

# EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 9

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Volume 9 • Number 4 • October 1985

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## Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from  
publications worldwide for an international  
readership, interpreting the Christian faith for  
contemporary living.*

GENERAL EDITOR: BRUCE J. NICHOLLS



Published by  
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

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Dr. Orr uses 'revival' for the renewal of life among believers and 'awakening' for the coming alive to spirituality of the community. He writes, "Revival is the work of God with the response of the people of God, awakening, the work of God with the response of the unregenerated masses."

Editor p. 304

## The Holy Spirit and the Church

Klaas Runia

*Reprinted from The Holy Spirit Down to Earth, 1977, with permission*

No Christian will deny that there is a close relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church. From the point of view of the *history of salvation* one can say that the New Testament Church came into existence on the day of Pentecost. On purpose we speak of the New Testament Church. If the term 'Church' is used in a wider sense, for instance, as a designation of the people of God, then it must be said that the Church was already in existence in the days of the Old Testament. One can think, for example, of the establishment of the covenant with Abraham and afterwards with Israel as a nation at Sinai. One can even say with the Heidelberg Catechism "that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, *from the beginning to the end of the world*, gathers, defends and preserves for Himself, by his Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life" (Lord's Day 21). On the other hand, it would be possible to say the the New Testament Church came into being during the ministry of Jesus Himself, who as the Messiah gathered a people around Himself. Yet "in the full sense of the Church in vigorous life, redeemed by the cross of Christ, invigorated by the divine power, set forth on the path of work and worship, the Church certainly did not come into existence until that day of Pentecost. The coming of the Spirit upon the little band of disciples galvanized them into action. It constituted them as the Church."<sup>1</sup>

But the relation between the Holy Spirit and the Church is not only of an historical nature. Spirit and Church are also inseparably related from the *theological* point of view. The ancient Church expressed this in its Creeds by incorporating the Church in the 'third' article, the article on the Holy Spirit. "I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the holy,

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *The Spirit of the Living God*, 1960, 54, 55.

catholic Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.” It is noteworthy that the Church is mentioned first, even before the blessings bestowed upon the individual believer. When the early Christians thought of the Spirit, they related Him immediately to the Church. Likewise, when they thought of the Church, they could do this only within the context of the Spirit and his work.  
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## THE SPIRIT’S RELATIONSHIP TO JESUS CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

The Church, however, is not only related to the Spirit, but also to Jesus Christ. She is not only called God’s temple, in which God’s Spirit dwells ([1 Cor. 3:16](#)), but she is also called the body of Christ ([1 Cor. 12:27](#)). This raises the question: What exactly is the relation between Christ and the Church on the one hand, and between the Spirit and the Church on the other? Behind this lies the question of the relation between Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As is well known, this is one of the most difficult problems in contemporary theology.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to discuss it here at great length. It must suffice to make some comments.

Taking our starting point in the history of salvation, we see a double relation between Jesus, who is the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, Jesus Himself is the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit overshadows Mary so that she conceives ([Matt. 1:18ff.](#), [Luke 1:35](#)). On the occasion of Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist, the Spirit descends upon Him ([Matt. 3:16](#)). Yes, He receives the Spirit not by measure, but in fullness ([John 3:34](#)). Therefore He may be called the Messiah, the one who is anointed with the Spirit (cf. [Luke 4:18, 19](#)). Through the eternal Spirit He offers Himself to God on the cross ([Heb. 9:14](#)) and through the same Spirit God raises Him from the dead (cf. [Rom. 1:4](#); [8:11](#); [1 Tim. 3:16](#)). The resurrection, however, is also a turning point in the relationship. As the risen and exalted Messiah, Jesus now receives the right to make disposition of the Spirit. Some theologians have even gone so far as to speak of an identification of the exalted Messiah and the Spirit.<sup>3</sup> In my opinion such an identification is untenable on the basis of the scriptural data. Admittedly, the exalted Christ, the Kurios, and the Spirit are inseparable. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and in the Spirit Christ Himself is present. Yet they are never identified, but always distinguished. This is true even of [II Corinthians 3:17](#), where at first glance Paul seems to identify them, when he writes: “Now the Lord is the Spirit.” But this is immediately followed by the words: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”<sup>4</sup> We can therefore go no further than to say that in and through the Spirit Jesus Himself is present. This does not mean that the Spirit is ‘only’ a function of the exalted Lord and does not have his own subsistence. p. 306 Just as in the history of salvation the Son makes Himself available to be the “servant of the Lord” (cf. [Phil. 2:7](#)), so the Spirit makes Himself available to the exalted Messiah. This Jesus foretold in the Paraclete sayings: “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak.... He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” ([John 16:13, 14](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. I. Herrmann, *Kyrios und Pneuma*, 1961; H. Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 1964, esp. Ch. I; J. P. Versteeg, *Christus en de Geest*, 1971.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herrmann, *op. cit.*, 140. This view is contested by J. P. Versteeg.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, 1946, 946. “The fact that Paul is not fusing the two persons of the deity into one is at once apparent when he writes ‘The Spirit of the Lord.’”

