

## *The Holy Spirit and the Scriptures*

**J. Theodore Mueller**

[p.267]

Evangelical Christendom has always regarded the Holy Scriptures as the divinely inspired truth of salvation. While God has revealed himself to man universally by his law written in the human heart and his witness in nature and history, he can be known savingly only from the gospel set forth in the Holy Bible (John 5:39; II Tim. 3:15-17). The fundamental proclamation of Holy Scripture is summed up in John 3:16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The gospel thus centers in the incarnation of the Son of God and his vicarious atonement (John 1:29; II Cor. 5:18-21).

This saving gospel revelation the Scriptures ascribe, in particular, to the Holy Spirit as its mediator; for while the Father sent his Son to redeem fallen mankind (John 3:17) and the incarnate Son redeemed man from sin and its consequences by shedding his blood on the cross (I Cor. 6:20; II. Cor. 5:18-21), the Holy Spirit applies the free and full salvation procured through Christ's substitutionary atonement by implanting saving faith in the hearts of men through the gospel (Rom. 1:16). In agreement with this sanctifying work the Scriptures ascribe to the Holy Ghost also the giving of the divine Word by which alone perishing man can be saved.

### **I. THE SPIRIT THE MEDIATOR OF THE SCRIPTURES**

The Bible is very emphatic in witnessing that the divine truth of salvation has been mediated to men by the Holy Spirit both orally and in the Scrip-

[p.268]

tures. He is the "Spirit of truth" (John 15:26). He moved the holy men of God to speak (II Pet. 1:21). According to St. Peter, the Spirit of Christ testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ by the prophets just as he testified them by his apostles (I Pet. 1:10-12). Of himself St. Paul declares: "Which things [the gospel truths that were freely given to him by God, v. 12] also we speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth" (I Cor. 2:13). The added participial clause translated in the KJV, "comparing spiritual things with spiritual," can have but one meaning: "Interpreting spiritual truths by means of Spirit-given words (cf. the marginal note in the RSV: "Interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language"). The appended words evidently climax the Apostle's remarkable statement that he was speaking the revealed gospel mysteries in words supplied to him by the Holy Spirit.

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Because the Holy Spirit is the mediator of all divine truth, the Scriptures are the "Word of God" or the "Word of the Lord," for he is true God with the Father and the Son (Acts 5:3; Matt. 28:19). In this sense, the New Testament, for example, quotes Ps. 95:7 ff., as spoken directly by the Holy Spirit: "The Holy Ghost saith" (Heb. 3:7). In this sense St. Paul writes: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16); and again: "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (I Cor. 14:37). In this sense the same apostle places the oral Word and the written Word on the same level of divine inspiration when he writes: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle" (II Thess. 2:15). In this sense the Christian Church has always accepted the canonical Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament as the inspired Word of God; and in this sense conservative theologians still "assert the verbal inspiration of the Bible, that is, its plenary inspiration in the full sense of the word, absolute in phrasing and in particular words," declaring: "By virtue of its inspiration Scripture is the book of God, wherein God infallibly and with divine authority tells us what to believe in matters of faith, what to do and what to forbear in matters of life and practice [and] what to reject as error or falsehood" (*Concordia Cyclopaedia*, 1927, p. 79).

## II. THE SPIRIT THE INTERPRETER OF THE SCRIPTURES

As the Holy Spirit is the divine mediator of the Scriptures, so also he is their divine interpreter. This truth is taught in those passages which affirm that he, the Comforter, testifies of Christ (John 15:26), that he guides believers "into all truth" (John 16:13-14), that he teaches Christ's disciples all things and brings to their remembrance whatever their Lord had taught them (John 14:26), in short, that he illuminates the hearts of men and moves them to believe the revealed truth of salvation. Christ states expressly that the Holy Spirit "shall glorify me; for he shall receive of mine, and shall

[p.269]

show it unto you" (John 16:14 f.). This means that the Holy Spirit does not testify by the written Word anything against Christ, the incarnate Word. The two are never in opposition to each other, but always bear witness to each other. The written Word is the divinely inspired revelation concerning the incarnate Word, the Saviour of sinners, by which the Holy Spirit is operative toward their salvation.

