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The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

By LORENZ WUNDERLICH

THE ministry of the Holy Spirit tends to be a neglected ministry, neglected by us in our lives with their problems and tensions as well as with their privileges and opportunities. With some this neglect may be due to a lack of knowledge about the vigor of the theology of the Holy Spirit as it is revealed in Scripture. With others it may rest in the lack of understanding of the rich fullness of the eternal purpose of the Holy Spirit in their lives. With still others it may be accounted for by the mistaken assumption that the ministry of the Spirit is more remote and therefore less practical than many other divine truths. God as Father and Jesus Christ as Savior—these are accepted as divine revelation which reflects and meets the most desperate needs of man. But the ministry of the Spirit is frequently associated only with church councils and creedal formulations, with theological textbooks and classroom lectures. Therefore it is not at all surprising that the theological literature centering in the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit bulks much less than that which clusters around other areas of divine truth.¹

¹ More than fifty years ago Karl von Lechler called attention to this "almost inexplicable gap in Christian knowledge." *Die biblische Lehre vom Heiligen Geist* (Gütersloh: Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1899), Vorwort, S. vi.

Scarcely a year ago Robert Cushman commented on the same neglect of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theology. He attributes it to three factors: (1) the rise of the scientific world with its challenge to the sovereignty of God; (2) the vitiating influence of Pelagianism upon Christianity with its stress upon man's moral achievement; (3) the tendency of Schleiermacher and his followers to substitute man's religious experience for the ministry of the Spirit. ("Karl Barth on the Holy Spirit," *Religion in Life*, Autumn 1955.)

But the ministry of the Spirit is a pulsating and powerful ministry. He is the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, no less. He is the "Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified." He associates Himself with the Father and the Son in the great acts of God in behalf of mankind, creation, redemption, sanctification (*opera ad extra*).² In these divine acts the "Trinity in Unity" is magnified, but in them each Person of the Trinity also assumes a dominant role.³ Creative activities and functions are assigned to the Son and the Spirit (Col. 1:16; Ps. 104:30), but both in Scripture (Mal. 2:10; 1 Cor. 8:6) and in two of the Ecumenical Creeds a major role in Creation is attributed to the Father. Again, the Father's love and the Spirit's mediation make the redemption a personal reality in our lives, but the act of redemption itself (incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection) was accomplished chiefly by Christ Jesus. Likewise, the Father and the Son are closely linked with regeneration and sanctification. At times Scripture even attributes our regeneration to them (James 1:17, 18; 2 Cor. 5:17), but it is the Holy Ghost "who has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

Moreover, the ministry of the Holy Spirit—proceeding from the Father and the Son and mediating to man the redemption established through the Lord Jesus—like other truths of divine revelation, is of the utmost practical importance. The Spirit of God associates Himself with every sanctified act of the child of God. Through Him we are called to be fellow citizens with the saints

² Dogmatians assign this term to divine acts in which the three Persons of the Godhead concur or co-operate.

³ J. Ritchie Smith, while reminding that the province of the Persons of the Trinity cannot be absolutely defined, "as though each of them possesses attributes or exercises functions in which the other Persons have no part," suggests: "The Father is God *above us*, the Son is God *with us*, the Spirit is God *within us*." *The Holy Spirit in the Gospels* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), p. 331.

Similarly René Pache finds three dispensations of God: that of the Father in the Old Testament exhibited in a *God for us* relationship; that of the Son in the Gospels who became *God with us*; that of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost as *God in us*. He adds the reminder that such concepts are useful as long as they do not detract from the "Unity in Trinity." (Chicago: Moody Press, 1954), p. 55.

and of the household of God. Through Him we learn the manifold aspects of Christian life and of acceptable service to God. Through Him the hope for salvation is founded on the grace of God rather than upon the merit life or upon an inner emotional experience. Through Him we become "epistles of Christ written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." He it is who transforms Christian theory into Christian living. And so a religion of mere letter and form can be translated into one of life and power only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Such was the promise to His disciples immediately prior to His ascension. Such was the fulfillment on and after Pentecost when the apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost. Such was also the experience of those among whom this Spirit-filled apostolate carried forward its ministry (Acts 8:18f.; 10:44; 13:52).

The purpose of this study, then, is to investigate briefly these aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit: regeneration, indwelling, sanctification.

