

The Holy Spirit*

—
Richard B. Gaffin, Jr.

I

Twenty years ago, when I was a seminary student, there was a slogan to the effect that the Holy Spirit was “the forgotten member of the Trinity.” Today, no one at all aware of more recent developments in the church and theology, will be able to say anything like that. The past 15-20 years have witnessed an unprecedented quickening of intense and widespread interest in the work of the Holy Spirit. While this interest has begun to show signs of levelling off over the past several years, it is still safe to say that at present no issue more preoccupies the church throughout the world than that of the Holy Spirit and his work.

This remarkable turn of events is largely bound up with the emergence and rapid spread of the charismatic movement. The phenomenal growth of this movement has no easy or single explanation, but certainly it can not be understood, at least in the West, apart from larger cultural and subcultural developments in recent decades. Among these, in particular, are a growing disillusionment with our society as a whole and its apparent direction (or lack thereof), and an awareness that things like industrialization, technology and material affluence, on which such high hopes have been set, tend by themselves to disappoint and depersonalize rather than to satisfy basic human needs and aspirations. Another factor is the “new irrationalism” of the West with its preoccupation with various Eastern religions and other forms of mysticism, in the quest for personal wholeness and experience with genuine emotional depth.

* An address, printed here with slight revisions, given at the National Presbyterian and Reformed Congress, meeting at Grove City College, Grove City, Pennsylvania, on July 17, 1979.

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 59

These trends betray a deep hunger which the Gospel alone can satisfy and it would be tragic for the church to neglect them. But they also intensify the demand to “test the spirits.” Accordingly, both within and outside the charismatic movement, there is a growing concern to counter the *antitheological* bias that has so often surfaced down through church history when the work of the Holy Spirit is under consideration. Efforts are under way to redress this *doctrinal* neglect of the Holy Spirit, so that now it can no longer be said that pneumatology is the neglected field of systematic theology. Across a broad front, contemporary theology has moved from a christological period (under the dominance of Karl Barth) into a pneumatological period. Apparently this is where it will remain for some time.

Where is and where ought the Reformed community to be in this situation? It is fair to say, I believe, that most of us see ourselves on the outside looking in. The

charismatic movement has largely caught us by surprise, leaving many of us perplexed or perhaps some of us antagonized. It has not had any real impact on our church life and Christian experience. No doubt some degree of isolation here is necessary. The totalitarian character of our allegiance to Scripture, and our conviction that the Bible is not simply a stimulus but the norm for Christian experience, makes a certain amount of isolation almost inevitable. No doubt, too, most of our critiques of the charismatic movement are accurate and need to be made. But it would be regrettable indeed if in this era of renewed and intensified interest in the work of the Holy Spirit, we of the Reformed community were to remain fixed on what sets us apart and only able to see the errors of our fellow Christians in the charismatic movement. These contemporary developments contain a massive challenge, the positive challenge to search ourselves. What ought to be our expectations for the work of the Spirit in *our own* lives and in the congregations to which many of us minister? Where are we involved, perhaps unwittingly, in grieving or quenching the Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19)? How can we as Reformed Christians function more adequately as ministers of the new covenant~not of the letter but of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:6)? These are the kinds of questions that ought to focus our concern.

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 60

II

It seems to me that a constructive searching of ourselves does well to begin by recalling our heritage. That is indispensable for getting our bearing and maintaining our balance in the present. B. B. Warfield, for one, has taken the position that Calvin is “preeminently the theologian of the Holy Spirit.”¹ This may seem a surprising assessment and is certainly not the popular view of Calvin. But, as Warfield points out, Calvin’s distinctive contribution is not, for instance, the doctrines of God’s sovereignty or of election and double predestination. These he simply took over from Augustine and others. Rather, his teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit is, Warfield writes, “probably Calvin’s greatest contribution to theological science. In his hands for the first time in the history of the Church, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit comes to its rights.”² Calvin’s *Institutes*, Warfield only slightly overstates, is “just a treatise on the work of God the Holy Spirit in making God savingly known to sinful man, and bringing sinful man into holy communion with God.”³ The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, by which we are brought to a saving conviction of the divine origin and truth of Scripture (I.vii), is a particular doctrine the church owes to Calvin. And under the term “regeneration” he discusses at length (II.iii-x) the whole process by which the Spirit subjectively renews the sinner.

The progression of the argument in Book III of the *Institutes* is particularly significant. There Calvin discusses the application of salvation in the experience of the individual sinner. With the rest of the Reformation he is clear that justification by faith “is the main hinge on which religion turns” (xi.i). But for Calvin justification has

1 1. “John Calvin the Theologian,” *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. S. G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1956), p. 484, *cf.* p. 487.

2 2. *Ibid.*, p. 487; *cf.* “On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, 1, ed. J. E. Meeter (Nutley, New Jersey): Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970), pp. 213f.

