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## De Opere Spiritus Sancti

By L. B. BUCHHEIMER

Article 5 of the Magna Charta of our Church bears the superscription "Of the Office of the Ministry." Specifically treated in Article XIV, it is here spoken of only in an incidental way, viz., as the office which is charged with administering the means of grace. Melancthon wants to teach how faith is obtained, and that is through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps—and here let it be remembered that the articles of our standard Confession originally had no superscriptions but that these were added at a later time—more properly the heading might be: "On the Origin and the Cause of Faith," or, enlarging the scope: "On the Work of the Holy Spirit." The article reads: "That we may obtain this faith, the office of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments is instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as their instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake. They condemn the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparation and works." Most illuminatingly does this article set forth a vital subject.

Nowhere does the difference between Lutheran theology and all other theologies appear more manifest than in the place given to the Holy Spirit in their respective systems. Here are some of the most important points of divergence that



separate Lutheranism from all other teachings. It is a difference that appears not only in theoretical statement, but one that in practical matters and methods of work makes and marks our Lutheran Church separate and apart from all others.

To begin with, there is a theology that has its center in God the Father, in His will and sovereignty (Calvin's); there is a theology that finds its center in Christ and the Cross; and there is a theology that revolves around the Holy Spirit and His work. Lutheran theology is Christocentric: Christ and His work it emphasizes above all things. We would not thereby in the least ignore or dishonor the Father or the Spirit. We would simply put that first which God's Word puts first. Thus, in the New Testament benediction it is the grace of the Lord that is put before everything else, then the love of God the Father, and, last of all, the communion of the Holy Spirit. With St. Paul the Lutheran theologian declares: "I determined not to know anything among you save Christ and Him Crucified." By this he evidently means, not that it was his purpose to ignore all else or to consider no other doctrine, but that he would view them all only in their relation to Christ and His Cross.

Lutheran theology regards Christ and His mediatorial work the center and substance of divine revelation. The whole plan of salvation can be rightly understood and interpreted only when we begin with Christ and view every teaching of the Scriptures in the light of His redemptive work. It has been this rule that has guided our Church in developing and setting forth the doctrines of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was sent only to reveal and apply the things of Christ. "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." "When the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth, for He shall not speak of Himself. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you." The Holy Spirit has not come into the world to speak for Himself, or to act for Himself, or in any sense to do an independent work, but He is sent by the Father and the Son upon the basis of what the Son has already done. He comes to take up and carry on the work of human salvation by applying to men the grace of the Son. — In a theology that is Christo-



centric the Holy Spirit must occupy a place in proper relation to Christ and the atonement effected by Him. There are those who so exalt the Spirit that they thereby neglect and obscure the work of Christ. They so magnify sanctification as to minimize justification. They would so direct attention to the Spirit, would so absorb mind and heart in the Spirit's work, as to turn men away from Christ and thus defeat the very object and purpose of the Holy Spirit, who desires nothing so much as to direct us to Christ. — In Lutheran theology the Holy Spirit occupies no such place. In no way do we exalt the Holy Spirit and His work *in us*, so as to disparage or obscure Christ's work *for us*. While in rank and power the Holy Spirit's work is co-ordinate with that of Christ, yet it bears the closest relationship to Christ and His work, and must not be separated therefrom. The Holy Spirit sent by Christ, bringing all the fullness of Christ's grace, comes in Christ's name, and bearing witness of Christ, He takes the things of Christ and declares them unto men. In other words: "The Spirit comes not to glorify Himself, not to be first and chief, not Himself to absorb all thoughts and attention, nor to be the great and almost exclusive subject of our prayers and preachings, but rather to turn every eye and every heart to Christ." This, then, is the place of the Holy Spirit in Lutheran theology in respect to His relation to Christ. — We teach accordingly that it is the peculiar province of the Holy Spirit in the work of human salvation to bring to men and apply this redemptive work of Christ, and thereby to produce faith and through faith justification and all that accompanies and results therefrom.

But in accomplishing His work He confines His operations to the use of means, the means of God's own appointment.

And now, taking another aspect of our subject, we may say that the place of the Holy Spirit in Lutheran theology is *that of union with the divinely appointed means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments*. Lutheran theology looks nowhere else for the Holy Spirit in the accomplishment of His precious work upon the hearts of men, and, on the other hand, it has the utmost confidence that the Spirit will always be found in living, active, efficacious connection with these means, "for by the Word and Sacraments, as by instruments, the Holy Spirit is given," declares the 5th Article of our Augsburg



**Confession.** And the same article emphatically rejects the teaching of those who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men without the outward Word. That the Holy Spirit in converting and saving men operates only by the Word is the position maintained by our theologians and by our Confessions. — Says Dr. Luther in the Smalcald Articles: “We must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit of grace to no one except through or with the preceding outward Word.” “We must constantly maintain that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments, and that whatever without the Word and the Sacraments is extolled as Spirit is the devil himself.”

