple values put conflicting demands on their attention, as I explained above, and resolving these conflicts is not necessarily any easier for an individual than it would be for a plural person. Witness Augustine's raging argument with himself over his carnal desires.[53] The operative question for whether a group of friends counts as a plural person, then, is not how frequently they face conflicts, but how they resolve them. Do they bargain from separate evaluative perspectives and seek one-by-one to maximize what is good for *me*? Or do *we* grapple with different interpretations of what matters to *us* until *we* find what feels right for, or meshes with, *us*? A plural person does the latter, settling conflicts in essentially the same manner as an individual person, within one joint evaluative perspective, through joint autonomy. For example, Sow and Friedman—the aforementioned coiners of the term *big friendship*—together form a plural person who values 'shine theory' ('I don't shine if you don't shine') and 'stretching' (adapting at the group-level to changing circumstances). For years, Sow and Friedman told a joint story about *our* being 'low-drama' and 'too big to fail'. But Sow, a Black Nigerian, 'often' became 'a foil for' Friedman, a white American, 'to learn about difference'. Friedman's obliviousness to the toll this asymmetry took on Sow strained *our* intimacy. Sow and Friedman eventually saw the 'hubris' of *our* too-big-to-fail attitude; went to couples therapy to save the friendship; figured out that *our* conflict-avoidant 'low-drama ethos' hurt *us*; and revised *our* joint values to an outlook more conducive to *our* flourishing. 'Many of the things that bonded *us* in the beginning had twisted to become points of weakness that now threatened *our* friendship', Sow and Friedman write.[54] Accordingly, what makes a plural person like Sow and Friedman cohere as an irreducible agent is neither *our* valuing this or that, nor *our* harmony, but rather *our* self-love, a deeply felt and absolutely unsubstitutable attachment motivating each of *us* to ask jointly what will help *us* thrive. That a plural person is absolutely unsubstitutable as well as irreducible is clear from what breakups or deaths can do to *our* surviving members. Augustine, after the death of an unnamed friend with whom he was 'another self', 'one soul in two bodies', describes it this way: 'I had become a great enigma to myself'.[55] *We* once figured out what

52 Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2012), 9.10.23–26, pp. 226–9 (emphasis mine).
53 Augustine, *Confessions*, 8.5.10–8.12.28, pp. 192–206.
54 Sow and Friedman, *Big Friendship*, pp. 70, 90, 130, 163, 167, 168 (emphasis mine).
55 Augustine, *Confessions*, 4.4.7–4.7.12, pp. 96–100.

mattered to *us* as part of loving *our* irreplaceably particular self; I no longer have *our* lights to steer by.

To sum up, a big friendship is a plural person capable of joint autonomy: *we* develop into an irreducible and irreplaceable someone with a say over *our* identity. Plural persons are thus every bit as real as their individual counterparts. It will not do to object that the human barriers of skin and skull, across which no streams of consciousness flow, make a joint self impossible. This objection depends on the expressivist identification of one's so-called real self with one's inner episodes. But (as I showed above) this theory turns human beings inside out. Any person, individual or plural, identifies their felt evaluations from the outside in, using public concepts. In both cases, the same type of reasoning about import stitches these emotions and desires into one personal identity. Nor will it do to insist that plural person theory necessitates implausibly saintly friendships. Human plural persons, like individuals, often exercise autonomy to sinful effect. For example, of the two friendships that were for Augustine a joint self, only his friendship with Monica was holy; he remembers the other as idolatrous.[56] Nor, finally, will it do to object that a friendship could only be intimate enough to merit talk of a joint self if some form of heteronomy—like codependency or enmeshment—were present. This objection assumes that social constraints always limit personal freedom. But submitting to such constraints (years of gymnastics training) can make new modes of expressive freedom possible (adding an eponymous skill to the *Code of Points*). And autonomy just is the reflexive constraint of loving something or someone. Objecting that intimacy causes heteronomy merely assumes an individualist conception of autonomy. Not only does befriending someone make new modes of plural agency (or acting as one of *us*) possible; close friends acquire an additional capacity for joint autonomy (or defining what matters to *us*). Shaping one another into another self extends rather than undercuts the autonomy of close friends.

All this to say, the assumption that the terms *person*, *self*, and *autonomy* apply only to individuals unduly limits the kinds of identity and the modes of agency available to human beings. It has also kept theologians from exploring the creative potential of bond-of-love pneumatologies, to which I now turn.

[56] I have illustrated plural person theory with nonfictional examples to appease the worry that Helm's theory 'seems to make true friendship nearly impossible', Erica Stonestreet, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (22 June 2010): https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/love-friendship-the-self-intimacy-identification-the-social-nature-of-persons (accessed 1 March 2024).

The immanent Spirit

My aim in this article is (as I have been saying) to provide a new conceptual scheme for illuminating the human experience of God's love. My primary concern is therefore the economy of grace. Yet an aside on the immanent Spirit is in order, for plural person theory cogently explains Augustine's insistence that the Father's and the Son's joint gift is not something but someone who also gives no less than God's own self.[57] The Spirit can be the mutual love of the Father and the Son and still—or precisely therefore—be a personal identity alongside them because the Spirit is a plural person.