3 3. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

a broader and deeper setting. That foundation, the opening and orienting chapter of Book III tells us, is “the secret working of the Spirit.” Without that “secret working,” that “secret energy of the Spirit,” Christ

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 61

remains outside us and all he has done for our salvation remains useless and is of no value to us. “To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectively unites us to himself” (i:1). This Spirit-worked union gives a share in all Christ’s saving benefits. Without it we have nothing, neither justification, nor sanctification, nor anything else. The application of redemption in its entirety is suspended on the work of the Holy Spirit in sovereignly uniting sinners to the exalted Christ.

Calvin saw too the *comprehensive* scope of the Spirit’s activity, in creation as well as redemption. The overall development of the *Institutes* reflects the insight, too often minimized or even denied, that the various saving activities of the Spirit are not apart from or in opposition to creation. Redemption is the vindication of God the *creator*. The new creation in the Spirit is the restoration and consummation of creation; it includes the renewal of the entire life of the creature made in God’s image. In Calvin’s statements on the Holy Spirit there is also a recognition of what we have subsequently come to refer to as “common grace.”

We can leave it to others to judge in detail just how adequately and faithfully subsequent generations of the Reformed tradition have maintained this heritage from Calvin. But certainly we are not wrong in saying that the work of the Holy Spirit has been a constant and even distinctive concern. Unlike other traditions, the Reformed tradition has not been content to rest in faith as kind of an ultimate fact in salvation. Genuine Calvinism is bound to probe deeper and ask the question, “Where does this faith by which I am saved come from?” “What is its origin?” And the answer found, the Reformed resting point, is the sovereign and gracious working of the Holy Spirit and in faith as a free gift of God alone. Especially with the emergence of its doctrine of regeneration in the classic, narrower sense, subsequent to the Synod of Dordt, the Reformed tradition has insisted that the entire soteriological process is rooted in the work of the Holy Spirit.

Various aspects of the Spirit’s activity in the believer were a dominant, at times consuming preoccupation of the Puritans in particular (e.g., John Owen’s monumental *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 1674). More recently, toward the

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 62

close of the last century, Abraham Kuyper wrote one of the comparatively few comprehensive treatments to date on the work of the Holy Spirit. Another important work from about the same time is that of George Smeaton (*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 1882). Warfield, then, was hardly being facetious or irrelevant when he replied to those in his day who found *the Westminster Confession* deficient because it lacks a chapter devoted specifically to “the Holy Spirit and His Work,” that it already has

nine chapters on that topic.⁴ (I take it Warfield was referring to chapters 10–18, which deal with the application of redemption.)

It would be very wrong, then, in the present circumstances of revived interest in the Holy Spirit, if we as Reformed Christians were only able to see ourselves as disadvantaged or impoverished. This is not to deny that we can learn something from the charismatic movement and other Christians outside our tradition. We certainly can. But it would be monumentally ungrateful if we were to overlook or depreciate our Reformed heritage, just in the things of the Spirit of God. Nor is it patronizing on our part to point out that the charismatic movement has flourished especially in those denominations and parts of the church where this rich heritage has never taken hold, or where in recent generations it has even been repudiated and abandoned.

But this still leaves us with the challenge, posed by contemporary developments and now, as we have seen, intensified by our own tradition: How adequately and effectively will the Reformed community today be a manifestation of the grace and power of the Holy Spirit?

To try to give an ultimate answer to this question would be presumptuous. The Spirit, scripture reminds us, is like the wind that blows where it wills (John 3:8; cf. 1 Cor 12:11). He is finally incalculable and mysterious in his working; his ways are past finding out (Rom 11:36). We need always to remember this and, especially where the work of the Holy Spirit is concerned, to guard against lapsing into various kinds of intellectualism and the undue logicizing to which theology is so prone.

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 63

At the same time, however, we must not be more modest than Scripture. This, too, is a vital part of our Reformed heritage: *spiritus cum verbo*, the Spirit working with the Word, and “the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (*West. Conf.*, I, X). Where do we get the (practical) notion we sometimes have that Scripture is a dead letter? Not from our Reformed fathers. The Bible is the living voice of the Holy Spirit *today*. This is the structure or pattern of working which the Spirit has set for himself in his sovereign freedom. We may have this confidence, then, that as we are conformed to this order, as we hear and obey this Word and no other, the voice of the Spirit, we will be blessed and used by the Spirit, and we will not be found resisting or quenching him.

I move on, then, to offer some biblical fundamentals for today concerning the Holy Spirit. My concern is especially with considerations needing to be emphasized, as I see it, within the contemporary situation. Even with this narrower focus, I am aware how partial my remarks will be and therefore unsatisfying to some. Still I hope to be saying things that ought to be said first. I do so, I might add, with the increasing conviction how much we need in our own day a work on the Holy Spirit on the magnitude of those of Owen and Kuyper.