For this reason it is not at all surprising that in the New Testament the Church is related to both Christ and the Spirit. The most fundamental of these relations is the one to Christ. The Church owes its existence to Him. Her being rests upon the saving act of God in Jesus Christ, upon the great atonement accomplished once for all in Him.<sup>5</sup> She is “the Church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood” ([Acts 20:28](#)); for “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her” ([Eph. 5:25](#)). Yes, this relationship is so close, that the congregation is called ‘the body of Christ.’ “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” ([I Cor. 12:27](#)). Here too Paul sometimes uses expressions that almost border on an identification between Christ and the Church (cf. [I Cor. 12:12](#)). Yet throughout his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians he clearly states that Jesus is the head of the body (cf. [Eph. 1:22](#); [4:15](#); [Col. 1:18](#)).

This close relationship with Christ, however, does not exclude but rather includes the relationship with the Spirit. It is through the Spirit that the exalted Lord communicates Himself and all his gifts to the Church. Exactly at this point it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between Christ and the Spirit. There is hardly any difference between the expressions ‘in Christ’ and ‘in the Spirit,’ or between ‘the Spirit in us’ and ‘Christ in us.’ Within this context Paul can also write: “Now the Lord is the Spirit” ([II Cor. 3:17](#)). For the same reason he can relate the so-called ‘charismata’ to both Christ and the Spirit. In [I Corinthians 12](#) they are ascribed particularly to the Spirit. In [Ephesians 4](#) the gifts descend from the exalted Lord. There is nothing contradictory in this, for it follows from that very same relationship between the exalted Lord and the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> The exalted Lord gives his gifts through the Spirit. The Spirit takes them out of Christ and gives them to the believers.

## THE SPIRIT GIVEN TO THE BELIEVERS COLLECTIVELY

The whole New Testament affirms that every believer receives the **P. 307** Holy Spirit. No one can be a believer without having received the Spirit in his heart. Emphatically Paul states: “No one can say ‘Jesus is Christ’ except by the Holy Spirit” ([I Cor. 12:3](#)). Yet we would be mistaken if we stopped here. In his great work on the Holy Spirit in *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* Swete has pointed out that, “as the end approached and the Pentecostal effusion drew near, Jesus spoke of the Spirit as to be given to His disciples collectively.”<sup>7</sup> And so it indeed happened on the day of Pentecost. Not only did the eleven receive the Spirit, but all 120 believers who were gathered together in “one place” ([Acts 2:1](#)). Later on the new converts received the Spirit, when they were added to the body of Christ by baptism and/or the laying on of hands (cf. [Acts 8:15ff](#), [9:17](#), [19:5ff](#)).<sup>8</sup>

In the letters of Paul we notice the same emphasis on the corporate aspect of the reception of the Spirit. We find this in particular in two of his letters and in both cases it is stressed against the background of internal strife and threatening conflict. In the congregation of Corinth there was the great danger of spiritual individualism, whereby each member of the congregation exulted in his own gifts. Overagainst this individualism Paul stated that the whole congregation is a temple (NAOS) of God’s Spirit in which God’s Spirit dwells ([I Cor. 3:16](#)). Later on, in the same letter, he wrote: “For with one Spirit we

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The Pattern of the Church, A Baptist View*, ed. by A. Gilmore, 1963, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Herman Ridderbos, *Paul*, 1975, 86ff.

<sup>7</sup> H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament*, 1919, 4th ed., 306.

<sup>8</sup> The only exception is the case of Cornelius and his household. This event has been called ‘The Pentecost of the Gentiles’ and is a remarkable parallel to the first Pentecost. Yet it should be noted that in [Acts 10](#) the outpouring of the Spirit happens only after Peter has arrived and has started preaching.

were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” ([1 Cor. 12:13](#)).<sup>9</sup> In the background of the letter to the Ephesians is the contrast Jews-Gentiles, a contrast that threatened the unity of all Christian congregations in the first century. And again Paul put the emphasis on the corporate reception of the Spirit. The basis of unity lies in Jesus Christ who in his death on the cross broke down the dividing wall of hostility ([2:14](#)). But in the same passage Paul also referred to the Spirit. In verse [18](#) he wrote: “for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father,” and he concluded the argument by saying: “In him (Jesus Christ) you too are being built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (verse [22](#)). It is not surprising either that this letter contains the passage about the one body, the one Spirit, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, the one God and Father ([Eph. 4:4–6](#)). Body and Spirit are [p. 308](#) mentioned in one breath, for the secret of the unity of the congregation is found in the one Spirit whom they all received and in whose gifts they all participate.

But these two letters are not exceptions. In nearly all the letters of Paul and also in those of the other New Testament writers we find similar statements (cf. [Rom. 5:5](#); [8:9–11](#); [Gal. 3](#); [2](#), [5](#); [1 Thess. 4:8](#); [1 Peter 4:14](#); [1 John 3:24](#); [4:13](#)). In all these texts the writers address the entire congregation. Their starting point is that all believers have received the Spirit. Rightly F. W. Grosheide says: “In the new dispensation the Church of the Lord, in the sense of the universal Christian Church, is a congregation of Spirit-possessors or Spiritbearers, *pneumatici*.”<sup>10</sup>

But can this relationship between the Spirit and the Church be defined more precisely? When we survey the history of the Church and of theology, we see that basically there are three different views.

