

CONVENTION ESSAYS - 1999

The Holy Spirit is God

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The apostle Peter made an important announcement that is recorded in the book of Acts. Describing the miracle that was happening in Jerusalem on Pentecost, he declared the beginning of the special advent of the Holy Spirit. This had been promised by the Old Testament prophets as a sign of the last days before the final, glorious advent of Christ.

. . . this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, . . . before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹

You and I are among those servants of God who are prophesying, thanks to the Holy Spirit. Using Scripture as his tool, the Holy Spirit is moving us to proclaim "the mystery hidden for long ages"² that Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, is the Savior of all. He is the Savior everyone needs to know and trust in order to escape God's coming judgment. The Holy Spirit is God, who creates our faith in Jesus, guides our lives as believers, and powers the proclaiming that we do. It is fitting therefore that we are giving honor to the Holy Spirit through the study that we are undertaking here.

The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Bible

We believe that the Bible testifies about our Savior Jesus Christ only because the writers were "carried along"³ this route by the Holy Spirit, like boats driven by the wind. The Holy Spirit taught the prophets and apostles what to say.⁴ As the influential, invisible author of the Bible, the Holy Spirit also reveals himself in the Bible that he produced.

The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Testament

The opening sentences of Genesis provide a dramatic introduction to the Holy Spirit. Against a cold, dark background, empty of all life, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."⁵ Again and again, the Pentateuch reveals the power of the Holy Spirit⁶ saying that he gave exceptional skill, ability and knowledge to certain chosen people. Sometimes he gifted them in physical ways⁷, but more often he blessed them spiritually in matters of faith. Joshua,⁸ Gideon,⁹ Samson,¹⁰ and Saul¹¹ became outstanding leaders of Israel under the influence of the Spirit of God. David, the royal psalm writer, explained his lyrical gift by saying "The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue."¹² The Spirit also receives credit for putting into David's mind the plans for the future Temple.¹³ The Old Testament says repeatedly that the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of the Lord, came upon the prophets, guiding their thoughts, words and actions. The third person of the Trinity receives praise and bestows blessings throughout the Old Testament period.

The Holy Spirit is revealed in the New Testament

Just as the Holy Spirit was "hovering over the waters" of the world before there was life in the beginning, so also, when the time had fully come, he powerfully "overshadowed"¹⁴ the womb of the virgin Mary causing her to conceive the baby Jesus. Soon after that great event began, the Holy Spirit moved one person after another to testify about Jesus. He started with Elizabeth, Mary and Zechariah¹⁵ and continued with the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and the wise men. Later he anointed Jesus himself to preach the good news.¹⁶ After he was glorified, Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to his disciples¹⁷ so they would understand the Scriptures¹⁸ and forgive sins in his

name.¹⁹ Then at last the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit came upon the entire church. The Spirit blew away language barriers, dissolved fears, and equipped believers to bear witness to Jesus as the promised Savior.²⁰ What he began to do on Pentecost, the Holy Spirit will continue to do “as he determines”²¹ until Christ returns.

The Holy Spirit has Divine Attributes

The Holy Spirit has Divine Names

The scriptures reveal that the Holy Spirit is God by accrediting him with divine names, divine works and divine attributes. The word spirit literally means “breath” or “wind” in Hebrew (ruach) and in Greek (pneuma). By itself the word “spirit” does not imply divinity any more than the words “father” and “son,” by themselves, imply divinity. But the fact that this Spirit repeatedly is called the Holy Spirit clearly indicates he is God.²² Translations of the Bible usually recognize this by capitalizing the word Spirit when the context reveals that the Holy Spirit is meant.

The divine identity of the Holy Spirit is also brought out by the following familiar passages of scripture. The apostle Peter warned Ananias, “You have lied to the Holy Spirit . . . you have not lied to men, but to God”.²³ The apostle Paul gave the names “Lord” and “God” to the Holy Spirit when he wrote about spiritual gifts, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. . . . All these are the work of one and the same Spirit. . . .”²⁴ Saint Paul also said that the body of a Christian is a temple of God because the Holy Spirit is there.²⁵ Added to these are many other examples of divine names and titles given to the Spirit. He is called “God’s Spirit,” “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of the Lord,” “the Spirit of Christ,” the Spirit of “truth,” of “life,” of “glory,” and “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead.”²⁶

The Holy Spirit does Divine Works

The Nicene creed praises the Holy Spirit as “the giver of life.” That is a fitting description of the divine activity of the Holy Spirit during the creation of the world.²⁷ He also deserves this praise because the gift of life can be transmitted from one generation to the next. As Job said, “The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”²⁸ But even more important than his gift of physical life is the new birth, the spiritual life, that the Holy Spirit works through the gospel in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and through the gospel by itself. “God . . . saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel.”³⁰

What is more, the Holy Spirit also preserves the life of God’s people by praying for them, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us. . . .”³¹ These creative and preserving activities affirm that the Holy Spirit is God. As God, the Holy Spirit also convicts us of sin, testifies of Christ, leads us to faith in our Savior, and preserves our faith.

It should be noted that all of these divine works are common to all three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three persons have the same divine nature and together are active in all divine works that are done outside of God, to or for his creation (the opera ad extra).

The Holy Spirit has the Divine Nature of the Triune God

In his institution of baptism, Jesus named the Holy Spirit as one of the three persons of the Triune God.³²

The fact that the Holy Spirit was named last does not indicate that he has a lower status or that he originated at a different time. Nor does the fact that each of the three persons is named separately mean that each one has his own divine nature. The divine nature of the Holy Spirit is not separate from the divine nature of the Father and the Son. Scripture teaches that there is one God³³ with one divine nature.³⁴ There are not three gods with three divine natures. “Each of the three Persons possesses this one undivided and indivisible divine essence in its entirety.”³⁵

Consistent with this, the Bible shows that the attributes of the Holy Spirit are the same as the attributes of the Father and of the Son. For example, the Holy Spirit is present everywhere, "Where can I go from your Spirit?"³⁶ He is eternal.³⁷ He is all-knowing: "The Spirit searches all things."³⁸ He is all powerful³⁹ and holy.⁴⁰ He is the "Spirit of grace"⁴¹ and of love.⁴² If the Holy Spirit were merely a force or a power proceeding from God, he would not be described as speaking,⁴³ being grieved,⁴⁴ or having a will of his own.⁴⁵

Occasionally we read a plural reference to the Holy Spirit in the Bible.⁴⁶ This may refer to the sevenfold characteristics of the Holy Spirit that were given to Christ as foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD"⁴⁷

The Holy Spirit was given to the human nature of Jesus "without limit."⁴⁸ For this reason, and also because Jesus and the Holy Spirit have the same divine nature, Jesus can be called "the Lord, who is the Spirit."⁴⁹ The perfect cooperation and divine unity of the second and third persons of the Trinity does not change the fact that the two persons are distinct and separate. The Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Son.⁵⁰

The Honor Due the Holy Spirit

Scripture warns against offending the Holy Spirit. When King Saul turned away from God, "the Spirit of the LORD" departed from him.⁵¹ When King David recognized that his sin and failure to repent grieved the Holy Spirit, he repented with all of his heart.⁵² God warned unrepentant Israel that they had "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit," and that therefore he "became their enemy and he himself fought against them"⁵³ A terrible judgment fell upon Ananias and his wife Sapphira when they refused to repent, or even to admit that they had lied to the Holy Spirit. The writer to the Hebrews warned,

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.⁵⁴

The Holy Spirit deserves the worship and respect of God's people. Sin grieves him.⁵⁵ Sanctified living honors him.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.⁵⁶

Since the Holy Spirit provides the power for sanctified living only through the gospel in word and sacrament, we honor him by staying in contact with these means of grace so that we do not put out the Spirit's fire by neglecting the gospel. We also give him the honor that he deserves when our church festivals, liturgical forms, prayers and hymns call on his name and praise his life-giving work.

The Holy Spirit has been the Subject □ of Theological Controversy

Eastern and Western Theologians Differed □ in their Views of the Trinity

In the first centuries of the Christian church certain theologians thought a great deal about the Trinity, but the East and the West had different points of view. The one side strongly proclaimed the distinctness of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The other side was strong in proclaiming that

God is One. Both the East and the West struggled to avoid the error of tritheism, the false teaching that there are three (Greek, *treis*) gods (Greek, *theos*).

Toward the end of the second century, as a result of this struggle to find the truth, a teaching known as "Monarchianism" began in the East and spread to the West. It was an attempt to proclaim the unity of God. Unfortunately, it destroyed the Trinity.

One form of this heresy sought to preserve the unity of God, the deity of Christ, and the deity of the Holy Spirit by teaching that the Son and Holy Spirit were simply modes or manifestations of God the Father. It was labeled "Modalistic Monarchianism" (Modal: appearing in different roles; Monarch: one principle being). Another name for it was "Patripassianism," because it claimed that the Father (Latin, *pater*) suffered (Latin, *passus*) in his role as the Son.

A second and distinctly different monarchian teaching, "Dynamistic Monarchianism," also tried to preserve the unity of God, but did it by denying the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. It speculated that God, the sole ruler, lifted Jesus up to a nearly divine level by filling him with powers called "the Logos" and "the Spirit."

In addition, a third destructive conclusion about the Trinity speculated that the only true God is the Father, and that the other two divine persons are only temporary, somewhat inferior displays that flow from the Father. This heresy became known as "Subordinationism."

At the time of these controversies, there were a great many differing opinions about the Holy Spirit, who was identified by some theologians as an energy, a creature, or an angel.⁵⁷ Yet, we can be sure from the simple statements of the Apostles Creed that the ancient church believed in the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit. "But it was not until the fourth century . . . that the . . . personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit were made prominent."⁵⁸

Subordinationism in the Eastern Church

Around 150 A.D. certain people in the Greek part of the church who wanted to avoid the heresy of tritheism, declared that Jesus Christ is not God, but is almost God. They said that the Logos, who became flesh in Jesus Christ, was one step down from the Father.

Origen of Alexandria, Egypt, polished some of the rough edges of this heresy, known as Subordinationism (Latin: having a lower or inferior nature). Struggling against the Monarchians, he insisted that the Father, Son, and Spirit were three eternally distinct persons, but he felt that they were not equal. He pictured the Trinity with three concentric circles forming an inverted triangle reaching from God to man. Origen reasoned that "Since all things have come into existence through the Logos, it follows that the Holy Spirit is the first of the spirits begotten of the Father through the Son."⁵⁹ He taught that all three persons have the same essence, but not the same existence.⁶⁰ Jesus and the Holy Spirit were part of a descending bridge between heaven and earth. The role of the Holy Spirit was to proceed from the Father through the Son in order to sanctify man.

Thus, according to Origen, the Son and the Holy Spirit were subordinate to the Father, and the Holy Spirit was also subordinate to the Son. This widely-believed distortion was not clearly corrected until the Council of Nicea in 325.

Dynamistic Monarchianism in the Eastern Church

Theodotus, who seems to have come from Byzantium about 190 A.D., attempted to preserve the unity of God in a different way. He too said that Christ and the Holy Spirit are not equal with God the Father, but according to his theory, the man Jesus was elevated to a godlike level when he received a dynamis, a power that came from God. Toward the end of the second century Theodotus moved to Rome bringing along with him this heresy which became known as Dynamistic Monarchianism or Adoptionism.⁶¹

In the third century a bishop in Antioch, Paul of Samosata, championed the same theory. He taught that the man Jesus Christ was moved up to the level of godliness through a dynamis, a power, consisting of the Logos and the Holy Spirit, given to him by God. He taught that "it is permissible to speak of a Logos or Son and a Wisdom or Spirit in God; but these are nothing more than attributes of God . . . impersonal influences."⁶²

The Augsburg Confession, in the Chief Articles of Faith, Article One, Of God, condemns the teaching of the Samosatenes for denying the personality and deity of the Logos and of the Holy Spirit.⁶³

Arius, a teacher in the church of Alexandria, also disagreed with the Samosatenes, but he based his disagreement on an extreme subordinationist argument. He concluded that Jesus was more than a man who was adopted by God; Jesus was the Logos, the Son of God, who existed before the creation of the world. However, he was not eternal. According to Arius, Jesus was a supremely important first creature who helped God create everything else. If he was a creature, as Arius insisted, he could not be God. Nor could the Holy Spirit be true God, from his point of view. Arius taught that the Holy Spirit was the first creature made by the Son.⁶⁴ Today this is taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses; however, they consider the Holy Spirit to be merely a force coming from God.

The leader in correcting the Arian heresy was Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, at the general council of Eastern bishops at Nicea, 325 A.D. With the word homoousios he declared that the Father and Son are one God having the same substance or nature. He also defended the homoousia of the Holy Spirit at the synod of Alexandria, 362 A.D., teaching that the Holy Spirit is God, for only a divine Spirit could make people "partakers of the divine nature."⁶⁵ Athanasius was convinced that the formula for Baptism reveals the divine nature of the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit merely were a creature, he would not be included under the same name with the Father and the Son.

Until then, not much had been said about the third person of the Trinity, but in the following years a great deal more attention was given to the Holy Spirit's identity. Bishop Macedonius of Constantinople opposed the position of Athanasius and insisted that the Holy Spirit is a creature subordinate to the Son.

But the Alexandrine synod of 362, spurred on by Basil of Caesarea's treatise on the Holy Spirit, condemned both Arianism and the similar teaching of the Pneumatomachians (Greek, "fighters against the Holy Spirit"), who were also called the Macedonians. Basil was the first to formalize the accepted terminology for the Trinity: one substance (ousia) and three persons or beings (hypostaseis).

Basil's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus, noted the biblical distinction between the three persons of the Trinity, namely that the Father is "unbegotten," the Son is "begotten," and the Holy Spirit "proceeds" from the Father through the Son.⁶⁶ This helpful distinction was accepted by the church at a synod held in Rome (380 A.D.).

In the year 381 A.D. in Constantinople, the church went a step further by affirming the full deity of the Holy Spirit, declaring him to be "the Lord and Giver of life, proceeding from the Father, worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son." In 451 at Chalcedon both the Eastern and Western branches of the church formally adopted this wording of the Nicene Creed.

Modalistic Monarchianism in the Western Church

Modalistic Monarchianism, the heretical idea that God the Father temporarily assumed the roles of the Son and Spirit, also began in the eastern church. Praxeas (190 A.D.) was among the first to bring this form of modalism from the East, where some years later the heresy would be opposed by Origen, to the West, where he met the opposition of Tertullian in Carthage, north Africa.

Tertullian said that Praxeas did two works for the Devil in Rome: he put to flight the Paraclete and crucified the Father.⁶⁷ The false doctrine of Praxeas destroyed the Triune identity of God.

The most significant example of Modalistic Monarchianism in Rome appeared a few years later, around 215 A.D. Sabellius of Lybia elaborated the error of Praxeas by teaching that the one true God revealed himself chronologically in three different, temporary roles: as Creator-Father in the Old Testament, as Redeemer-Son in the life of Jesus, and finally as Sanctifier-Spirit in the church. In other words, he was saying that God is a single person, a unity.

Tertullian labored against the modalistic heresy by correctly teaching that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct, eternal, coexisting persons who together are the one Triune God. To express his thought he used the word trinitas (Trinity).⁶⁸ Tertullian, however, was not without error himself. He held to a "subordination of the Son and of the Spirit to the Father."⁶⁹ To illustrate this he drew analogies from nature: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are to each other like a fountain, stream, and river. The Father is the whole substance. The Son and Spirit descend from the Father.

Augustine added a new emphasis to the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity two hundred years later when he made it customary to say that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father "and the Son" (Latin, filioque). When he spoke about the procession of the Spirit, he meant the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, not simply the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Augustine reasoned that if the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, he must also proceed from the Son, because they have the same divine nature.

But Augustine also contributed to the confusing muddle of modern theology when he tried to explain the unexplainable. In order to make a distinction between the "generation" of the Son from the Father and the "procession" of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, he expressed the theory that the Holy Spirit is a mysterious, eternal substance common to both the Father and the Son that could also be called "friendship", or a "bond of love".⁷⁰ In his great work, *De Trinitate* (On the Trinity), he wrote, "Therefore the Holy Spirit, whatever it is, is something common to both the Father and the Son. But that communion itself is consubstantial and co-eternal; and if it may fitly be called friendship, let it so be called; but it is more aptly called love. And this is also a substance, since God is a substance, and 'God is love,' as it is written." [6,5:7]

In 589 A.D. at the Third Council of Toledo, in Spain, the first evidence can be seen that the filioque found its way into a western version of the Nicene Creed. This was done to refute the Arians. The church in Spain was being troubled by a group of Arian heretics who denied the full deity of the Son. However, these Arians were willing to say that the Holy Spirit was God. This caused their opponents to reply that Jesus must be God also, because the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son (filioque), and God can only proceed from God.

This does not mean that the term filioque was widely accepted at that time. In fact, the filioque was resisted in both the West and the East for generations. Western theologians knew that the Eastern church had not accepted the concept. Pope Leo III, for example, refused to allow the addition during his lifetime. In fact, he ordered the engraving of the creed in Latin and Greek, without the filioque, on two silver plates to adorn the wall of St. Peter's basilica in Rome. He did this even though he agreed with the filioque doctrinally.

Eastern theologians, fearing that the filioque taught Sabellianism, insisted that there can be only one God, who is the Father, and that the Father must be the source for both the Son and the Holy Spirit.

When Pope Benedict VIII officially declared the filioque statement to be part of the creed spoken at the Latin mass in 1014 A.D., he deeply offended the leaders of the Eastern church. Forty years later, in 1054 A.D., after several centuries of controversy about doctrine and practice related to this and other matters, a break which continues to this day occurred between the Roman church of the West and the Orthodox church of the East.