III

4 4. “On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” p. 205.

Even a superficial glance at the New Testament with a concordance in hand discloses an unmistakable pattern. The high percentage of references to the Holy Spirit (approximately 80%) are found in just over half of the New Testament—in Acts, the epistles and Revelation. There are only a relative handful of references in the gospels.

More significant is the nature of this distribution of references. In the gospels, so far as the present work of the Spirit is concerned, the accent is on Jesus and his activity. For the disciples, the Spirit is a matter of *promise*, a still *future* gift. In Acts and the epistles, however, emphasis is on the *present* reality of the Spirit as he is active in the church and at work in believers. This pattern raises a key question: what explains this difference, this decisive transition for the disciples? The answer, of course, is Pentecost, what is variously described as

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 64

the baptism of (in, with) the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 11:16), or the outpouring (Acts 2:17, 18, 33; 10:45), or gift (Acts 2:38; 10:45 ; 11:17 ; 15:8), of the Spirit.

The New Testament, then, provides a dramatic, historical perspective that is basic to understanding the work of the Holy Spirit. It is fair to say that everything in the New Testament about the Spirit's work looks forward or traces back to Pentecost; everything pivots on Pentecost, along with the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, with which Pentecost is closely associated as a single complex of events. (Acts 2:32, 33 make this association clear.) Accordingly, a basic question is what really happened at Pentecost. What is the significance of the baptism (gift) of the Holy Spirit?

Our first inclination is to answer this question in terms of ourselves and to look for the primary significance of Pentecost in individual Christian experience. This tendency is surely borne out by contemporary developments, where, for example, the basic understanding of Pentecost that many have is that it is the model for a post-conversion, "second blessing" experience of the Spirit's power to be sought by all believers. But this or any other assessment of Pentecost primarily in terms of the believer's personal experience is wrong, because it virtually short-circuits a decisive element in New Testament teaching on the work of the Holy Spirit and so distorts the whole.

Even more basic than Pentecost and its relation to the Christian life is the tie between Pentecost and the person and work of *Christ*. Jesus himself points to this tie in Acts 1:5, where the impending day of Pentecost is indicated to be the fulfillment of the prophecy which climaxed the preparatory preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16): "He [*i.e.*, Jesus, the Christ, *cf.* vs.15] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Pentecost, then, is evidently the work of Christ. In fact, Pentecost consummates his once-for-all accomplishment of our redemption. From one perspective, it is even fair to say that the earthly ministry of Jesus in its entirety consists in securing and then communicating to the church at Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit. This needs to be explored further.

The vital bond between the Spirit and Christ as incarnate lies along two strands of biblical witness which intertwine and condition each other. One line, so to speak, runs from the

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 65

Spirit to Christ, whereby Christ is the recipient or bearer of the Spirit. The direction of the other line is from Christ to the Spirit; here Christ is the sender or giver of the Spirit. Generally the second line has been better recognized than the first, but neither is really understood apart from the other.

How these two strands relate to each other can be seen from the basic thread of the narrative in the gospels and Acts. According to the gospels, Jesus, in terms of his genuine humanity, is a man of the Spirit. Luke especially draws attention to this: his conception is by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:35); by plain implication, the Spirit is with him from childhood (2:40; cf. 1:80; 2:52); the Spirit comes upon him at his baptism (3:22), and consequently the entire course of his public ministry is impelled by the Spirit (4:1, 14; 10:21; Acts 10:38). Jesus, as John the Baptist testifies, is given the Spirit without measure (John 3:34).

At the same time, John's climactic prophecy concerning the future ministry of Jesus marks him out as the *giver* of the Spirit (Matt 3:11, 12; Mark 1:7, 8; Luke 3:16, 17). At least two ramifications of this promised baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, fulfilled at Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5), are plain from the context in Luke 3 and ought not to be overlooked. For one, John's declaration is intended to answer (vs. 16) the basic question of the crowd whether he might possibly be the Christ (vs. 15). As such, meeting this question on the basic level it was asked, John's response is a virtual one sentence summary of his own ministry in comparison with that of the "coming one," Jesus, a comparison under the common denominator of baptism: "I baptize you with water, but...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John's role is provisional and preparatory, his call to repentance is anticipatory (cf. vs. 4; 7:27f); therefore his ministry in its *entirety* is set under the *sign* of water baptism. In contrast, Jesus is the fulfillment; therefore his ministry taken as a *whole* centers in the *reality* of baptism with Holy Spirit and fire. Secondly, verse 17 ("His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire") plainly shows that the fire of the Messiah's baptism is destructive, or at least includes a destructive aspect (cf. vs. 9), and further that this baptizing activity

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 66

as a whole involves nothing less than the final judgment with its dual outcome of salvation or destruction. Messianic Spirit-and-fire baptism is of a piece with God's great discriminating activity at the end of history, of cleansing the world-threshing floor or, to vary the biblical metaphor slightly, harvesting the world-field (cf. Matt 13:36, 43). To sum up here, Pentecost, as the goal of Christ's earthly ministry, has end-time, eschatological significance.