## A. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

This view is concisely expressed in the formula: “The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church.” This formula, dating back to Augustine, has been taken up in official papal statements of both the 19th and 20th century (*Divinum Illud Munus*, 1896, by Pope Leo XIII and *Mystici Corporis*, 1943, by Pope Pius XII). It is a clear indication of how the Roman Catholic Church sees itself and how it sees the Holy Spirit in relation to itself. George S. Hendry puts it thus: “In the Roman view, the Church is primarily the successor of Christ; the presence and power of the Holy Spirit are then regarded as endowments bequeathed by Christ to the Church to enable it to discharge its supernatural role.”<sup>11</sup> On the one hand this means that the Roman Catholic Church does admit that it needs the Spirit. In order to fulfil its mission it is dependent on the Spirit. On the other hand, this dependence is understood as a kind of possession. In particular the bishops as successors of the apostles and therefore of Christ Himself, partake of the Spirit. They have the right to administer the sacraments and thus to forgive sins. Although it is not denied that the Spirit also works in the ordinary members of the Church, the latter are and remain dependent on the former. Pius XII declares that the Spirit, “though present in all the members and working in them in a divine way, works on the inferior members through the ministry of the superior ones.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The RSV translates ‘by one Spirit,’ but we believe that ‘with one Spirit’ is more correct (cf. also the same expression *en pneumatē* in [Matt. 3:11](#); [Mark 1:8](#); [Luke 3:16](#); [Acts 1:5](#)). Cf. also H. N. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 372/3.

<sup>10</sup> *De Heilige Geest*, ed. by J. H. Bavinck, P. Prins, G. Brillenburg Wurth, 1949, 99.

<sup>11</sup> George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, 1957, 55.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 44.

In this way the Holy Spirit **P. 309** is imprisoned in the sacramental institution of the Church and Hendry rightly comments: "There is no place in the Roman Catholic system for a confrontation of the Church with the Holy Spirit as Lord, i.e., as witness to the Lordship of Christ over the Church. Rather, the Holy Spirit, as the soul of the Church is the source from which the Church is inflated with its own authoritarian claim."<sup>13</sup>

The question may be asked whether this view still holds true of present-day Roman Catholic teaching. Have there not been shifts in emphasis, especially since the second Vatican Council? Although there have been important shifts, we nevertheless believe that basically, at least as far as official teaching is concerned, nothing has really changed. It is true for example, that the *Constitutio de Ecclesia* of Vaticanum II first speaks of the Church as the 'people of God' (*populus Dei*) and only then mentions the hierarchy. Yet it speaks of the hierarchy in such a way that the ordinary members of the Church are still fully dependent upon them. "With priests and deacons as helpers, the bishops received the charge of the community, presiding in God's stead over the flock of which they are the shepherds in that they are teachers of doctrine, ministers of sacred worship and holders of office in government" (section 20). In the next section we read: "In order to fulfil such exalted functions, the apostles were endowed by Christ with a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit coming upon them (cf. [Acts 1:8](#); [2:4](#); [John 20:22-23](#)), and they passed on the gift of the Spirit to their auxiliaries by the imposition of hands (cf. [I Tim. 4:14](#); [II Tim. 1:6-7](#)), which is handed down to our day through the episcopal consecration.... It is abundantly clear that by the imposition of hands and through the words of consecration, the grace of the Holy Spirit is given, and a sacred character is impressed in such wise that bishops, in a resplendent and visible manner, take the place of Christ Himself, teacher, shepherd and priest, and act as his representatives (*in eius persona*)" (section 21).

## B. THE SPIRITUALIST VIEW

An altogether different view is found in the so-called Radical Reformation. Here all emphasis is put on the gift of the Spirit to the individual believer. While Rome institutionalised the Spirit, the Radical Reformation individualised Him. *The dwelling place of the Spirit is the heart of the individual believer. All stress is laid on the immediate subjective experience of the Spirit. The Church as an **P. 310** institution hardly plays a part in their lives. The really important thing is the fellowship with those who have a similar experience. Berkhof puts it thus: "In no case is the church more than the assembly of those who recognize one another as bearers of the same Spirit. Their church is at most an organized group or sect, in many cases a loose convention or conventicle. In every case this church, as such, is not the work of the Spirit but it is a human consequence of the spiritual work in individual hearts, founded on the natural impulse of congenials to seek out one another. So the relation of the Spirit to this community never can be more than an indirect one. Hence it is quite natural that the group is dissolved or that secessions take place as soon as the participants no longer recognize one another as bearers of the same Spirit."*<sup>14</sup>

Although, to all appearances, this view is diametrically opposed to that of the Roman Catholic Church, there is fundamentally a great deal of agreement. For here too dependence on the Spirit (which is readily acknowledged) basically means possession. Those who have received the Spirit are absolutely certain of his presence and can always

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<sup>13</sup> Hendry, *op. cit.*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> Berkhof, *op. cit.*, 46.



appeal to Him. Here too there is no real place for criticism, for who in the world would dare to criticize the Spirit? It is interesting to note that this fundamental harmony (or should we say analogy?) between Roman Catholicism and Radical Reformation was already recognized by the Reformers. In connection with the inseparable relation between Word and Spirit Luther wrote in the *Smalcald Articles*: "In these matters, which concern the external, spoken Word, we must hold firmly to the conviction that God gives no one his Spirit or grace except through or with the external Word which comes before. Thus we shall be protected from the enthusiasts—that is, from the spiritualists who boast that they possess the Spirit without and before the Word and who therefore judge, interpret, and twist the Scriptures or spoken Word according to their pleasure. Münzer did this, and many still do it in our day.... The papacy, too, is nothing but enthusiasm, for the pope boasts that 'all laws are in the shrine of his heart'.... All this is the old devil and the old serpent who made enthusiasts of Adam and Eve."<sup>15</sup> In his *Reply to Sadoletto* Calvin made exactly the same observation. "We are assailed by two sects which seem to differ most widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptists? And yet, that you may see that Satan never p. 311 transforms himself so cunningly as not in some measure to betray himself, the principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God that they may make room for their own falsehoods."<sup>16</sup>