On the basis of such passages as have just been quoted, Christian theologians have asserted the saving testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men by which he engenders and strengthens faith in them, glorifies Christ by them and sanctifies them in their daily life. This sanctifying witness of the Holy Spirit manifests itself in the believers by their sincere faith in Christ as their personal divine Saviour, their unshakable conviction of their sure salvation, their patient endurance in affliction, and their radiant hope of eternal life until by grace they finally obtain the crown of righteousness. In short, the testimony of the Holy Spirit makes men believers in Christ by an inward persuasion of

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the truth of the gospel and asserts itself in them to God's glory by their consecrated Christian life.

### III. TWO AXIOMATIC TRUTHS

From the doctrine of Scripture, asserting the Spirit's sanctifying work in the hearts of believers, two very important axiomatic truths may be derived.

The first is that the illuminating witness of the Holy Spirit never takes place apart from God's Word as set forth in the Scriptures. Such as reject the Scriptures as the divine truth grieve the Holy Spirit and harden their hearts against his testimony of the divine truth (Acts 7:51). Our Lord recognizes but one way by which sinners are sanctified: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Of his own words—and these we now have in the Scriptures (II Thess. 2:15; I Pet. 1:10-12)—Christ says: "The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life" (John 6:63). Those who reject the gospel of salvation, our Lord declares to be outside his kingdom of grace, as the "world" which "cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him" (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit therefore does not witness savingly in malicious unbelievers. Perverse rejecters of the divine Word may indeed voice fragmentary truths pertaining to the area of civil righteousness or social ethics, since the divine law is written also in their hearts to guide them in the affairs of this life; but to them the gospel is a stumbling block and foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23). At Corinth the Apostle brushed aside the "wisdom of this world," exalting itself over the divine wisdom of salvation as foolishness before God, exclaiming triumphantly: "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them

[p.270]

that believe" (I Cor. 1:20 f.). Thus the saving witness of the Holy Spirit never occurs outside of or in opposition to the Scriptures. Whatever other religious assurance or religious experience unbelievers may boast is at best only self-deception. Luther's emphatic statement that whatever teaches anything apart from or against Scripture is the "perverse devil" (*der leidige Teufel*) is in full agreement with God's Word which warns us against our "adversary the devil," whom we are to "resist steadfast in the faith" (I Pet. 5:8 f.).

The second axiomatic truth concerning the illuminating and sanctifying witness of the Holy Spirit is that it does not take place in such as persistently repudiate Christ's vicarious atonement. The gospel doctrine of Christ's atoning death on the cross is the very core of the Scriptures. When our Lord commanded his opponents to search the Scriptures because they testify of him (John 5:39), he made himself known to them as the divine Saviour of lost and perishing man. This same central gospel truth he impressed upon his disciples especially before his last great suffering when he addressed them on his saving mission as

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the world's divine Redeemer (John, chs. 13-17). In this his final instruction he carefully explained to his followers also the witnessing function of the Holy Spirit, who was to bring to their remembrance whatsoever he had said to them (John 14:26), testify of him (John 15:26), guide them into all truth (John 16:13-15), and so strengthen their faith in him as their divine Saviour. At the same time he added, by way of warning, that the unbelieving world could not receive the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). The saving testimony of the Holy Spirit therefore does not take place in those who obstinately reject Christ as their personal Saviour and his vicarious atonement as their only hope of salvation.

#### **IV. EFFECT OF THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS BY THE DIVINE WORD**

Let those who reject the inspired Scriptures, either in whole or in part, bear in mind that the Holy Spirit, witnessing by the divine Word, exercises both an illuminating and a blinding, or hardening effect upon men.

Of the illuminating effect of the "statutes of the Lord" the inspired Psalmist says that they "are right... enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:8). Of the divinely inspired Word he writes: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105); and again: "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple" (v. 130). The "simple" are those who believingly and gratefully receive the divine Word, hating "every false way" (v. 128).