But the messianic baptism prophesied, contrary apparently even to John's expectations (Luke 7:18ff), does not take place immediately. Rather Luke and the other Synoptic evangelists are concerned to show that a period intervenes, based on

Jesus' own submission to John's water baptism *and*, correlative with that, his own reception of the Spirit (Luke 3:21, 22; note that all three gospels have an almost identical structure, *cf.* Matt 3:13–17 and Mark 1:9–11, in which the account of Jesus' baptism also follows directly on John's prophecy). In one word, the evangelists are concerned to show that the content of the *gospel* intervenes between John's prophecy and its Pentecost fulfillment. For the Spirit-and-fire baptism, eventually realized at Pentecost, to be one of blessing rather than destruction for the Messiah's people, for the Spirit to come upon them not as a consuming fire but as a recreating wind, then the Messiah himself must first become identified with them as their representative sin bearer (the point of Jesus' being baptized by John, which explains John's recoil, *cf.* Matt 3:14) and, at the same time, be endowed with the Spirit, in order, by his obedience to death on the cross, to bear away the wrath and condemnation of God their sins deserve. Pointedly, if they are to receive the Spirit as a gift and blessing, then he must receive the Spirit for the task of removing the curse on them.

This close integration of John's ministry (baptism), Jesus' ministry based on his own reception of the Spirit, and Jesus as the giver of the Spirit is very sharply focused in John 1:33. Identifying Jesus in his role as "the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (vs. 29), the Baptist says that he would not have known him (as such) "except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 67

with the Holy Spirit'." This is the (*gospel*) explanation of the two strands mentioned above relating the Spirit and Jesus.

It bears emphasizing now, that it is the *exalted* Christ, Christ as resurrected and ascended, who gives the Spirit. This is plain, for instance, from Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14ff). The pivot of much said on that occasion is found in verses 32 and 33. Having just dwelt on the resurrection (vss. 24–31) as God's response to the wicked men who crucified him (vs. 23), Peter summarizes by saying: "God has raised up this Jesus, to which we are all witnesses. Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit (*i.e.*, the promised Holy Spirit), he has poured out what you both see and hear." Here the outpouring (baptism) of the Spirit is closely connected with and conditioned on the climactic events of Christ's work, especially his resurrection and ascension. Further, the broader context of Luke-Acts, including the tie, already noted, between John's water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism, suggests an instructive parallel between Jesus' own baptism by John and Pentecost: At the Jordan, the Spirit was given to Jesus, by the Father (Luke 3:22), as endowment for the messianic task before him, in order that he might accomplish the salvation of the church; in contrast, at Pentecost, the Spirit, was received by Jesus, from the Father, now as reward for the redemptive work finished and behind him, and was given by him to the church as the (promised) gift (of the Father). (The fully trinitarian involvement in Pentecost is apparent.)

Two related points in these verses may be mentioned briefly, without our being able to discuss them adequately here. (1) The Spirit poured out at Pentecost is "the promise...from the Father," "the promise of the Father" (1:4; Luke 24:49). Thus, this outpouring is seen to be the essence of the fulfillment of the primal promise made to

Abraham (Gen 12:2, 3) and awaited under the entire old covenant (vs. 39 ; *cf.* esp. Gal 3:14). This points up again the central place of Pentecost among the objectives contemplated in Christ's work of redemption. (2) There is, then, the strong suggestion here that Pentecost is a once-for-all, epochal event, on the order of the

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 68

resurrection and ascension, with which it is so intimately related. Pentecost is *not* the first in an indefinitely continuing series of similar events, nor is it the model of an experience for believers regardless of time or place.

Paul's commentary in this connection, frequently overlooked, is 1 Corinthians 15:45: "The last Adam became life-giving Spirit" (*cf.* 2 Cor 3:17). In my judgment, exegesis of this passage, in the Reformed tradition rooted in the work of Geerhardus Vos,⁵ has shown convincingly that "spirit" in this statement refers to the Holy Spirit and that the "becoming" has in view what took place at the resurrection or, more broadly, the exaltation of Christ. Here, then, in this remarkable assertion, Paul not only points to Christ as the giver of the Spirit, but in so doing he *identifies* them in some respect, dating from the resurrection. While from the context the life-giving activity in view primarily pertains to the future, bodily resurrection of the believer at Christ's return, at the same time who Christ now is and what he *presently* does as resurrected is also surely in view.