In addition, modeling the Spirit as a plural person removes any binitarian tints from Barth's picture of God-in-Godself. A critic like Jenson describes Barth's picture as two eternal signatories (Father and Son) of an everlasting pact (Spirit) to love Jesus. Where Jenson sees an impersonal pact, plural person theory finds the joint evaluative perspective of a plural person. The resulting picture looks more like this: From all eternity, the love between two 'independent' divine modes of being constitutes a third equally independent joint divine mode 'over against them'.[58] The 'autonomy' peculiar to this third divine mode is joint autonomy,[59] which 'cannot result from' either of the other modes 'alone', nor from their 'co-operation', but is wholly *ours*.[60] In other words, the Father's and the Son's friendship eternally forms one *us* or Spirit whom Father and Son love and to whom Father and Son each therefore feel answerable as one of *us*.[61] And what matters to *us*, from before all time, is actively including the human being Jesus (and Jesus's fellow human beings) in *our* bond.[62] Barth is wrong, then, to say that 'even if the Father and the Son might be called "person"', the Spirit 'could not possibly be regarded as the third "person"'.[63] The Spirit is a plural person who commits God-in-Godself to being God-for-humanity.

To accept this model of the Spirit is not (note well) to give up on describing the inner-trinitarian relations in terms of family. It is simply to recognize that such family-talk does not on its own convey what kind of bond the Father and the Son have: an interpersonal connection amounting to a person. The love between a parent and a child is not *au fond* a capacity for joint autonomy on the part of friends who see one another as another self, though some parent/child relationships do evolve into that. Put another way, every big friendship

57 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.36, p. 428.
58 *CD* I/1, p. 487.
59 *CD* I/1, p. 468.
60 *CD* I/1, p. 486.
61 *CD* I/1, p. 480.
62 *CD* II/2, pp. 104–5.
63 *CD* I/1, p. 469.

is a plural person, but not every loving parent/child relationship is also a big friendship.

Another benefit of this model is that it reconciles psychological analogies for the trinity (Augustine) with social ones (Jonathan Edwards). Psychological analogies preserve God's oneness but risk modalism. If, as Augustine has it, the trinity resembles the mental life of a human individual—where memory, understanding, and will are one mind, not three—then God seems to be one person accomplishing different tasks at different times.[64] Social analogies affirm the plurality of personal identities in God but risk tritheism. If, as Edwards has it, the 'friendship' that 'subsists eternally and necessarily between the several persons in the Godhead' resembles a 'society or family', then there seem to be three Gods.[65] Plural person theory combines the appeal of both analogies into a single account of the trinity as distinct centers of mind (I and thou, Father and Son) and one irreducible center of mind (*us*, Spirit).

Theologians criticize bond-of-love pneumatologies for making the Spirit lesser. Does reconstructing this model with plural person theory make the Spirit too much—more special or more of a person than the other trinitarian identities? On the one hand, Edwards might approve of such an overcorrection. According to him, the Spirit 'governs' God's 'heart', 'wholly influences both the Father and the Son in all they do', and 'sustains' their 'character and honor'.[66] On the other hand, an individual person and a plural person are (as I explained in section 2) persons in exactly the same respect: each is an absolutely unsubstitutable someone who figures out what matters to them and upholds their identity as part of loving themself. So, a plural person is no more (or less) a person than *our* individual members. And plural person theory glosses the Spirit's governing and influencing and sustaining the Father and the Son as *our* joint autonomy, *our* love of *us*, an attachment that neither obliterates nor exhausts Father or Son.

Some theologians sense an additional way in which bond-of-love pneumatologies make the Spirit lesser. By attributing the Spirit's origin to the Father (who begets the Son and spirates the Spirit) and the Son (who also spirates the Spirit), bond-of-love pneumatologies attribute a property to the Father and the Son that the Spirit apparently lacks: the power to 'give rise to another' divine person.[67] Does this imbalance of divine properties imply that the Spirit is not fully divine? According to Kathryn Tanner, maintaining the

64 Augustine, *The Trinity*, 10.17–19, pp. 300–2.

65 Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, ed. Paul Ramsey, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 557; Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 21 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 135.

66 Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity*, p. 147.

67 Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 189.

equality of the trinitarian persons requires that any divine property be either a 'general divine quality' (a substantial property that all three persons have) or a 'distinguishing characteristic' (a relational property that only one person has). Attributing a property to two allegedly slights the third. But Tanner is incorrect to insist that 'if' the Father and the Son share 'the power to generate another' 'then the Spirit should share it too' on pain of being lesser.[68] As soon as a theologian names a person-defining property possessed by one of the trinitarian identities (the Son's filiation, say), they have thereby named a complement property possessed by the other two (the Father's and the Spirit's non-filiation). That the Father and the Spirit share the property of non-filiation is no slight against the Son's divinity. It is no use rejoining that complement properties do not count as properties; there is no special reason why they should not.

Plural person theory provides a further response to worries like Tanner's, one that bridges the Spirit's immanent identity and economic work: deification. For many bond-of-love thinkers, 'becoming a Christian means' (to quote Joseph Ratzinger on Augustine) 'becoming' the Spirit's 'mode of being'.[69] Augustine says that through the Spirit the whole trinity inhabits a human believer's heart.[70] Lombard says that a human believer loves God thanks to the same Spirit who binds the Father and the Son to one another in love.[71] Edwards (citing 2 Peter 1:4) adds that the Spirit thus makes the saints 'partakers of' God's 'very Deity', 'so' uniting with their 'human faculties that', in the 'exercise' thereof, 'God does all' and the saints 'do all'.[72] Barth, too, says that a human believer participates in God (*teilnehmen*, *Teilnahme*) insofar as the Spirit draws the believer into the freeing and bold and intimate friendship between the Father and the Son.[73] For these thinkers, the Spirit indwells human believers, regenerates them, and brings them into God's triune *koinonia*, all without erasing the difference between creator and creature, deity and deified, partaken and partaker. Modeling the Spirit as a plural person explains how the Spirit conforms humanity to divinity such that the former participates in the latter the way a jewel participates in the light passing through it—not disappearing in it but reflecting and refracting it distinctively (Edwards).[74] It explains why being quickened by the Spirit means moving oneself, not being God's marionette (Barth).[75] In a nutshell, what it means for the Spirit to indwell