THE REGENERATING SPIRIT

The word *παλιγγενεσία* (reproduction, renovation, renewal, new birth, regeneration) occurs twice in the New Testament (Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5). The evangelist brings it to us from the announcement of the Lord Jesus with regard to the glorious renewal in heaven and earth which is to accompany His return as our gracious Judge. The apostle associates the term with the moral renovation which is effected by the Holy Spirit through Baptism. St. Paul regards regeneration solely as an act of God's grace whereby He "hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us in the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13)." Regeneration is variously described in the Word of God. In a restricted sense conversion, new birth, vivification, and illumination are synonyms of regeneration. Conversion is both illustrated and defined in the action of the Gentiles in Antioch who turned to the Lord by faith in Christ Jesus through the preaching of the Word (Acts 11:20,21). New birth is also equated with regeneration in the Scriptures. Jesus indicates the necessity of such a new birth in His instruction of Nicodemus. Just as in biological processes a child becomes a member of the human family through its birth from human parents, so in spiritual processes it is necessary to be born

again or anew of God in order to attain membership in the family of God (John 3:3, 5, 6). This spiritual birth is achieved through the faith that Jesus is the Christ (1 John 5:1). Again, regeneration is described as the change in the condition of the sinner from one of spiritual death to one of spiritual life. God gave life in Christ to the Ephesians who once were dead in sins and uncircumcision of the flesh (2:4, 5). The Colossians attained to that same spiritual life through the power of God (2:12, 13). Furthermore, St. Peter states of the regenerated that they have been transferred by God from spiritual darkness to His marvelous light (I, 2:9). By divine commission St. Paul is to open the eyes of the Gentiles and "to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God, that they receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18). In comparing the former spiritual condition of the Ephesian Christians with their present one the apostle declares: "Once ye were darkness, but now ye are light in the Lord" (5:8, RSV). It is, then, a truth of Scripture that by the divine miracle of regeneration the soul is converted, born anew, revived, illuminated.

This regeneration is an act of God's grace and not one of man's effort. This is repeatedly affirmed in the Word of God. It is God's love and mercy which accomplished our spiritual resurrection (Eph. 2:5). Of those who received the eternal Logos in faith and thus were raised to sonship with God, of them the apostle John declares that they were "born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13). At the very top of the list of good and perfect gifts which must all be attributed to the Father of lights, St. James places our birth through Him by the Word of truth (1:18). Possession of the Son by man is equated with eternal life, and this possession on our part is solely the gift of the Father (1 John 5:12).

That regeneration is an act of God is also implied by comparison of the regenerated state with a resurrection and with a new creation. The regenerated are those who are "alive from the dead" (Rom. 6:13), whom God "hath quickened together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). They are God's "workmanship created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:10). The new man is "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24), and anyone who is "in Christ is a new crea-

ture" (2 Cor. 5:17). The change which has taken place is so complete and so decisive that the regenerated man is nothing less than a new creation with new desires, new abilities, and new activities.

Such regeneration through the love of the Father and the vicarious atonement of the Son is ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit. The new birth through the Spirit is made a spiritual and a logical *sine qua non* by the Son of God Himself (John 3:5,6). It is a spiritual necessity because God has made it so: "except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." It is a logical necessity because "that which is born of the flesh is flesh." In the presence of increasing apostasy among His followers, the Savior attributes the miracle of spiritual life to the Spirit (John 6:63). It is the Spirit who transforms the carnal mind to such an extent that it will not regard divine truths as a "hard saying." It is the Spirit of the living God who gives life to St. Paul as a minister of the new covenant and to those who are entrusted to his Gospel ministry (2 Cor. 3:6). Christian virtues, such as love, gentleness, and meekness, are to find their motivation in the truth that God has saved us, not through our righteous deeds but "according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior" (Titus 3:5,6). The word *ἀνακαίνωσις* is one which is characteristic with St. Paul. It implies not only new strength and vigor but a complete change for the better, a life which is opposed to the former corrupt condition.⁴ This is both the mission and the accomplishment of God the Holy Spirit.

THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

The Spirit of God, who has effected the regeneration of the sinner, does not leave him to his own devices, does not cast him upon the impotent resources of sinful self. That would be eternally fatal to man. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit takes full possession of the Christian. He makes him His residence, His tabernacle, His temple. He dwells in him.