To discover trinitarian confusion or a denial of the personal distinction between Christ and the Spirit at this point in Paul is to create a problem that is not there. Eternal, innertrinitarian relationships are outside his purview here. He is not thinking in terms of Christ's essential deity (which he plainly affirms elsewhere, Phil 2:6; *cf.* Rom 9:5), but of what Christ experienced in his genuine humanity. His perspective is *historical*. He is speaking about what Christ *became* in his identity as the last *Adam*, the second *man* (vs. 47). The oneness or unity in view is economic or functional, eschatological. Paul's point is that by virtue of his glorification, Christ, as last Adam and second man, has come into such permanent and complete possession of the Spirit that the two are equated in their *activity*. The two are seen as one, as they have been *made* one in the eschatological work of giving life to the church. The great Dutch

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 69

reformed theologian Herman Bavinck wrote that "this taking possession of the Holy Spirit by Christ is so absolute" ...that "the Holy Spirit has become entirely the property of Christ, and was, so to speak, absorbed into Christ or assimilated by him."⁶

This teaching of Paul ties in with and explains what Jesus himself had to say to his disciples in John 14–16 , when he promised the coming of the Spirit as Counselor or Advocate. In particular, at 14:12ff the point is made that the giving of the Spirit by

5 5. *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), pp. 166-169; "Eschatology and the Spirit in Paul," *Biblical and Theological Studies* by the members of the Faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), pp. 231-234; *cf.* R. B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 78-92, 96f.

6 6. *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. H. Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 387.

the Father is both conditioned on Jesus' *going* to the Father (vs. 12) in his glorification, and is at the same time the *coming* of Jesus himself (vs. 18 : "I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you"). The coming of the Spirit, following the ascension, is the coming of Jesus. Jesus' further promise of his presence and coming in the verses that follow (vss. 19–23) is similarly to be understood of the Spirit's coming (rather than as referring either to the brief period of his post-resurrection appearances or the second coming).

We have been asking after the significance of Pentecost. A basic factor emerging from our discussion, one that controls both the christology and the pneumatology of the New Testament, is the thorough *integration*, the complete *correspondence*, the total *congruence*, there is in the church and the experience of believers between the work of the exalted Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. We may say not only that at Pentecost Christ pours out on the church the gift of the Spirit, but also that Pentecost is the coming to the church of Christ himself as the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit of Pentecost is the resurrection life of Jesus, the life of the exalted Christ, effective in the church.

The Spirit's work, then, is not some addendum to the work of Christ. It is not some more or less independent sphere of activity that goes beyond or supplements what Christ has done. As John 16:13, 14 make unmistakably plain, the Spirit has no program of his own; as the "other Counselor" (14:16 ; *cf.* 16:7), he has no other function than to glorify *Christ* and minister the things of *Christ*. In his ministry the Spirit is

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 70

"self-effacing." The Spirit's work is not a "bonus" added to the basic salvation secured by Christ. *This* is the "full" gospel, and it is the only gospel.

The coming of the Spirit brings to light not only that Christ *has* lived and *has* done something but that he, as the source of eschatological life, now lives and is at work in the church. By and in the Spirit Christ reveals himself as present. The Spirit is the powerfully open secret, the revealed mystery, of Christ's abiding presence in the church. So, for example, the familiar words of Christ at the close of the Great Commission: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20) are not to be understood only in terms of Christ's omnipresence by virtue of his divine nature, but also and primarily in terms of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. The "I" who speaks here is the life-giving Spirit, the glorified Son of Man, about to come at Pentecost and be present in the church through the power of the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit is nothing less than the gift to the church of Christ himself, the glorified Christ who has become what he is by virtue of his sufferings, death and exaltation. In this sense, the giving of the Spirit is the crowning achievement of Christ's work. Pentecost is his coming in exaltation to the church in the power of the Spirit. It completes the one-for-all accomplishment of our salvation. Without it, that work that climaxes in Christ's death and resurrection would be, strictly speaking, unfinished, incomplete.

IV

Once we have grasped something of the bond between the Holy Spirit and Christ, we have a foundation for understanding the Spirit's work in the church and individual Christian experience. Actually, in discussing Pentecost in relation to Christ we have already found it not only natural but necessary to make repeated mention of the church. This happens, of course, because Christ's work is never private, merely for himself, but always messianic, for and in the interests of the church. The life-giving gift (reward) of the Spirit, which he received from the Father in his exaltation, he received, "not for his own private use" (Calvin, *Institutes*, III:1:1), but that he might

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 71

share it with us, his people. The Holy Spirit is the central blessing of the kingdom which, too, it is the Father's sovereign good pleasure to give to Jesus' disciples (cf. Luke 11:13 with 12:32). Here we will only be able to reflect briefly on several aspects of our sharing in this great kingdom gift.