It is very important for us, too, to have a clear understanding of these matters. For these same views are still present in our day. There may have been many changes in the Church of Rome, but at this point it has remained faithful to its own tradition. The spiritualist view also abounds in our day and makes its inroads into our own churches. I am thinking here in particular of the so-called charismatic movement. At first glance it seems to be quite different from the movements of the Radical Reformation. Pentecostals usually put much emphasis on their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. They also appeal to Scripture in order to found and prove their views. But every one who has a close acquaintance with them soon discovers that in many cases their own spiritual experience is at the centre of their spiritual life. I am afraid that Hendry is right when he says: "The spiritualist individual experiences his own conversion and the resultant spiritual glow rather than Jesus Christ and him crucified; when he bears his testimony, it is to speak of his new-found peace and happiness rather than to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."<sup>17</sup> At times I also wonder whether the 'underground' connections between the catholic and spiritualist views are not showing in the great impact the charismatic movement of our day has on large segments of the Roman Catholic Church. Undoubtedly, there are other points of contact as well (e.g., in the doctrine of sacramental grace), but does the deepest point of contact not lie in the idea of the possession of the Spirit, once He has been given and received?<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Smalcald Articles*, Ch. VIII, 3–5. Cf. *The Book of Concord*, ed. T. G. Tappert, 1959, 312.

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed. by John C. Olin, Harper Torchbooks, 1966, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Hendry, *op. cit.*, 68/9.

<sup>18</sup> We also believe that there is a clearly 'enthusiast' or 'spiritualist' trend in many documents of the World Council of Churches. They, too, often claim the presence and guidance of the Spirit, without giving any evidence that the ideas brought forward are based on or legitimated by Scripture. A clear example is the opening statement of the Uppsala Report on 'The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church,' which reads: "We give thanks to God the Holy Spirit that at this very time he is leading us into a fresh and exhilarating understanding of the Body of Christ, to the Glory of God the Father" (*The Uppsala 68 Report*, 11).

## C. THE PROTESTANT VIEW

As an example we take the view of Calvin. As is well known, Calvin had a very 'high' view of the Church. The heading of Chapter I of Book IV of the *Institutes* reads: "The true Church with which as Mother of all **P. 312** the godly we must keep unity." In the first section of this chapter he writes: "I shall start, then, with the church, in whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. 'For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder,' so that for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother."<sup>19</sup> In the fourth section of the chapter he deals with 'the visible church as mother of believers' and writes: "For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels."<sup>20</sup> All this the Church can do only because the Spirit is present in her.<sup>21</sup>

If one did not know better, one might believe he is listening to a Roman Catholic author! But, of course, these statements of Calvin may not be isolated from his total view of the work of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> In particular his *Reply to Sadoletto* is important for our discussion. Sadoletto had claimed that the Church is always and everywhere directed by the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Calvin's reply is a question, followed by an affirmation. What comes of the Word of the Lord, that clearest of all marks, and which the Lord himself, in pointing out the Church, so often recommends to us? For seeing how dangerous it would be to boast of the Spirit without the Word, He declared that the Church is indeed governed by the Holy Spirit, but in order that government might not be vague and unstable, He annexed it to the Word.<sup>23</sup> Calvin does not deny that the Church needs the Spirit. He also believes that the Spirit has been given to the Church. He is willing to say: "The Spirit goes before the Church, to enlighten her in understanding the Word," but then he immediately adds: "While the **p. 313** Word itself is like the Lydian stone, by which she tests all doctrines."<sup>24</sup> These few sentences very succinctly summarize the view of the Reformers, which, dare I say, is the view of the New Testament itself. For both Luther and Calvin a Church without the Spirit is an absurdity, but the Spirit is the Spirit of the Word.<sup>25</sup> The Church did not receive the promise of the Spirit, but this promise is not automatically fulfilled. It is fulfilled only if, on the part of the Church, there is faith, and this faith is regulated by the Word of God. The Church will never doubt that the Holy Spirit is always with it, its best guide in the right path. But it will at the same time be mindful what use God would have us receive from his Spirit. 'The Spirit,' he says, 'whom I shall send from the Father will lead you into all truth.' But how? Because, he says, 'the Spirit will recall all

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<sup>19</sup> *Institutes*, IV, I, 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Op. cit.*, IV, I, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, IV, XIX, 6. "Surely, the Holy Spirit is still present among God's people, for the church cannot stand unless he is its guide and director."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. S. van der Linde, *De Leer van der Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn*, 1943, and Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 1957.

<sup>23</sup> *A Reformation Debate*, 60. For Sadoletto's statement, see 41. Cf. also 45: "The Church errs not, and even cannot err, since the Holy Spirit constantly guides her public and universal decrees and councils."