But with the same clarity and emphasis the Scriptures tell us also of the blinding, or hardening effect of the divine Word upon perverse unbelievers. The Lord thus hardened Pharaoh's heart when obstinately he disobeyed his Word and stubbornly refused to let the people go (Exod. 7:3, 14; 9:12). To the Corinthians St. Paul writes: "For we are unto God a sweet savour of

[271]

Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life" (II Cor. 2:15 f.). Here the line between the illuminated believing hearers of the Word and the blinded unbelieving hearers is sharply drawn. This blinding is directly attributed to God who judicially inflicts it upon them because of their unbelief. To this truth the Apostle clearly witnesses: "According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day" (Rom. 11:7). Unbelieving Israel is here pointed out as a warning to all who spurn the divine Word. The same truth is taught in the final chapter of Acts where St. Paul impressed upon his unbelieving Jewish hearers the warning of Isaiah: "Hearing ye shall hear, and not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive... lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (Acts 28:24-27). The same words of Isaiah our divine Lord proclaimed to the unbelieving Jews who refused to believe, even "though he had done so many miracles before them" (cf. John 12:37-41). The unbelieving Jews rejected the oral

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---

proclamation of the gospel, because they had first rejected the sacred Scriptures, which testify of the Redeemer and his gospel of salvation.

Both Luther and Calvin acknowledged this twofold effect of the divine Word upon men. Ronald S. Wallace in his recent book *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., 1957) sums up Calvin's view on the twofold effect of the preached Word thus: "It can either soften or harden the heart. It can either save or condemn the hearer" (p. 93). He then quotes Calvin as saying: "The Gospel is never preached in vain, but has invariably an effect, either of life or death" (*Commentary* on II Cor. 2:15). Again: "As the Word is efficacious for the salvation of believers, so it is abundantly efficacious for the condemning of the wicked" (*Commentary* on Isa. 55:11). To these statements of the Genevan divine Mr. Wallace adds: "Calvin is, however, careful to add, when he speaks in this strain, that this negative effect 'does not belong to the nature of the Gospel, but is accidental.'" Its destroying effect comes "from the fault of mankind" (pp. 93 f. *Commentary* on II Cor. 10:8). That indeed is true, as St. Paul testifies when he writes to the Corinthians: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; to whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ... should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:3 f.). The expression "the god of this world" denotes Satan, under whose influence all unbelievers are. According to the context, St. Paul here argues: "The Holy Spirit desires to enlighten those who hear the glorious gospel of Christ, but if they persist in their unbelief he permits Satan to blind their minds so that they finally arrive at a stage where they are unable to perceive the divine truth." Whether the gospel truth is brought to men by Christ's mes-

[p.272]

sengers orally or whether it is presented to them in the Scriptures, is immaterial since it is always the same divine Word. For the Apostle his oral Word and his written Word were equally inspired by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 2: 13; 14:37; II Thess. 2:15).

From the fact that the unbelieving Jews rejected Christ, just because they rejected the Scriptures (John 12:37-41), it is obvious that what is true of the perverse rejection of the incarnate Word is true also of the perverse rejection of the written Word. In both cases the blinding, or hardening effect of the divine Word takes place. When Simeon blessed the Christ Child in the temple, he said by divine inspiration: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). The words "for the fall" evidently mean "for condemnation through the rejection of Christ," while the words "for the rising again" means "for salvation by believing in Christ." The added explanation "for a sign which shall be spoken against" signifies that Christ will always be an object of peculiar derision to unbelievers who willfully deny him and his divine truth. Thus Christ is a rock against which blind unbelief dashes itself to pieces, and at the same time a rock upon which believers rise to glory.

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Christ, however, is not a rock of rising or falling *per se*, but inasmuch as he proclaims himself to be the appointed Messiah who came to seek and save that which is lost (cf. John 6:60-66; 8:42-59). As such he is believed or rejected both in his oral proclamation and his written proclamation in the Scripture. He thus could challenge his unbelieving opponents: "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:46 f.). To reject the Scriptures means therefore to reject Christ as the divine Redeemer. Thus also the Scriptures become to unbelievers a rock against which they dash themselves to pieces by their stubborn unbelief, while to all believers the divine Word proves itself a rock of salvation by which, through faith in Christ, they rise to everlasting life. St. Paul well describes the twofold effect of the divine Word when he writes: "We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Cor. 1:23 f.). So, then, as the Holy Spirit by an act of divine grace enlightens the believers, by an act of divine judgment, he also blinds or hardens those who maliciously refuse to believe the divine Word, either in its oral proclamation or in the inspired Scriptures.