Confusion in the Modern Church

Robert W. Jensen is one modernist who sees himself on a mission to amend inherited teaching.⁷¹ According to Jensen, "Spirit" was a "term" that biblical theology provided to describe what comes from a meeting between God and a believer. The "Spirit" is "faith's knowledge of God."⁷² He writes, "Truly, the Trinity is simply the Father and the man Jesus and their Spirit as the Spirit of the believing community."⁷³ He calls "the Spirit" a "dynamism" that gripped the church as it expected the future return of Jesus.⁷⁴ Because of his belief that the Holy Spirit is not a person of the Trinity, but a power that comes from God, Jensen is a modern example of Dynamistic Monarchianism. Pieper states that "most of the English, American and German Unitarians are Dynamic Monarchians."⁷⁵

Modern theology, with its rejection of the authority of scripture, presents human speculation about the Trinity. Liberal scholars openly deny the deity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They use the terms Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but explain them to be three divine operations of one divine Person (Modalistic Monarchianism).⁷⁶

The Prussian Reformed theologian, Schleiermacher, recommended that the name Father be used to represent the real God, and that the names Son and Spirit be used to represent temporary ways that the Father revealed himself. "The Holy Spirit was to him merely the 'Gemeindegeist' (spirit of the believing community) proceeding from Christ, 'a working, spiritual force.'"⁷⁷ Schleiermacher tended to agree with Immanuel Kant that God is unknowable. He suggested that the giving of the Spirit on Pentecost meant simply that the risen Christ had caused the beginning of the organized, corporate entity known as the church.⁷⁸

Later in the 1800s Albrecht Ritschl, an agnostic, repeated and varied Schleiermacher's doctrine slightly by saying that the Holy Spirit was an impersonal power emanating from God and dwelling in the church.⁷⁹

Modern day Modalism tries to make the Trinity a reasonable doctrine by saying, "God is love. The Father is love given in the past, the Son is love manifested in the present, the Spirit is love stretching into the future."

There are also modern Subordinationists, including some Arminians, who argue that the Son is younger than the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is younger than both because he proceeds from both of them. In contrast, the Athanasian Creed states, "And in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but the whole three Persons are coeternal together and coequal."⁸⁰

In the ancient Christian church a group of Jewish Christians known as the Ebionites thought of the Holy Spirit as a female person of the Trinity.⁸¹ A modern theologian whose writings appeared on the internet recently also speculates about the gender of the Holy Spirit. Citing examples from the apocryphal Acts of Thomas, he notes that one branch of the Syrian Orthodox Church has a whole system of theology based on the femininity of the Holy Spirit. Then he proceeds to develop his own similar theological system, suggesting that a female Holy Spirit explains the feminine characterization of "Wisdom" in Proverbs 8:12-31.⁸² Modern feminist theologians who prefer to worship God as Sophia, a goddess, are of the same unorthodox opinion.

The Holy Spirit can be the Subject of Cultural Misunderstandings

Words need to be chosen thoughtfully

Louw and Nida make the interesting observation that many cultures of our world are animistic, and that in such cultures it can be very difficult to find a completely suitable word to speak of the Holy Spirit. "If one uses a term which normally identifies local supernatural beings, there is a tendency to read into the term the meaning of evil. . . . If one uses a term which means 'heart' or 'soul' (and thus the Spirit of God would be literally equivalent to 'the heart of God'), there may be complications since this aspect of human personality is often regarded as not being able to act on its own."⁸³ In many languages the best equivalent for Spirit is "breath," which is the root meaning of the biblical word for the Spirit.

Understanding must be established carefully

In all parts of the world, including the western nations, it is necessary to explain carefully what is meant by the words "Holy Spirit." The term refers to the third person of the Triune God, the Lord and giver of life. Although he is equal to the Father and the Son in every way, he is not one of three gods. He is God, who together with God the Father and God the Son is worshiped and praised because of who he is, because of what he does for us as the Lord and giver of life, and because of the life-giving faith that he creates in us to the glory of Jesus our Savior.

The Holy Spirit is the Giver of Faith

Dr. Gottfried Herrmann
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1. The Holy Spirit in our time

Sometimes there is the complaint that the Holy Spirit receives too little attention in theology and sermons of Christian churches. In a way that may be correct for former times (even though not in the way it is often said). But in our day we usually do not have to fear this anymore. There has probably never been a time before in which more was discussed in the churches about the Holy Spirit and his work than today.

For about 100 years the new enthusiastic movements have received much attention. In the beginning of the 20th century the Pentecostal churches came into existence. They demanded a baptism of the Spirit that should have a greater importance than the baptism by water. That "baptism of the Spirit", they said, should be shown in extraordinary works of the Spirit. Speaking in tongues and other ecstatic appearances were claimed to accompany such a baptism.

In the more recent past the charismatic movement attracted attention in a similar way. The charismatics believe that the Holy Spirit should be shown in visible and perceptible works of power. The so-called "Toronto Blessing" can apply as the most popular example, where people are reported to be thrown on the ground, tossing and turning and screaming through the influence of the Holy Spirit. Through services of praise or adoration the charismatics try to put people into a trance and believe that this is the work of the Holy Spirit. We know from the Bible that the Holy Spirit can bring out such effects (cf. 1 Sa 10:10f). But the question is: Is it possible to have an extraordinary appearance and automatically be able see the Holy Spirit as the originator of it. Such a conclusion is not possible because Satan also can use those signs (cf. Ex. 7:11f). If we want to be sure that we are dealing with the Holy Spirit, we have to stick to those ways that he stuck to himself. He wants to work through God's word and the sacraments. There we should look for him. (The next essay will deal with it in detail.)

Here we wish to ask what the reason is as to why the extraordinary works of the Holy Spirit attract so much interest today. It probably is because the center of theology was moved during the time of Pietism. Influenced by the increasing individualism of modern times, the concentration of theological thinking moved toward the subjective feelings and experiences, and away from objective facts of salvation. Not the content of faith (the so-called *fides quae creditur*) but the act of faith (*fides qua creditur*) became of chief importance to many people. Not what I believe was interesting but how I believe and in which way this faith influences my life.

When the topic is "Salvation," so often the full work of the Holy Spirit is not meant anymore, but only salvation in a generalized way: Christian living as based on the faith. This emphasis leads to the situation where the true and most important work of the Holy Spirit almost completely shifts into the background. It appears there is a much greater interest in the psychological considerations about faith.

2. The work of the Holy Spirit

We have a proverb in Germany: “They have the name according to their deeds.” That means: Some people’s names are Miller and they actually work in a windmill. Others’ names are Little and they actually are little in size. Other people are called Schuetze and they actually are good marksmen. It is the same with the Holy Spirit. He has his name in his work. Martin Luther writes in his Large Catechism:

This article (as I have said) I cannot relate better than to Sanctification, that through the same the Holy Ghost, with His office, is declared and depicted, namely, that He makes holy. Therefore we must take our stand upon the word Holy Ghost, because it is so precise and comprehensive that we cannot find another. For there are, besides, many kinds of spirits mentioned in the Holy Scripture, as the spirit of man, heavenly spirits, and evil spirits. But the Spirit of God alone is called Holy Ghost, that is, He who has sanctified and still sanctifies us. For as the Father is called Creator, the Son Redeemer, so the Holy Ghost, from His work, must be called Sanctifier, or One that makes holy” (Large Cat. II, 36f; Triglotta 687; BSLK 687f).

Following that, Luther also explains what is meant by “Sanctifier.” Through his suffering, dying and resurrection our Lord Jesus did everything that is needed for the eternal salvation of all people. But that would be of no use to us if we knew nothing about it. We would live and die without having heard anything about this wonderful gift. It is exactly at this point where the work of the Holy Spirit starts. He takes the part of making us appreciate what Jesus has achieved for us. Luther writes:

“For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves” (Large Cat. II, 38f; Trigl. 689; BSLK 654).

The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ. He leads us to faith in the Savior. The faith he gives us is the hand whereby we take hold of Christ. Through faith we get a share in what Jesus achieved for us. He has us bring forth “fruits”—fruits produced by the faith that the Holy Spirit works in us.

3. No faith—without the Holy Spirit

The first and most important work of the Holy Spirit is that he leads us to faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). That means: No person can recognize Jesus Christ as the Savior and accept him as such. The Holy Spirit brings us to such recognition. The Holy Scripture describes this process with several pictorial terms. Connected with this it talks about enlightenment, conversion and rebirth: “Who (God) has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace” (2 Ti 1:9). Or, again: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pe 2:9).

In the picture of rebirth it is the work of the Holy Spirit which is expressed most significantly: “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:4-6). The Lord Christ himself says to Nicodemus: “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit” (Jn 3:5).

Since the Fall every human is born as a sinner. All of us suffer from the inherited taint of not being able to live without sin. Sin is resistance against God. We do not live our lives as we should. We do not live in fellowship and harmony with our creator and Lord but as his enemies. The Bible calls this “sinful mind” or “spiritual death”: “The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Ro 8:7). “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins” (Eph 2:1).

Only through a totally new beginning can we be rescued from this hopeless situation. This new start happens through rebirth. The Holy Spirit brings it about that we are born again—this time as spiritual, God-pleasing humans. He shows us God’s will which is expressed in the Ten Commandments. Through the word of the Law he lets us realize how lost we are as sinners and how much we need a Savior. Through the word of the Gospel he awakens the confidence in us so that we confide in this Savior. He causes us to trust in this Savior only and to depend for salvation entirely on what he has achieved for us. The Bible calls this faith. In the Apology of the Augsburg Confession Melanchthon describes this process in the following words:

“Christ in the last chapter of Luke (24:47) commands that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name. For the Gospel convicts all men that they are under sin, that they all are subject to eternal wrath and death, and offers, for Christ’s sake, remission of sin and justification, which is received by faith. The preaching of repentance, which accuses us, terrifies consciences with true and grave terrors. In these, hearts ought again to receive consolation. This happens if they believe the promise of Christ, that for His sake we have remission of sins. This faith, encouraging and consoling in these fears, receives remission of sins, justifies and quickens. For this consolation is a new and spiritual life” (Apol. IV,62; Trigl. 139; BSLK 172f).

The Holy Spirit gives us faith through pure grace. And he does that not just in any way but through means. The word of the Gospel and holy baptism are his “vehicles” through which he comes to us and works in us. (The next essay will deal with this more precisely.)

It is surely no coincidence that the Holy Scripture compares our coming to faith to a second birth. For this comparison shows that the rebirth is not a human work. Birth means: Something happens with me. I am passive, not active. In rebirth the Holy Spirit does the same thing with me. He gives me new life, the spiritual life that extends past the death of my flesh. He does this through pure grace. There is nothing I could contribute. Everything is done by God: Through his word he sends his Spirit to me (compare Formula of Concord, Epit. II, 18; Trigl. 791; BSLK 781).

Here man’s reason raises its objections. Is not man degraded to a machine if he acts only passively during the rebirth? Does that not lead to the conversion being an irresistible compulsion (as Calvin claims)? It remains a secret how the Spirit of God works on our hearts in every detail. We only know his means (word and sacraments) and the result. “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

It is misleading to speculate about the role of man’s will in conversion (as Melanchthon did in his later editions of his Loci). Such speculations end very soon in Pelagianism and the related error that man could work at least the beginning of his conversion by himself. The Formula of Concord says correctly:

“For when the Holy Ghost has wrought and accomplished this, and man’s will has been changed and renewed by His divine power and working alone, then the new will of man is an instrument and organ of God the Holy Ghost, so that he not only accepts grace, but also cooperates with the Holy Ghost in the works which follow” (Epit. II, 18; Trigl. 791; BSLK 780f).

However, it is certain that we can resist the work of the Holy Spirit. God does not force any human to embrace his happiness. He does not—as the old church fathers said—pull us to himself by the hair but with the heart.¹ Don’t we unfortunately experience too often that people prevent

the Word of God from coming to them at all or that they stubbornly ignore his voice? They are lost through their own fault.

4. Faith—as work?

Our old Adam does not hate anything more than receiving a gift. Even on those occasions where we regularly give presents—Christmas, for example—the subject of “gifts” becomes in reality a mutual exchange of presents. But the Holy Scripture is extremely clear: Only through grace because of Christ are we saved, not because of our works. If just a little bit of works gets involved, then grace is not grace anymore. This is a valid point also in regards to conversion or rebirth.

But even where “by grace alone” (*sola gratia*) and “for the sake of Christ alone” (*solus Christus*) is taken seriously, danger lies in wait. Often “by faith alone” (*sola fide*) is misunderstood as if the faith is a human work. In this case they say: Of course we are saved through God’s grace for the sake of Jesus. God did the decisive thing for us. But now he expects that man does his work, too. Man has to agree to accept this offer. He has to give his “Yes” to this offer. God knocks on the door but man has to open it himself. Billy Graham describes it:

“The biblical conversion includes three steps—two of them are active, one is passive: repentance means to turn away from the former life. Faith means the conscious turn to God. Rebirth is the resulting gift of the new life from God.”²

That means: First the human has to take two steps in the direction of God, then God takes one step towards the human. In this case, faith is declared as a work man has to do before God is gracious to him.

But the question is: What does faith have to do with conscious recognition at all? Sure, there is no doubt that the recognition is a part of faith along with the trust and the confidence. Does not the Lord Jesus say: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3)? And the Apostle Peter writes: “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Pe 1:3).

However, when the Holy Scripture describes faith—among other things—as recognition, it does not mean the purely intellectual understanding of godly truth. Here is why: “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” (Isa 40:13; Ro 11:34; 1 Co 2:16). And the Apostle Paul says correctly: “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe . . . But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Co 1:21-27).

When the Scripture calls faith a recognition, then this recognition does not only apply to reason but includes the whole human being. A strong sharing or fellowship growing out of deep love (like the Hebrew verb “*yadah*” = recognize). The Hebrew even describes the sexual connection of husband and wife with the same word. Such a recognition of God has nothing to do with purely intellectual works/words. In fact, the opposite is true, especially in the case of the baptized mentally ill and children where this faithful recognition of our Savior and trust in him may well be much more pronounced than in the case of a normal adult. Since reason is more often an obstacle to faith in the case of a normal adult, the Lord Jesus reminds us: “Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 18:3).

Therefore it is foolish and unbiblical when the Baptists deny the capacity of faith for little children and for that reason refuse to baptize them. This wrong and unbiblical understanding of faith unfortunately can be found almost in the whole evangelical-pietistic spectrum of “decision theology.” People are encouraged to decide for Jesus or to “give their lives to the Lord” to be saved eternally. They ask for human work. And they even refer to biblical statements. Doesn’t the Bible, they contend, very often ask for conversion or faith in the imperative form? Doesn’t the

Lord Christ say to his disciples: “Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:15)? And the Apostle Paul encourages the prison warden in Philippi: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

But here one sees that in such requests faith is only described as the way in which salvation comes to us. If faith were a condition that had to be fulfilled by man, then this definition of faith would stand in direct contradiction to the clear witnesses of the Scripture. The Lord Jesus points out: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). Or, the prophet Jeremiah confesses: “Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God” (Jer. 31:18).³

Therefore, any human activity in conversion is out of the question from the start. If somebody follows the voice of God, then this is not an independent step towards God, but a sign that the Holy Spirit already has worked. And where the first spark of faith is lit, there the conversion has already happened.⁴

After the Fall no human is able to do anything good concerning God anymore. He faces his creator not neutrally anymore but as his enemy. He is not able anymore to turn to God himself. The Apostle Paul says: “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one” (Ro 3:10-12). And to the Corinthians he writes: “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he can not understand them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Co 2:14). The Formula of Concord summarizes:

Namely, that the spiritual and divine things the intellect, heart, and will of the unregenerate man are utterly unable, by their own natural powers, to understand, believe, accept, think, will, begin, effect, do, work, or concur in working anything, but they are entirely dead to what is good, and corrupt, so that in man’s nature since the Fall, before regeneration, there is not the least spark of spiritual power remaining, nor present, by which, of himself, he can prepare himself for God’s grace, or accept the offered grace, nor be capable of it for and of himself, or apply or accommodate himself thereto, or by his own powers be able of himself, as of himself, to aid, do, work, or concur in working anything towards his conversion, either wholly, or half, or in any, even the least or most inconsiderable part . . .” (SD II, 7; Trigl. 883; BSLK 873f).

When our Lutheran Confessions rule out any human cooperation concerning conversion (and we certainly agree with that!), this does not mean that human feelings are unaffected. It does mean, however, that also such feeling in the converted is a work of the Holy Spirit. The Formula of Concord remarks:

“So also when Luther says that with respect to his conversion man is pure passive (purely passive), that is, does nothing whatever towards it, but only suffers what God works in him, his meaning is not that conversion takes place without the preaching and hearing of God’s Word; nor is this his meaning, that in conversion no new emotion whatever is awakened in us by the Holy Ghost and no spiritual operation begun; but he means that man of himself, or from his natural powers, cannot do anything or help towards his conversion, and that conversion is not only in part, but altogether an operation, gift, and present, and work of the Holy Ghost alone, who accomplishes and effects it by His power and might, through the Word, in the intellect, will, and heart of man . . .” (SD II, 89; Trigl. 915; BSLK 909f).

5. Remain in faith until the end

In the explanation of the teaching of rebirth and conversion as Scripture says it, it is not about theological sophistry. When there is no clarity about what happens in rebirth, then our whole Christian life is in danger. If the rebirth—even just a tiny little bit—consists of human work, then our faith relies on the shaky foundation of our feelings. Then, in afflictions, the question will always arise: Did we turn close enough to God, or did we believe strongly enough? Only when we

accept the clear witness of the Scripture (although our old Adam does not like it), and when we let the rebirth be completely the work of the Holy Spirit, can we find the confidence of our salvation.