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. S. van der Linde, *op. cit.*, 98.



that I have said to you.' Therefore, he declares that we are to expect nothing from his Spirit than that he will illumine our minds to perceive the truth of his teaching."<sup>26</sup>

At this point I would like to make one more reference to contemporary Roman Catholic theology. Some authors definitely show a much better understanding of the relationship between Spirit and Church. Hans Küng, for instance, clearly states that the Church is under the Spirit.<sup>27</sup> He works this out in four theses. 1. The Spirit is *not* the Church. It would be very dangerous to identify the Spirit and the Church. 2. The Spirit precedes the Church. 3. The Spirit works wherever He wants. 4. The Spirit works whenever He wants. The fact that the Church still has the Spirit, in spite of all her failures, is evidence of God's faithfulness. Every Protestant cannot but agree with this. And yet one cannot help feeling that there are still traces of spiritualism in Küng's view. In this whole section of his book there is no reference to the norm of God's Word, and therefore the question remains unanswered: how do we know where and when the Holy Spirit speaks to us? This silence about the Word as the decisive criterion is an indication that Küng has not yet fully abandoned the spiritualistic stance which characterized both Rome and the Radical Reformation.

### **How Does the Spirit Work in the Church?**

The Church as an empirical phenomenon shows two aspects, an institutional aspect and a community aspect. Both of them are **p. 314** indispensable and for both of them the work of the Holy Spirit is decisive.

### **A. THE INSTITUTIONAL ASPECT**

We start with a quotation from Berkhof. "For many Protestants it is difficult to understand that the Spirit has anything to do with the institutional and organizational character of the church. The reason is that they have such an individualistic and spiritualistic or, at best, personalistic conception of the Spirit that they do not understand that God created structures as well as persons and that in his saving work he is also interested in structures insofar as they can serve his purposes. The New Testament has not the slightest trouble in seeing that the Spirit is connected with outward acts, ministries and organizations."<sup>28</sup> He then goes on to mention several of these connections, such as: baptism, the laying on of hands, the Lord's Supper, the proclamation of the Gospel, authority and discipline in the Church, and the ministry.

Without the Holy Spirit all these activities and functions would lack all spiritual power. Of course, they could still be there without the Spirit. Externally the Church could maintain itself for a long time without the presence of the Spirit. But she would be spiritually dead. She would have become a purely human organization. Because of this possibility some Christians regard the institution of hardly any importance at all. In their opinion it is only the organizational hull. We believe that this is an altogether wrong approach. Actually it is an approach of unbelief. We should never forget that the Lord has given his promise to grant us his Holy Spirit through these institutional means. We can only be Church, if and when we believe this. Here too the word of Luther applies: 'If you believe, you have.'

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<sup>26</sup> *Institutes*, IV, VII, 13.

<sup>27</sup> H. Küng, *De Kerk*, 1967, 200ff.

<sup>28</sup> H. Berkhof, *op. cit.*, 51.

## B. THE COMMUNITY ASPECT

The institutional aspect is not the only one, it is not even the most important one. The real purpose of the Spirit is to create a community of believers. When we put it thus, we do not in any way want to make a contrast. As a matter of fact Reformed theology has always rejected any such contrast. H. Bavinck wrote: "The congregation of the believers on earth is not only charismatic, but also institutional. She is not only herself the property of Christ, but she also serves to lead others to Christ. She is *coetus* (meeting), but also *mater fidelium* **P. 315** (mother of the believers); organism, but also institution; purpose and means at the same time."<sup>29</sup> Bavinck also explicitly refuses to answer the question which of the two has priority. "The question of the priority of the institution or the organism is itself evidence of onesidedness. Both belong together and constantly interact."<sup>30</sup> Yet he does not deny that the deepest essence of the Church is its being the people of God or the congregation of believers. "There can be no doubt that according to the Scriptures the essence of the Church is found in its being God's people."<sup>31</sup> "It is beyond all doubt that in its deepest essence the Church is the congregation of true believers."<sup>32</sup> This is also the teaching of the Reformed confessions. The Belgic Confession states: "We believe and profess one catholic and universal church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by his blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit" (Art. XXVII). The secret of this congregation is that she is the body of Christ, and this she is because the Holy Spirit connects these people with Christ and thus with each other. As we have seen before, for Paul's 'body' and 'Spirit' belong so closely together that they are complementary. "There is one body and one Spirit" ([Eph. 4:4](#)). "With one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" ([I Cor. 12:13](#)). He also calls the congregation "a letter from Christ ... written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" ([II Cor. 3:7](#)). In connection with the expression 'the fellowship of the Holy Spirit' (cf. [I Cor. 13:14](#); [Phil 2:1](#)) Morris writes that two interpretations are possible. The expression can mean: 'participation in the Spirit' or 'fellowship created by the Spirit.' But then he adds: "Whatever be the verdict on the disputed point, it is beyond doubt that the New Testament views the Christian Church as a fellowship of the redeemed, and a fellowship created by the Holy Spirit. It is not simply the result of the coming together of like-minded people, drawn together by a common interest. It is the result of the action of the Spirit Himself."<sup>33</sup>

This congregation therefore is a charismatic fellowship. I shall not go into the question of the charismatic gifts, because this is the subject of another paper. But in my opinion there can be no doubt that according to the New Testament all believers have received one or more gifts of the Spirit (cf. [I Cor. 12:4-7](#), esp. verse [6](#)—"in every **p. 316** one"—and verse [7](#)—"to each"; cf. also [I Peter 4:10](#)—"each"). But they have not received them for their own pleasure, but 'for the common good' ([I Cor. 12:7](#)), for 'building up the church' ([I Cor. 14:12](#)). Here we also find the secret of a vigorous congregational life. The latter is not just a matter of active office-bearers (however important!), but of a congregation in which all use their gifts to the full and co-operate for the edification of the whole.