## **V. DENIAL OF PLENARY INSPIRATION IMPERILS THE SPIRIT'S WITNESS**

But we may say still more. All who deny the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and assume only a partial inspiration imperil the testimony of the Holy Spirit. To his unbelieving hearers Christ proclaimed the im-

[p.273]

portant truth that they refused to accept him as their divine Lord just because they refused to believe the writings of Moses, i.e., the inspired prophecies of Moses concerning him as the promised Messiah (John 5:46 f.). Their perverse refusal to believe the Messianic prophecies in the writings of Moses made it impossible for them to regard Christ as their Saviour. Rejecting the Scriptures, they resisted the Spirit's testimony asserting itself also in the Lord's oral proclamation. Unbelieving readers of the Bible, who accept of the Scriptures only what pleases them and reject what is not in agreement with their critical minds, thereby exalt their perverted reason above the written divine Word and make it impossible for the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth. And, as it happened in the case of the unbelieving Jews to whom the Saviour witnessed, the rejected divine Word may be the very fundamentals which they require for salvation.

God's Word declares emphatically: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16 f.). Whatever therefore is a part of Scripture is also divinely inspired and as such the divine Word by which the Holy Spirit witnesses to men the saving truth of Christ. Liberals may ridicule this conclusion, yet it is sound and unanswerable, resting upon the witness of the Scriptures no less than upon the infallible authority of the divine Christ,

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---

who acknowledged "all scripture" as God's Word and so as divinely authoritative, including such books, chapters and parts of the Old Testament long repudiated by destructive Bible critics as mythical (John 5:39). In Matthew 19:4-6 our Lord decisively refers to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to assert God's will and institution over against the Jewish unlawful divorce practice. To the omniscient Son of God, Adam and Eve were not mythical characters, but historical persons. Nor was the divine institution of holy wedlock, as reported in the first two chapters of Genesis, to him anything mythical, but something very factual and normative. Just so St. Paul in Romans 5:12-19 regards Adam as a historical person and the story of his fall as the divinely inspired truth standing in close relation to the gospel of salvation; for there he compares the first Adam, whose fall brought death into the world, with the second Adam, our blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ, whose vicarious death brought life to lost mankind. So, then, our divine omniscient Lord and his inspired apostles recognized all the Scriptures of the Old Testament as the divinely inspired Word and as such the true source and rule of faith and life. Unless we are ready to disavow their authority we must regard all the canonical books of the Old Testament as the divinely inspired Word of God and the means of the Spirit's witness for the salvation of men.

If, in opposition to Christ and his inspired apostles, liberal theologians reject large parts of the Old and New Testaments as mythical, this un-

[p.274]

warranted action is prompted by sheer unbelief and downright rebellion against God. Dr. F. Pieper in his *Christian Dogmatics* rightly calls this procedure an act of high treason by which the destructive critics challenge and violate the infallible judgment of the sovereign God and exalt their own fallible opinions over his inerrant divine truth. Where that is done willfully and persistently, there God in his righteous wrath and just judgment may ultimately withdraw his Holy Spirit so that the Spirit's saving witness is no longer perceived in their darkened hearts (Matt. 13:13-15; John 12:39-41). If by way of exception they still cling to Christ as their divine Saviour—as some profess to do—that is due solely to God's superabundant grace and undeserved longsuffering.

Christian believers do not tempt Christ by disobedience (I Cor. 10:9), but keep in mind his rule of true discipleship: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Genuine discipleship of Christ, created by the Holy Spirit's guidance into all truth (John 16:13), with the full understanding of the divine truth and the complete spiritual freedom of God's dear children, exists only in such as obediently continue in the divine Word, and for us today that is the divine Word of the Scriptures. This is the meaning of Christ's earnest words: "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:44). This is the meaning also of our Lord's solemn threat: "Whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19). When God, after the departure of Moses, called Joshua to lead Israel, he commanded him: "Only be thou strong and very

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---

courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest" (Josh. 1:7). This same divine command is found also in the last book of the Bible: "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in his book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life... and from the things [promises] which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:15-19).

While St. John here speaks of "the prophecy of this book," he states a principle that applies to all the Scriptures as God's inspired Word. Men are not to add to God's sacred revelations, nor are they to take away from them, but they are to search the Scriptures believingly and faithfully, since they testify of Christ (John 5:39). The Scriptures are a gospel unit witnessing with one accord to our divine Redeemer so that they cannot be accepted in part and also be rejected in part. They must be received wholly as God's Word and not merely in part. Luther very strikingly compares the Scriptures with a golden ring which cannot be broken, for if it is broken in a single place the whole ring becomes unfit for use. In the same sense Luther also

[p.275]

remarks that the Holy Spirit cannot be divided so as to speak the truth in one place and falsehood in another. Let all who condemn the Scriptures in part as untrue or mythical consider the great harm they do to Christendom as also the occasion of stumbling they give to the enemies of the cross of Christ who pride themselves on their atheism and rejection of the Scriptures. On Judgment Day we must give an account of our stewardship of the divine Word which God in his infinite mercy gave to perishing sinners for eternal salvation. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

## **VI. DETACHMENT OF THE SPIRIT FROM THE SCRIPTURES**

Church History has much to report on the many attempts made within Christendom to detach the Spirit's testimony from the divine Word as set forth in the Scriptures. We shall here refer only to a few manifestations of this trend.

