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Spirit and Spirituality in Luther

It is too long since we had an essay from our Editorial Adviser and the former Principal of Cliff College. One of Dr Wood's many long-standing interests is in Martin Luther. The present essay was given as the 1989 Annual Lenten lecture at the Centre for Reformation Studies in Sheffield.

Two prominent concerns on the Christian scene today are by no means unrelated. One is a renewed emphasis on the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The other is a resurgence of interest in the communion of the believer with God. Spirit and spirituality are contemporary keywords and the one leads to the other. Understood in biblical terms, spirituality may be defined as the response of the human spirit when activated by the Spirit of God. It is more than a matter of devotional exercises or forms of prayer. Spirituality is not to be regarded simply as an effort of man to reach out to God. It is rather the outcome of God's initiative in reaching out to man in grace and enablement.

Spirituality, then, has to do with the inner life of the Christian. That inner life will affect, and indeed control, active service and witness in the world, but its own operations remain largely hidden from view. Alfred Adler, the Austrian psychologist, once declared that all who take holiness seriously are compelled to lead 'a life within life'. He himself regarded it as an escape into the realms of fantasy, but in fact it is not so. Rather, it represents reality at its profoundest level. When interpreted like this, it might be even more accurately described as 'life within a life'. As an antidote to modern secularism, Christian spirituality, as reflecting the impact of the Holy Spirit on the spirit of man, affirms and enhances life at its highest and fullest.

These issues which are the subject of ongoing discussion today are, however, far from novel. They have been raised in previous periods of the Church's history and perhaps never more acutely than at the time of the Protestant Reformation and by Martin Luther himself. Nowadays Protestants, along with Roman Catholics and the Orthodox, are being urged to re-examine their roots with a view to a sharpened appreciation of their distinctive

stance. It may therefore prove unexpectedly profitable to reconsider Luther's approach to Spirit and spirituality.

Methodology

The method adopted in this survey is to allow Luther to speak for himself. The material presented here is drawn directly from primary sources. Whilst not ignoring what has been so prolifically written about Luther, particularly in recent years, our major preoccupation is with his own account of his teaching. As Ian Siggins has advised, we must avoid forcing Luther into the Procrustean bed of concerns that were not in fact his.¹ In examining any aspect of Luther's theology, he himself must be permitted to write the agenda and define the terms of reference. This we will endeavour to do.

At the same time, nevertheless, we should bear in mind the reformer's reluctance to claim magisterial authority for his own writings. They only carry weight insofar as they are channels of the Word. Luther's cautionary comments about his works—especially his initial efforts—included in the 1545 Preface to the complete edition of his Latin writings—are well known and often quoted (LW 34:327–8. For key to Luther references see end notes). As early as 1522, however, Luther wound up his Introduction to the Wartburg Postil by expressing a fervent wish that his own writings would soon no longer be necessary. 'O would to God that among Christians the pure gospel were known and that most speedily there would be neither use nor need for this work of mine. Then there would surely be hope that the Holy Scriptures too would come forth again in their worthiness' (LW 35:123–4).

Contrary to a fashion which has prevailed of late, no unduly rigid distinction is drawn in the treatment that follows between the young and the mature Luther. As we have seen, Luther himself issued a caveat with reference to works produced before his experience of evangelical illumination in the Tower Room of the Augustinian monastery at Wittenberg which probably occurred late in 1514. Although some may disagree, we are inclined to accept the verdict of Gordon Rupp when he concludes, concerning Luther: 'It is clear that in all essentials, his theology was in existence before the opening of the Church struggle in 1517'.² Nevertheless it may be a wise procedure to compare the

¹ Ian D. K. Siggins, *Martin Luther's Doctrine of Christ*, New York, Yale University Press, 1970, 7.

² E. Gordon Rupp, *Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms*, London, S.C.M. Press, 1951, 39.

earlier works with the later in each instance in order to check for similarities and differences.