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<sup>29</sup> H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, IV, 288.

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, 313.

<sup>31</sup> *Op. cit.*, 282.

<sup>32</sup> *Op. cit.*, 283.

<sup>33</sup> Leon Morris, *op. cit.*, 58.

c. However, this is not the end of the matter. The Church is not the end of God's ways. God's ultimate concern is with the world. It is striking indeed, how in the New Testament the gifts of the Spirit are nearly always connected with the *missionary task of the Church*. We see this already in the Paraclete sayings ([John 15:26, 27](#)). It is a very dominant theme in the Lukean writings ([Luke 24:48, 49](#); [Acts 1:4-8](#)). It is also emphasized in the gospel of John ([John 21:21-23](#)). And when the Spirit is poured out on the day of Pentecost all these promises are at once fulfilled: Peter and all the others immediately begin to evangelize ([Acts 2](#)). As a matter of fact the whole book of Acts is full of it. We call it the Acts of the Apostles, but a better name might be: the Acts of the Holy Spirit. And it is very significant indeed that this book of the Spirit contains the story of the missionary outreach of the Church. The Spirit Himself takes care that the programme of [Acts 1:8](#) is carried out: "In Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

In this way the Church is in the service of the coming Kingdom. Or to put it another way: the Church stands between the accomplished work of Christ and the Kingdom that is still to come. She lives between the times: the time of Christ's first coming and the time of his second coming. She lives out of the first coming and towards the second coming. And the time between these times is the time of the Holy Spirit, who as the Vicar of Christ works in this world, using the Church as his instrument.

### **What Does the Holy Spirit Do in the Church?**

1. The Holy Spirit gives *power* to the Church. In [Acts 1:8](#) we read Jesus' words: "You shall receive power ('dunamis') when the Holy Spirit has come upon you." And indeed, this 'dunamis' becomes visible everywhere. It becomes visible in the *life of the early Church*, [Acts 2:44-47](#). They were together and had all things in common. This is not an 'experiment of communism,' nor the picture of an ideal, but the description of the charismatic reality which prevailed in the life of the new Christian community. This 'dunamis' also becomes visible in the *preaching*. The preachers are ordinary people, the words they use [p. 317](#) are ordinary words, and yet what an effect they produce (cf. [Acts 2:41](#); [4:8](#); [13](#), [33](#) (with great 'dunamis'); [6:10](#); etc.). Some scholars have suggested that there may have been a charismatic element in this preaching.<sup>34</sup> This could well be so, when we take into account the reaction of Festus in [Acts 26:24](#) (cf. also [I Thess. 1:5](#); [I Cor. 2:4](#); [II Cor. 5:13](#)). It would be the fulfilment of [Luke 21:15](#). It also raises the question: Is our preaching today also full of the 'dunamis' of the Spirit? Why does our preaching today often have so little effect? Are our ministers not 'full of faith and of the Holy Spirit' (like Stephen in [Acts 6:5](#))? Is this also the reason why revivals do not seem to happen any more? Some time ago Dr. M. Lloyd Jones wrote: "You will not get the things I mentioned until something has happened to the preachers. The present state of things is a reflection of a defect in the preachers; it is great preaching that produces great believers and great listeners and congregations who rejoice.... The congregation is stirred by great preaching. And this is what happened in the great revivals."<sup>35</sup> The 'dunamis' of the Holy Spirit also becomes visible in the *charismatic phenomena*, such as speaking in tongues (cf. [Acts 10:46](#); [19:6](#) and the charismata mentioned in [I Cor. 12-14](#)). In addition, many signs and wonders happened (cf. [Acts 3:1-10](#); [4:30](#); [5:12](#); [6:8f.](#); [9:36f.](#)). Yet we should be mistaken if we would seek the power of the Spirit only in extraordinary and spectacular things. This power may become very manifest in such things but it is just as much present in the ordinary things which happen in the lives of Christians. Morris writes: "I like the story of the drunkard

<sup>34</sup> Cf. H. M. Matter, in *De Heilige Geest*, 1949, 81.

<sup>35</sup> 'Twenty-five years on,' Elwyn Davies and Dr. M. Lloyd-Jones, in *The Banner of Truth*, 1975, 20.

who was converted, and who later came across some of his mates. On hearing what had happened they were amused, and somewhat cynical. 'You don't mean to tell me that you believe the Bible!' said one of them. 'Do you really think that Jesus changed water into wine?' 'Well, I don't know about that,' came the reply. 'But I do know that in my house He has changed beer into furniture!' And in its measure the same is true of everyone who has come to a saving knowledge of Christ. When Christ comes into a man's life, so does His Holy Spirit. The Spirit comes with creative power, and in the power of the Spirit that man is able to do things he could never do before. The Spirit does not simply tell men what to do; He gives them strength to do it."<sup>36</sup>

It is very important for us today to remember all this. There are many complaints about the powerlessness of the Church. But is the reason [p. 318](#) not this, that so many of our activities lack the power, the 'dunamis', of the Spirit? And we cannot blame the Spirit! We can blame only ourselves. Do we really pray for the breakthrough of his power in our lives? Let us remember: "Without the Holy Spirit, and without an intense belief in the Holy Spirit, no Church can have any real growth and development in its faith and in its belief."<sup>37</sup> And that is really what matters. The important thing is not that the 'machinery' of the Church runs smoothly, but that something happens to the people in and around the Church. Thomas Chalmers was once congratulated on a masterpiece of speech delivered in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. 'Yes,' said Chalmers, 'but what happened?'<sup>38</sup>