1. *Old covenant, new covenant and the work of the Spirit.* One much agitated question concerns the differences in the Spirit's activity between the old and new covenants. Reformed doctrine has never settled for pat answers to this question, in terms of a sharp disjunction, say, between an external working of the Spirit under the old covenant and an internal working under the new. Admittedly, explicit Old Testament references to the Spirit's work in individuals are sparse, but to structure the difference between old and new by the distinction between theocratic endowment and personal indwelling (the Spirit "on" and "in"), is not only unconvincing but wrong. Both factors interweave, for example, in David's prayer: "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). The surrounding verses reflect an intense concern about sin, repentance, forgiveness and salvation, a concern obviously flowing from the deepest recesses of his person. More is at stake in David's plea than the loss of his theocratic prerogatives and powers. Also, the faith of Abraham, the model for all believers, both old and new covenant (Rom 4; Gal 3), can only have its origin in the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit. Further, the piety and prayers of the Psalms while not the average experience in Israel, were still a model and norm for their day, and are essentially continuous with the new covenant experience of the Spirit's sovereign work of inner renewal and personal transformation.

Yet, the writer of Hebrews says of old covenant believers that "none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect" (11:39, 40). What does this "something better" of the new covenant (cf. 7:22; 8:6) entail for the experience of those presently under its gracious administration, particularly for their experience of the Holy Spirit? Taken as a whole the New Testament seems to indicate one fundamental and decisive difference between old and new covenant believers. That is the Spirit-worked *union* New Testament

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 72

believers have with the *exalted* Christ, the life-giving Spirit, the Christ who is what he is, because he has suffered and entered into his glory. The covenantal communion with God enjoyed by Abraham and the other old covenant faithful was an anticipatory and provisional fellowship; it lacked the finality and eschatological permanence of

our union with (the glorified) Christ, which is the ground and medium of our experiencing all the other blessings of redemption.

The corporate or ecclesiological dimension of this union needs to be stressed. Pentecost, as often pointed out, is the birthday of the church as the new covenant people of God and the body of Christ. In particular, the Spirit poured out at Pentecost constitutes the church as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:22), as the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells (2 Cor 3:16). Believers are living stones who *together* make up a great Spiritual house (1 Pet 2:5). Within this temple-house, their relationship of dependence on Christ, the cornerstone, may not be confused with, but at the same time it may not be separated from their relationship of dependence and responsibility toward each other.

But what further, *in detail*, are the experiential implications of the difference between the old and new covenants, created by union with Christ? Here Scripture is elusive. In fact, I am inclined to say that we are on the wrong track if we are looking for Scripture to sanction a specific pattern or routine of experiences in the inner life of the believer. Joy in the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52; 1 Thess 1:6; *cf.* Gal 5:22), for instance, is something more, and different, than a particular psychic state or emotional response. The Bible is just not interested in the question of individual religious experience, at least in the way we are inclined to be preoccupied with it. What the New Testament does disclose of the experiential newness of Pentecost largely results as it accents the broader concerns about Christ and the church already discussed. The individual repercussions of the Spirit's working are in the background so that spelling them out will probably always contain a problematic element. But along these broader lines the difference between old and new covenants is clear and bears emphasizing.

a) Christ has become life-giving Spirit. The Spirit is now present and at work in believers as a result of the actually

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 73

finished work of Christ. The Spirit is present not, as previously under the old covenant, proleptically, "ahead of time," in terms only of promise; but he is "properly" present, "in due season," on the basis of the actual fulfillment, apart from which the promise is ultimately null and void. This is the sense of the puzzling comment of the Evangelist in John 7:39: "For the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified." On the one side, this statement should not be toned down to say in effect that the Spirit is now more fully present, present to a greater degree, than under the old covenant; it expresses absolutely what formerly was not and now is the case: the Spirit is present as the Spirit of the glorified Christ. On the other hand, it should not be so abstractly absolutized that it contradicts the undeniable indications of the Spirit's activity in the Old Testament.

b) The Spirit now present is the *universal* Spirit. The Spirit is at work in the new covenant community, now no longer restricted to Israel, now expanded to include both Israel and the nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. In contrast to the old covenant order the Spirit is now poured out on all "flesh" (Acts 2:17). The Spirit is the "blessing of Abraham" now, at last, come to the Gentiles (Gal 3:14), the Spirit of the kingdom taken away from old, unrepentant Israel and given to a nation (the new

Israel) producing its fruits (Matt 21:43). This unprecedented world-wide dominion of the Spirit (Christ, the life-giving Spirit) dates from Pentecost. It cannot be stressed too emphatically, then, that the Spirit of Pentecost is the Spirit of *mission*. Missions is of the essence of the New Testament church (e.g., Matt 28:19, 20; Luke 24:47, 48; Acts 1:8); where the church is no longer a witnessing church, whether in the immediate, local or world-wide context, it has lost contact with its Pentecostal roots. *This* is the inestimable privilege, the great experiential blessing, of New Testament believers, that they have been given the responsibility and power to witness to the saving, new creation lordship of Jesus Christ over the whole of life throughout the entire creation.