Our Lutheran Confessions precisely point out this comforting aspect over and over again. For example, we read:

“And, in a word, it remains eternally true what the Son of God says (John 15:5): Without Me ye can do nothing. And Paul (Phil 2:13): It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. To all godly Christians who feel and experience in their hearts a small spark or longing for divine grace and eternal salvation this precious passage is very comforting; for they know that God has kindled in their hearts this beginning of true godliness, and that He will further strengthen and help them in their great weakness to persevere in true faith unto the end” (SD II, 14; Trigl. 885; BSLK 876f).

The Holy Spirit brings us to faith. He works a rebirth in us. But with this his work is not finished. He also takes care of us so that we stay in faith. As to this remaining in the faith, it is important that we not doubt the work of the Holy Spirit. The Lord Christ says: “But he who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matt. 24:13).

Many Christians are concerned about staying in faith until the end of their lives. Such doubts are understandable. Who knows what life will bring? Who can be sure that he is not going to stagger? If we look to ourselves we can never find this confidence. But it is not necessary to look to ourselves, for it is not our efforts which keep us in the faith. The Holy Spirit works faith in us and he is the one who wants to keep it there as well. He has promised that to us. The Apostle Paul writes about that topic: “Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Php 1:6). And in 1 Corinthians we read: “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Co 1:7,8).

Whoever considers faith and rebirth as man’s work will soon lose faith again. There are many examples of this in church history. Satan puts his full effort into bringing souls already won for Jesus back into his kingdom. We can resist his attacks only when we are trusting in the work of the Holy Spirit for the preservation of our faith.

How does this happen? The Holy Spirit preserves our faith by working in us through his means of grace. He leads us to the fellowship of the believers who gather around word and sacraments. Here we receive fresh food for our faith and here we are strengthened in the fellowship of brothers and sisters. In this way he works in us and takes care that we persevere until the end. For that he deserves our daily praise and thanks!

6. Conclusion

Finally, there is especially one misunderstanding to avoid. We heard how important it is that any human cooperation concerning conversion and rebirth is out of the question. There is no cooperation. The conversion is no “joint venture” (this is a new “German” expression) where God and man work hand in hand. This applies to rebirth, the coming to faith (*conversio prima*). And besides this, it is valid for the daily conversion also (*conversio continua*).

Concerning this, Luther says in his Small Catechism:

“. . . that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts, and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Small Cat. IV, 12; Trigl. 551; BSLK 516).

And in the first thesis of 1517 Luther says:

“Because our Lord and Master Jesus Christ says: Repent, etc., he wants the whole life of his believers on earth to be a constant never-ending repentance.”

This daily turning back is necessary for a believer, too. Yes, it even has faith as a requirement. Through this the believer becomes able and willing through the Holy Spirit to cooperate in this work that pleases God.⁵ Any passivity would be wrong. (But a later essay will deal with this topic).

Let us encourage each other over and over again and pray to God:

Oh, enter, Lord, thy temple,
Be my spirit's Guest,
Who gavest me, the earthborn,
A second birth more blest!
Thou in the Godhead, Lord,
Tho' here to dwell Thou deignest,
For ever equal reignest,
Art equally adored. Amen.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 228:1)

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The Holy Spirit Uses Word and Sacrament to Carry Out His Work

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As many Christian denominations continue to spread, Lutheran Christian doctrine, especially in Malawi, is often attacked by these denominations. The attack our doctrine gets from the Pentecostals says that we Lutherans are not possessed by the Holy Spirit. They say that there is no sign in our members showing that we have the Holy Spirit. They accuse us of not offering enough prayers asking that we be filled with the Holy Spirit.

The topic of our third triennial convention is, "COME, HOLY SPIRIT, GOD AND LORD: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HIS WORK."

It is a good theme that shows we do honor the Holy Spirit in our Church. We do believe that the Holy Spirit is God. We do ask the Holy Spirit to come to us. This essay shows that the Holy Spirit uses Word and Sacrament to carry out His work.

A. The Holy Spirit uses the Word

The Holy Spirit works through the Word to bring a person to faith. Let us look at the following passages: Romans 10:17, "Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Isaiah 55:11 says, "My word . . . will not return to me empty, but will

accomplish what I desire.” Romans 1:16 says, “I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.” These passages are very familiar to us and are very clear.

Romans 10:17 clearly points out that faith always comes through hearing the message which is the Word. Since the Spirit is the one who creates faith, by saying that the Word creates faith (Romans 10:17), Scripture limits the Spirit’s activity to where the Word is preached and heard. Isaiah 55:11 shows that the Word of God is like an agent in bringing God’s saving will to the world. Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel message is the power of God.

Surely the gospel reveals what saves us, namely the righteousness of Christ, as Paul says in Romans 1:17. Another beautiful passage we can cite is 1 Peter 1:23, 25, “For you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. . . . And this is the word that we preached to you.” Two truths are clear in these passages. First, the Word brings faith to a person. Secondly, where the Word is absent, there can be no conversion to faith. These passages tell us the tool the Spirit uses in conversions and they also limit the Spirit to using the tool.

Most Protestant churches separate the Spirit from the Word in conversion. The Spirit, they say, comes alongside of the Word, uses the Word, helps to explain the Word, and yet is not in and with the Word.

The Word in Scripture is described as doing much the same as the Holy Spirit does. Notice the similarities of operation. As we saw in Romans chapter 10 and other places, the Word is active in conversion. But as we will see, the work of the Word as well as the work of the Spirit, continues in a Christian’s life. Christ prays to his Heavenly Father at the Last Supper, “Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth” (John 17:17). Christ prays to his Heavenly Father to make his disciples holy. How will that happen? It will be done through the Word. The Word also has as its central function to witness to the fact that Jesus is Christ, proclaiming him to be the Savior who wants to make all men God’s children.

Christ told the Pharisees, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39). The Word is active in leading us to understand the difference between sin and righteousness in our lives. The Word goes into our very being, separating truth from error. The writer to the Hebrews says, “The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Here we see that the Word is not simply a book of principles and laws to follow, but a living force. The Spirit gives us grace, but notice how the Word of grace, the Word which tells us about God’s grace, is the instrument of the Spirit’s working that grace in our hearts. Paul tells the Ephesians as he leaves them, “Now I commit you to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Ac 20:32). Listen also to what Paul says to the Thessalonians, “And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe” (1 Th 2:13).

That Word is at work in us. Our Bible might be on the shelf, but the Word we have heard, understand and believe by the Spirit, is now at work in us. Compare also James 1:21, “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” John in his first letter writes, “I write to you young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (1 Jn 2:14). In 2 John 1,2 the apostle writes, “The elder, To the chosen lady and her children whom I love in the truth—and not I only, but also all who know the truth—because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever.” Paul tells Timothy, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Ti 3:16,17).

The above passages show how closely bound the Word and the Spirit are. We have seen that the Word converts us, but also the Spirit does the same. We have seen that the Word testifies to our sonship by faith, but the Spirit also does the same. We have heard that the Spirit lives in us, but the Word does the same. The Spirit produces fruit, but the Word does the same by equipping us for every good work. We have seen that the Spirit gives us gifts but it is the Word that spreads those gifts to individuals through hearing the sermon and teaching. These two, even though they are not the same, work the same operation, operations which include every area of the believer's life. Even though it seems that the above passages do not link the Spirit and the Word the connection is there. Christ and the Apostle Paul show the connection. Jesus says, "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life" (Jn 6:63). Paul writes, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17). It is easy to see the connection of the Word and the Spirit.

Those who claim that the Spirit sometimes comes apart from the Word must consider the following questions. What faith will the Spirit work unless the Word works also? What hope will the Spirit give us unless the basis for hope is spelled out by the Word? What joy will the Spirit give unless the source of joy is given in the Word? What love can the Spirit inspire unless the Word gives us the reasons for that love? What teaching will the Spirit give us unless that teaching is found in the Word? What guidance will the Spirit give us unless the cause of action is directed by the Word? In short, what areas of our Christian lives are dealt with by the Spirit alone and apart from the Word? Are there any areas where the written Word is powerless? 2 Timothy 3:16 again gives us our answer, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God's Word governs all areas of our lives. I believe that as we understand more and more the nature of God's working in us through his Word, the desire to separate the Spirit and the Word will disappear.

The passages above point to the fact that the Spirit works through the Word, and where the Word is used there the Spirit is working. This should lead us from an inward searching for the Spirit to searching for him in his Word where he speaks to us. Subjectivism disappears and in its place comes a faith built solely on the Word of God.

Yet in using this means of grace, the Word, there is perhaps a tendency to become too stiff in supplying the Bible doctrine to our lives. One of the ways we might misuse this teaching is to think that only at the exact time when we read the Bible will we be strengthened by the Spirit. Or we may think that only when we are reading the Bible we will be given wisdom or guidance for a particular situation. Certainly God's grace in all its forms comes to us as we study his Word, hear a sermon or meditate on the Word. But think of the passages which describe the Word as living in us, as working in us, as that which "penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). This Word along with God's Spirit dwells in us. As we write sermons we lean back in our chairs and a good idea comes into our head which we know will edify our people. Did the Spirit give us that idea? Certainly. Can we say that we did that apart from the Word that lives in us? Not at all.

As we preach, sometimes we get ideas that are not in our manuscript. Provided these are right and sound truths, we attribute them to the Spirit. But should we attribute them to the Spirit as if He were speaking to us without the Word? We cannot say that, since as we have seen, anything that is edifying must have its origin in the Word that is dwelling in us. (Cf. again 2 Ti 3:16) When we are emboldened to witness for Christ, the Spirit is certainly working in us. Here again reasons for being bold are also present, reasons derived from the Word we have heard, reasons centering around those truths about salvation spoken of in the Word.

Another way we could have problems understanding this teaching is by saying that the Spirit always works effectively when God's Word is taught. Luther makes the point that we cannot force God's Spirit to work when we are using his Word. It is important to remember that the Spirit works when and where he pleases. A discussion of this properly belongs to God's hidden will. I think we

might keep this in mind, and yet use God's Word as if we were forcing God to work, confident that God's Word will accomplish what he wants it to do.

The doctrine of the Spirit working independently is bound up with synergism and man's claim to have a free will in spiritual matters. Such teachers say that since man's will is free to accept or not to accept Christ, then, it is not important whether the means of grace are present. When grace is not understood properly, man feels that he can approach God, make a step in the right direction and appropriate God's Spirit. He is not so concerned about approaching him through means.

Those who separate the Spirit and the Word are compelled to ask repeatedly, How can I receive the Spirit? If there are not means of grace used, then the appropriation of the Spirit must come in other ways. In all cases these ways turn out to be works. The Pentecostal churches talk much about living the Spirit-filled life. But accomplishing this depends, to their way of thinking, not on the means of grace, but on prayer, confessing sins, obedience to God's command and preparing themselves in various ways to receive the Spirit. The books written and printed on the subject are many. They sound pious and biblical. But these books teach about Christ only in passing as if they are eager to get on to the most important subject, namely, learning how to live a Spirit-filled life. In turning people from the means of grace to works, the writers of these books are cutting their readers off from the very Spirit they wish to find. Paul's words to the Galatians apply here, "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit are you now trying to attain your goal by human efforts?" (Gal 3:2,3). Luther's words also apply here, "Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God's order? With all his mouthing of words, 'Spirit, Spirit, Spirit,' he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind. They do not tell you how or when, whither or what, but you are to experience what they do" (LW, Vol 40, p. 147).

By God's grace many who only know the doctrine of the Spirit's immediate working are kept in faith by the Holy Spirit though the Word they hear. Yet how much peace aren't they robbed of? How much inner searching, doubt and anxiety don't they go through in their lives as Christians? How much anxious preparations do they go through lest they miss the Spirit's guidance when all the time he is there ready to speak and lead them through his Word? The dangers of separating Spirit and Word are many, but they all lead to work righteousness and trying to find God by our own efforts instead of God finding us through his means of grace.

It is very interesting to see that even when we come to the sacraments, we also see the Holy Spirit working through the Word.

B. The Holy Spirit uses the Sacraments

Let us see the Holy Spirit working through the Sacrament of Baptism. What is Baptism? Let us read Luther's explanation. "Baptism is not simply water, but it is water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's word. What is that word and command of God concerning Baptism? Jesus says, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every thing I have commanded you.'"

Let us think about the earthly element we use in Baptism which is water. But why water? Why did the Lord use such a commonplace substance as water to convey such glorious blessings? We know there are many exotic and mystic liquids, but only water is selected by the Lord. The answer is that God has commanded us to use water. We thank God for making this element which is most available in nearly all places of the world.

God has commanded Baptism, but what benefit does it give? We again read Luther's explanation in the Small Catechism. "What does Baptism give or profit? Baptism works forgiveness of sin,

delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. Which are those words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says, Mark 16:16, "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned." Baptism is a means of justification. The Lutheran Confessions say, "A Sacrament is a ceremony or work in which God presents to us that which the promise annexed to the ceremony offers; as, Baptism is a work, not which we offer to God, but in which God baptizes us, that is, a minister in the place of God; and God here offers and presents the remission of sins, etc., according to the promise, Mark 16:16: Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Apology XXIV, 18).

Jesus' words are clear. To the question: What must I do to be saved? he gives the answer, "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved." Forgiveness of sins is conferred not only through the Word, but the great benefits of salvation are also conferred through Baptism. Baptism bestows, and the believing baptized person accepts and receives, the great salvation from the Savior.

Blessings such as those just spoken about lead to the question which Luther asks: "How can water do such great things?" Chiefly based on Titus 3:5-8 he says, "It is not water that does such great things but the Word of God which is in and with the water and faith that trusts this Word of God in the water. For without the Word of God the water is simply the water and no baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a gracious water of life and a regeneration in the Holy Spirit as St. Paul says in Titus 3:5-8, 'According to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.'" Indeed it is the Holy Spirit working through the Word that gives the water such power. It is not the way you do it that gives it power. Rather, it is God, yes, the Holy Spirit, that works through it.

Baptism is a means of grace, and it is good for us to continue remembering the words that Luther used in closing his confession on Baptism in the Large Catechism, "Thus it appears what a great, excellent thing Baptism is, which delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new man; and is and remains ever efficacious until we pass from this estate of misery to eternal glory. For this reason, then let everyone esteem his Baptism as a daily dress in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the faith and its fruits, that he suppress the old man and grows up in the new. For if we would be Christians, we must practice the work whereby we are Christians. But if anyone fall away from it, let him again come into it. For just as Christ, the Mercy Seat, does not recede from us or forbid us to come to him again, even though we sin, so all his treasure and gifts also remain. If, therefore, we have once in Baptism obtained forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old man about our neck" (Large Catechism, Of Baptism, 83-86).

Now let us speak about the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Hundreds of books have been written by different authors trying to explain the teachings of the Lord's Supper. In striking contrast to the millions of speculative words produced by men concerning this sacrament, the scriptural accounts dealing with the Lord's Supper total only a few hundred words. In our Bible we have four separate but parallel accounts of the institution of this sacrament. They are recorded in Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. The Apostle Paul adds a few inspired words of explanation in the tenth chapter of that same letter to the Corinthians (1 Co 10:16-17,21) These five brief sections constitute the sum total of what the Bible has to say directly concerning the Lord's Supper. There is a strong possibility that the phrase "breaking bread" in Acts 2:46 also refers to the Lord's Supper, but it could refer merely to communal participation in daily household meals. We cannot determine with certainty whether "breaking bread" refers to one or the other or perhaps even both.

All four writers agree on the essential truths concerning the Lord's Supper. The first and most obvious truth is that it was none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who instituted his sacrament, as attested to by all four writers. Moreover, all four likewise point out the very special day and the time during that day when it was instituted. Paul reports that it was "the night in which he was betrayed." This agrees fully with the synoptic Gospel accounts, all of which fix the time of institution as the evening on which the Lord ate his final Passover meal with His twelve disciples, at which time he pointed out Judas as his betrayer. The three Gospel writers further describe how Jesus later that same evening led his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane where Judas carried out his heinous act of betraying his Savior to the powers of darkness and evil.

Another vital point on which these four writers agree is that our Lord employed two ordinary earthly elements, two familiar Jewish table foods. He gave them bread to eat and the cup to drink. We can be certain that the bread was of the unleavened kind since that was the only kind permitted by the Mosaic law for use in a Jewish household during the Passover festival (cf. Exodus 12: 17-20 ; Leviticus 23:6; Numbers 28:17) Although Paul does not describe the contents of the cup, all three Gospel writers identify its contents as the fruit of the vine, which was a common Jewish expression for fermented wine.

Again all four accounts agree that Jesus first spoke a prayer of blessing or thanksgiving over the bread before breaking it into smaller pieces for convenient distribution. Matthew and Mark state that the Lord also spoke the word of prayer over the cup before distributing it to his disciples. Luke and Paul do not directly say that Jesus spoke the words of prayer over the cup, but they definitely infer through the use of the words "In the same way," meaning he did the same thing he did when he gave them the cup as he did when distributing the bread.

When one goes through the passages that talk about Holy Communion, one wonders where we find the Holy Spirit working. Despite the fact that we can find no passage of Scripture which directly links the Holy Spirit to the Lord's Supper, I am sure that no one assembled here today has any doubts whatsoever that God, the Holy Spirit, is indeed very active at every proper celebration of the Holy Supper. How can we be sure? Simply because at the very heart of the Lord's Supper we find none other than the very heart of the gospel: namely, that the holy precious body and blood of Jesus Christ have been "given and shed for the forgiveness of sins." This is purest gospel, and wherever the gospel is proclaimed we have the full assurance of Scripture that there the Holy Spirit is exceedingly active in his salutary work of creating, preserving and strengthening faith in the hearts of penitent sinners. Accordingly, the Christian Church from earliest times has rightly regarded the Lord's Supper, along with Baptism and the spoken or written gospel, as a blessed means of grace. Through these means of grace God has promised to convey and seal to lost sinners the good news that, as a result of the redemptive work of Christ and God's decree of universal justification, they are the recipients of the undeserved mercy of their loving and gracious God.