[68] Tanner, *Christ the Key*, p. 188.
[69] Joseph Ratzinger, 'The Holy Spirit as *Communio*: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine', *Communio* 25 (1998), p. 327.
[70] Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.33, p. 425.
[71] Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007), 1.17.1.2, p. 88.
[72] Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity*, pp. 194–5, 251.
[73] *CD* III/3, pp. 285–8; *CD* IV/2, p. 800; *CD* I/1, p. 480. Joseph Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 83.
[74] Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, p. 442.
[75] *CD* IV/2, p. 800.

and regenerate and draw a human believer into God's triune life is for God and the believer to befriend one another and develop into an irreducible plural person who determines—within a joint evaluative perspective, out of solicitude for *our* well-being as this particular self—the kind of life worth *our* living. The Spirit does generate divine persons: the numerous plural persons whom God forms with God's numerous human friends.

The economic Spirit

Whether God is a trinity or a binity of persons matters to critics of bond-of-love pneumatologies for good reason. The Spirit lifts human believers into the trinity (says Lombard),[76] thereby instilling holy dispositions in them (Edwards adds).[77] Attributing this work to an impersonal power, rather than a person who loves freely, mischaracterizes grace as a causal process that happens to one, like skin cells repairing DNA damage after a sunburn, rather than God's unwavering commitment to one; it makes the Spirit the first step in this sequence of cause-and-effect; and it invites worries about which subsequent steps lead to one's salvation: one can either passively observe one's fading sunburn, or one can stimulate the healing process with expensive serums. Depersonalizing the Spirit is a problem, in other words, because it heightens anxiety about one's own spirituality and blocks trust in God's promises.[78]

Lombard and Edwards are adamant that the Spirit is not a causal power. Lombard writes that a human believer loves God thanks to the same Spirit who binds the Father and the Son to one another in love (as I showed in section 3). Yes, the Spirit enkindles a believer's passion for God.[79] But Lombard is clear that the Spirit does not 'cause' love; the Spirit 'is' love.[80] Similarly, Edwards locates the Spirit's influence on believers not in the physical realm of cause-and-effect, but in the social and normative space of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments. The Spirit, weaning believers from sin and conforming their hearts to the gospel, is not so much a physician administering a drug as a cross between an English teacher inculcating an enthusiasm for Shakespeare and a coach instilling confidence.[81] The Spirit renews and sanctifies through self-communication and relationship. Believers who before could only speculate about God's grace now know the gracious God tangibly—the difference between reading a description of honey and actually tasting honey.[82] The Spirit

[76] Lombard, *Sentences*, 1.10.2.3, p. 60.
[77] Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity*, p. 197.
[78] Robert Jenson, 'The Holy Spirit', in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, eds. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp. 125–34.
[79] Lombard, *Sentences*, 1.17.4.1, p. 91.
[80] Lombard, *Sentences*, 1.17.3, p. 90.
[81] Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1730–1733*, ed. Mark Valeri, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 17 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 423–4.
[82] Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses*, pp. 413–14.

regenerates believers, then, not by making the believer the object of God's causality, but by loving the believer and—like a teacher or coach who creates a safe environment for their mentees to take risks—initiating a relationship in which actively loving God elicits new thoughts and feelings from the believer. True, the Spirit acts causally 'upon inanimate creatures', moving on the face of the waters (Gen 1:2), just as the Spirit has an 'extrinsic' neuroenhancing effect 'upon' the 'unregenerate', occasionally stimulating their 'conscience'. But Edwards is clear that the Spirit lives 'in' a believer, 'uniting' with their 'soul' like another self.[83]

Modeling the Spirit as a plural person is one way of affirming with Edwards that the Spirit acts in the personal and normative space of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments rather than the impersonal realm of physical causes. Plural person theory also makes sense of Edwards's claim that God does not do 'some' of the Spirit's work and the believer 'the rest'. Instead, '*we*'—the plural person or Spirit whom God and the believer become—'do all'.[84] That is, the Spirit is an expansion *ad extra* of God's friendship *in se*. The Father's and the Son's mutual friendship eternally constitutes a plural person or Spirit to whom befriending humanity matters. In the economy of salvation, God befriends the believer: *our* love starts to light up certain things that are salient for *us*, transforming some of your and my individual responses to import into joint values *we* hold for *our* sake, new first-person plural habits of thought and feeling. In other words, patterns of felt evaluations and evaluative judgments with a common focus on *us* interlink in a personal identity that is not partly God's and partly the believer's, but wholly *ours*—a joint evaluative perspective from which each of *us* reliably feels, desires, and does what *our* Spirit calls for in the relevant circumstances (notwithstanding occasional failures on the believer's part). *Our* love of *us* 'perfect[s]' the believer 'more and more' (for in loving *us* the believer holds joint values with God) and 'communicates' God's inexhaustible 'fullness' in a new way (for in loving *us* God holds joint values with this unique human creature).[85] The Spirit's work is therefore not an extrinsic causal force determining a human believer like the moon determines the tides. It is not heteronomy but joint autonomy—in a word, love.