Such indwelling by God in the regenerated is attributed also to the Father. St. John points to the keeping of God's command-

⁴ J. A. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 38.

ments — in this case a specific reference to faith in Jesus Christ and to love toward one another — as evidence for the Father's indwelling in the Christian (1 John 3:24). St. Paul emphatically reminds the Corinthian Christians that both individually and collectively they are the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). One of the strongest apostolic appeals for the disavowal of idolatry and for the cultivation of spiritual purity rests upon this truth: "Ye are the temple of the living God" (2 Cor. 6:16). Similarly, the saints at Ephesus are instructed that they, as fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, are built into this holy temple for a dwelling place of God (Eph. 2:22).

Together with the Father, the Son also makes the Christian His dwelling place. The chief reason for glorying in their spiritual wealth on the part of the Colossians is succinctly epitomized as "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27). It is the apostle's prayer for the Ephesians that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith (3:16, 17). So closely is the life of St. Paul identified with his crucified Lord that he can refer to himself as one in whom Christ lives (Gal. 2:20). Moreover, this indwelling by the Father and the Son in the believer is precisely what the Savior had promised to His disciple Jude: "If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23). Thus the specific "I in you" relationship between Christ and His apostles becomes the "I in him" relationship with every Christian. The "I in you" of the Bread of Life is also the "I in them" of the eternal High Priest (John 14:20; 17:26).

It is, however, particularly the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which comes to repeated and emphatic prominence in the Scriptures. The anxiety of the apostles at the impending withdrawal of the visible presence of their Lord is to be allayed by a threefold divine promise: The Paraclete is to come *to them*; He is to be *with them* forever; He is to dwell *in them* (John 14:17). But such indwelling of the Spirit of God was not to be the comfort of the Twelve alone; it is experienced by every child of God. This truth is implied in certain types or symbols of the Holy Spirit; it is inherent in relationships existing between Him and the Christian; it is elaborated upon in numerous Bible passages.

Water is the first symbol of the indwelling Spirit. In His instruction of the Samaritan woman, Jesus designates the water of life which He dispenses as a well of water springing up into eternal life. During His preaching in the temple this spiritual water is equated with the faith of the believer. But he who partakes of this water, he who believes in Christ Jesus as his personal Savior, is used by God to bestow similar blessings upon others. This is made possible by the Spirit, "which they that believe on Him should receive" (John 7:37-39).

Another symbol for the indwelling Spirit is that of the seal (ἡ σφραγίς). A seal indicates authority, security, authentication.⁵ Among the Jews the seal was used to attest contractual agreements (Jer. 32:9, 10) as well as to proclaim authority and to insure inviolability (Matt. 27:66). But the seal was also affixed to denote possession and ownership. The servants of God are sealed with the seal of God (Rev. 7:3 f.). In the life of the Christian who believes and trusts in Christ through the Word of Truth, this sealing is effected by "that Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). Therefore the appeal is made to the Ephesians that they are not to grieve the Spirit of God, in whom they are sealed unto the day of redemption (4:30); they are not to break that seal. This sealing by God through the Spirit is to be a personal proof to the Christians at Corinth that both St. Paul and they were established in Christ.

A third symbol related to the concept of indwelling is that of the earnest money (ὁ ἀρραβών). In business transactions this earnest money was the down payment, which was regarded as a pledge that the balance due would be paid. In the spiritual realm the Holy Spirit is designated as the Guarantee of our eternal inheritance until we actually gain full possession of it (Eph. 1:13, 14), as God's pledge for our immortality (2 Cor. 5:5). Moreover, He who establishes us in Christ, anoints and seals us, also gives us this ἀρραβών of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. 1:22).

The indwelling of the Spirit of God is also inherent in certain relationships which exist between Him and the Christian. In the

⁵ Image, or likeness, is the meaning which George Smeaton suggests. "There are two purposes for which men use a seal, to secure a property from hazard, and to impress the owner's image on it." *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), p. 234.