2. *The gift and gifts of the Spirit.* Especially in view of contemporary differences in viewpoint, it is important to distinguish clearly within the overall working of the Spirit in the church between the gift (singular) and gifts (plural) of the

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 74

Spirit. "With one Spirit we have all been baptized into one body, ... we were all made to drink of one Spirit," Paul says (1 Cor 12:13). All believers, without exception, share in the gift of the Spirit by virtue of their union with Christ and, correlatively, their incorporation into his body, the church, which he (permanently) baptized with the Spirit at Pentecost. The gift of the Spirit is present in the church on the principle of "universal donation." On the other hand, the gifts (plural) of the Spirit are workings of the Spirit variously distributed within the church. No one gift (in this sense) is intended for every believer. The gifts of the Spirit are given on the principle of "differential distribution." This seems clear, for instance, from the rhetorical questions posed by Paul at the close of 1 Corinthians 12 (vss. 29, 30): all are not apostles, all are not prophets, ... all do not speak in tongues, etc. This is ultimately so, it should be stressed, by divine design (the one body with diverse parts), and not because of lack of faith or the failure to seek a particular gift.

The significance of this distinction can be seen from another angle. The gift of the Spirit, in which all believers share, is an essential aspect of salvation in Christ (cf. Acts 2:38; 11:18, where it is associated with repentance unto life). It is an actual foretaste of the eternal life of the future. It is an *eschatological* gift. Paul uses two figures that are especially well-chosen to make this point. The Spirit already at work in all believers is the "firstfruits" in the enduring harvest of renewal to be completed in the resurrection of the body at Christ's return (Rom 8:23). Again, the gift of the Spirit is the actual "deposit," the "first installment," the "downpayment" on the final inheritance to be received in its fullness when Christ returns (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13, 14). In distinction, the gifts (plural) of the Spirit, variously distributed in the church, are *provisional* and *subeschatological*. This is clearly one of Paul's points in 1 Corinthians 13:8ff: prophecy and tongues, among other gifts, have a provisional, limited function and so are temporary, destined to pass away (vss. 8, 9), while those works of the Spirit like faith, hope and love endure (vs. 13).

Of a number of implications that could be drawn here, just two may be mentioned very quickly. a) All believers, not just some, are "spiritual." We need to be both grateful and

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 75

challenged by this. An “unspiritual” or “carnal” Christian is a contradiction in terms. This is precisely Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 3:1–4: the jealousy and strife present among the Corinthians (vs. 3) are not rationalized as “low level” or “second class” Christian behavior. They are the work of the “flesh” (*cf.* Rom 13:13, 14; Gal 5:20); that means they are unrelieved opposition to the Spirit of God and in fundamental conflict with the Corinthian’s identity in Christ (*cf.* the verses just preceding, 2:14, 15 ; also Rom 8:5–8; Gal 5:16, 17). b) The gifts (plural) of the Spirit are not “means of grace” in the sense of those provisions of God—Scripture, the sacraments and prayer—which are intended for all believers and are indispensable for personal sanctification and growth in grace. No one gift (*e.g.*, tongues) is necessary for the worship and witness God desires in each one of his people. True spirituality is not dependent on the reception or exercise of any one particular gift. This is one of the basic points of the “hymn to love,” 1 Corinthians 13, within the overall thrust of chapters 12–14 . In giving gifts to his church God does not put some of his people at a disadvantage in relation to others with reference to “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

3. *Walking in the Spirit.* We have been stressing that all in the church, without exception and from the time they are united to Christ, share in the gift of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis, however, ought not to be taken as suggesting that the Spirit’s work in the believer is essentially a matter of what is in the past and so something to be presumed on or rested in as taking place automatically. Some such attitude neglects crucial aspects of New Testament teaching on the work of the Spirit and thus seriously distorts the whole. There is nothing passé about the work of the Spirit. That his work is to be a present, ongoing concern of the Christian life can be seen from those places where *believers* are *commanded* concerning the Spirit. Negatively, they are not to “grieve” (Eph 4:30) or “quench” (1 Thess 5:19) the Spirit. Positively, they are to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18); they are to “walk in (by) the Spirit” (Gal 5:16, 25; *cf.* Rom 8:4).