Lutheran theology teaches that the Gospel always possesses divine power unto salvation, because it is always accompanied by the life-giving Spirit. The Holy Spirit is joined to the Word indissolubly and communicates thereto divine and saving power. The Word that we preach is never a dead, empty, powerless word. It is the power of God unto salvation. It is the Word of the Spirit. “The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life.” The Word and the Spirit are so conjoined and united together that whatever the Spirit accomplishes for the salvation of men He accomplishes through the Word, and whatever effects are produced by the Word we know to be the work of the Spirit. There are many who seem to regard any use of, or reliance upon, external means as not only unnecessary, but as direct antagonism to the work of the Spirit. They appear to be persuaded that the farther we get away from the means of grace, the more will they have of the Spirit. The idea of the spiritual must not, they think, be associated with anything material. They therefore put in opposition things that belong together. It is as though one were to take the position that we are not nourished and kept alive by the bread we eat, by the water we drink, or by the air we breathe, but that our natural lives are sustained by the immediate power and goodness of God alone; that therefore the less we use and depend on these external means, bread, water, etc., the more life we will really have and enjoy directly from God. Absurd and foolish as this may seem, it is not more foolish than the position taken by the opponents of what they are pleased to call “sacramental religion.” When they say that it is not by Baptism that we



are regenerated, but by the Holy Spirit or by the grace of God, two things are put over against each other that belong together and are in perfect harmony. There is no more opposition between the Holy Spirit and Baptism as to the cause of regeneration than there is between the Holy Spirit and grace. There is no more opposition between the Holy Spirit, who regenerates the soul, and Baptism, as the means through which He effects this gracious work, than there is between the power of God which sustains our natural life and the food through which He sustains it.

The place of the Holy Spirit in Lutheran theology, then, is something fixed and definite. He always accompanies and works efficaciously in and through the means of God's own appointment. Wherever they are, there is also the Spirit with His saving grace. In the theology of many the place of the Holy Spirit is a very indefinite and uncertain matter. He may accompany the Word and Sacraments with His grace and power, and He may not. — Accordingly, here again our Lutheran theology takes issue. Our Confession says: "We should not and cannot always judge, from our feelings, of the presence, operations, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, but inasmuch as these are often cloaked in much infirmity, we should be convinced, from the promise that the Word of God preached and heard is assuredly the ministry and instrument of the Spirit by which He truly and efficaciously operates on the hearts."

Lutherans look with suspicion upon the genuineness of that Christianity which says, "I have experienced certain feelings, therefore the work of the Spirit has been effected in my heart. I have been born again and am a child of God." Luther says: "I have been baptized. Through Baptism God's grace and Spirit have come to me, for Baptism is the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. God has thereby signified His acceptance of me, a poor sinner, and has received me into His love and favor. Therefore I am a child of God."

Perhaps another feature of our subject merits consideration. We hear a great deal about a spiritual blessing or Baptism of the Spirit. Every Bible reader knows that the New Testament in a number of passages speaks of Baptism with the Holy Spirit. Lutheran theology has always objected to the view that the Baptism with the Holy Spirit signifies a be-



stowal of a heavenly Comforter which would place a person into a state of sinless perfection here on earth. Nowhere, furthermore, is found the vain dream that by some special act of preparation or consecration on our part we fit ourselves to receive the Pentecostal blessing, the Baptism and infilling of the Holy Ghost. Very distinctly and emphatically does our Confession reject the erroneous teaching of those who imagine the Holy Spirit is given to men through their own preparation and works. As far as the special gifts of the Holy Spirit are concerned, the theologians of our Church evidently regard these gifts as they were bestowed in the Apostolic days as extraordinary blessings of God provided for a special need of that time. The New Testament was then not yet written. It was necessary, therefore, that the Apostles and their helpers, as they preached the message of Jesus Christ, be in possession of powers which in signs and miracles would demonstrate that they were divinely sent.

In the judgment of our teachers no further divine power is needed in the present time for the work of the Church than that which every Christian may have through faith in the Word. They hold, too, that every believer possesses this power precisely in proportion to the strength of his faith and his knowledge of the truth, without any special outpouring or infilling of the Spirit. We use the expression "filled with the Spirit" even today, but look upon this endowment as one which is to be shared by all believers. In the words of a great writer of another faith: "This state of being filled with the Holy Ghost is not regarded by the writer of the Acts of the Apostles as necessarily carrying with it the power of working miracles or any other supernatural endowment, nor is it confined to the aristocracy of the Church, but it belongs to all." Filled with the Spirit—there is but one way to be filled, and that is to be filled with the Word of the Spirit. We receive the Spirit through the hearing of faith; we minister the Spirit through the hearing of faith. What we need to make us efficient servants in Christ's service is God's Word and absolute, unwavering faith in that Word. Having these, we have all the spiritual endowment promised; we have all the divine equipment we need.

We might here ask the question: Has the doctrine of the Holy Spirit received altogether adequate treatment in Lutheran



theology? The Reformed have charged the Lutheran Church with indifference to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. One of their number maintains that it was entirely neglected in Lutheran theology, and another claims that Calvin was the discoverer of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately for both claims, our boys and girls learning their Catechism, the explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, can give them specific answer. The person and work of the Holy Spirit is by no means ignored in the Lutheran system. Luther's *Commentary on Galatians* is filled with the spirit of the Spirit. Every Lutheran Confession recognizes the Spirit's activity in connection with the means of grace. True, no Lutheran Confession contains an Article *De Spiritu Sancto*, but my opinion is that Article V of the Augsburg Confession may well bear that superscription.

This, then, in brief, is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Lutheran theology. It is a doctrine that should give confidence and encouragement to every faithful Christian teacher. The Gospel we preach is not an empty vessel or a dead letter. We can be sure the ministry of the Word is the ministry of the Spirit. "For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Ghost and in much assurance." Lutheran preachers proclaim their message with all confidence, firmly believing that the Holy Spirit according to the divine promise will surely accompany His Word and work through it effectually to the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers.

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