Therefore we can conclude by saying that those who refuse to be baptized are rejecting God's means whereby the Holy Spirit does His work. We also say the same words to those who do the same with the Lord's Supper. Rejecting God's means of grace is sinning against the Holy Spirit.

May God preserve this true teaching in our Church.

The Holy Spirit Comforts the Church

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What means does the Holy Spirit use to give us his comfort? What is the content of the comfort of the Spirit? These questions will be answered in the first part of this essay. From the first chapters of the Bible I will then point to the origin of some of the circumstances of life to which all people

are subject and because of which we need comfort from the Lord. Finally, with a few examples, I will show how the Holy Spirit comforts us in different situations.

Four basic truths show what means the Holy Spirit uses to comfort the Church and the content of his comfort.

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in a language we understand.

The human soul is created with the ability to hear and understand the meaning of God's Word. The language is called "the human language" because it is a human ability. But language didn't originate with man. God spoke before the first human being was created. Through his Word he created the heavens and the earth. In Psalm 33:8-9 we read: "Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm."

From the first two chapters of Genesis we understand that both God and man spoke the same language, what is now called "the human language." When God speaks his words are full of divine power and truth and God's Word accomplishes what it says (Ge 1:3, etc.). God gave man divine truth through his Word (Ge 1:28-29, 2:16-17) and man answered with words that were expressions of the godliness, obedience, love and gratitude of his soul (Ge 2:20,23).

After the fall into sin we notice a dramatic change within man. The linguistic and rational abilities are still there but righteousness and love are lost. No longer did Adam express love for God with his words. Instead his words were full of fear, foolishness, excuses and accusations (Ge 3:10,12). One state of things didn't change though by the fall into sin. Just as before the fall God also after the fall continued to communicate divine truth to man through the spoken word in a language he understood (Ge 3:14-19). God spoke directly to the first human beings and later he gave his word through his prophets and apostles.

In Genesis 2 we see that God and Adam communicated in a language common to them even before the woman was created. The linguistic ability in man therefore had a function and a purpose before there was another human being to speak with. Man first used his linguistic ability to communicate with God, listen to God's Word and also to express his godliness, obedience and love. We too use the human linguistic ability in this way when we read a chapter from the Bible and pray the Lord's Prayer. Some contend that the linguistic ability originates with man and is a result of evolution. And some hold that the human language can't communicate divine truth. I claim the opposite. From the first two chapters we can see both the origin of language and how the linguistic ability was used and from this use we can understand something about the purpose. God gave linguistic ability to man so that God and man could communicate.

God is the giver of both linguistic ability and of divine truth, which he communicates by speaking words in a human language. We find this for example in Exodus 4:11,12. The Lord spoke to Moses: "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say." It is God's will that we should always meditate on the words he has given us. This fact is expressed in Psalm 1. It is also God's will that we should answer him with words expressing our gratefulness and love for God. This is made clear in David's prayer: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise" (Ps 51:15).

The Holy Spirit has spoken to us through the prophets and the apostles.

The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cooperate in this work of speaking to us humans and giving us his word, but this work is nonetheless ascribed chiefly to the Holy Spirit. We confess in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." The words of the prophets in the Old Testament are ascribed to the Holy Spirit (Zec 7:12, 2 Pe 1:21). The words Jesus received from the Father and spoke to the apostles are ascribed to the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:2, Jn 16:12-15). Saint Paul claims to proclaim

spiritual matters with words he has received from the Holy Spirit (1 Co 2:13). Also, when the divine inspiration of Scripture is described as a direct dictation by the glorified Christ to his apostle John as his penman, these words are ascribed to the Spirit. In the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation we read what is said about the words Christ dictated to John: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 2:7,11,17).

Scripture is God's Word and Scripture is exclusive. There is no spiritual or divine truth or revelation from God beside the words of Scripture. In Isaiah 8:19,20 we read: "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony!"

We have now begun to zoom in and focus on our object. If we are to seek comfort from the Spirit, we should seek it in the words of Scripture and in no other place.

The Holy Spirit works only through the Word and sacraments.

God has divided Scripture into two parts—the law and the gospel. Both these doctrines have divine effects. The law gives knowledge about sin (Ro 3:20) and the gospel works faith, salvation and a new birth (Ro 1:16,17; 1 Pe 1:23). The work performed by the words of Scripture is identical to the work of the Spirit. In the passage where Jesus gives the promise of a Comforter, the Holy Spirit, he also says that the work of the Spirit not only is to comfort. He will also convict the world of guilt in regard to sin (John 16:8). But the foremost work of the Holy Spirit is to comfort. The Holy Spirit works faith, salvation and a new birth (1 Co 12:3; Jn 3:6). This does not imply two separate causes for contrition and faith, Scripture and the Spirit. No, the work of Scripture and the Spirit are indivisible. The Scriptures have divine effects and the work performed by the Word is identical to the work performed by the Spirit. We can make only one distinction: the Holy Spirit works through the word of Scripture as his instrument.

In Scripture God has instituted two sacraments for his New Testament church, where he has united his word, or more precisely his gospel promise, with earthly elements: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Holy Spirit works new birth, faith and salvation also through these sacraments. (I will later on mention one of the functions of the Lord's Supper). Baptism in water gives and works rebirth. Jesus said to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5). What is true about the words of Scripture is also true about the sacraments. The work of the sacraments is identical to the work of the Holy Spirit. Only one distinction can be made: the Spirit works through the sacraments as his instruments.

We have now completely zoomed in and focused on the object of this lecture. Finding the comfort of the Holy Spirit is a matter of separating law and gospel, because we find the comfort of the Spirit in the gospel in word and sacraments only and nowhere else. Thus we confess in the Smalcald Articles (VIII:10): "Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point, that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments."

The biblical doctrine of the means of grace is a great comfort to us Christians. It teaches us where to go to find comfort and help against sin and all of its consequences. We are to turn to the gospel in Word and sacrament where God the Holy Spirit deals with us and gives us saving faith. This doctrine brings us great comfort, because it teaches us that we cannot be saved by our own works, only by the work of the Holy Spirit, not by our merit but by grace for Christ's sake. We read about this in the Augsburg Confession article V: "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake."

Since God has made sure the presence of the gospel word here on earth until the last day, this doctrine gives even greater comfort to the Church on earth. We read in Isaiah 59:21: "As for me,

this is my covenant with them,' says the LORD. 'My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever,' says the LORD." This is a divine promise that the ministry of preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments will be upheld among the human race until the end of time. God's covenant with his people, which is extended throughout history, implies that the church of God will exist until the last day, that this church exists where the gospel is preached and that the Holy Spirit will work through the preaching of the gospel until the last day. The enemies of God will never succeed in destroying the Church or silencing the saving Word of God.

The Holy Spirit comforts the Church with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we look more closely at the picture emerging as we focus on the gospel in Word and sacrament we clearly see who appears in the center: Jesus Christ our Savior. In Revelation 19:10b we read: "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." This verse implies that prophecy is centered in Jesus. The Holy Spirit comforts the Church with the testimony of Jesus. Jesus Christ is God and man in one person and the "reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8). He completed the requirements of the law by his perfect obedience for us and in his suffering and death he bore the punishment for our sin. His resurrection on the third day confirms that God counts us as righteous for Christ's sake. Christ's resurrection is also proof that we have eternal life for his sake and will be glorified with him. We find comfort against sin and all its consequences in Christ and his work.

The comfort of the Holy Spirit is the gospel of Jesus Christ. But not only does the Holy Spirit show us Jesus Christ as our Savior; he also gives us faith in him through the gospel, and in this way he brings comfort all the way into our hearts, as we also confess in Martin Luther's Large Catechism: "For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the Gospel" (The Large Catechism, The Creed, Art III, 38).

Our need for comfort by the Holy Spirit

From the first chapters of the Bible we will now study some general circumstances of life which show that we need something more than comfort and support from other people who have ability to show empathy. Because of the consequences of the fall we need divine help and comfort from the Holy Spirit.

The first promise created the Church

The Holy Spirit is the creator of saving faith in people's hearts through the gospel of Jesus Christ and his saving work. The Church is made up of those people who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and its consequences. The birthday of the Church, therefore, is that day when God proclaimed the first promise of a Savior to Adam and Eve and created faith in their hearts.

The events directly before and after the proclamation of the first promise show us some general circumstances of life which do not change during the course of history until the end of time and due to which the Church needs comfort from the Holy Spirit.

The fall resulted in disastrous consequences for our first parents and also for their descendants. Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. The image of God in man was holiness, and righteousness, true knowledge about God and perfect love for God (Eph 5:9, Col 3:10). But when our first parents broke God's commandment, they also lost their righteousness and became sinners. They lost their true knowledge of God and lost their love for God. Instead they were filled with fright and a fearful expectation of judgement. They ended up under the judgement of the law. They died a spiritual death, which, without interference from God, inevitably would lead to physical and eternal death as God has said: "When you eat of it you will surely die." All descendants of Adam are in the same hopeless situation as he put himself into. Human beings are not born in the image of God, but in the image of their parents, that is, as spiritually dead

sinners, as we read about Seth: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth." King David confesses in Psalm 51 that he was formed as a sinner in his mother's womb, he is a sinner by nature and therefore he does what is evil in God's sight (Ps 51:4-6). And Paul says about all people: "We were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph 2:3).

Adam's actions after the fall show that he still was an intelligent creature who to some degree could understand connections between cause and effect and was able to act deliberately to gain a certain result. At the same time his actions, and the reasons he gave for them, revealed a mind totally without reason in his relationship to God and a heart lacking confidence in God and love for him. Adam lacked true knowledge about God and thought he could hide from him who is present everywhere and knows everything. He was filled with terror of God and strove to get as far away as possible from God. Also, he had lost his understanding of God's creation and how to use it in the right way. No longer did he know why God had given him a wife and how he ought to treat her. Instead he blamed his own sin on her. Adam's actions could be viewed as an attempt to solve the problems his sin had brought on him. But none of these attempts could take away the fear of God and his punishment and the damage of sin. In his hopeless situation man himself could not find any real and lasting comfort.

The attempts to solve the problem that we see Adam try are repeated in different ways by unbelievers throughout history without success. In his spiritual blindness after the fall man does not even realize how hopeless his situation is and therefore tries to find solutions such as "hiding," "denial," or "blaming someone else." For this reason comfort is not the only work of the Spirit. God reproached and exposed Adam when he said: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (Ge 3:11). This is the preaching of the law, which exposes sin, reproaches, threatens and frightens. The Holy Spirit continues to carry out this work throughout history. The Spirit exposes sin. Jesus said: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (Jn 16:8). This is called the "foreign" work of the Spirit and he performs it in order to do his proper work—to comfort through the gospel of Christ.

To our first parents God gave the promise of a Savior who would crush the serpent's head. This message is by nature pure comfort. It does not contain any demands or threats and it says nothing whatsoever about us or about our works. The promise deals with Christ and his work for us. It did not depend on our first parents and it does not depend on us to free ourselves from the power of the devil and the harm sin has brought on us. The promised Hero would alone do this. He would crush the serpent's head, that is the power and dominion of the devil, consisting of captivity under sin and death. He would do this at a very high price. It would cost our Savior suffering to crush the dominion of the devil: He would be stricken in his heel (Ge 3:15).

Throughout the history of salvation God continues to speak to humanity through the prophets and the first promise is thereby further explained and clarified. Gradually, as we read on in Scripture, we understand that the promise points to Jesus Christ and his work for our salvation. We come to know the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of God's promises of a Savior. We also get to know the person in the Trinity who gives us these promises of a Savior—the Holy Spirit. God's Word to us as a whole is ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The main point in this Word is the message about Christ and the chief work of the Holy Spirit is to comfort us with the promise of Christ. Thus he is also called the Comforter.

After the church was born through the first promise, God does not treat his believers in accordance with what the reason of fallen man believes is reasonable or desirable. As a consequence of sin suffering entered our lives. The woman was to bear and raise her children with pain (Ge 3:16). Adam had worked and taken care of the garden also before the fall, but now hardship and suffering became part of that work. The work to provide for the necessities of life would mean toil all the days of their lives, and in the end they would be worn out and die the physical death (Ge 3:17-19). Furthermore, God drove them out of the garden and put the

cherubim and a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life (Ge 3:22-24). In Genesis 4 the believers had another new experience. They would have to suffer hatred from the unbelievers: the unbelieving Cain killed the believing Abel (Ge 4:8; 1 Jn 3:12).

From then on many things have happened in the history of humankind. However, from one point of view nothing at all has happened concerning the circumstances of life for people, their relationship to God, and God's way of dealing with them. When Adam and Eve were banished from Eden, they had only a word from God to hold on to. The first man and woman had to hold on to this promise of a Savior alone against sin and all of its consequences in their lives. This was the Spirit's comfort in their lives. Their senses and reason could not confirm the truthfulness of this promise. Rather their mind and reason experienced quite the opposite. If Adam and Eve had judged the matter according to their reason, they would have been able to draw conclusions only from what they saw, felt and experienced. If they were to draw any conclusions from the pain, toil and perishableness they felt in their bodies and from what they saw and experienced when God banished them from the garden of Eden, it would rather be the assumption that God's wrath was dwelling on them. They had only a promise from God to cling to, a promise that assured them of grace from God and a Savior. They had to believe God's promise without anything else confirming or guaranteeing it than the fact that God said so. They believed without seeing. This is the nature of saving faith. We read in Hebrews 11:1: "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The way of salvation appointed by God is not by seeing, understanding and experiencing but by faith in God's promises. Saving faith believes God's word because God says so, without any further affirmation from what can be understood with our reason and be seen or experienced with our senses, yes in opposition to what these our abilities tell us. God's dealings with us find no support in our understanding so that the grace promised to us can be affirmed by what we experience with our senses. It was only by faith that our first parents could make their own the comfort given to them through the promise, and the fact that they did so was the work of the Spirit. The same is true about us. The comfort given to us by the Spirit is by nature such that it cannot be affirmed with our reason or senses. It is faith that believes the gospel promises and it is the Holy Spirit himself who awakens this faith in our hearts and in this way he himself brings his comfort into our hearts.

The Comfort of the Holy Spirit in specific situations

Now let us turn to how the Holy Spirit comforts the Church in some specific situations. These were introduced in our study of circumstances of life common to all humans presented in the first chapters of Genesis. The different types of difficulties we all must face or constantly experience because of the fall could be titled: "Our sin," "Our spiritual blindness," "Our disturbed line of communication with God," "The toil and suffering in our daily life," "Death in our bodies", and "Enmity from unbelievers." The basis for how the Holy Spirit comforts the Church is the fact that "God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments. It is the devil himself whatsoever is extolled as Spirit without the Word and Sacraments." The comfort given to us in word and sacrament and the comfort from the Spirit are indivisible. Studying how the Spirit comforts the Church in specific situations is the same as studying how apostles and prophets divided the law and the gospel and gave the promises of the gospel to God's people in such situations. Generally speaking then, the Holy Spirit comforts us with the doctrines of objective justification, the authority of God, and the means of grace when we are tortured by sin; the doctrine of Christ's resurrection when we are troubled by death; and the doctrine of election against suffering, affliction and against the enemies of Christ and his Church.

In preparation to make us more ready to believe the gospel promises in these difficult times of life the Holy Spirit regularly trains our faith in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper for his New Testament Church. This sacrament is to be celebrated often in the congregation. In the Lord's Supper we receive assurance that we belong to the new covenant which means that God forgives our wickedness (Jer 31:34; Lk 22:20, Ex 24:8). The body of Christ is present under the bread and is given us to

eat in this sacrament and the same blood by which the new covenant was established before God, Jesus' blood, is present in the wine and is given us to drink. This sacrament gives us forgiveness of our sins and strengthens our faith in Christ. We believe that the true body and blood of Christ are present in this sacrament, in, with, and under the bread and wine, because God says so in the words of institution. Every Sunday and on other festivals, when this sacrament is celebrated, we are trained by the Holy Spirit to believe what we cannot see, only because God says so in his Word, in order that we on other occasions also will believe what we cannot see, and again only because the Holy Spirit says so in the Word.

Our sin

Since the Holy Spirit works through the outward Word it is of great importance that every Christian, and especially the pastors, know just what gives comfort from the Holy Spirit to people who are afflicted by sin. Every day we see and experience sin in our bodies and lives and hear the accusations from our conscience. When we listen to God's law these accusations can become very persistent and sharp. The apostles comforted the Christians who were troubled by sin by pointing to objective justification and the authority of God. This is the Holy Spirit's comfort against sin. When we are troubled by sin we should seek comfort in this and we should give these same words to our fellow Christians in the same situation.

St. John writes in 1 John 2:1,2: "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." This passage and other similar Bible passages assure us that Jesus has taken away our sins, too. Because he is the reconciliation for the sins of the world he is surely also so for ours. If our heart still condemns us we should remember that our heart is not the highest authority. "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" are words of comfort written by the apostle John to those who were accused by their hearts. God knows he has pronounced another verdict than does our condemning heart—he has declared us righteous for Christ's sake (Ro 3:24). God is the highest authority and he has the last word—not our heart.

It is characteristic of the Spirit's comfort that it cannot be confirmed by our senses. In this way there is room for the way of salvation God has ordained—salvation through faith. In the gospel the Spirit assures us of things we cannot see. We see and experience sin in our bodies and lives every day. Every day the Holy Spirit comforts us through the gospel of Christ, provided we use the Word, meditate on it and live in it. In this gospel the Holy Spirit assures us that sin does not exist where it can be seen and felt—it exists where it cannot be seen. In the Word the Holy Spirit assures us: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps 103:12), and "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Co 5:21). Scripture certifies that sin is where it cannot be seen—sin is in Christ who himself was without sin: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pe 2:24). And now, after his resurrection our sins are not in him either—in him is only splendor and glory. So where are they now? Well, the Holy Spirit assures us that God has hurled all our sins into the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19) and we are included in a covenant where God no longer remembers our sins (Jer 31:34). The Holy Spirit does not only set before us this comfort as an object of faith. He also gives us faith in our hearts and in this way he brings divine comfort into our hearts. God the Holy Spirit works this faith in our hearts that we regard God's Word and promises to be more sure and true than what we see with our eyes and experience with our senses.