Trinitarian benediction the apostle bespeaks for us the *κοινωνία* of the Holy Spirit. Both St. Paul and St. John emphasize the bestowal of the Spirit by God upon man as well as the reception of the Holy Spirit by man from God. This suggests the indwelling. Moreover, Christians are said to be filled with the Spirit. Thus special commissions were assigned by God to man, and special tasks were accomplished by man through the Spirit who possessed them. Moses, Bezaleel, Gideon, Samson, and other saints of the Old Covenant were thus Spirit-filled for their God-given duties. The prophet Ezekiel expressly declared: "The Spirit entered into me when He spake unto me and set me upon my feet" (2:2). David pleaded: "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). Filled by the Spirit, Zacharias uttered the Benedictus; filled by the same Spirit, Stephen remained steadfast and unmovable in the hour of death. The prophets and apostles as teachers and leaders of the church were full of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2 and 4; 1 Cor. 2:12, 13; 1 Peter 1:10-12). However, also the individual Christian was Spirit-possessed. The disciples of Pisidia, to whom the Gospel only recently had been proclaimed, are characterized as being filled with joy and with the Holy Ghost (Acts 13:52). The Christians of Ephesus are exhorted to shun indolence, folly, and drunkenness and to be filled with the Spirit, through whom they are to grow in piety, gratitude, and joy (5:18).

This indwelling of the Spirit in the regenerate is also repeatedly affirmed in the New Testament, chiefly in the letters of St. Paul, but also in those of St. Peter and St. John. Not only the gifts of the Spirit are imparted to the believer but also the Spirit Himself. Without this indwelling Spirit it is impossible to please God, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. In fact, without this indwelling of the Spirit, man is removed from God, he cannot be counted among God's own (Rom. 8:8, 9). Again, by His residence in the body of the Christian the Spirit of God has transformed it into a temple of God. This temple is set apart for God's honor, worship, and glory, but it is also the area in which the Holy Spirit activates and strengthens to a nobler life and a nobler service (1 Cor. 3:16, 17). Such an exalted position for our bodies as temples of the Spirit is to be the highest motivation for an unending struggle

against the fleshly sins, which so easily beset us. Neither use nor disposition of property lies within the jurisdiction of him who holds no title to that property. We are not our own; we are the property of God the Holy Spirit. What is more, the enormity of the purchase price demands an adequate return. Therefore we are to glorify God in our body and in our spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). Even as the love of the Father and the atonement by the Son have unending value, so also the indwelling of the Spirit is to be a permanent one. The words of the Dutch theologian are strongly reminiscent of the vigorous language of Martin Luther: "For the Holy Spirit does not dwell in our hearts as we dwell in our house, independent of it, walking through it, shortly to leave it; but He so inheres in and cleaves to us that, though we were thrown into the hottest crucible, He and we could not be separated. The fiercest fire could not dissolve the union."⁶ It is this indwelling Spirit who seeks to determine our whole attitude toward God and man. We are emancipated from the bondage of the Law and of the flesh, we have become the children of grace, and we have been adopted into the family of God. As such we learn through the indwelling Spirit to demonstrate our confidence in this filial relationship through our petitions to the Father. The Spirit's "Abba, Father" truly becomes our "Abba, Father." Not only does the indwelling Spirit incite us to prayer and intercession but He also joins Himself to these petitions (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The Spirit dwelling in us also supplies us with the divine strength required for retaining the good thing which has been committed to us (2 Tim. 1:14). He establishes us in the assurance that God is in us and that we are in Him (1 John 3:24; 4:13). Even suffering in the name of Christ is to produce a certain joyful constancy through the abiding and indwelling Spirit (1 Peter 4:14). The eternal purpose of God in our lives, the crown of the Christian's existence, the final consummation of our hopes in the resurrection of our bodies to a glorified existence with God forever — this is accomplished by Him through the Spirit that dwells in us and constitutes God's pledge to us (Rom. 8:11).

⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1904), p. 524.