This model also sharpens Barth's picture of 'the freedom of the friends of God',[86] wherein God freely decides, from before all time, to invite human beings into *our* Spirit. The form in which the Spirit 'open[s]' a believer 'up' to God is the bond of friendship between God and the believer that likewise opens God up to the believer.[87] Put differently, God makes Godself

83 Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses*, p. 411.
84 Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity*, p. 251 (emphasis mine).
85 Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, pp. 442–3.
86 *CD* III/3, p. 285.
87 *CD* I/1, p. 450–1.

answerable to the plural person constituted by God and the believer. *Our* Spirit opens God up to new human concerns—as in Abraham's argument with God about Sodom (Gen 18:16–32), or Moses's arguments with God about Israel (Ex 32:7–14; Deut 9:13–29), or the Syrophoenician woman's argument with Jesus about the Gentiles (Mk 7:24–30). But God does not limit God's concerns to God's friendships. Rather, *our* Spirit opens believers up to 'a definite' divine 'commission in the world', namely, to act in ways that, nourishing *us*, also nourish 'creation as a whole'—as in the conversions of Lydia (Acts 16:11–40) and Paul (Acts 9:1–19).[88] God thus freely imposes on Godself the constraints of love under the conditions of a finite, contingent, and temporally extended world—constraints that include seeing the embodied and historically situated concerns of God's human friends as God's own to the extent that they implicate *our* flourishing. As a result, constituting a plural person with God erases neither one's idiosyncrasies nor the particular contexts in which one befriends God; and befriending God does not necessarily require one to forsake what matters to one about, or thanks to, these contexts and idiosyncrasies. Instead, from all eternity, God chooses, 'without abandoning the helm for one moment',[89] to exercise joint autonomy with all manner of human believers—to become so many absolutely unsubstitutable plural persons who jointly develop *our* identity. Insofar as each human believer is 'unique and irreplaceable',[90] God thereby expresses Godself 'in continually new forms',[91] telling new joint stories. And insofar as God is 'eternally rich',[92] each believer, conforming my desires to *our* Spirit, expresses the divine plenitude in a distinctive way. From before all time, God has a notional idea of future contingents pertaining to this plenitude. But God-for-us knows the splendor of God-with-us only once *we* particularize it—akin to the difference between speculation and a sense of the heart (Edwards),[93] or between the morning and evening knowledge that angels have of God's creation (Augustine).[94] God, then, eternally determines to be Godself through God's friendships with human believers. In deifying, God confirms God's deity.

Barth's version of deification—grounded as it is in God's freedom—preserves the creator-creature distinction. Edwards's version also preserves the boundary between deity and deified, but by grounding deification in God's self-love. According to Edwards, God creates the world for God's own

88 *CD* III/3, p. 287.
89 *CD* III/3, p. 285.
90 *CD* III/2, p. 271.
91 *CD* II/1, p. 314.
92 *CD* III/4, p. 16.
93 Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses*, p. 413–14.
94 Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2006) 4.39, pp. 263–5; 4.48–49, pp. 269–70; 5.36, p. 294.

sake, out of 'infinite love to' and 'delight in' Godself. That is, God makes Godself, not creation, God's 'last end'.[95] Yet God also sees Godself as incomplete without the world; it no less expresses God's 'own complete self' than branches and leaves complete a tree. Ergo, God's making Godself God's last end, and God's acting for creation's sake, must not be 'opposite parts of a disjunction', Edwards writes.[96] Plural person theory clarifies Edwards's argument. Recall (from section 2) that a pattern of emotions, desires, and judgments constituting a personal value is only subfocused on the value, and ultimately focused on oneself. That is, one's sense of self is at stake in such values. One tries to live up to them out of solicitude for one's well-being as this particular person. Creating is one of God's personal values, says Edwards. It is central to God's conception of Godself. God's corresponding felt evaluations and evaluative judgments are therefore only subfocused on creation and ultimately focused on Godself. God creates, in other words, as a part of loving the irreplaceably particular self God is. Or, better: the friendship between the Father and the Son is a joint self or Spirit for whom the only kind of trinitarian life worth living includes at least two things, expressing the divine plenitude in creation and incorporating human creatures into the trinitarian life. It is out of love for *our* triune life as this particular plural person, the Spirit, that God decides to include humanity in *our* Spirit. Thus, from all eternity, God's commitment to constituting more plural persons with human believers is only subfocused on these 'abundantly diffused' 'emanations' of the economic Spirit and ultimately focused on the 'infinite fullness' of the immanent Spirit.[97]

God's self-love also explains how the economic Spirit can diffuse a multiplicity of such emanations without rendering the Spirit multiple. If God's reasons for creating and deifying are focused on the immanent Spirit, then the Spirit's wildly abundant economic form—as so many plural persons—stays true to the Spirit's immanent form. God always stays true to Godself in God's friendships with human believers. This splendor spreads out to a dazzling eschatological wholeness of which God's human friends catch glimpses—as in Jesus's high priestly prayer (Jn 17:20–21).

So far, I have characterized the economic Spirit in abstract terms. But modeling the Spirit as a plural person also makes sense of existing Christian practices. For example, as Tanya Luhrmann's ethnography of a Chicago Vineyard church suggests, American evangelicals experience their faith as friendship with God. These Christians read prayer manuals and hear sermons that instruct them to interact with God as they would with their closest human friends. They schedule regular *quiet times* to hang out with God in which they not only talk to God, but also tease God, giggle with God, scream at God, and

95 Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, p. 436.
96 Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, pp. 439–40.
97 Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, pp. 438–9.

listen for what God might have to say. The discipline of quiet time trains evangelicals to perceive God's voice in their own streams of consciousness. Reading the Bible becomes a dynamic two-way conversation that evokes new meanings from the text as God responds directly to the believer. Evangelicals thus develop what Luhrmann calls a *participatory theory of mind*. This phenomenon shows up in other Christian traditions, too. Quakers call it *living in the Light*; Catholics call it *Ignatian contemplation*. For such Christians, distinguishing God's thoughts from one's own is a skill that improves with practice. Mastering it gives the believer something like Edwards's sense of the heart. One of Luhrmann's informants compares this transformation to finally meeting God after years of being pen pals. Another describes it as being the Spirit's 'conduit'. Believers 'allow' the Spirit 'to move through' them 'to act on behalf of God'.[98] Modeling the Spirit as a plural person explains the structure of practical reasoning that these Christians are using: God and the believer shape one another into another self for whom a certain kind of joint life is worth living.