2. The Holy Spirit is the *guide* of the Church. This is the promise which Jesus gave to his disciples: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" ([John 16:13](#)). Undoubtedly this first of all applies to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and his saving work. One may say that the New Testament is the evidence of the fulfilment of this promise. Both the Gospels and the Epistles show such a deep insight into the person and work of Christ that only one explanation will do: these writers were guided by the Spirit. But Jesus' promise was not restricted to the apostles and their fellow-workers. Also in subsequent ages the Spirit has been active in guiding the Church. Again and again he raised up men and women who were privileged to discover new truths in the Word of God or who were able to apply to the Word of God in a new way to the situation in which the Church found itself. One can think here of such great men as Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc. But through the centuries there have also been many men and women who worked in a local church and were a tremendous help to their congregations. In this connection we should also mention the confessions of the Church, in particular those of the 16th and 17th century which have been and still are of tremendous value for the Church. But the guidance of the Spirit into all truth is not limited to doctrinal or confessional matters only. It applies to all matters that concern the church, including matters of government and discipline. The Dutch fathers of the 16th century were fully right when they inserted the following words in the official 'Opening prayer for ecclesiastical assemblies': "We beseech Thee, faithful God and Father, that, in accordance with Thy promise, Thou wilt abide in the midst of the present assembly through Thy Holy Spirit, and that He may lead us into all the truth." Likewise they said in the 'Closing [p. 319](#) prayer': "Thou hast also been present with Thy Holy Spirit in our assembly, guiding our deliberations according to Thy will, and binding our hearts together in mutual peace and unity." This thanksgiving has nothing to do with the Roman Catholic idea of the

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<sup>36</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, 77/8.

<sup>37</sup> William Barclay, *The Promise of the Spirit*, 1960, 108.

<sup>38</sup> Barclay, *op. cit.*, 112.

‘possession’ of the Spirit, but was the believing answer to the promise which had been mentioned in the opening prayer. Moreover, the appeal to the promise was never isolated from the obedience to the revealed Word. In the same opening prayer we also read: “Grant that Thy Word may be our only rule and standard, in order that our deliberations may resound to the glory of Thy Name, the edification of Thy Churches and the peace of our own consciences.”

3. The Holy Spirit, however, is not only the guide, but is also the *critic* of the Church. However true it may be that the Church is the communion of the saints, these saints are certainly not yet perfect. They are still sinners, as Luther said: *simul justus et peccator* (at the same time just[ified] and a sinner). Although Rome does acknowledge that the members of the church, including the members of the hierarchy, are all sinners, yet it maintains that the Church as a whole cannot err in doctrine. This view found its culmination point in the decision of Vaticanum I concerning the infallibility of the Pope, when he speaks *ex cathedra* in matters pertaining to faith and morals, a decision which was deliberately and emphatically repeated by Vaticanum II.<sup>39</sup> Here the Holy Spirit is imprisoned in the office of the Church. Protestants have rightly rejected this view as contrary to the Word of God. To be sure, they also believe the indefectibility of the Church.<sup>40</sup> This does not mean however that one particular ecclesiastical institution or denomination will remain till the end of the ages, but rather that there will always be a congregation of believers, however small, which will confess Jesus Christ as Lord, and believe in his Word.

Every Church, both as a local congregation and as a denomination, is constantly open to the criticism of the Spirit, who exercises this criticism by the Word of the prophets and apostles, inspired by Himself. Again and again He confronts the Church with his Word, challenging the Church to examine whether it is really obedient to the Word. This challenge also comes to us as Reformed Churches. For it may be true that we have beautiful confessions, but this does not automatically imply that we are truly obedient Churches. First of all, these confessions themselves are not perfect and therefore cannot be [p. 320](#) the last word. I know we have always acknowledged this. The Belgic Confession, for instance, says: “Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with these divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all.” Undoubtedly we all agree with this statement, but do we live up to it? To what extent for instance are we guilty of traditionalism? Traditionalism is an easy way out. The traditionalist always has the confession on his side. But does he have the truth on his side? Is he hiding behind the walls of the confession in order to escape from the claim God’s Word makes on him in this particular situation? The truth is never abstract but always concrete. In new situations (and history is changing the situation all the time) the Spirit wants to grant us out of the treasure of God’s Word both old and new insights (cf. [Matt. 13:52](#)). Are we willing to accept them?

But the confessional aspect is only one side of the matter. There is also the aspect of the life of the Church. What are we doing with Jesus’ commandments? (cf. [Matt. 28:20](#)). For instance, what are Christians of the so-called first world doing for the people in the third world? What is our attitude as a church towards people belonging to another race? What are we doing with texts such as: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither

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<sup>39</sup> *Constitutio de Ecclesia*, section 25.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Bavinck, *op. cit.*, IV, 308/9.



slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” ([Gal. 3:28](#))? Are we really willing to revise our own views, yes to revise ourselves, i.e., to be converted, and accept the other as he is? Are we really willing to examine our beliefs and attitudes in order to find out whether we are guided by man-made ideologies instead of being guided by the Word of God? Let us remember, personally but also as Churches, that we can be very confessional and yet utterly unfaithful to the Gospel of Him who told us the parable of the Good Samaritan, yes, who Himself was *the* Good Samaritan, giving his life for sinners of all nations and races. Let us also remember that in all seven letters to the seven congregations in Asia Minor, in which they are criticized on account of both doctrine and life, the expression recurs: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” ([Rev. 2, 3](#)).