It is not the least of Luther's achievements that he steered clear of the "enthusiasm" or "spiritualism" of his day, which asserted the Spirit's witness apart from or beyond the inspired divine word in the Scriptures. In his notable work *A History of Christian Thought* (Vol. I, p. 235), Dr. J. L. Neve presents Luther's doctrine on this point as follows: "The Spirit operates, and this is energetically emphasized (by Luther) against the spiritualistic tendencies, only through the Word and in the Word, as this Word awakens faith and at the same time becomes the bearer of the entire revelation for the awakened faith (cf. W. 18, 136, 9 ff.; 139, 18 ff.)." Dr. Neve adds by way of explanation: "By the term 'Word of God' Luther has reference primarily to the living Word as preached in the Church.... But



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the truth of this Word is conditioned by its dependence upon the written Word (*op. cit.*, p. 256)."

The fact that the truth of the oral Word is conditioned by its dependence upon the written Word of the Scriptures, Luther proved time and again by identifying the oral "Word of God" with the written "Word of God" set forth in the Scriptures. The preacher, Luther affirmed, must preach only the Word of Holy Scripture, for "the Bible is the very Scripture of the Spirit" (W. 7, 638; 46, 545; 47, 133). When in the Smalcald Articles Luther wrote: "The Word of God shall establish articles of faith, and no one else, not even an angel" (Part II, Art. II. 15), he had in mind, as the context shows, the sacred Scriptures. Just because the Scriptures are the Spirit's own divine word, they, according to Luther, approach man with his divine power for faith and salvation.

This almighty divine power, exerting itself by the Word, can, of course, be resisted, just as God's omnipotent power working by means can always be resisted. Thus a tree, which owes its origin and preservation to God's omnipotent power, may be hewn down by feeble man. So also the conception of human life may be prevented, though God is the omnipotent author of all

[p.276]

life. Nevertheless, it is the Spirit's divine power, operative by the Word, which makes the gospel the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:19), just as it was the omnipotent power of God in his creative word: "Let there be light" which brought forth light at the creation of the world, or as it was the omnipotent power of God in the divine life-giving words addressed to dead Lazarus: "Lazarus, come forth," which caused him to come forth from the grave alive. Luther did not think of any "mechanical" power of the divine Word; he merely claimed for the divine Word the power for faith and salvation just because it is the Word of the omnipotent Lord.

Luther thus took very seriously such passages as teach that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16); that the Word of God works effectually in those that believe (I Thess. 2:13); that we are born again by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever (I Pet. 1:23); that the words of Christ are spirit and life (John 6:63) and others; for, as he said, they all declare that the Holy Spirit operates, converts, enlightens, justifies and sanctifies by the living divine Word. To Luther the written Word of the Scriptures is always indissolubly joined with the power of the Holy Spirit, who has made it for all times the means by which he operates on and in the hearts and minds of those who properly hear and read it. This truth he recognized in such passages as I Thessalonians 1:5; Psalm 19:8; II Timothy 3:16 f.; John 7:17 and others. Because Luther was in principle opposed to all forms of scholasticism, he never endeavored to present his doctrine of the efficacy of the divine Word in any Aristotelian category. He rather stated his teaching on the sanctifying operation of the Spirit in and by the divine Word in plain language, intelligible to the laymen of his day for whom he largely wrote, since he wished them to share in the blessing of the restored gospel.

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To describe the relation of the omnipotent witness of the Spirit to the divine Word, Luther used the prepositions "by," "in," "with," and "under" to designate, first, that the Spirit and the Word are never identical, and second, that the Spirit and the Word are so intimately joined that in his witness the Spirit never goes beyond the written Word. In his great work *Die Lehre Luthers* (Vol. VII of his *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte*) Reinhold Seeberg aptly describes Luther's thought on this point as follows: "The Spirit never enlarges the area of divine revelation; he merely conveys to the individual hearts what the words declare that proceed from Christ's mouth" (*op. cit.*, p. 383). While Luther thus adopted St. Augustine's distinction between the external Word and the internal Word, he at the same time clarified the relation and extent of the two (*op. cit.*, p. 383 f.).