Our spiritual blindness

We see in Genesis 3 how foolishly Adam acted and spoke after the fall. This the most gifted human being could not perform better. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned." Human reason is spiritually blind after the fall and does not understand anything. Because of this we can assume

that everything we and other people conceive regarding spiritual matters is wrong. It is a great suffering to know that we don't have any points of orientation in spiritual matters within ourselves. But knowing that the Holy Spirit gives us lost people a sure guide and basis for our existence is a great comfort. In Psalm 119:105 we read: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." We should hold the words of the apostles and prophets as being more certain than our reason and senses, just as Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:19: "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Where Paul speaks about our having "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10), he also urges us to "let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly as [we] teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as [we] sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in [our] hearts to God" (v. 16). Paul also writes: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Ti 3:16,17). For this reason we ought not to despair at the sight of the consequences Adam's fall brought on all of his descendants. We are not left to spiritual darkness and blindness. Through his Word the Holy Spirit gives us true knowledge of God. And just like the apostles we also are to have greater confidence in the words of Scripture than in our own senses and understanding. God's Word is truth.

Our disturbed line of communication with God

In the fall Adam lost his ability to communicate with God. God continued to speak to man but man could not answer in a way that pleased God. We have to depend totally on the Holy Spirit in order to pray to God according to his will. A prerequisite for all prayer is the spiritual condition of the person praying. God does not hear the prayers of unbelievers but prayers from believers go up before God (Pr 15:8; Rev 8:4). God the Holy Spirit makes us into the right kind of people to pray by granting us saving faith through the gospel in word and sacrament.

God wants us to pray to him in all trouble and to praise him (Ps 50:15). The Holy Spirit renews us and gives us a correct knowledge of God and opens our lips so that we can declare his praises (Col 3:10; Ps 51:17). The Holy Spirit helps us to pray by showing us what we need and what God's gifts are in his word, yes, he gives the very words to use in our prayers to God, when we ask him for help, thank him and praise him. The book of Psalms is such a collection of prayers where the Holy Spirit himself has given us prayers for different occasions in life. In addition to these acts of mercy the Holy Spirit himself also intercedes for us. The Spirit knows better than we what our needs are and he helps us by praying in harmony with God's will. We learn this from Romans 8:26,27: "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." So, therefore we have this confidence in him.

Death in our bodies

Through the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us the same thing about death as about the cause of death, namely sin. We who have come to faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin through the work of the Holy Spirit are to firmly believe that death is not where it can be seen and experienced. With our senses we can feel and see that our bodies deteriorate and die. What we cannot see, but still believe because of God's promise, is the fact that we have eternal life through faith in Christ. In John 5:24 Jesus says: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." And in John 11:25,26: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" The Holy Spirit keeps on focusing on the invisible and when we experience decay in our bodies the Holy Spirit renews our inner self with the assurance of the glory awaiting us—we will be raised with Christ. St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

The toil of everyday life and suffering for Christ

We believe we have a merciful God for Christ's sake because God says and promises this in his Word. But God's dealings with us do not find approval in our reason in such a way that the grace offered in the promise can be confirmed by what we experience with our senses. Contrary to what reason would find reasonable God sends suffering upon us. But in the midst of suffering, the Spirit gives us another kind of comfort compared to what the world would give and our reason desire. As believers in Christ we can even rejoice in our sufferings since we know that they carry a spiritual good (Romans 5:1-5). "Also, as Paul in a very consolatory way treats this, Rom. 8, 28. 29. 35. 38. 39, that 'God in His purpose has ordained before the time of the world' by what crosses and sufferings He would conform every one of His elect to the image of his Son, and that to every one His cross shall and must work together for good, because they are all called according to the purpose, whence Paul has concluded that it is certain and indubitable that 'neither tribulation nor distress, nor death, nor life,' etc., 'shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord'" (SD XI:49).

Enmity from unbelievers

When we meet enmity from unbelievers and see how the evil in this world obstructs the gospel and threatens the church, the Holy Spirit guides us to the invisible. There is a special book written for that purpose. In the book of Revelation the Spirit directs us to Christ who is the victorious one and who has authority to judge. The judgement, where the enemies of God are ultimately defeated and Christ triumphs surrounded by a people he has saved from the great tribulation, is described in picture after picture. Reality is not only what we see and experience, reality is also what the Spirit reveals in his word. His word is more sure and certain than our senses. For our reason it is hard to understand how God can be almighty and good when the wickedness is so great. Through faith we understand that God has everything under control and that the total number of the elect most certainly will be saved. Christ is protecting his church "and the gates of [hell] will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). Even if it would come to the point where the enemies of Christ would kill us, they will not overcome us: Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The doctrine of election is the ultimate comfort □to the struggling and suffering church on earth.

Having been brought to faith in our Savior Jesus Christ through the gospel, we meet suffering and affliction in our new lives as Christians because of our sins and we see the activities of the enemies of God. It is then that the Holy Spirit gives us the ultimate comfort in passages speaking about God's gracious election. These passages show that we were not reached by the gospel by accident. Neither did the Holy Spirit decide to make us believers only at the moment we heard the gospel. No, God has elected from eternity every one of those who will be saved and he has ordained to save us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And therefore he has awakened faith in our hearts through the preaching of the gospel. The reason for our salvation is God's eternal decision, which cannot be revoked or aborted. That is why we who believe can be absolutely sure of our salvation. Neither sin, nor the devil nor the wickedness in this world can deprive us of our salvation. Because of God's decision our salvation lies safely in the almighty hands of our Savior Jesus Christ, and he assures us: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27,28).

The Holy Spirit Sanctifies and Preserves the Church

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Introduction

According to the cultures of Zambia, the country where I live, the people like to do much ritual cleansing. People are cleansed. Places are cleansed. Things are cleansed. Such cleansing is done by special ceremonies. When a stranger or foreigner dies in a village, a ceremony is arranged to cleanse the whole village. When a person dies, the village is cleansed. The bereaved family prepares a feast. They brew beer. They invite the chief and the village elders. They cleanse the whole village from the spirits of the departed, so that these spirits will not trouble them again.

There are also times when in a village children or elders continue to die, one after the other, and diviners are called to find the cause of such deaths. The diviner makes people drink some medicine, and whoever vomits is looked upon as the one who is causing those deaths. He can be killed or chased from the village. Thereafter, the whole village is cleansed. It is cleansed to chase away the evil spirit of that evil person who was causing those deaths.

Also when a chief or president of our country is installed as chief or president, special powder is smeared on the forehead of that person to show that the person has been consecrated for a holy purpose. This is not done to any other person. In this way this person is cleansed, or consecrated for the special work he is to carry out in his office.

It is commonly believed that once a person, place, or thing is cleansed, or consecrated, such things become holy, and nothing evil can stand in their way.

In Old Testament times "persons, places and things" were cleansed also, i.e., consecrated to serve holy purposes (cf Ge 2:3; Ex 13:2; 40:10-13, etc.). Connected with this were the Mosaic rites of purification (cf. e.g. Nu 6:11; Lev 22:16, 32; Heb 9:13). Garments were washed in preparation to meet God (Ex 19:10,14). Priests were consecrated for their service to God, including their vestments (Ex 29:1-9), warriors were consecrated (Isa 13:3). The firstborn was dedicated (Dt 15:19). The plunder from battle was dedicated for use in the temple (2 Sa 8:11). These rites, however, when applied to persons were efficacious only in a ceremonial sense and did not extend to the purifying of the moral and spiritual nature. They were symbolical, and thus were intended not only to remind the people of the necessity of spiritual cleansing, but also of the gracious purpose of God to actually accomplish his work in a spiritual way. So David prayed, "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean," and also "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:7,10).

Thus we have seen how important it is for people to feel cleansed. In our African village life our people want to be cleansed from evil spirits. In the Old Testament God himself provided for ceremonial ways in which his people should be cleansed and consecrated for his special service (Ex 19:10-23; Lv 11:44-46; 20:7). In the New Testament God also wants his people to be cleansed for his special service. Since he is a holy God, he wants his people to be "made holy" or "sanctified," in order to serve him. This cleansing is not merely an outward cleansing, but an inward cleansing of heart and spirit. It is the work of God especially assigned to the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit (2 Th 2:13; 1 Co 6:11; Tit 3:5). It is that work generally known as the work of sanctification. The Greek word for "sanctify" is *hagiazō*, literally to "make holy."

For us to understand how the Holy Spirit sanctifies and preserves the Church on earth, it is important for us to see how the Bible and the Confessions of our Church use this word "sanctification." Like so many other words in Scripture, it is used in more than one way. It is used in a narrow sense and in a wide sense.

In its narrow sense, sanctification designates the internal spiritual transformation of the believer, or the holiness of life which follows upon justification. As we read in Romans 6:22, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life." The Formula of Concord states: "In the same manner the order also between faith and good works must abide and be maintained, and likewise between justification and renewal, or sanctification. For good works do not precede faith, neither does sanctification precede justification. But first faith is kindled in us in conversion by the Holy Spirit

from the hearing of the gospel. This lays hold of God's grace in Christ, by which the person is justified. Then, when the person is justified, he is also renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, from which renewal and sanctification the fruits of good works must then follow" (Trigl. 929, Sol. Decl.,III, 40f.).

The Holy Scriptures and our Lutheran Confession, in other words, use the word "sanctification" to point us specifically to a renewal of life in which man's nature is delivered from the service of sin and dedicated to the service of God. Paul speaks of this new nature as living "by the spirit," leading a life of sanctification in bringing forth the fruits of the spirit, which are listed as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22,23). It is the sanctified life of the Christian which follows justification.

The word "sanctification" is also used in a wider sense in Scripture to include the entire work of the Holy Spirit as the "Giver of Faith." It includes the work of the Holy Spirit in his use of the Means of Grace, the Word and the Sacraments, to carry out his work. We have heard this presented in the preceding papers at this conference. It is in this wider sense that Martin Luther used the word "sanctification" in his Small and Large Catechisms when he entitled the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed relating to the work of the Holy Spirit as "Of Sanctification." In his explanation of this Article he states, "I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Ghost has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church he daily and fully forgives all sins to me and all believers. On the last day he will raise me and all the dead; and he will give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true" (The Third Article, Sanctification, explanation; Luther's Small Catechism in WELS Kuske edition, p. 188).

In his large Catechism Luther explains how the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification also includes bringing us to Christ through the preaching of the gospel (Trigl. 689). This is sanctification in its entire sense as the work of the Holy Spirit. It comprises all that the Holy Spirit does in rescuing man from sin, creating faith within him, helping him to persevere in that faith and keeping him in that faith until his final deliverance in heaven. It includes justification, as we read in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

Let us follow this sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in its wider sense as we follow these steps of Luther in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, applying these steps especially in our field experience in Central Africa.

Christians Are Called by the Gospel

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14 Paul says, "From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul here says that God chose us to be saved and not to perish. Our salvation embraces the fullness of God's purpose to deliver us from the ravages and consequences of sin. The way in which he will accomplish this will be through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. He continues to say how we were called. He says, "He called you through our gospel." Here Paul shows that the gospel is the means by which God's call comes to us. It is through the preaching of the gospel that God calls us to himself. He calls us out of the unbelieving world to be holy. The Holy Spirit calls us through the gospel in word and sacraments.

This has been the wonderful story of the growth of the church of Jesus Christ, as recorded for us in the book of Acts. We see in the early Church in Jerusalem how believers were added to the Church through the word which the apostles taught (Ac 2:38-47). The Ethiopian eunuch (Ac 8:35-39) is another person who heard the gospel and was baptized. When Peter preached in the house of Cornelius, the Holy Ghost came to all those who heard the word and were baptized

(Acts 10:44-48). At Pentecost Peter stood up and said to the people, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Ac 2:38). God the Holy Spirit calls through the word. We would not have believed if the Holy Spirit did not work through the word. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:17). The gospel is active not only in the spoken word, but also in the sacraments. In Titus 3:5 Paul says, "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." As we receive the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, we also receive the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins (1 Co 10:16).

The book of Acts shows us especially how wonderfully this power of the Holy Spirit was active in extending the Church of Jesus Christ to all the world. In the very first chapter of Acts Jesus says to his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). The call of the gospel of Christ went out to many different places, especially through the work of the Apostle Paul. Paul, however, did not do this by his own power. Very frequently Luke, the writer of Acts and Paul's co-worker, refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in accomplishing this growth. In his commentary on the book of Acts, F. F. Bruce writes that the entire book might be fittingly called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit" (The Acts of the Apostles p. 30).

We in Central Africa have truly seen this in action. It was nearly forty years ago that my father came to Lusaka from Malawi and became a member of the Lutheran Church in Lusaka in a location called Matero through one of the earliest missionaries who shared the gospel of our Lord Jesus with him. The first service was in his house, and he became a lay preacher until the Bible Institute was established in 1964. He was one of the first three graduates of the Lutheran Seminary in 1972. From the few congregations that were established, some of which were started by him in various parts of Lusaka at that time, the Lutheran Church of Central Africa (LCCA) has grown to a membership of over 35,000 people in over 200 congregations scattered throughout Zambia and Malawi, reaching also into Mozambique, and with some contacts in Tanzania, Congo DR, and Zimbabwe.

We are not praising ourselves for this wonderful growth. For a Christian to be able to do something that is pleasing before God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Php 2:13). God must make the unwilling willing. He must give the strength and power to conquer sin. The Christian will then live a life of repentance. He will be able to help his neighbors; he will be forgiving; he will support the work of the Church. These are not the fruits of the flesh, nor are they the consequences of his own personal activity. It is God that works these things in him.

In Zambia the gospel is spreading like fire. The Holy Spirit is working through the gospel we continue to preach in its truth and purity. Many people are called to faith. Members who move to other areas where we do not have a church try to invite us, but since the laborers are few, we sometimes fail to reach them. The membership in our conference continues to grow because the gospel is working. Most of the people who come to town have no church at all. There are also many small churches mushrooming every day. These as we know have no sound doctrine. They are very aggressive and seem to have a large following, but end up confusing people. As Lutherans our goal is to continue to teach and preach the same truth as presented in the Scriptures because we believe that the Holy Spirit is in control to convict people of their sins and bring them to our Lord Jesus Christ.

The churches which seem to be spreading very quickly around us today are the Pentecostal Churches. They emphasize human feelings and emotions as the work of the Spirit rather than facts as presented in the Scriptures. They emphasize special revelations, speaking in tongues, miraculous healing based upon personal experience, things which have no real basis in Scripture. Because many people in Africa like to express their feelings outwardly, they are often trapped by the false teachings of other churches. Spirit-worship has always been a part of African traditional

religion, in which the spirits of the gods, the spirits of the ancestors, the spirits of the tribes control the people's lives. Many syncretistic churches cause great confusion to our people.

How important it is, therefore, for us to teach that the Spirit of God comes to us alone through his holy Word and the sacraments, Baptism and Lord's Supper. It is through these means alone that we are called by the gospel.

Having been called by the gospel, having been brought to faith in Jesus Christ as our only Savior from sin, devil, and death, we are, as Luther adds, enlightened with spiritual gifts.

Christians Are Enlightened with Gifts

But what are some of the gifts with which the Holy Spirit has enlightened us? For us to understand how Christians are enlightened with gifts, it is important that we understand what it means to be enlightened. The word "enlightened" means that the Holy Ghost brought us out of the darkness of unbelief into the light of faith so that we can see all the gifts God gives us in Christ. Jesus says in John 8:12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." Again Jesus says, "I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive the forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Ac 26:17,18). Paul also says, "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Co 4:4).

Once a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior from sin, and walks with him in faith, he sees these gifts which the Holy Spirit has given him. What are some of those gifts which the Holy Spirit has given him? In Ephesians 1:7, Paul says, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." The Holy Spirit has enabled us to see that through the blood of Jesus we have the forgiveness of our sins. It is impossible to know this without the help of the Holy Spirit. Again Paul in Romans 5:1 says, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are no longer troubled by our sins because we know that the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all unrighteousness. We are no longer rebellious to God as before. We do what God tells us to do. God speaks to us when we need his comfort, encouragement, wisdom. This all is a result of the peace we have with God. Again in Titus 2:11-13, Paul says, "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Since the Holy Spirit has enlightened us to see by faith such wonderful gifts of God as forgiveness, peace, hope, joy, and comfort, we will be able to produce the fruits of faith. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Co 5:17). In Ephesians 2:10 Paul again says, "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Having been created anew by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, a Christian will be able to produce good works. Jesus tells us, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Indeed we can do absolutely nothing without Jesus, but through believing in him the Holy Spirit enables us to produce good works.

People in our country like to say that it is difficult to discover a gift or a talent. I think this is true to some extent. For one to know that his talent is that of a potter or a designer can be difficult. He might try other jobs first which he thinks are important or can give him a high income. He learns the hard way that money does not grow on trees. He then decides to do whatever comes along. A friend invites him to join in making pots, cups, plates, etc. He says to himself, "Well, since I have not found what I am looking for, I can meanwhile be passing time doing it." He does it for few months and he sees that the commodities are selling like hot cakes. He works hard in that business and as years go by, he realizes that it is his talent.

That is the same way the Holy Spirit also works. He calls us and gives us faith. Then he shows us the gifts which are there for us. Before he called us we did not see these things. But after calling us, we now see them. We realize that this is why we were called and rejoice that we have found the most needed gifts (talents) in our lives.