A new and wider self

To kick-start this pneumatology and get some of its theoretical apparatus up and running, I have restricted discussion of the economic Spirit to a narrow, idealized case: friendship between a human being with their wits about them (to put it in the awful parlance of Anglo-American philosophers) and God. Real life is much more complicated. For example, as most Christian theologies would have it, a human being does not encounter (much less befriend) God in isolation. Where is the church in all of this?

Jenson concludes his criticism of Barth's pneumatology with ecclesiological musings that might seem like plural person theory. Citing Joseph Ratzinger, Jenson opines that only a thinker less resolutely Protestant than Barth could locate the Spirit's personhood and agency in the 'new and wider self' of the church.[99] The Spirit, as the agent of the Father's and Son's unity, would on such an account draw human beings into the divine unity by knitting them together as one collective ecclesial self and making that wider ecclesial self the irreducible subject of the verb 'I believe'. Ratzinger explains: 'Faith is essentially a joint belief with the church as a new and wider self. The "I" in the expression "I believe" is no longer my old "I," withdrawn in itself; it is the "I" of the *anima ecclesiastica*, that is to say, the "I" of one in whom the whole

[98] T. M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (Vintage: New York, 2012), pp. 258–9.
[99] Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', p. 303.

community of the church expresses itself'.[100] Ratzinger doubts that such a conception of faith 'really' conflicts with 'Reformation' theologies.[101] For him, this new and wider self to which the Spirit binds one in faith is but the Pauline 'I yet no longer I' of 'the encounter with Jesus'. A faith that gives one 'a new subjectivity in communion with' Jesus thereby incorporates one into Jesus's body, the church: one receives one's 'I' anew 'in the "we" of the communion of saints'.[102] Jenson (a Lutheran with Catholic leanings) adopts this ecclesiological conception of the Spirit's personhood in his own systematic theology: 'the Spirit finds his "I" in the Son just insofar as the Son is the *totus Christus*, insofar as the Son includes and is included in his community. And the Spirit him*self* is nothing other than the Freedom that occurs in these relations'.[103] Jenson thinks, in other words, that the Spirit's 'personality' is that of a collective agent[104]—the *totus Christus*, or (as a reader of Augustine explains) the 'new spiritual entity' that the Spirit 'brings … about' by metaphysically uniting Jesus and his church into 'one' body of which Jesus is the head and Jesus's believers are the hands, ears, eyes, feet.[105]

Jenson wagers that such an answer to the question of how the Spirit is personal would entail an ecclesiology too Catholic for Barth. As Jenson explains, 'if the Community between the Father and the Son were himself an *agent* of their love, immanently and economically'—a person rather than a principle—'then the church, as the community inspirited by this Agent, would be the active *mediatrix* of faith, in precisely the way demanded by Catholics and resisted by Protestants in every chief dialogue'.[106] Jenson concludes that, because Barth would never locate the Spirit's self in the new and wider self of the church, his commitment to conceptualizing the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son leaves him with no other option than denoting the Spirit 'invariably by impersonal terms' like 'power', 'activity', and 'capacity'.[107] To be sure, 'Catholic commentators' do find in the *Church Dogmatics* 'many' approximations 'to Catholic patterns of thought', but Barth remains on Jenson's diagnosis a practical binitarian—which Jenson sees as 'the last resistance' of Barth's 'Protestantism'.[108]

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100 Joseph Ratzinger, *Eglise, Œcuménisme, et Politique*, trans. Philippe Jordan, Phillip-Ernst Gudenus, and Beat Müller (Paris: Fayard, 1987), p. 173 (translations mine). Because what interests me presently is Jenson's constructive use of Ratzinger, I use the same French translation of Ratzinger that Jenson cites.

101 Ratzinger, *Eglise, Œcuménisme, et Politique*, p. 172.

102 Ratzinger, *Eglise, Œcuménisme, et Politique*, p. 173.

103 Jenson, *ST*, pp. 160–1 (emphasis Jenson's).

104 Jenson, *ST*, p. 160.

105 J. David Moser, '*Totus Christus*: A Proposal for Protestant Christology and Ecclesiology', *Pro Ecclesia* 29 (2019), pp. 6, 9.

106 Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', p. 303 (emphasis Jenson's).

107 Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', pp. 303, 304.

108 Jenson, 'You Wonder Where the Spirit Went', p. 303.

I am less interested in the biographical question of whether anything like a plural person *avant la lettre* would have been conceivable to Barth than in the conceptual question of whether modeling the Spirit as a plural person entails a Catholic (or broadly episcopal) ecclesiology—a possible upshot of Jenson's commentary on Barth. I submit that it does not. Or (more exactly) one *could* derive a Catholic ecclesiology from this model of the Spirit, but theological consistency *does not require* it, for the model is compatible with a range of ecclesiologies: Catholics and Protestants alike could find stuff of worth in it.

To show why, I must first describe a key difference between the solution to the problem of the Spirit's personhood that this article develops and the solution that Jenson entertains. Namely: the new and wider self of which Ratzinger writes and to which Jenson alludes is not a plural person. Certainly, theologians not infrequently theorize the church as a collective person: Dietrich Bonhoeffer does it in *Sanctorum Communio*; Hans Urs von Balthasar does it in *Spouse of the Word*.[109] But a person (as I argued in section 2) is an absolutely unsubstitutable someone with a capacity for autonomy—with, that is, a say in determining what matters to them as part of loving the irreplaceably particular self they are. The church is too diffuse to meet these conditions. Personhood, then, can be ascribed to the church only figuratively.

