

When Paul speaks of the Spirit of God, he is thinking primarily of the presence and power of God active in the life of the believing community and in the lives of those who are part of it.

Paul often expresses the reality of God and of the Spirit in *temporal* metaphors, using the categories of present and future. If he sometimes conceives the present as moving ahead toward the future (e.g., Rom 13:11 f.), he at other times conceives God's future as moving in on the present, in which cases he thinks of the Holy Spirit as the bearer of God's future, establishing the power of the new age already in the midst of the old, within those who, through faith in Jesus Christ, are participants in the new creation.

This is the meaning of two special metaphors, both temporal in character, by which Paul describes the Spirit. One metaphor derives from Israel's practice of offering God, at the annual feast of the harvest (the Festival of Weeks), the first, and presumably choicest, portions of the yield. The *first fruits* were not the whole, but they represented it and, in an important sense, embodied it. Thus, when Paul refers to believers in Romans 8:23 as those "who have the first fruits of the Spirit," he is thinking of the Spirit as the power of salvation present already with believers, empowering and renewing them and, even in the midst of the old age, establishing them in the hope for the full harvest that is yet to come (vss. 24 f.). Paul's other temporal metaphor derives from the world of business and commerce, and it appears twice in 2 Corinthians. This is the idea of *down payment, first installment, earnest money, or guarantee*. In 5:5, he says, "God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee," thereby thinking of the Spirit as the effective presence of God's power in the present—not the fullness of it, but no less the reality of it in the believer's life. "[God] has put his seal upon us and given his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (1:22).

For Paul, the power of the new age, which is already effective in the present, is God's love—the love through which God has created all that is and has willed that it be sustained, and through which God has redeemed it and will consummate it. For Paul, the decisive *event* of God's love is Jesus Christ, where he finds established that powerful, redeeming love through which the world is reconciled to God and those who are open to receive it

participate in the new creation (2 Cor 5:14-20; Rom 5:6-11). This is God's love, to which faith is the response and by which faith itself is empowered to express itself as love in the believer's life (Gal 5:6, assuming a double reference in the verb: faith is rendered active by God's love and becomes active in the believer's love).

But if Christ is the decisive *event* through which God's love is established, it is equally true that the Holy Spirit is the decisive *bearer* of God's love, the means by which God's love is made present in the believer's life. "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

Thus, for Paul, faith is faith only as it is enacted in love, which is the power of the new age present and active already in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it is by the enlivening power of the Spirit that the believer is sustained and guided in her or his new life. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25)—the principal and inclusive fruit of the Spirit being love (5:22). If love never ends (1 Cor 13:8), this is because it is God's own power, the power of the new age, reaching back into our present, claiming us for God and endowing our existence with meaning and direction.