Christians Are Sanctified and Kept in the Faith

The Holy Spirit's work of sanctification is a continuous process. Luther emphasized this in his explanation to the Third Article when he stated that the Holy Spirit has not only "called me by the gospel" and "enlightened me with his gifts," but he has also "sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

By bringing me to faith in Christ as my Savior a "new self" has been born (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). In this life here on earth, however, the Christian retains his sinful nature. The "old self," born in sin, still is there to trouble him (Eph 4:22). The Apostle Paul writes about this struggle still going on between his sinful nature and the Spirit of God dwelling within him (Ro 8:9). In Galatians he writes, "The sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want" (Gal 5:17).

The dangers to our faith that are caused by our sinful nature may vary. People speak about many different desires that are contrary to the Spirit: sexual immorality; selfish ambition; dissensions, etc. He also includes "witchcraft," which is the problem that is especially dangerous in our African culture (cf. Gal 5:16-21). Instead of being led by the Spirit of Christ, there is the danger of being controlled by the "spirit world" in which the life of people in Africa was centered as a result of their natural religion and beliefs.

This is true because when most Christians are confronted by problems, e.g. sickness or death in the family, witchcraft becomes the source of all evil. Many people would not believe that the person has died a normal death due to sickness and non-availability of proper medication. They would still think somebody caused it. When a sickness is prolonged, then it is not a normal sickness, somebody has witched that person. It is because of being controlled by the spirit of the world that people's minds think this way. This is one of our biggest challenges as pastors in Africa, to help those who are afraid of other forces to trust in the Lord for guidance and protection.

The work of the Holy Spirit must therefore continue to work in us as Christians. He has certainly given us the Means of Grace to do this. Our Baptism should be a daily reminder to us of that new life in Christ into which we have been reborn. Paul states in Romans 6:4: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." We should continue frequently and faithfully to receive Christ's body and blood in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Again, as Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 11:26 "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." He also states in Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."

The danger often exists that we turn to Christianity as some kind of supernatural medicine which can magically cure our trouble, without realizing that the new Spirit of Christ within us needs to be constantly strengthened with word and sacraments as long as we live. "Dear friends," John writes in his first epistle (1 Jn 4:1ff), "do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world." John, we know, especially warns against "the spirit of the antichrist."

May we therefore, as the Apostle Paul admonishes, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph 6:10,11). Make use of the means of grace, God's word and sacraments, through which the Holy Spirit keeps us in the true faith.

Christians Are United in One Holy Christian Church

All believers everywhere in this world are united in one holy Christian church through the work of the Holy Spirit. By faith in Jesus their sins are washed away "by the washing with water through the word" (Eph 5:26). They are members of Christ's body (Eph 5:30). They are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens, "built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets,

with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:19,20). They are all “baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Co 12:13).

They are gathered into one spiritual body, and only God knows the members of his church (2 Ti 2:19). Yet we can be sure that his holy Christian Church is found where the gospel is preached and the sacraments are used as instituted by Christ (Mt 28:19,20). Jesus says, “Where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them” (Mt 18:20).

So also we are sure that the Lord Jesus is with us at this conference through his Holy Spirit. It is a great encouragement for me to be here personally. We come from different parts of the world. We have different cultural backgrounds. We speak different languages. Yet we have one spirit. Jesus said to the people who believed him, “If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples” (Jn 8:31). May the word of Christ dwell in us richly as we teach and admonish one another with all wisdom (Col 3:16).

I shall close with words from the book of Hebrews 10:24,25, “Let us consider how we may spur one another toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” On the last Day, as Luther closes his explanation to the Third article of our Creed, the Holy Spirit “will give to me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true.”

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The Holy Spirit Gives Spiritual Gifts to His Church

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Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Peru

The subject of spiritual gifts has received more detailed attention in the last few decades than perhaps ever before in the Lutheran church. The reason may be the challenge of the Pentecostal movement or the Charismatic movement, but a comparison with earlier writings and dogmatic treatments will show that very often it was not a separate topic, or was barely mentioned at all. For example, a free conference in 1972 had a series of five essays, published in a booklet, *God the Holy Spirit Acts*, but there was no essay dedicated to the topic of the gifts of the Spirit, and a cursory reading did not show any detailed discussion of the matter. Pieper does not have a special section of his *Dogmatics* dedicated to the subject either. Nor, as far as a quick survey of the table of contents revealed, does Hoenecke. This does not mean that the matter is never touched on, nor that there are not sections which give valuable insights concerning spiritual gifts, but in these treatments they do not receive the prominence which has become common in the last few decades.

It is probably this which above all leads to the charge that spiritual gifts have been neglected in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and which has led to the special challenge which the Charismatic movement presents to us in our day. However, I am happy to report that we are not so poor in resources for appreciating and evaluating properly the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it may at first seem. Luther, Walther and Pieper all discuss related movements, from the Anabaptists to the Methodists, and even classical Reformed to some extent, and the comments that they direct against such movements still give us many of the keys to a correct understanding of the true

doctrine of spiritual gifts, and a reaction to the false doctrine espoused by the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.

The greatest gift of the Holy Spirit

On the day of Pentecost, after the Holy Spirit had come upon the disciples with special manifestations, and had given them the ability to speak in other languages “the wonderful works of God,” Peter preached a powerful sermon. At the close of that sermon the people’s reaction to the sermon was that “they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Ac 2:37). Peter’s reply takes us to the heart of our topic. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The phrase, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” could be taken in two ways. Either it is the great gift of faith, the means of appropriating Christ and the forgiveness of sins, or it is the Holy Spirit himself, “the gift which is the Holy Spirit,” who comes to the baptized in baptism working repentance and faith, and thus giving the forgiveness of sins. The second is more probable. We see here that Peter ties the reception of the Holy Spirit himself, with all his gifts and graces, to the sacrament of Christian baptism. This is also the finding of Presbyterian scholar F. Dale Bruner. He states: “Our text teaches us that since the occurrence of Pentecost Christian baptism becomes the locus of the Spirit’s reception in response to the Spirit’s pressure in preaching. Henceforth, baptism is Pentecost. . . . The content is God’s free gift of the Holy Spirit. And after Pentecost this gift is offered, as here, with forgiveness, in the humble rite of baptism. Baptism becomes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Peter in Acts 2:38 offers no other definition.”¹ On Pentecost the word of Christ was preached, the sacrament of baptism was administered, and a vibrant Christian congregation was formed. Everyone who was baptized that day, according to Peter’s promise, received the gift of the Holy Spirit at the same time as he received saving faith and the forgiveness of sins.

The means of acquiring the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit

We maintain that the Holy Spirit himself with his grace, his gifts and his powerful working are available only in the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. Commenting on the statement of our Confessions in which Luther wrote: “We must maintain that God will not deal with us except through his external Word and sacrament. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and sacrament is of the devil,”² Walther comments: “Note well what our church says here. Whatever a person claims to have achieved in the line of grace apart from the Word and the sacraments is from the devil, for he has given it to him. Such a person has a false God, a false Christ, a false grace. Therefore if the enthusiasts would cling to their basic principles even to their death, not a one of them could be saved, for they always say that if you want to receive grace you have to pray until you feel that you are filled with it. But because God has His own also among these people, such homemade notions are cast overboard, especially in the hour of affliction, perhaps not until the time of death. Then they think of this or that beautiful passage and cling to such a rock and are saved even in the hour of death. This [is] the only way in which they can be saved. Anyone who wants to find grace elsewhere than in the Word and sacraments sees only an apparition, not grace itself.”³

Pieper insists on the same thing, and specifically mentions the gifts of the Holy Spirit. “But the remission of sins for Christ’s sake and faith in this remission, regeneration unto spiritual life and all the spiritual gifts connected with it, God will give only through the means of grace He has ordained, through the Word of the Gospel and the Sacraments.”⁴

He also quotes Luther: “God has established this order regarding His Holy Spirit, that ordinarily He is to come through the Word. Christ Himself says this at this place. . . . He will not have it that you fly to and fro to seek or to imagine a ‘Spirit’ so that you might say: I have received it through the ‘inner voice’ [Einsprechen] of the Holy Ghost. . . . Christ will not accept such inner voice, but binds us to His Word only; He does not want the Spirit separated from His Word. Therefore, if you hear some one boasting that he got something by inspiration or inner voice of the Holy Spirit, and it lacks God’s Word, be it what it may, then declare it to be the abominable devil.”⁵

We shall see later in the paper what the Pentecostals and Charismatics teach about the way in which the Spirit and his gifts come to men. For the moment we shall let this suffice, since this theme will have been adequately covered by Pastor Chinyama in the third essay. For our purposes, it is enough to insist that just as the Holy Spirit uses the means of grace to initiate and strengthen faith, those same means of grace are his means of producing the fruit of the Spirit in those who have been brought to faith by him, and to give them his gifts.

The fruits of the Spirit

In Galatians chapter 5 Paul discusses first the “acts of the sinful nature”, and then “the fruit of the Spirit.” “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22). The first term is love, and it subsumes all the following terms. All Christians receive a new nature which is characterized by these attractive fruits. It is significant that when Paul discusses the individual gifts of the Spirit, he generally insists that they are to be exercised in love, going so far as to say that they are utterly valueless unless they are accompanied by love.

Nevertheless, Paul does not picture Christians as ever reaching perfection in this life in regard to the fruits of the Spirit, but reminds them that they also have a fleshly nature, so that “the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Gal. 5:17). For that reason Paul reminds and exhorts us: “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” The presence of conflict, weakness, difficulty in living the Christian life as well as we would like is not evidence of the lack of the Holy Spirit, or that he has not yet come in his fullness. Rather, this very conflict is evidence of the Spirit’s presence, and it is through this conflict, as we are strengthened and encouraged by the means of grace, that the fruits of the Spirit express themselves.

These general fruits of the Spirit, however, which are to be common to all Christians, are not what are usually meant when we speak of the gifts of the Spirit. Spiritual gifts, rather, are the special endowments, different in the case of each Christian, which the Holy Spirit gives for the building up of Christ’s church.

Saints equipped by the Spirit to carry out his work

In Ephesians 4 Christ is presented as a triumphant king, ascended into heaven after a descent to earth in which he triumphed over every opposing power. The enemies whom he conquered were our enemies, sin, death, Satan, hell. For this reason he was able to give “gifts to men” (v. 8). Another term occurs in verse 7, “But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.” Since the grace has been apportioned or given (ejdovqh) according to the measure of the gift of Christ (kata; to; mevtron th` dwrea` tou` Cristou`), this is not the favorable attitude in the heart of God which is the basic meaning of the word cavri, but rather a concrete result of grace.⁶ In the case of Paul, it was his apostolic office. But he was not alone in receiving gifts from Christ. Among the gifts of the exalted Christ to the church were people with the gifts to carry out different aspects of the office of the holy ministry. “But to each one of us grace has been given.” “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (v. 11). A special place among the gifts which the risen Christ has given to his church is occupied by the different forms of the ministry of the Word. Some of these forms were temporary, given only in the formative years of the church. We no longer have apostles in the same sense, nor do we need more than those original apostles who together with the prophets are mentioned in Eph 2:19 as providing the foundation of the New Testament church (I believe the term prophets refers to the Old Testament prophets in this reference). Christ himself grants to the church ministers of the Word as his gifts, and the ministry of the Word is to be received by the church with full thanksgiving and appreciation. He who calls, also equips for that service for which he calls. “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant” (2 Co 3:5,6).

It could be asked, Why are we discussing a passage which deals with the gifts of the exalted Christ, when our theme is the gifts of the Holy Spirit? The reason is that the very same gifts are attributed to the Holy Spirit in other passages of Scripture. In 1 Co 12, for example, when spiritual gifts are mentioned, the three divine persons are mentioned as their source: "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men" (1 Co 12:4-6). And Paul speaks to pastors and teachers, the elders of the Ephesian church, and reminds them that the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd (pastor) the flock of God (Ac 20:28).

Chrysostom comments on this in his Homilies on Galatians: "But that it [the apostleship] was not entrusted to him by men, Luke declares in the words, 'As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul' (Ac 13:2). From this passage it is manifest that the power of the Son and Spirit is one, for being commissioned by the Spirit, he says that he was commissioned by Christ. This appears in another place, from his ascription of the things of God to the Spirit, in the words which he addresses to the elders at Miletus: 'Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, in the which the Holy Ghost hath made you bishops' (Acts 20:28). Yet in another Epistle he says, 'And God hath set some in the Church, first Apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers.' (1 Corinthians 12:28.) Thus he ascribes indifferently the things of the Spirit to God, and the things of God to the Spirit."⁷

However, it is also important that we note the purpose for which God has given gifted men to the church for the public ministry of the Word. It is not so that they will be the only people with gifts or a task in the church, but rather, "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12,13). Some, such as Stoeckhardt and Hodge, take the second element of verse 12 as a separate activity, and thus interpret the phrase as saying that the men that were given are to exercise themselves in the work of the ministry, that is, perform the duties of their public ministry. "They have been appointed to the 'work of ministering,' or 'the business of the service,' and this ministering is the 'building up of the body of Christ,' of the Church; it consists therefore of preaching and teaching."⁸ Others such as Lenski and Markus Barth, interpret as the NIV translates, "to prepare God's people for works of service." The second seems preferable. As all members receive gifts from the Holy Spirit, all are to exercise these gifts for the edification of the church. Nevertheless these works of service are not to be confused with the public work of the called ministry. For those who have the particular gifts of speaking words which encourage and build up the church, their activity would be more in line with the "mutual conversation and consolation of brethren"⁹ of the Smalcald Articles, which would include all private uses of the keys. The result will be that "then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:14-16). Each member of the body will have something to do so that the body reaches its goal. The public ministry has as one of its functions preparing and encouraging all the members of the body in using for the common good those gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them.

While the Ephesians passage speaks of gifted men as a special gift of Christ to the church, Romans 12 has a wider reach. Not only the public ministry of the word is mentioned, but also many other services which would be included in the service referred to in Ephesians 4:12.

Let us use our varied gifts according to the measure of faith and the gift given to us

"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give

generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Ro 12:6-8).

In this passage only the first term has a direct connection with the ministry of the Word. Some of the others may be reflective of offices in the church, occupied by those elders that did not labor in word and doctrine (1 Ti 5:17), but others seem to reflect the countless opportunities that God gives to members of the congregation whom he equips with special gifts to serve in those varied capacities. Remembering the purpose for which God gives the gifts, for the building up and benefit of the body, not for personal self-aggrandizement, each Christian is actively to use the gifts which have been entrusted to him or her.

Those who can find a special satisfaction in the countless types of service which are needed both within and outside the congregation are actively to use their gift and their opportunities. “If it is serving, let him serve.” In my last congregation in the United States, there were flowers on the altar every Sunday. For months I didn’t even know how they got there. A very kind and unpretentious member of the congregation simply always took care of seeing that they were there, without ever drawing attention to herself. And that is typical of the gift of serving when it is used as God intended. Pastor-teachers were listed in the Ephesians passage. But it seems that this passage in Romans is broader, and includes many members who have the special gift of being able to teach others. That gift, too, is to be exercised, whether on the congregational level, as our Sunday School and Vacation Bible School teachers do, or on the family level, or when there is an opportunity to teach others who do not know what the Word says about sin and salvation to those who fall into their circle of influence. Not only the gifts will vary, but the aptness for age levels or for teaching at different levels of complexity will vary. Paul is saying that whatever the level of ability, if God has given us this gift, we should use it according to that level for the good of the body.

Certainly many besides the called workers in a congregation will have the gift of finding just the right thing to say to encourage those who are suffering and dispirited. This gift, too, is to be used actively, so that the body will lack nothing. All Christians have the responsibility to give of their means for the spread of the gospel and for the alleviation of human suffering. Paul in this passage, however, implies that God gives certain individuals a special gift of finding joy in giving generously for the support of his church or for other needs. That gift is not to be resisted, but exercised. Here surely we are not dealing with a gift that could conceivably be limited to the public ministers.

Leadership is also mentioned. Any organization needs leaders, and the church is no exception. Yet its needs are greater than a worldly organization. The church needs people whom God has gifted so that they lead by example, by inspiration, and above all, for the glory of God and the benefit of his people, not for self-glory or even for the glory and success of the organization as such. When God supplies such consecrated leaders they are not to be despised nor undervalued. Nor should those whom God has given the gift of contributing to their brothers in this fashion turn away from leadership positions in the congregation and its organizations. This gift, too, is to be used.

Paul ends the list with showing mercy. But here Paul doesn’t just mention that the gift is to be used, but prescribes the manner in which it is to be used, “cheerfully.” Another dear lady from my former congregation could be the embodiment of this gift. Wherever she saw need, she would try to help in any way she could, always with cheerfulness, never grudgingly. It wasn’t that she had great resources; what she had was a big heart that the Holy Spirit had given her. Returning to the Ephesians passage, one of the responsibilities of the public ministers of the Word whom God has given to the church, is to encourage and train the members of the body to find those areas in which the Holy Spirit has given them gifts by which the body can be built up, not with legalistic pressure, but through teaching and encouraging to use faithfully the opportunities to serve which present themselves. Peter also writes an exhortation similar to St. Paul’s: “Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various

forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Pe 4:10,11).

The Corinthian problem

The Corinthian congregation appears to have had the gifts of the Holy Spirit in special abundance. What should have been a great blessing for the congregation, however, instead became a serious problem. The gifts themselves, of course, were not the problem. The manner in which they were evaluated and used was.