That last point is worth elaborating. Jenson's (and Ratzinger's) new and wider self cannot be a plural person, because the joint autonomy in virtue of which a friendship is a person cannot be scaled up to a group as large as a parish (let alone the *totus Christus*), where (to quote Margaret Gilbert) 'many members will be strangers to one another'.[110] The basic motivating force in a plural person—what makes a plural person cohere as an irreducible agent—is an intimate love that renders a few individuals absolutely unsubstitutable in one another's estimation: *our* affection for *us*—a bond to which each of *us* contributes irreplaceably (and sees the others as so contributing)—reliably lights up certain things as desirable to *us*. Thus, a plural person cannot change its individual membership without losing its identity as the particular plural person it is. But human finitude would preclude all 4900 parishioners of Holy Name Cathedral, or all 8500 members of Trinity United Church of Christ, from knowing one another deeply enough to become non-fungible objects of one another's love (*mutatis mutandis*, the *totus Christus*). So, although in communal worship they could display *collective effervescence*—spreading to one another the type of pre-conceptual affective contagion that Durkheim

[109] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, trans. Richard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), pp. 143–92.

[110] Margaret Gilbert, *A Theory of Political Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 99.

attributes to ritual[111]—they could not in any setting display the type of conceptually interlinked felt evaluations, or joint emotions and joint desires, indicative of a plural person with a reliable sensitivity to what matters to *us* in *our* unsubstitutable particularity. Simply put, all 4900 or 8500 (or innumerable) souls could not share with each other all at once the intimacy required to link them in one gargantuan bond of friendship. Instead, a group of such magnitude can act corporately (as opposed to merely distributively) only if its members recognize the group's right to act on their behalf (by, say, reciting the Nicene creed at mass) and the group has a procedure for discerning the group's intentions (like the two-thirds qualified-majority rule of a papal conclave) as well as protocols for enacting them that encourage honesty and cooperation among individual members (like anonymous nominations).[112] Because of these communal norms, a group that welcomes indefinitely many members maintains its identity as the particular corporate agent it is when new members join or old ones leave (whatever deference a Catholic owes the current pope qua pope, for example, they owe also to former and future popes qua pope). The basic motivating force in this kind of collective agent—what makes it cohere as an irreducible agent—is the non-intimate respect that members feel for the group's form of life and for fellow members in their fungible role as upholders of that form of life.[113] The institutional sociality characteristic of such a *community of respect* cannot bind all members to one another in the sort of unscripted and enduring emotional attachment necessary for each of *us* to have equal say over the contours of *our* identity such that the group develops a truly joint self. Hence, even though a community of respect can exercise agency at the group-level (pursuing goals that matter to the group), it cannot exercise autonomy at the group-level (defining and revising what matters to *us* as part of loving *our* irreplaceably particular life), in contrast to a plural person.[114]

The distinction between plural persons and communities of respect that I have been describing matters for at least three reasons. First, for Jenson,

111 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995), pp. 207–41.

112 Christian List and Philip Pettit, *Group Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For an alternative model of ecclesial agency, see Joshua Cockayne, *Explorations in Analytic Ecclesiology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

113 Bennett Helm, *Communities of Respect: Grounding Responsibility, Authority, and Dignity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

114 What is the greatest number of members a group can have and still behave as a plural person? Feminist organizer Jo Freeman observed in the 1970s that whenever an informal feminist group exceeded 15 members, small subgroups of friends would develop, leaving those outside these cliques powerless to set the group's agenda—unless the group put formal procedures in place, meaning a democratic structure with fungible roles, 'The Tyranny of Structurelessness', in *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*, ed. Dark Star Collective (Oakland: AK Press, 2002), pp. 68–75.

the Spirit's personhood is the *totus Christus*. But the *totus Christus* (somatic metaphor notwithstanding) lacks the absolute unsubstitutability and the capacity for autonomy that characterize persons. Consequently, when it comes to the problem of the Spirit's personhood, Jenson's model of the Spirit as the new and wider self of the church only gets as far as personhood in a metaphorical sense. Modeling the Spirit as a plural person, by contrast, makes it possible to say something much stronger about the Spirit's personhood, that is, to talk about the bond of love between the Father and the Son as a person in a literal sense.

Second, Jenson reads Lombard and Edwards as likewise uniting the *totus Christus* in one wider self.[115] Thus, according to Lombard, the Spirit 'inflames' one 'to love God and neighbor' and 'conjoins all the good angels and all God's servants in the bond of holiness'.[116] And thus, for Edwards, 'in this also eminently consists our communion with the saints, that we drink into the same Spirit … in which they are all united; 'tis the bond of perfectness by which they are one in' God.[117] If Jenson's reading of them is right, they are wrong, since the *totus Christus* is too diffuse to meet the criteria of a joint self. In terms of plural person theory, though, a sounder reconstruction of Lombard's and Edwards's point would go like this: God forms many absolutely unsubstitutable plural persons with many human friends. But God always stays true to Godself (as I put it in section 4). So, there is some overlap in the values of these plural persons. For instance, in each case, *our* intimacy (or friendship-love) commits *us* to respect (or neighbor-love) for all creatures, angelic as well as earthly. The sameness of the Spirit into which all the saints drink is that of constancy or trustworthiness rather than uniformity or fusion.