Paul provides an instructive perspective on the continuing activity of the Spirit in the church in the one passage in the New Testament where believers are commanded to be filled with the

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 76

Spirit (Eph 5:18). The verses that immediately follow (vs 19–21) are dependent syntactically on this command and so indicate what is characteristic of the Spirit’s filling work. Paul then goes on to elaborate at some length on the element of mutual subjection, in particular, by spelling out its implications for marriage, the family, and work (5:22–6:9). From this it is plain that the filling or fullness of the Spirit is not, at least primarily, a matter of unusual or enrapturing experiences, but is the reality of the Spirit’s working in the basic relationships and responsibilities of everyday living. Being filled with the Spirit means marriages that really work and are not poisoned by suspicion and bitterness, homes where parents, children, brothers and sisters actually enjoy being with each other, free from jealousy, resentment and constant tension, and job situations that are not oppressive and depersonalizing, but meaningful and truly rewarding. The Spirit is the power of a new creation, reclaiming and transforming nothing less than the whole of our creaturely life. By the same token, the mark of a genuinely Spirit-filled Christian is that that Christian is not preoccupied with some

past experience, no matter how memorable, but with what the Spirit is presently doing in his or her life and with what even greater filling the future may bring.

Two extremes falsify New Testament doctrine concerning the Spirit's work in the believer. On the one side is the view, widely current today, that the real, proper work of the Spirit is distinct from conversion and usually subsequent to it, and that only those believers who have had this additional, empowering experience of the Spirit are able to witness effectively and lead consistent Christian lives. On the other side is the practical tendency to view the Spirit as little more than a presupposition of the Christian life. The Spirit's regenerating work is seen as critically important at the beginning of the Christian life, for producing faith, but after that he virtually vanishes from Christian experience. This latter extreme is the one that has most often plagued the Reformed tradition, and it creates an experiential vacuum that errors like the other, "second blessing" extreme seek to fill. The answer to both is union with Christ, the lifegiving Spirit, a union which from beginning to end, from our regeneration to our final glorification is (to be) a dynamic, transforming union.

WTJ 43:1 (Fall 1980) p. 77

"If we live in (by) the Spirit, let us also walk in (by) the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). Perhaps no other single statement better captures the whole of our experience of the Holy Spirit than this. The overall structure here is that which we find throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul, for the Christian life in its entirety: expressed grammatically, the Spirit is both an indicative and an imperative in our experience. But always such that the imperative is grounded in the indicative, the command concerning the Spirit rooted in the reality of our having received the gift of the Spirit. And never the one without the other: the indicative without the imperative results in the inaction of mysticism and quietism; the imperative without the indicative produces a legalistic and moralistic striving that denies the gospel.

The pattern of indicative and imperative also provides the scope for us to appreciate the deep harmony in the Christian life between the Spirit of God and the law of God. Where the law functions to cut off and expose every effort of the sinner to justify himself, where the law condemns, the liberating ministry of the Spirit stands in the sharpest contrast (Rom 8:1-3; 2 Cor 3:6ff). But where the Spirit functions to bring life and freedom in Christ, there the content of the law and obedience to it make up the very substance of that freedom (*e.g.*, Rom 8:4; Gal 5). This emphasis on the positive place of the law in the life of the believer is a long-standing Reformed distinctive, and is needed in our own day more than ever, particularly when it comes to a proper understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

We began by noting the renewed interest of our times in the work of the Holy Spirit, including the emergence of the charismatic movement. It would be a tragic loss, however—and the church would be missing a great opportunity—if this interest were to be expended on the differences between charismatic and noncharismatic Christians, real and important as those differences are. The task before the church today, both urgent and promising, is to demonstrate unambiguously, in practice as well as proclamation, that at its *core* the gospel concerns not only the free and full remission of sin, but the reality of a new creation and eschatological life already present in Christ, the present renewal and transformation of the believer in his entirety,

according to the inner man (2 Cor 4:16), and the redirection and reintegration of human life in all its aspects.

The gospel is also the good news concerning the exalted Christ, the life-giving Spirit. Where this awesome and glorious truth is not really grasped, the church will be uncertain of itself and ineffective in serving its Lord. With this gospel it is more than equal to its mission in the world. In the power of Pentecost the church will live eloquently in hope of the glory to be revealed (Rom 8:18–25), confident in its expectation of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13).

1

¹Westminster Theological Seminary. 1981; 2002. *Westminster Theological Journal Volume 43*. Westminster Theological Seminary

In Abrahamic religions, the Holy Spirit is an aspect or agent of God, by means of which God communicates with people or acts on them. The word spirit (from the Latin spiritus meaning "breath") appears either alone or with other words in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) and the New Testament. Combinations include expressions such as the "Holy Spirit", "Spirit of God", and in Christianity, "Spirit of Christ". Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are saved, filled, sealed, and sanctified. The Holy Spirit reveals God's thoughts, teaches, and guides believers into all truth. The Holy Spirit also helps Christians in their weakness and intercedes for them.

The Holy Spirit. 117,909 likes · 3,117 talking about this. THS provides free access to daily news from around the world, giving particular emphasis to... Facebook is showing information to help you better understand the purpose of a Page. See actions taken by the people who manage and post content. Page created - October 26, 2018.