There is a reason why we have saved our consideration of this chapter until last. One is that in Pentecostal circles, chapters 12 to 14 of 1 Corinthians receive almost all the attention. Bruner writes: "The Pentecostal places unusual stress upon the gifts of the Spirit and particularly upon the gifts discussed in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14."¹⁰ He also says: ". . . in the life of the Pentecostal movement, as far as we have been able to observe, there appears to be no deliberate or widespread practice of the non-remarkable gifts per se. Therefore, if it can be said that Pentecostalism stresses the spiritual gifts, then it would be more accurate to say that it stresses the extraordinary spiritual gifts. For there is no serious emphasis in the Pentecostal movement on the gifts associated with (to take but one New Testament list) wisdom, knowledge, or faith, all somewhat intangible endowments. It is the more striking gifts which are the special Pentecostal concern."¹¹ Just because Paul in Corinthians is dealing, not with general exhortation, but the resolution of a problem, we can get a distorted picture of the Biblical teaching on spiritual gifts if we give first and primary attention to the 1 Corinthians passages. This can be illustrated by the argument of some Pentecostals that tongues are to be given the highest value, because otherwise Paul would not have spent so much time on them in 1 Corinthians 14.12

When we examine Paul's treatment of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, we find several emphases that we have seen before. He speaks of their diversity: "There are different kinds of gifts . . . There are different kinds of service, . . . There are different kinds of working" (v. 4). Later on, through a series of rhetorical questions, he reinforces this principle of variety. "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (vv. 29,30).

A second emphasis which may also be found in Ephesians, and more explicitly in Romans (12:4,5) is the comparison with a body. As in the physical body no member works against the other members of the body, but rather all aid and support each other with their particular functions, so in the spiritual body of Christ, the church, all gifts are to be used for the good of the body, rather than for selfish ends against the body. Here in 1 Corinthians 12:12f. Paul writes: "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. . . . If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."

While the Lord's initiative in determining the distribution of the gifts among the members of the congregation was implicit in the other treatments of spiritual gifts, in 1 Corinthians 12 the Spirit's sovereign will in determining who will receive what gift is made explicit and emphatic. After mentioning the message of wisdom, the message of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, different kinds of tongues (or languages) and interpretation of tongues, Paul writes: "All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines" (v. 11).

All are gifts of the same Spirit (vv. 4,7,8,9,11). It is possible that the term translated "spiritual gifts" in verse 1 could be translated "spiritual people." Tw'n pneumatikw'n could be either masculine or neuter. If this was the term which the Corinthian tongues speakers used for themselves, then it is

possible that Paul subtly changed the emphasis when he chose the term *cavrisma* in verse 4, to emphasize not a supposed higher status or quality of the persons who had particular gifts, but the fact that all were in fact gifts, provided purely out of grace, not in response to any merit or worthiness on the part of the recipients. It would then be a master stroke of pricking the bubble of pride and egoism which seemed to afflict the Corinthian tongues speakers.

The other special emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12 is the purpose of the gifts. "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (v. 7). Gifts of the Spirit do not have the purpose of bringing personal glory or providing an occasion for boasting, or envy, or for despising the recipients of "lesser" gifts. All are to be used for the common good. Nevertheless there is a certain hierarchy in the spiritual gifts. Those are most to be desired which best serve the common good, which serve particularly to build up the church (v. 31; 14:1,5). Thus Paul enumerates some of the gifts in verse 28: "And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues." The argument is made by some that the order does not indicate Paul's level of appreciation, but in view of the discussion in chapter 14 and the problem of the overvaluation of tongues in Corinth, it seems inescapable that when Paul begins with "first," "second," "third," he is establishing a scale of values based on the criterion of their contribution to the edification of the church.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is intimately related to both chapters 12 and 14. Since all spiritual gifts have been given not for selfish and egotistical use, but for others, to build up the body, Paul reminds the Corinthians that unless love, that queen of the fruits of the Spirit, predominates and motivates all practice of the spiritual gifts, they become worthless. Thus Paul ends 1 Cor. 12 with the words: "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." That most excellent way is the way of love. We are reminded that love is not self-seeking (13:5), that no matter what the spiritual gift, in contrast with faith, hope and love, it is temporal, and therefore limited. "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (v. 8). Following his magnificent hymn on selfless Christian love, Paul begins his 14th chapter with "Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts." Not just any gifts, however, but with a gentle corrective for the Corinthian specialization in the most showy but at the same time least useful of the gifts, he exhorts them, "especially the gift of prophecy."

Why does Paul suggest that they seek especially the gift of prophecy (probably a gift which God gave to some at that period through which he gave them special revelations of his Word and will to speak in the congregation as well as in other situations, cf. Rev. 1:3; 10:11; 19:10; 22:7; Acts 21:10-11; as well as verses 29-32 of this chapter)?¹³ It is because they speak in clear and intelligible words and thus edify the congregation. "But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church" (vv. 3,4). Since edification of the church, the contribution to the body, is the purpose of the spiritual gifts, Paul can say: "I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified" (v. 5).

Paul reinforces this by contrasting the effects of tongues with the effects of prophecy on a stranger who may happen to come into the worship service. "So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!'" (vv. 23-25). Indeed, the congregation itself will suffer if everyone insists on speaking in tongues, and there is no prophecy. "Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction?" (v. 6). Thus Paul can write: "So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up

the church" (v. 12). After regulating both the public exercise of tongues and prophecy (no tongues unless there is an interpreter, though they may be used in private, and even if there is an interpreter, no more than two or three people, as well as no more than two or three prophets) Paul concludes his discussion: "Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (vv. 39,40).

What were the tongues in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14? Most contemporary scholars take them to be ecstatic utterance, not necessarily in ordinary human languages. One book defines them: "Glossolalia appears, then, to be a form of the phenomenon of ecstatic speech which is characteristic of primitive Christianity, a phenomenon which—as we see from the history of religions—was very widespread and had its antecedents in the Judaism of the time of the New Testament, had its own terminology, and as we shall see, had its own proper original situation, in accord with the experience of the Spirit which existed in the primitive Christian community and with its eschatological consciousness, and it also had its own interpretation, derived from this situation."¹⁴ Hodge, however, makes a persuasive case for viewing them as languages not learned by the speaker, and not understood by the hearers, but nevertheless real human languages as were those spoken by the disciples on Pentecost, though he admits that no single theory meets all the difficulties presented by some of the passages. Those who interpret them as ecstatic speech like to point to 1 Corinthians 13:1, where Paul speaks of tongues of men and of angels. However, it seems that Paul is using hyperbole here, just as he does when he speaks of himself or an angel from heaven preaching another gospel. That doesn't imply that any angel from heaven really will preach another gospel, and it is unlikely that the 1 Corinthians 13 passage refers to speaking in angelic languages as a real occurrence in Corinth either. Chrysostom reminds us: "This whole passage is very obscure; but the obscurity arises from our ignorance of the facts described, which, though familiar to those to whom the apostle wrote, have ceased to occur."¹⁵

The Chrysostom quote raises another question. Did tongues disappear, or are they still present or once again present in the church today? If in fact they disappeared, there is not much need to inquire too deeply into their precise nature. And the historical evidence, as the Chrysostom quote from the fourth century shows, is that they did disappear. Only in marginal and heretical groups such as Montanism was there any widespread practice of what were represented as special miraculous sign gifts after the immediate post-apostolic period.

Some have in fact attempted to demonstrate exegetically that tongues had to cease with the completion of the New Testament canon. An example is Douglas Judisch in his book: *An Evaluation of Claims to the Charismatic Gifts*. Judisch states: "The thesis of this study, however, is that it is contrary to the Word of God to claim prophetic gifts in the postapostolic era. . . . The charismatic movement of course warns us not to limit the Holy Spirit in this way. The truth of the matter, however, is that we must recognize and respect the limits that the Holy Spirit has set upon Himself. Indeed we limit the Spirit if we insist that He conduct Himself in the same way in every age—if we argue that, because he bestowed miraculous powers on men in biblical times, He must bestow miraculous powers on us today as well." He particularly argues on the basis of the phrase "but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Co 13:10). He argues that the "perfection" or "perfect thing" is the completed revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures, and that therefore the Scriptures themselves have declared that the prophetic gifts must cease with the passing of the apostolic age.

Judisch's interpretation, while possible, does not seem to be well enough established to make this a *sedes doctrinae* for the cessation of tongues, however. It seems to me that Joel Gerlach offers us a better criterion for evaluating the claims of the continuance of the special miraculous gifts, and particularly the gift of tongues or languages. Prof. Gerlach writes: "That makes for an interesting bit of exegesis consistent with the reading of the tongues episodes in Acts by these interpreters. It also simplifies the solution to the tongues problem today for those who accept that exegesis. To us however it seems to press something from the text which Paul does not explicitly say. That tongues will cease—yes, definitely. That tongues will cease prior to the rendering

useless of prophecy and knowledge—no, not positively. In context Paul's purpose is merely to establish the supremacy of love over all else (cf. verses 8 and 13 particularly). We must be cautious not to make Paul say more than he intended to say. Moreover, an assessment of the tongues movement today is possible without recourse to this particular passage."¹⁶

Prof. Gerlach adds a little later on in his article: "Our basis for judging righteous judgment is the whole counsel of God. Thus, if a person comes to me and claims to have the gift of tongues, the important thing for me is not to hear a demonstration so that I can determine whether or not it is of the Spirit. I want to know how that person understands and confesses the gospel. If anyone comes to me, and does not bring 'this doctrine,' then I am not to receive him into my house nor bid him God speed (2 Jn 10). In such a case there is no need to determine whether his ecstatic speech is of the Spirit or not. His doctrine certainly is not.

"On the other hand, if someone comes to me (as in one case with which I am familiar) and claims to have the gift of tongues, and confesses with me the whole doctrine of the gospel, then I am going to extend the right hand of fellowship to that person. As for the tongues, I still may not be certain whether it is a thing of the Spirit or not. I am not certain that it is, but neither can I be certain that it is not. I will simply withhold my judgment. Meanwhile, I will counsel that person with regard to the restrictions St. Paul imposes upon the use of this gift in the church. He will use it privately, not publicly without an interpreter. And if it is ecstatic rather than a legitimate language, there will be no interpreter available. He will not encourage others to seek the gift because Christians are to desire prophecy rather than tongues, and because in all authenticated cases it was not given to individuals seeking it or even expecting it. I will also warn him about the abuse of the gift as in the case of the Corinthians lest he become 'puffed up' as did many of them."¹⁷

An examination of Pentecostal and Charismatic positions on the gifts of the Spirit

Following Prof. Gerlach's counsel that the true basis for judging those who claim to possess the gift of tongues and other special charismatic gifts is to examine their doctrine, we shall take a brief look at some of the teachings of those who promote particularly the gift of tongues in our day, the Pentecostals and Charismatics.

When we test the doctrine of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement, it will be found wanting in many areas. Perhaps one of the most obvious is the common Pentecostal insistence that all Christians should speak in tongues. The obvious answer to Paul's rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 12:30, "Do all speak in tongues?", is No, unless it is also to be maintained that all should be apostles. Pentecostals have several ways of trying to escape the force of this passage, some claiming that there is a distinction between speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues as in Corinth,¹⁸ while others claim that Paul speaks there only of the public use of the gift, while all should use it privately.¹⁹

Another obvious problem is that Paul doesn't tell the Corinthians that they should all speak in tongues, but rather that they should seek "especially the gift of prophecy" (1 Co 14:1); again he says, "[B]ut I would rather have you prophesy" (v. 5). The Pentecostal overemphasis on tongues and on the spectacular in general contradicts Paul's entire treatment in 1 Corinthians 12–14.

A far greater problem, however, is what Pentecostal teaching does to grace alone, faith alone, and Scripture alone, as well as to baptism as a means of grace.

Regarding grace alone, Bruner describes the Pentecostal doctrine as deficient in several respects. "Grace, according to Paul, is the condition of the believer's mastery of sin. It is the tragedy of Pentecostalism, on the other hand, that it makes the mastery of what it considers sin to be the condition for the grace of the Holy Spirit. Grace itself, or the forgiveness of sins, appears in Pentecostalism to play a role only in the Christian's conversion, rarely appears in other discussions, and thus ceases for all practical purposes to be the center, accompaniment, and determinant of the whole Christian life. The reversal of the apostolic sequence of grace-then-obedience lies at the bottom of the Pentecostal error."²⁰

Pentecostalism, together with the Charismatic movement, teaches that there must be a second great crisis experience after conversion and that the full coming of the Holy Spirit must await that event. This coming is dependent on the Christian's fulfilling a number of conditions. According to mainstream Pentecostal thinking, a believer must pass through several stages before he is eligible for the reception of the Holy Spirit in his fullness.

We can see some of this illustrated in the example which Bruner cites of a Pentecostal exegesis of Acts 2:38. Donald Gee, a Pentecostal writer, says Bruner, finds "three specific conditions for the baptism in the Holy Spirit: repentance, baptism, and reception. It is important for us to mark how these terms are defined in the exposition in order for us to understand the Pentecostal thought-world." He must repent, that is forsake all sin, then he must be baptized in water, a symbolic public act that includes more than the baptismal rite but rather "applies to all-round obedience in everything. It means actions that witness before all that you have accepted the position of discipleship. Notice particularly that baptism is for 'remission of sins.' It is hopeless to expect the Holy Spirit to come in and fill you until your heart is clean." Bruner remarks: "It may be observed here that baptism is given a very practical and active interpretation. Baptism means, as Gee emphasizes, 'actions,' the believer's actions—'actions that witness before all that you have accepted the position of discipleship.' Or as Pentecostals usually express it, baptism signifies obedience. Obedience is the positive complement to and fulfillment of repentance which is primarily negative. In Pentecostal exegesis obedience as a condition for the spiritual baptism means, specifically as Gee explained above, activity directed toward the promised removal of all remaining sin through Christ's blood, toward what is called 'heart cleanness,' so that the Holy Spirit may have a suitable dwelling-place in the believer."²¹

While Pentecostal writers such as Gee do go on to speak of faith in third place, and can even say that "we 'receive the promise of the Spirit through faith' (Gal 3:14). Ultimately there can be no other way," it is important to understand what Pentecostals understand by faith in this context. For faith is not simple trust in the divine promise, but rather what I can finally do after I have fulfilled all the other conditions for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Chief among these conditions is a separation from sin, or obedience. "Sin is something which, with Christ's help, the Christian can, indeed must, remove prior to his being able to receive the full gift of the Holy Spirit. Obedience has as its major task the removal of sin. For 'you can receive the Holy Spirit, but not with sin in your heart' (Conn [a Pentecostal writer])."²² The believer, without having the full presence of the Holy Spirit we might add, must make his heart sinless, so that the Holy Spirit can come in. Bruner aptly comments that of "the believer is required nothing less than the supreme accomplishment—the removal of sin—and this prior to the supreme divine bestowment, the full gift of the Holy Spirit. Without the filling of the Holy Spirit men are given the Herculean task of removing all known sin—in order, finally, to obtain this full Spirit. But if men can do all this without the full Spirit why is he necessary?"²³

When the Christian has accomplished this, then he may believe. "Obedience facilitates faith. This is why it will be noticed that faith is not infrequently placed at the end of Pentecostal lists. For when the necessary obediences have been carried out, then one can believe that God will fulfill his promise."²⁴ Bruner quotes a Pentecostal writer: "If, upon searching your heart you find that you are truly submissive to the revealed will of God and in harmony with your fellow man . . . , then it will be easy for you to exercise that simple and childlike faith in the Lord that will bring a quick response from him."²⁵ As Bruner summarizes the Pentecostal concept of faith: "Faith to the Pentecostal means going all the way with Christ; being totally yielded. Thus the first faith is not ordinarily sufficient for the gift of the Spirit, due not only to its insufficient object or direction (Christ and not the Spirit himself) but also, and as important, due to its insufficient content or substance. Pentecostal faith, like Pentecostal obedience, is not normally effective until it can approach totality. Total obedience plus total faith should grant the total baptism in the Holy Spirit."²⁶

The contrast of this with the Scriptural doctrine that the Holy Spirit is received purely by grace, through baptism and the promise of the gospel, should be evident. Baptism is man's obedience. All activity of the Spirit has been removed from it. Small wonder that the Pentecostals must then

look for another stage when the Spirit finally comes to them, through what Bruner calls the real Pentecostal sacrament, speaking in tongues. What is gift in the Scriptures becomes reward in Pentecostal teaching. Our Confessions reject: "the teaching of the Synergists, who maintain that in spiritual things man is not wholly dead toward that which is good, but only grievously wounded and half-dead. As a result, his free will is too weak to make a beginning and by its own powers to convert itself to God and to obey the law of God from the heart. Nevertheless, after the Holy Spirit has made the beginning and has called us by the Gospel and offers his grace, the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, then the free will by its own natural powers can meet God and to some degree—though only to a small extent and in a weak way—help and cooperate and prepare itself for the grace of God, embrace and accept it, believe the Gospel, and by its own powers cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the continuation and preservation of this work within us. But we have shown above that such a capacity naturally to prepare oneself for grace does not come from man's own natural powers but solely through the operation of the Holy Spirit."²⁷ And also, "When [not before] we have received the Holy Spirit by faith, the keeping of the law necessarily follows, by which love, patience, chastity, and other fruits of the Spirit gradually increase."²⁸

The Pentecostal teaching on conditions for the full reception of the Holy Spirit finally tends to subvert the very substance of the gospel. Bruner points this out by once again calling attention to the Pentecostal doctrine of absolutes. "But a difference separates the two classic religious ways—the ways, respectively, of law and gospel, to and of the Spirit—and this difference may be discovered by observing the location of absolutes. The way of the law places the absolutes on men; the way of the gospel places the absolutes on the Messiah. The necessity of the law's righteous demands being fulfilled is of central concern to the gospel. But the gospel removes the burden of absolute fulfillment from the back of the believer to the cross of Christ and we may say that this is what makes it gospel."²⁹

Bruner concludes with a devastating evaluation of what is truly at stake in the Pentecostal insistence on a later baptism in the Holy Spirit with its initial evidence as speaking in tongues. "But something graver must be said about the Pentecostal evidence. The Pentecostal evidence is not simply a harmless idiosyncrasy which can be smiled upon in its naiveté and passed by. For since this evidence is required of Christians in addition to faith before they can have God in his fullness, it threatens to remove Pentecostalism outside the sphere of Christian faith. The Pentecostal evidence bears the marks of the demand in the early church for circumcision (cf. Gal. Passim; Ac 15). And Paul did not look upon this or any addition to faith as harmless."³⁰ Thus Bruner can say, and we concur in his judgment, "The problem in Pentecostalism is not that Pentecostals take the Bible too seriously or literally but that Pentecostalism as a rule does not take that which the Bible exists to teach seriously enough—the Bible's message and *raison d'être*, the gospel. The Pentecostal conviction, in Hollenweger's words, that 'we must fulfill the whole Scripture' . . . is precisely the message of the law (cf. Gal 3:10-13). . . with which Paul contrasts the message of the gospel. The false Pentecostal Bible understanding, in our opinion, flows at its deepest level from a false understanding of the gospel, not from a failure to understand the Scripture less literally."³¹

These are just a few of the areas in which Pentecostalism can be placed before the bar of Scripture and found to be in serious and soul destroying error. Of course, if we were to believe the Pentecostals, we would have no reason to discuss the gifts of the Spirit, for they are available only after we have earned the so called gift of the baptism in the Holy Spirit by meeting all the proper conditions and speaking in tongues. God preserve us from such a perversion of a precious doctrine of the Holy Scripture!