### ***Agreement of Luther and Calvin***

It has been stressed time and again that there was a great difference between Luther and Calvin in their emphases on the Spirit's operation in and

[p.277]

by the divine Word. This difference exists and must not be overlooked even though, as Dr. B. B. Warfield points out, Calvinism and Lutheranism "have infinitely more in common than in distinction" (*New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, II, p. 160). The difference manifests itself especially in Calvin's theological view of the sacraments, though on this point the Genevan was far removed from Zwingli's more extreme position.

In Calvin's *Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, Ronald S. Wallace quotes Calvin at great length to clarify his view on the relation of the Spirit to the divine Word. He writes: "Calvin seldom refers to the preaching of the Gospel without speaking of it in such exalted language and without exhorting the readers to prize beyond all other gifts of God to the Church this incomparable treasure set in our midst by the grace of God, for it is the Word which is able to save the human soul" (p. 89). He then quotes Calvin's words: "It is a high eulogy on heavenly truth that we obtain through it is a sure salvation; and this is added, that we may learn to seek and love and magnify the Word as a treasure that is incomparable" (*Commentary* on Jas. 1:21). Again: "The Gospel is not preached that it may only be heard by us, but that it may, as a seed of immortal life, altogether reform our hearts" (*Commentary* on I Pet. 1:23). Despite such expressions, Calvin, however, held that the Spirit works when and where he wills, though not apart from the divine Word. He thus writes: "The work of the Spirit, then, is joined to the Word of God. But a distinction is made, that we may know that the external Word is of no avail by itself, unless animated by the power of the Spirit. All power of action, then, resides in the Spirit Himself... and thus all power ought to, be entirely referred to God alone" (*Commentary* on Ezek. 2:2; *op. cit.*, p. 89 f.). The reader easily detects in these statements that Calvin was eager to deprecate any "mechanical power" of the Word and ascribe all glory for the believer's conversion to God. He writes, for example: "Saving is not ascribed to the Word, as if salvation is conveyed by the external sound of the voice, or as if the office of saving is

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taken away from God and transferred elsewhere" (*Commentary* on Jas. 1: 21). Again: "God sometimes connects Himself with His servants and sometimes separates Himself from them.... He never resigns to them His own office" (*Commentary* on Mal. 4:6). Whereas Luther might be accused of "mechanizing" the Word, Calvin might be charged with separating the Spirit from the Word. Against such misinterpretation of their doctrines both, however, protested.

Despite their differences, both Calvin and Luther firmly held to the canonical Scriptures as God's inspired Word to which everyone desiring to be saved must submit in willing and consecrated obedience. As a matter of fact, on account of the special situation which Calvin faced in Switzerland, he and his followers developed the doctrine of verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures much more systematically than did Luther, who in this matter regarded himself as in no special opposition to Romanism, against which he primarily directed himself, except, of course, that he rejected the

[p.278]

Apocryphal writings as non-canonical and maintained the distinction of the ancient Christian Church between *homologoumena* and *antilegomena*.

Luther therefore agreed with Calvin in rejecting "heavenly prophets" and other "swarmers" (as Luther called them) who boasted special revelations from God outside and apart from the Scriptures. The reason why Luther spoke of the "spiritualists" as swarmers (*Schwaermer*) was because they, like bees, were swarming in the air without any certain place upon which to rest. The swarmers, he said, were aimlessly flying around in the cloudland of their own dreams and refused to base their faith on the Bible. Luther, just as Calvin, wanted the teachings of the Church to rest upon clear passages of the Scriptures, or lucid and unmistakable divine words which could not be shaken. Thus the Protestant leaders of Wittenberg and Geneva, whatever their other differences, were in full agreement in teaching that the divinely inspired Scriptures are the only source and norm of the Christian faith and so the divine means by which the Holy Spirit leads men into all truth. Both opposed the detachment of the Spirit from the Scriptures.