Third, modeling the Spirit as a plural person could accommodate a variety of ecclesiologies, including bottom-up traditions (like Quaker process) as well as top-down ones (like Catholic polity). So, for example, this model provides a conceptual framework for understanding the Quaker experience of a *gathered* or *covered* meeting for worship—that is, an occasion of unprogrammed *waiting worship* in which the worshippers, stilling their minds and silently waiting for the Spirit's prompting them to speak extemporaneously, feel especially keenly their connection with one another and God.[118] What could the Spirit's influence mean in this context? Each Quaker, having developed through the discipline of waiting worship something like the Christian participatory theory of mind that Tanya Luhrmann observes in American evangelicals, attends inwardly to God, discerning with God what

115 Jenson, *ST*, p. 149.
116 Lombard, *Sentences*, 1.17.4.1, p. 91; 1.17.1.3, p. 89. Cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 8.12, p. 255.
117 Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity*, p. 130.
118 My descriptions of Quakerism rely on *Faith and Practice* (McNabb: Illinois Yearly Meeting, 2020).

matters to the specific plural person God and this human being have formed over the course of many such meetings.[119] *Our* joint evaluative perspective would presumably include a commitment to Quaker ministry, or helping others experience that of God within them, too. As part of loving *us*, then, *we* care about the spiritual condition of others in this meeting, be they Quakers, non-Quaker regular attenders, or newcomers. Accordingly, *we* wordlessly determine how to act on behalf of *our* Spirit here and now: whether to pull others into 'rivers of living water' by speaking from *our* experience (Jn 7:38) or by deepening the expectant silence that makes such spoken ministries possible. Should a Quaker so speak on *our* behalf, a newcomer might sense in the message an invitation to friendship with God. A Quaker or regular attender might sense therein a more limpid expression of something they saw only hazily before. Or they might feel the words as a knife cutting open their heart and trimming off parts that conflict with what the Spirit requires.[120] This account of Quaker practice is one way of describing how one's friendship with God (the plural person that God and a human believer constitute) includes other human believers and their friendship with God (other plural persons that God constitutes with other believers).

Alternatively, the pneumatology I have sketched in this article could be fleshed out along Catholic lines to show how one's friendship with God includes other human believers and their friendship with God, for the pneumatology just as easily explains the Catholic notion of the *sensus fidei*—that is, the spiritual intuition by which a Catholic, whether part of the laity or the hierarchy, can reflexively (a) tell if a teaching or practice they encounter harmonizes or jars with Christian truth, (b) distinguish adiaphora from what Catholic faith requires, and (c) improvise a more fitting witness to the gospel in response to new cultural and historical circumstances.[121] Magisterial teaching likens the *sensus fidei* to the intimacy of friendship: the feel a believer has for Christian truth resembles a friend's knack for anticipating 'what delights or disappoints' their friends (as Sr. Sara Butler puts it).[122] Modeling the Spirit as a plural person literalizes this analogy. Church doctrine classifies

[119] The meeting therefore includes multiple human/divine plural persons; the meeting is not itself a plural person. Quakers call themselves uppercase Friends. But the worshippers at any given Quaker meeting might not know one another well enough to count one another friends in the lowercase sense. Moreover, Quaker meetings will open their doors to as many newcomers as their meetinghouse safely accommodates.

[120] Margaret Fell, 'The Testimony of Margaret Fox', in *Quaker Writings: An Anthology, 1650–1920*, ed. Thomas Hamm (New York: Penguin, 2010), pp. 44–9.

[121] See the International Theological Commission's '*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church' (2014), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html (accessed 1 March 2024).

[122] Sr. Sara Butler, '*Sensus Fidei*: Chapters One and Two', International Theological Commission, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_butler-sensus-fidei_en.html (accessed 1 March 2024).

the *sensus fidei* as a meta-virtue underlying all the cardinal and theological virtues in a faithful Catholic: it is the shape of fortitude and hope in (say) a Polish priest holding mass in the woods to evade the communist police; or the instinct for love and justice in (e.g.) an American journalist urging the archdiocese of New York, on the basis of Catholic social teaching, to pay their gravediggers a living wage. The Spirit infuses this meta-virtue in a believer and opens their heart to a holier way of life and higher insight into the faith. How might this infusion, this opening, happen? The form of practical reasoning proper to a plural person is (as I hinted in sections 2 and 4) virtue—a perceptual capacity, developed through loving *us*, by which the friends reliably sense threats or boons to *us* and spontaneously curb the former or pursue the latter.[123] A Catholic acquires the *sensus fidei*, then, through friendship with God. This friendship might begin with infant baptism or the rite of Christian initiation of adults; it deepens with ongoing liturgical and devotional practice. Hymns, the eucharist, confession, *lectio divina*, Ignatian exercises: these rituals inculcate a distinctive yet uncodifiable outlook in a Catholic that enables them to recognize instinctively the behavior *our* Spirit calls for in any situation.

Such Quaker and Catholic versions of the pneumatology I have sketched alike resolve a potential problem with this model of the Spirit: how to tell when talk of what matters to *us* (where the plural person includes God and a sinful human believer) is the Spirit's work, and when it is idolatry masquerading as a believer's joint evaluative perspective with God. Needless to say, on account of human finitude and sin, a believer will not always get the requirements of *our* Spirit right; nor will the believer always be able to detect all on their own any conflicts between what they think *we* stand for and what actually conduces to *our* flourishing. In both ecclesiologies, though, a community helps its members discern the truth and vice versa.

For example, anyone present in a Quaker meeting for worship may experience the Spirit's prompting them to speak (in the manner I described above). One can test one's experience of the Spirit against such vocal ministries. Because truth does not contradict truth, or (as I put it earlier) God stays true to Godself in each of God's friendships with human believers, incompatible experiences call for further discernment about whether one has merely projected one's own ego onto the Spirit. In addition, a Quaker *meeting for worship with a concern for business* makes decisions affecting the meeting only if there is unity among all present regarding the action at issue: members listen deeply and prayerfully to one another until a *sense of the meeting* emerges, that is, a collective recognition that this action is God's will for the meeting. But suppose a Quaker in attendance, discerning with God what matters to *us*, sees the action as out of step with divine guidance. They might, then, determine that what *our*

[123] John McDowell, 'Virtue and Reason', *The Monist* 62 (1979), pp. 331–50.