Where do we receive the Spirit together with all his gifts and graces? We shall allow Luther to remind us once more: "For what the Holy Spirit works in us we, too, know and teach, thanks to God, even more and better than they. But we should not permit Him thus to be torn from Baptism and the Sacrament and made to stand in an empty corner, as they stare into space for the Spirit and seek private revelations apart from the Word and God's order. For we know that He wants to be active in us through the very Word and Sacrament and in no other way. For this reason there

is no need of searching further for the Spirit if we have this Sacrament of Baptism; because we hear from Christ's Word and institution that the name of the Holy Ghost, as of the Father and of the Son, i.e., the name of the whole divine Majesty, is present there. Since, however, God's name and Word is there present, you must not regard it as simple and plain water, accomplishing no more than bathing water, but you must regard it as a water that washes us of our sins and Scripture calls a washing of regeneration, by which we are born again into eternal life.³²

May God grant us, though his appointed means of grace, a rich measure of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, gifted men to guide our congregations, gifted people to serve one another in love, and true edification of the body of Christ through the rich application of the gifts of the Spirit. May we be renewed day by day through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and may his gifts come to ever more people through the preaching of the gracious gospel of the forgiveness of sins through Christ. And may we be preserved from all perversions of the Spirit's gifts which convert the charismata, gifts of grace, into rewards for human effort, which lead to spiritual pride and the classification of true Christians as carnal and inferior because they cannot prove with tongues that they possess the Holy Spirit. Let us continue to see the evidence of the Spirit and his gifts where we may truly find them, in the preaching of his Word and in the precious fruits of faith, including faithful use of the non-spectacular gifts of the Spirit in the everyday walk of struggle with sin which is the Christian's daily task. Let us remember that the Spirit has been given for the conflict; he is not the reward for having won the conflict on our own.

Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord!
Be all Thy graces now outpoured
On each believer's mind and heart;
Thy fervent love to them impart. TLH 224:1

Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord: □ Preserve Our Unity of Faith

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Introduction

If this were a business training session, or a professional conference of some kind, I'm not sure I'd like to be the seventh presenter near the end of the schedule. To look at the other six topics is to see that the Holy Spirit is receiving our full attention during this entire conference. But that is good, and if what I present has been included in the other papers, so much the better. This is one subject that can not get enough attention in our world. As Paul told Timothy: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Ti 3:16). Note that Jesus Christ is the focus of these words, the author and finisher of our salvation, but see also the prominent role that the Holy Spirit plays in Paul's teaching to Timothy. My prayer as I present this paper to you as brothers is that you view me as Paul wanted to be seen when he said, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ, and as those entrusted with the secret things of God" (1 Co 4:1). In this paper we want to stress that it is only by the Holy Spirit that we are united in faith, and it is only by the Holy Spirit that we are preserved in that unity.

I. Only by the Spirit Are We United in Faith.

Our minds can only dream of the unity that existed when God rested on the seventh day. Perfect unity between Creator and created was coupled with perfect unity between husband and wife. How tragically that unity was shattered between holy God and his disobedient creation when our first parents fell into sin! And how quickly other evidences of fractured unity reared their ugly heads. How long was it before "the Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." How could such a difference arise so quickly? The

boys had the same parents as teachers and role models. In his grace God even reached out to Cain and said, "If you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Cain didn't listen, and murder followed in short order.

That lesson is repeated more often than we might wish on the pages of Holy Scripture. For instance, how could both Judas and Peter sit at the feet of the Master for over three years, and still miss so much? With Judas it was greed, a blinding desire for the material things in life which left him in despair, willfully choosing eternal separation from God in hell. With Peter it was pride and self-confidence. All by himself he would stand tall for Jesus, and even die rather than deny. Yet, you know what happened. Not once, but three times he denied and even added other sins to that denial. Yet, when the Lord turned and looked at him, he wept bitterly but did not despair. Why? God's Word told us only minutes ago: "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great." The record shows that Judas received even more warnings than Peter during the Lord's earthly ministry, and yet he refused the blood which would be shed in only a matter of hours for him and for all people of all times. The only conclusion we can reach on the basis of Scripture is that if we are saved it is wholly, solely and completely the work of God's gracious working by the Holy Spirit through the gospel. On the other hand, if we are condemned, it is only because of the self-imposed blindness of rejection and unbelief.

Later in life Peter would say this: "In his great mercy he [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pe 1:3b-5). The first thing that comes to mind for us as children of God when we hear about a "new birth" is Holy Baptism. By this gift of God many of us were first made members of God's eternal family. Listen as Paul echoes this same truth: "But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Tit 3:4-7).

But back to Peter's words for a minute. What do these words mean: "you, who through faith are shielded by God's power"? It is important to see that God's Word never confuses "grace" and "omnipotence." Faith is created, sustained and strengthened by grace alone. Only grace, not omnipotence or any other kind of irresistible power or force, reaches into the heart and soul and works spiritual blessings. The only tool which grace employs is the Word and sacraments as its means.

Omnipotence, on the other hand, operates in a different realm. It does not operate in or on our faith as if it were some kind of irresistible power. No, God's omnipotence works above, over and around us, and its force is felt, not by us, but upon our enemies: the devil, the world and our sinful flesh. Paul tells us: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Co 10:13). In every spiritual danger and trouble faith turns to God by grace and trusts his promise to use his power to shield us and provide a way of escape for us. We need to learn from Daniel in the lions' den and the three men in the fiery furnace. Remember also Luther's words from the Sixth Petition: "We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory." That we should be united in this faith as brothers is a miracle of God's grace, and one more evidence of his power to ward off the constant attacks of the three enemies who hound us relentlessly.

Another evidence that it is only by the Spirit that we are united in faith comes from Paul's letter to the Thessalonian congregation: "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it

actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Th 2:13). What does this mean? Those of us who first learned God's Word using the King James translation remember that last part of the above passage this way: "ye received it, not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you who believe." Paul cited examples of the Word's effectiveness in the Thessalonian believers earlier in the letter. Here are some of them: "We continually remember before our God and Father your works produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Th 1:3). And again: "Our gospel came to you not simply in words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (1 Th 1:5). And again: "You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Th 1:6b). And finally: "[Y]our faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the true and living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath" (1 Th 1:8b-10). Here I should insert Article I of the proposed confession, The Eternal Word: A Lutheran Confession for the Twenty-first Century. It was drafted on the basis of essays presented at the 1993 convention of the CELC and presented for adoption at this conference. It is our clear conviction that only the Holy Spirit can unite us in faith, and that his eternal Word is the only source of such unity.

Now consider the companion passage from St. Paul's second letter to the same congregation: "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Th 2:13-15). Notice how both start. "We ought always to thank God." Paul begins so many of his sentences with these words that we almost take them for granted and jump over them. They are not idle words, but rather they are Paul's heartfelt expression of thanksgiving to God the Holy Spirit for the unity of faith which God alone can give. Notice also how completely he gives God the credit for faith and unity of faith. He says: "from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit." What an awesome mystery confronts us each time we as believers ponder the truth that our God chose us from before the foundation of the world. How else can we possibly begin to give thanks without also taking notice when Paul encourages us to "stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by mouth or by letter."

No discussion of our unity of faith would be complete without also reflecting on these words of Jesus, spoken to his heavenly Father in prayer: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me, and they have obeyed your word" (Jn 17:6). Then he said, in preparation for his great sacrifice, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (Jn 17:11). And finally, as he looked forward down through the centuries, he added these words to those of us assembled here in Winter Haven, Florida, this day: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one, as we are one" (Jn 17:20-22). So much more could be said about the glorious truth that it is only by the Holy Spirit's gracious power that we are united in the faith, but it is time to move on to the equally glorious fact that it is only by the Spirit's working that we are preserved in this most holy faith.

II. Only by the Spirit Are We Preserved in Unity of Faith.

Our Lord was not alone in praying for unity in his Church. So also did Paul and Peter on many occasions. It hardly needs repeating that each time we pray the Lord's Prayer we join the throng that seeks to hallow God's name, have his kingdom come to us and others, and his gracious good will be done in all that we think, say and do. That those are the first three petitions did not

happen by mere chance or accident. Unless God's Word is taught and practiced in all its truth and purity, there can be no unity in Christ's Church. Nor can his kingdom come, unless "our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy Word, and lead a godly life now on earth and forever in heaven" (The Second Petition, "How does God's kingdom come?" Luther's Small Catechism). The third petition underscores the same truth as follows: "God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live."

First of all let me take you to a place in Scripture which starts with the Word as the foundation and from there proceeds to a prayer that God would not only give but preserve unity of faith among believers. "For everything that that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Ro 15:4-7). The formula is really very simple. (1) Start with the premise that everything in God's Word was written to teach us. (2) Ask God to give a spirit of unity so that we may with one mouth and mind glorify him as we follow Christ Jesus. (3) Accept one another, always remembering how Jesus accepted each of us as lost and condemned creatures, patiently leading and teaching us everything we know about the one true God. (4) The goal is always and only to bring praise to God.

Jesus also gives us a simple formula for preserving our God-given unity as believers. He said: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Unfortunately, when unity in the Church is threatened, the formula of Paul and Jesus is sometimes replaced by human devices. Unity in the Church can not be maintained by agreeing to disagree. Nor can it be maintained by electing the "right" slate of candidates, who then will be able to restore unity by the power of persuasion or position. Preserving the unity of faith is the work of the Spirit through the Word, and not the result of human maneuvering and machination. St. Paul might want to add these words to this point: "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Co 10:5). And to do that it is also necessary to heed the following: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who . . . did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing. . . ." (Php 2:5,6a). Only when and where the Spirit gives unity of heart and mouth can that unity be preserved and strengthened.

Paul underscores this truth in another context as well: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might rest not on man's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Co 2:1-5). Corinth was as much a septic tank as are many of the large cities in America today. Not only that, the infant believers in that congregation were still very weak, still prone to personality attachment, still lax in discipline, still "sleeping" when it came to something as important as the Lord's Supper. No wonder Paul trembled! But he did not resort to "eloquence or superior wisdom," both of which he possessed in rich measure from our God who gives all talents and abilities to His people. No, Paul preached "Christ and him crucified," and his message and his preaching were "a demonstration of the Spirit's power." What a testimony! What a lesson for us to ponder and emulate!

Christ's Church faces threats to unity of faith in every generation. Satan can't stand to let the gospel march to victory without doing everything in his power to obstruct God's glorious plan. These threats take on many forms as we will see by reviewing a number of them from the pages of Scripture. These examples can be most instructive for us on our particular watch in history to insure that under God's grace we preserve the gift of unity with which he has blessed us.

Sometimes unity is threatened by something as simple as an innocent lack of understanding, and that might even include something very basic to our faith and doctrine. For example: “Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor, and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John” (Ac 18:24,25). What high grades Apollos receives under inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was learned and spoke with great fervor as he taught about Jesus accurately. There was only one problem. Somehow during his training the subject of baptism either had not come up, or else it had not been taught thoroughly. The only baptism he knew of was that of John the Baptist, which Paul later described as follows: “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance” (Ac 19:4a). So what was to be done to correct the misunderstanding, or perhaps better, the lack of understanding on the part of Apollos? “When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately” (Ac 18:26). What a beautiful solution. In the privacy of the home of believers the matter was resolved, I am sure, with thankfulness on the part of Apollos. Would that all differences, difficulties and threats to unity could be resolved with such ease!

Sometimes it takes a larger group to clarify an issue. “Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses’” (Ac 15:5). How was this matter handled? “Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question” (Ac 15:2b). What transpired? “After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: ‘Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between them and us, for he purified their hearts by faith. . . . No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are’” (Ac 15:6-9,11). Then it was James who spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself” (Ac 15:13,14). He then verified this by quoting from Amos 9:11,12. And, finally, we are told: “Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers. With them they sent the following letter . . .” (Ac 15:22,23a). That letter is also included in the sacred record (Ac 15:23-29).

A number of lessons are worth noting in this exchange. First of all, the issue was confronted and not swept under the carpet. Secondly, they chose leaders who were capable, gifted men who were filled with the Spirit, to lead the delegation. Thirdly, they discussed the issue openly, looking to those with the most experience and knowledge to lead that discussion. Fourthly, they formulated a response and supported it with Scripture. And finally, they not only sent a delegation back to Antioch but also put that response in writing so that all might gain the benefit of it. What a wonderful procedure they followed in order to preserve the unity of faith!

Unfortunately, not every threat to unity has the same outcome as the two noted above. The Scriptures provide abundant instruction as well for those threats which confront the church and do not reach harmonious resolution. For example, God’s Word tells us: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God: whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (2 Jn 9-11). All three of John’s epistles are filled with instruction on preserving the unity of faith on the basis of Biblical truth. Paul adds this perspective: “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who

have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness” (2 Th 2:9-12). And to Timothy Paul said this: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (1 Ti 4:1,2). Any number of similar warnings could be added to this list of threats to the unity of the church, but these three will serve to alert us to the forces of evil that are at work seeking to destroy the unity of faith as Satan’s agents in every age of the Church’s history. The words: “God sends them a powerful delusion,” and “all will be condemned who do not believe the truth,” are chilling to ponder, and yet our God has warned us that these things will happen.

So what are we to do when such things rear their ugly heads during our watch in the Lord’s Church? From one imprisoned for his unswerving loyalty to Christ and God’s Word we hear this: “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1-3). Elsewhere Paul added: “And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way that you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Col 4:3-6). And Peter, who was slow to learn this truth, also adds: “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior may be ashamed of their slander” (1 Pe 3:15,16). And, finally, our God also says this: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:1,2).

Against that backdrop, what are we to do when we come face to face with those who persist in undermining the authority of Scripture and stray away from the clear teachings of God’s holy Word? Our God does not fail us. His directive is clear: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Ro 16:17,18). In another context Paul paraphrases Isaiah 52:11 when he says to the Corinthians: “‘Therefore come out from them and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Co 6:17–7:1). There have always been those who argue that these verses only applied to the situations which prevailed in Paul’s day at the churches in Rome and Corinth. But the Word speaks clearly and presents a general, timeless and universal principle, one which is to guide Christ’s Church until his return in glory. We are always to be on guard against any and all who persist in disturbing the church’s unity by causing divisions and putting obstacles in our way that are contrary to the teaching we have learned. If we were to see this happening, and in spite of it continue to practice fellowship with those who persist in these activities, our own actions would be a cause of division and offense. Worse than that, to ignore this principle, or to refuse to apply it, jeopardizes our own fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit gave us our unity of faith and uses this principle to preserve our unity of faith!

Concluding Thoughts

I had just completed the third year of the WELS eight year worker training program for the public ministry when in 1961 the WELS in convention severed fellowship with the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. That in turn led to the dissolution of the old Synodical Conference, which for years upon years had been the Spirit’s tool to promote and preserve unity of faith. My mentors back then already spoke often and enthusiastically about the need for a new Synodical

Conference which would do the same for those still in fellowship with us, and growing numbers of national churches around the world who were maturing under the Spirit's guidance and gift. Eventually, this conference, the Confessional Evangelical Lutheran Conference, was God's answer to that desire to promote, strengthen and preserve our God-given unity.

Reflect with me one final moment on how this conference would have looked in 1961. There may have been a number of Apaches there. Possibly some Zambians might have made the trip, but no one from Malawi, because we did not enter that field until 1963. There may have been Japanese representatives. There would have been representatives from Germany. The appeal from Nigeria had not as yet arrived, nor had the plea from Cameroon. Hong Kong didn't make contact for another year, and Mexico asked for help a year after that. We were not yet in Puerto Rico, and Colombia started twelve years after that. Taiwan and Indonesia would soon follow, as would Brazil. And most recently, look at Russia, Bulgaria, Albania, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Thailand and India. While not all these churches are represented here as of yet (and I ask our ELS brothers to fill in their fields as well; also we take note of the formation of the LBK in 1974), might we not pray for the day when this conference will have representation, not only from those here named, but also from many others as well? I pray that the Holy Spirit who has united us in faith will continue to preserve us in that special gift of his grace, so that together we might share his saving Word with countless others, until that glorious moment when we will all be privileged to join the throng around God's throne "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev 7:9b). Together then we will sing eternally: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10). Then will also be heard this echo: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever, Amen!" (Rev 7:12).