THE SANCTIFYING SPIRIT

The word sanctify, ἁγιάζω, is variously used in the New Testament. It designates the Levitical purification which was fundamentally associated with ceremonial sacrifices (Heb. 9:13). The term also refers to the separation of objects and of people from profane use and their consecration to God. Every creature is thus sanctified by the Word of God and by prayer (1 Tim. 4:5). Jesus pronounces the gold in the temple sanctified (Matt. 23:17). The Son of God points to His own sanctification by the Father and by Himself. The Father sanctified the Son and sent Him into the world (John 10:36), the Son sanctified Himself in order that His disciples might be sanctified (John 17:19). Obviously such sanctification is not one of progressive holiness but rather a dedication for a sanctified mission and holy purpose. A third meaning of ἁγιάζω is to make holy, render holy, declare holy. The Corinthian Christians, among whom were such as previously had committed flagrant sins, are called saints, those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). A divine change had taken place in their lives. God's grace in Christ through the preaching of the Word had declared them sanctified or holy. And now their bodies as members of Christ are to be dedicated to the service of Christ, to the glorification of God. Emancipated from the slavery of sin to the glorious freedom of δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, they are to produce fruits of sanctification. It is in this sense that Luther offers his explanation in the Third Article: "If you are asked: What do you mean by the words: I believe in the Holy Ghost? you can answer: I believe that the Holy Ghost makes me holy, as His name implies."⁷

However, this new nature which is ours and the new man whom we have put on through regeneration have not eliminated or destroyed the old nature and the old man. Sanctification is not equated with sinlessness. St. Paul, the sanctified ambassador of Christ, still struggled with his sinful flesh (Romans 7), and it is the membership of Christian congregations which is admonished by the apostle "not to fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16), "to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Gal. 5:24), and "to mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom. 8:13).

⁷ Large Catechism III 40.

It is in this contest of dealing death to sinful flesh, in this exercise unto godliness, that God comes to our aid. The regenerating and indwelling Spirit enables us not only to be God's children but also to live as God's children. The life which is Spirit-filled is also Spirit-lived (Gal. 5:25). For such a life there is no divine condemnation because the just requirements of the Law have been met in Christ for those who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4). Spirit-mindedness does not only bring life and peace, it is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). The Holy Spirit not only establishes a filial relationship between the believer and his God but also adds such a measure of reliance on that position that he constantly and confidently seeks the Father's heart with Spirit-phrased petitions.

It is the Spirit of God who enables the regenerated man to withstand and overcome both the flagrant violations of God's Law and the cherished evil thought locked in the chambers of the heart. The sins of which some of the Corinthian Christians were guilty before their washing and sanctification were sins of heart, of tongue, and of hand: greed, vilification, idolatry, immorality, theft (1 Cor. 6: 9, 10). It is the ministry of the Spirit in the child of God which produces and strengthens in him the God-pleasing virtues of the Christian life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). Much has been written about these Christian graces, and each of them solicits careful study. It will serve our purpose to note that they do not suggest a magic formula; they are not the product of an emotional outburst; they do not offer compensation for any spiritual inferiority complex. On the contrary, they are the highest traits of Christian character; they represent the fruits of the Spirit in our hearts and lives; they constitute both the purpose and the effect of our sanctification.

In the presence of doubt and terror it is the sanctifying Spirit who establishes and sustains our conviction that we are God's own elect (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). His intercessions "in sighs too deep for words" are in full accord with the Father's will and thus cover the imperfection of our petitions (Rom. 8:26). This sanctifying Spirit will bring our sanctification to its ultimate perfection by transforming our mortality into immortality at the resurrection of all flesh (Rom. 8:11). It is this eschatological ministry of the Holy

Spirit which is so forcefully presented by Luther in the explanation of the Third Article in the Large Catechism.⁸

The Spirit of God regenerates, dwells in, and sanctifies the believers, but He also unites them by an indissoluble bond into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), the holy Christian Church. The distinguishing characteristics of this unity in the Spirit are one Lord — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; one faith, one Baptism, one body, one hope (Eph. 4:4-6). For the welfare of that unity the Spirit bestows the necessary gifts (1 Cor. 12:11), those which are general and permanent as well as those which are extraordinary and temporary. For the benediction on this unity the Spirit adds His *κοινωνία*, with the accompanying Christian graces: love, liberality, humility, Christ-mindedness (Phil. 2:1f.). For the continuance of that unity the Spirit establishes and guides the ministry of the church (John 16:13; Acts 13:2; 20:28), instructs its membership (Rev. 2:3), and provides for expansion and growth (Acts 9:31).

Thus the Holy Spirit is the divine Dynamic in the life of the Christian. Therefore "if we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25)!

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⁸ Regin Prenter elaborates on this aspect. He asserts that this explanation is a good summary of "Luther's total understanding of the Spirit and His work." *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), pp. 238f.