In his *Spiritus Creator* Regin Prenter, to whom all subsequent researchers in this field are indebted, divides his analysis of Luther's concept of the Holy Spirit into two chronological sections—before and during the controversy with the enthusiasts. Yet he can devote an entire chapter to 'the continuity of Luther's testimony about the Spirit' and is at pains to explain that the decision to use only sources from the first period in the earlier part of the book 'is no indication that Luther's own view of the Holy Spirit underwent any change after 1522'.³

The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Luther's Theology

Luther was no merely academic theologian. He was concerned throughout his reforming career with the relevance and application of doctrine to life. For him theology was an urgently practical and not simply a theoretical discipline, as Siggins rightly insists.⁴ Experience makes a theologian, Luther asserted, and his theology of the Word was also a theology of life (WA 5:163). Life as God intends it is spiritual as well as physical and psychic, and the source of such life is the Holy Spirit. Hence Prenter can venture to affirm that 'the concept of the Holy Spirit completely dominates Luther's theology'.⁵ It affects every aspect of his teaching. In his *Brief Explanation of the Creed* (1520) Luther boldly sets out his personal convictions. 'I believe not only that the Holy Ghost is one true God, with the Father and the Son, but that no one can come to the Father through Christ . . . nor attain any of His blessings, without the work of the Holy Ghost, by which the Father and the Son teach, quicken, call, draw me and all that are His, make us, in and through Christ, alive and holy and spiritual, and thus bring us to the Father; for it is He by whom the Father, through Christ and in Christ, worketh all things and giveth life to all' (PE 2:372-3).

Commenting in 1535 on Galatians 3:2—'Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?'—Luther refers to the Holy Spirit as 'such a great prize' that the human heart neither understands nor believes that it cannot be obtained as a reward but must be accepted as a gift (LW 26:213). All Christians constantly 'need the aid and comfort of the Holy Spirit'

³ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, E.T. 1953, xvi.

⁴ Siggins, *op. cit.*, 2.

⁵ Prenter, *op. cit.*, ix.

(LW 26:393) and every true pastor by his ministry maintains 'the gifts and works and power of the Holy Spirit', along with the knowledge of God and faith in Christ bringing the fruits of his passion and death (LW 46:228). The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not discoverable by the exercise of human reason but is revealed supernaturally from heaven itself (LW 22:248).

In his *Brief Confession Concerning the Holy Sacrament* (1544) Luther rejects the heresy of Macedonius, the fourth century Bishop of Constantinople, who was deposed from his office because he denied the deity of the Holy Spirit by holding that He is a created being subordinate to the Son. Macedonius recognized all the articles of faith except this one, so Luther supposed. What good did such acceptance do to Macedonius and his party, Luther enquires. It amounted to as much as subscribing to none of them. Even though he could recite and speak about these other items of belief quite correctly, he nevertheless had no true God because he did not regard the Holy Spirit as divine (LW 38:309-10). To devalue the significance of the Spirit is to rob the Christian faith of its activating principle.

Luther takes up a similar theme in one of his major Reformation treatises *On the Councils and the Church* (1539). He complains about those who 'preach Christ nicely with Nestorian and Eutychian logic that Christ is and yet is not Christ' (LW 41:114). They may be fine Easter preachers, he argues, but they are very poor Pentecost preachers since they do not teach sanctification by the Holy Spirit. They dwell exclusively on the redemption purchased by Christ on the cross without realizing that it had one end in view—namely, that the Holy Spirit might effect a transformation as believers die to sin and live for righteousness when the old Adam is replaced by the new man in Christ. 'Christ did not earn only *gratia*, "grace", for us, but also *donum*, "the gift of the Holy Spirit", so that we might have not only forgiveness of, but also cessation of, sin' (LW 41:114).

The centrality of the Holy Spirit in Luther's theology is indicated by his contention that the Reformation itself was carried forward, not by human ingenuity or organization, but solely by the Spirit, through the medium of the proclaimed Word. It was God the Father and the Holy Spirit who sanctified the corrupt Church by means of that Word and purged away all papal infidelity and idolatry (LW 41:223). The reborn Church itself represented a miracle of the Spirit. The Pope and his partisans, on the other hand, 'have another Holy Spirit' since they seek to reimpose the demands of the Law as a way of acquiring righteousness (LW 32:79).