### ***Modern Forms of Detachment***

In the revolutionary spiritualism of his day, Luther encountered the detachment of the Spirit from the divine Word in various forms. One of the earliest spiritualists was Andreas Karlstadt, his colleague at Wittenberg, who had supported his challenging theses against Rome and had attended his decisive disputation with Dr. Eck at Leipzig as his trusted friend. Soon, however, Karlstadt became a religious evolutionist, encouraging incendiary methods of reformation. He almost succeeded in destroying Luther's work at Wittenberg by his extreme seditious procedure, for which he cited the Spirit's promptings. Fortunately the great Reformer, who meanwhile had been busy at the Wartburg translating the New Testament into the language of the people, was informed of Karlstadt's erratic behavior and, boldly returning to Wittenberg, soon restored peace and order by means of a few timely sermons. Luther's sane and sober guidance of the

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disturbed people was based upon clear Scriptures passages, whereas Karlstadt boasted of being led by the Spirit's inward prompting in his social and spiritual agitations. His example shows that the pretended guidance of the Spirit without the inspired Scriptures may lead to unspeakable confusion.

More calamitous was the appeal to the Spirit, apart from the Scriptures, in the case of Thomas Muenzer, whose personality and talents so favorably impressed Luther that the Reformer recommended him to his friend John Silvanus for promotion at Zwickau, Saxony, where in 1520 he was appointed a pastor. But before long Muenzer began to raise objections to Luther's spiritual Reformation of the Church. He pretended to be moved by the Spirit to surpass Luther as a reformer. To this end he depreciated the Bible, which Luther esteemed as "the treasure of all treasures." Following his "inner light," he set out to destroy the godless in the world and establish a kingdom

[p.279]

of peace ruled by Christ. His fanaticism fanned into burning flames the prevailing unrest among the peasants, caused by many social and economic evils, and finally led to the Peasant's War. In a short time the disorganized peasants were defeated and their "prophet," as Muenzer was known among them, was executed. Karlstadt and Muenzer, no doubt, were extreme enthusiasts in their appeal to the "inner guidance of the Spirit" apart from the written divine Word. While the invocation of the Spirit has not always proved itself so utterly disastrous, the two cases show the dangers inherent in this trend. Wherever the Scriptures are set aside and man's faith is based upon some alleged "inner prompting of the Spirit," there commonly the gospel truths of the Christian faith are set aside and social pursuits are put in the place of the spiritual teachings of Christ's saving gospel.

The dangerous tendency of detaching the Spirit from the Scriptures may be illustrated also by the failure of neo-orthodoxy to restore to the Christian Church the gospel of Christ in the sense of Biblical theology.<sup>1</sup> Without doubt Christendom owes a debt of gratitude to

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<sup>1</sup> As P. T. Forsyth recognized, the danger of "spiritual vagrancy" coheres in emphasis on the "Spirit of Christ" rather than on the letter of Scripture (*Faith, Freedom and the Future*, pp. vi-ix). While Forsyth, despite his departure, stayed rather near the "letter," others did not. Daniel Jenkins professes that the Spirit gives insight for "discriminating between what is true and false" in the traditions of the past (*Tradition, Freedom and the Spirit*, pp. 65, 70). Contemporary illumination of believers is thus exalted above apostolic inspiration. H. H. Farmer affirms that the Bible is an indispensable record which confronts us reliably with the concrete individuality of the historic Christ ("The Bible: Its Significance and Authority," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, p. 156), yet he disparages its infallibility and appeals to the Spirit as compensation for its fallibility: the Holy Spirit takes the things of Christ and shows them to scholars (*ibid.*, p. 17). But does not genuine Christian faith first take its rise from the conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, and not from the Spirit apart from the Gospel history? If trustworthy knowledge of Biblical events is dependent upon modern scholars specially illumined by the Spirit, the Bible itself becomes unprofitable for the ordinary reader and the ordinary believer. The fact is, however, that the transition from an inerrant Bible to a Bible trustworthy in its main outlines cannot really be made by a decisive appeal to the Spirit, for in dealing with special historical revelation our concern is not with an immediate divine activity but, rather, with something historically determinable. Neo-orthodox theologians who make the Spirit rather

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Karl Barth. In the arid desolation of bankrupt humanism he called thinking religious leaders to a new appreciation of theology as also to a new appraisal of basic Christian values. His slogan, "Back to Luther and Calvin!" challenged the theologians of his day to go beyond Schleiermacher and the crass rationalists, and once more to review the theology of the Reformation as a new starting point. But Barth went back neither to Luther nor to Calvin. His doctrine of the Scriptures is