Spirit requires of them in this situation is to *stand in the way*, or state their opposition to the proposal and their unwillingness to let the meeting decide in favor of it, in which case the Quaker and their meeting have a shared obligation to continue discerning God's will.

Similarly, for Catholics, the *sensus fidei* comes in two forms, one personal (the *sensus fidei fidelis*), the other communal (the *sensus fidei fidelium*). Neither reliably tracks the truth without the other. On the one hand, thanks to the *sensus fidei fidelis*, a lay Catholic without theological training can detect heterodoxy: if their bishop preaches heresy, *our* Spirit should prompt them to dissent from their bishop. Moreover, thanks to the *sensus fidei fidelium*, the laity's conviction about a doctrinally undefined topic can shape the development of Catholic teaching. Occasionally the laity collectively senses the truth of something while the magisterium remains divided about it.[124] On the other hand, agreement among the faithful (*consensus fidelium*) or unanimity of clergy and laity on an issue (*conspiratio pastorum et fidelium*) is the criterion by which a believer tests the deliverances of *our* Spirit for authenticity.

But either way—whether a human believer befriends God and tests the deliverances of *our* Spirit in a bottom-up or a top-down ecclesial community—two things follow from this pneumatology regarding how one discerns the truth. First, because (as I just argued) personhood does not scale, plural persons and communities of respect help their members discern the truth in non-equivalent ways: the former through personal intimacy, the latter through impersonal respect for communal norms. Each therefore offers a different kind of check on error. In a plural person, the love *we* feel for *our* absolutely unsubstitutable *us* links each of *us* viscerally to reasons for reassessing *our* values whenever one of *us* reinterprets what conduces to *our* well-being. So, if *we* value *our* involvement in a certain community of respect, and I begin to feel as one of *us* that some of the community's practices are harming *us*, my voicing this concern should motivate each of *us* to reconsider, from *our* joint evaluative perspective, the place of these practices in *our* life—as when the Catholic biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson came to support with 'passionate conviction' the full inclusion of gay people in the church's life after his gay daughter and his gay students showed him that his prior beliefs 'helped to create a world where' they 'were treated cruelly'.[125] A community of respect lacks the emotional closeness necessary for such an exercise of joint autonomy. If a member of a community of respect finds some of its

[124] So it was with the immaculate conception and Mary's assumption.

[125] Luke Timothy Johnson, 'Scripture & Experience', *Commonweal* 134 (15 June 2007), p. 16.

practices harmful, that member cannot simply rely on the community's feelings toward them to prompt a communal reassessment of the practices in question. Rather, the very procedures that make a community of respect a corporate agent make the communal reassessment of its practices a slower and chillier affair—as when in the early 1700s the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting censured or disowned members who publicly demanded that Quakers stop enslaving Black people before the clerk found a sense of the meeting that enslavement was wrong.[126]

Second, because (as I argued in section 4) the human grasp of God is a function of human friendships with God in the changing sphere of history, distinguishing truth from error or Spirit from idol does not aim at a fixed target but at a living God who is 'always doing a new thing' for the sake of the many plural persons God constitutes with human believers (Isa 43:19). Such discernment requires one to take the particularity of God's human friends, the inexhaustibility of God, and the consequent plenitude of divine immanence into account. It demands of all human believers their inquisitive receptivity to the surprises of the wildly abundant Spirit and their trust that this plenitude does converge on one source. Moreover, as it comes indefinitely closer to that source, such discernment must continue indefinitely, drawing on wisdom from multiple communities of respect that span generations as well as varieties of belief, expertise, and social location. In sum, any point on the long timeline of theological inquiry—or on the shorter timeline of one believer's life—represents a provisional grasp of God's unfolding splendor.

Conclusion

On the basis of some clues from prior bond-of-love pneumatologies, I have developed a new model of the Spirit as a plural person who indwells, regenerates, and deifies human believers through friendship with them. According to this model, the Father's and the Son's friendship eternally constitutes the Spirit, a joint personal identity irreducible to the others. What the Spirit cares about from before all time is making humanity part of *us*. Thus, out of love for *our* triune life as the particular plural person *we* are—namely, the Spirit—God freely decides from all eternity to include humanity in *our* bond. The Spirit's acts of indwelling, regenerating, and deifying are, then, expansions *ad extra* of God's friendship *in se*: God and a human believer befriend one another and thereby constitute a plural person who, instilling joint habits of thought and feeling in each of *us*, at once sanctifies the believer and uniquely expresses God's inexhaustible splendor. This model illustrates the principle of *divine non-competitiveness*: the deeper the

[126] This is not to deny that human friendships buckle under the force of structural oppression (cf. the example of Sow and Friedman in section 2). Neither a plural person nor a community of respect is immune from error.

intimacy between a human creature and their divine creator, the more distinctly themself that creature becomes, like a jewel aglow in sunlight.

To be sure, one might wonder where Christ went. But—as critics of bond-of-love pneumatologies never tire of saying—pneumatology has been undertheorized largely because Christology has overshadowed it. Theologians begin with Christ, and by the time they get to the Spirit, there is nothing left for the Spirit to do. By reversing this order, I have been able to build, not just a new model of the Spirit, but a new conceptual scheme for interpreting the relationship between divine grace and human agency—one that can shed light on a number of theological loci, including Christology.