4. We also need the Holy Spirit to attain the true *unity* of the Church. We cannot do that ourselves, neither in the local congregation, nor as denominations. Already in the New Testament itself we see that the unity is constantly threatened, and that on two accounts.<sup>41</sup> [p. 321](#) On the one hand, it is endangered by the presence of error (the antichrist-motif); on the other hand, it is endangered by lack of love (the Apollos-motif, cf. [1 Cor. 1:10ff.](#)). In both cases the division can be overcome only by obedience to the Word of God. In the first case, where the truth of the apostolic witness is consciously gainsaid or rejected, there is no real unity any more, and the definite warning is sounded not to seek or maintain unity. Here the New Testament speaks of its ‘anathema’ ([Gal. 1:8](#)), or it uses the qualification ‘antichrist’ ([1 John 2:18](#); cf. [4:1ff.](#)). In the second case, when it is not a division for the sake of truth but for purely personal reasons, all disunity is utterly condemned. With strong passion Paul puts the question to the Corinthians: ‘Is Christ divided?’ ([1 Cor. 1:13](#)). The answer is implied in the question. It is impossible for the body of Christ to be divided by such purely personal, non-theological factors. It is impossible, because the one Spirit of Christ dwells in them all. Paul pleads with the Ephesians that they be “eager to maintain the *unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace” ([Eph. 4:3](#)). And then he immediately continues, stating the reason: “There is one body and one Spirit” (verse [4](#)). Likewise he pleads with the Philippians: “So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, *any participation in the Spirit*, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind ...” ([Phil. 2:1, 2](#)).

All this applies not only to the local congregation, but also to the area of ecumenicity. We have to stretch out our hands, across the walls of our Reformed Churches, to reach others. I know this is not easy. There are many complicating factors. But I am convinced that we are not allowed to let our historical, cultural, racial, national, social and even doctrinal differences be the last word. We have also to listen to what the Spirit has to say to us *today*. The Spirit did not work and speak in the past only, but He also speaks today. I believe it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ who has set the Churches into motion, so that they begin to seek each other. Let us never forget that the modern ecumenical movement started on the mission field! We do not have the right to isolate ourselves and hide ourselves in our Reformed castle, but we must be willing to enter into serious conversations with other Churches and to listen, together with them, to what the Spirit has to say to us in the Word of God, as it applies to our 20th century situation. In the only recorded prayer of Paul, a prayer for the Church, he asked for the power “to comprehend *with all the saints* what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God” ([Eph. 3:18, 19](#)). [p. 322](#)

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *The Nature of the Church and its Ecumenical Calling*, Report for the RES of Amsterdam 1968, *Acts*, 1968, 233ff.



5. Finally, the Spirit keeps the *expectation* of the Church alive. The Spirit Himself is an eschatological gift. His coming on the day of Pentecost is evidence that the 'last days' have started (cf. the insertion by Peter of the words 'in the last days' into the prophecy of Joel, [Acts 2:17](#)). In [Romans 8:23](#) Paul speaks of himself and the believers in Rome as "we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit." The genitive 'of the Spirit' is a genitive of explanation, meaning: the Spirit Himself is the first-fruit of the harvest to come. He is the foretaste of the Kingdom.<sup>42</sup> Likewise the Spirit is called the 'arraboon,' i.e., the down-payment, the first instalment of the riches to come ([II Cor. 1:22](#); [5:5](#); [Eph. 1:14](#)). As Christians and also as Churches we are constantly inclined to settle down in this world. But the Spirit does not allow us to do this. Again and again He awakens us out of our worldly complacency and our complacent worldliness. He knows that what He gives now is only a down-payment. And He keeps alive the desire for the full adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies ([Rom. 8:23](#)). Yes, the joy and peace which He gives makes us abound in hope ([Rom. 15:13](#)). It is therefore not surprising to see that the Book of Revelation closes with the call of the Spirit and the bride: 'Come' ([22:17](#)). Without the Spirit the bride could well have forgotten her bridegroom. But the Spirit keeps the memory of Him alive in her heart and mind. The Spirit Himself is also looking forward to his coming, for at that moment his work too will be perfected. In the present we have only the 'down-payment.' Then we will receive the fullness of the Spirit. John says when Jesus appears that we shall be like Him ([I John 3:2](#)). Of Jesus we read in [John 3:34](#) that he received the Spirit 'not with measure.' We may expect that we too will be full of the Spirit. Our whole being, body and soul, will be permeated and controlled by the Spirit.<sup>43</sup>

Yes, then we shall be God's people in the fullest sense of the word. God Himself will dwell with us and we shall be his people ([Rev. 21:3](#)), a people so full of the Spirit that no trace of sin is left. "In our present world we have no words or ideas to describe what that means, not even by analogy. It is enough to know that the power of Christ's resurrection, which is the power of Spirit now in the world, is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think. 'Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is'" ([I John 3:2](#)).<sup>44</sup>

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# Renewal Catholic, Charismatic and Calvinist

G. A. Cole

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Berkhof, *op. cit.*, 106.

<sup>43</sup> *Institutes*, I, XIV, 18; III, XX, 46.

<sup>44</sup> Berkhof, *op. cit.*, 108.