[p.280]

very definitely at variance with that of the Wittenberg and Genevan divines who, for example, did not regard large portions of the Scriptures as mythical and unhistorical, as does Barth. They accepted the canonical Scriptures as the divinely inspired Word of God which is both infallible and inerrant. Barth regards only that as the Word of God which the Spirit impresses upon the individual human mind as such, or, we may say, the Bible is God's Word only so far as God speaks through it. If God does not speak through the Scriptures they are not God's Word, but merely man's word (cf. *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, p. 123). Thus neo-orthodoxy denies the objectivity of theological truth and so has no "sure word of prophecy." To Barth divine truth is all the more subjective, since the Bible, according to his view, was written by erring men and so is itself errant. He writes: "The prophets and apostles even as such... in their spoken and written word [were] capable of error and actually erring men like us all" (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 563 ff.). But Luther and Calvin esteemed the Scriptures as God's infallible Word because they were given by divine inspiration. The Spirit never errs and therefore the Scriptures are God's inerrant Word even if men refuse to believe them. But according to Barth "the inspiration does not lie before us as the Bible lies before us. The Bible is God's Word [only] so far as God lets it be His Word" (*ibid.*).

To what deplorable aberrations from conservative Biblical theology the neo-orthodox "doctrine of the Word" will lead is shown by Barthianism in its more liberal manifestations. Emil Brunner, for example, oriented Barthian theology to what has been called "Anglo-Saxon liberalism." He writes: "I myself am an adherent of a rather radical school of Biblical criticism which, for example, does not accept the gospel of John as a historical source and which finds legends in many parts of the synoptical gospels" (*The Theology of Crisis*, p. 41). Or: "Whosoever asserts that the New Testament gives us a definite consistent account of the Resurrection is either ignorant or unconscientiously" (*The Mediator*, p. 577). Brunner rejects the Christian doctrines of the inspired, inerrant Scriptures and of Christ's virgin birth and propitiatory atonement. In its more liberal aspects neo-orthodoxy conforms to modernism, which denies the gospel truths held by the Christian Church. For this sort of theologizing neo-orthodoxy certainly cannot claim the

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than Scripture the locus of revelation (even if they locate that revelation on the "rim" of Scripture) exaggerate the fact that the Spirit conveys personal conviction and certainty into the notion that the Spirit is the immediate source of revealed truth. While they insist that the Spirit is not to be sundered from Scripture, they mean little more than that the Bible serves as the frame within which the Spirit existentially encounters man; surely they do not affirm the revelation-status of Scripture itself.—ED.

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Spirit's guidance into all truth; it is a movement away from the Scriptures, and no appeal to the guidance of the Holy Spirit will avail in its behalf.

## VII. THE ABIDING SPIRIT IN THE ABIDING WORD

When Christ promised his disciples the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth, he addressed them as sincere believers. The Comforter was to be theirs as the Spirit of truth which the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him. But the believing disciples knew him, for he dwelled with them and in them and was to abide with them forever (cf. John 14:16

[p.281]

f.). Here, then, we have two basic truths concerning the Holy Spirit: first, the Spirit forever abides with all true believers in Christ; and second, the world cannot receive him, because it refuses to accept him. But believers in Christ also keep his words (John 4:23), as these are now set forth to us in the Scriptures. It is the peculiar nature of Christian believers that they are built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone" (Eph. 2:20).

This divine foundation of the apostles and prophets, the sacred Scriptures, will endure till the end of time, and through the divine Word the Holy Spirit will gather into Christ's kingdom of grace and glory God's elect whom no man shall pluck out of his hand (John 10:20). Human speculations and heresies are doomed to pass away. But the promise of our divine Lord stands forever: "My words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Resting upon that sure promise of the living triumphant Christ, the communion of Christian believers will always hold fast to the inspired divine Scriptures and the gospel message of Christ's perfect vicarious atonement. Led by the Holy Spirit, Christ's followers will be more than conquerors in their battle for the divine truth. In his immortal Reformation hymn Luther penned defiant words: "We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us." God's communion of believers cannot fail, because the triumphant Christ and his Holy Spirit, working with the divine omnipotent Word, cannot fail. "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him" (John 4:16 f.). By this unflinching divine promise the Church of Christ will be triumphant till the end of time.

[p.406]

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