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luther's Experience

The role of the Holy Spirit was focal in Luther's theology because he knew that it was so in his own Christian experience. Describing his evangelical conversion in the Wittenberg Tower Room, when his eyes were enlightened to see the graciousness of God, he attributes it to the operation of the Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit, Luther explains, who unveiled the Scriptures for him and enabled him to enter through open doors into paradise (LW 54:193-4). As Philip Watson has shown, 'Luther's own heart, which for all his endeavour had remained so cold, was kindled with the love of God through the Holy Spirit given unto him. The gift of the Spirit and the gift of love were, indeed, one and the same; and the Spirit became a living reality in Luther's life and thought as never before'.⁶ From then on Luther was, in Tillich's phrase, 'Spirit-determined and Spirit-directed'. He entered into a definitive experience in which 'Spirit fulfils spirit instead of breaking it'.⁷

'I too have been in the Spirit and have seen the Spirit,' Luther tells the Councilmen of Germany in 1524 as he warns against the errors of those who boast about the Spirit but consider the Scripture of little worth (LW 45:365-6). The allusion is to extremists on the radical wing of Protestantism. In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520) Luther acknowledges the leading of the Spirit in the genesis and preparation of his Reformation writings. He feels himself duty bound, so he declares, 'to set forth publicly the counsel I have learned under the Spirit's guidance' (LW 36:77). He tells his friend George Spalatin that in order to get the most out of studying the Bible it is essential to despair completely of any diligence or intelligence of his own and to 'rely solely on the infusion of the Spirit'. Then he adds pointedly: 'Believe me, for I have had experience in this matter' (LW 48:54).

Luther's conception of spirituality underwent a fundamental transformation as a result of his enlightenment and his consequent resolve to test doctrine and practice solely by the Word of God. He had hitherto attempted to conform to the standards of medieval monastic devotion. With characteristic zeal and determination he strove to emulate his peers. He confessed later that if the monastic life could have led a man to heaven, he would have qualified for entry (WA 38:143; cf. WA 40.i.685; LW 26:458; LW

⁶ Philip S. Watson, *Let God be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther*, London, Epworth Press, 1947, 21,22.

⁷ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, London, Nisbet, 1964, Vol. III, 250.

38;166). A dispassionate observer like Richard Friedenthal is compelled to concede that Luther was 'more completely the monk than his fellow monks'.⁸ 'In the papacy I was zealously given to piety,' Luther confesses, 'But how long did it last? Only until I read Mass. After an hour I was worse than before. In the end one becomes weary and feels impelled to say: "I will lay piety, Moses, and the Law aside and cling to another Person, who say (Mt. 11:28). 'Come to Me all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'.'" (LW 23:271)

'When I was a monk,' Luther again reveals, '. . . I tried many methods. I made confession every day etc. But none of this did me any good, because the desires of the flesh kept coming back. Therefore I could not find peace' (LW 27:73). He admits that he was at that time unable to grasp the meaning of Paul's statement in Galatians 5:17—'For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish'. Soon, however, he was to realize with the apostle that those who are led by the Spirit are no longer in bondage to the Law (Gal. 5:18).

In his exposition of John 1:17 in 1537 Luther explains that the disciples of the Law fall into two categories. There are those in the first place who delude themselves that they are capable of meeting the Law's demands in their own inherent strength, and indeed are convinced that they are doing so. On the other hand there are those—and Luther himself was once one of them—who expend their energies on the Law, 'toiling, disciplining and tormenting themselves, only to sense in their hearts that they are unable to keep the Law with their deeds . . . Such people set about attempting to fulfil the Law with their works. They labour incessantly, mortify their flesh, wear coarse shirts, fast, and scourge themselves in an effort to meet the Law's prescriptions' (LW 22:142). Elsewhere in his sermonic commentary on the Gospel according to John, Luther refers to those who imagine that by their extreme asceticism they can 'build themselves a special bridge to heaven' (LW 24:35). 'But,' Luther adds, 'this is a bridge and stairway made of spider web; the higher they ascend on it, the deeper and more shamefully they fall into the abyss of hell' (LW 24:36). There is no other way than Christ alone, to whom the Spirit points. 'This is surely the right road and bridge; it is firmer and safer than any stone or iron structure. But heaven and earth would have to collapse before this road would ever deceive me or lead me astray' (LW 24:36).

⁸ Richard Friedenthal, *Luther*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, E.T. 1970, 105.

Prenter has a particularly pertinent section dealing with 'the Spirit and empirical piety' in Luther. 'If we are not led by the Spirit into the kingdom of Christ then we are *eo ipso* in the kingdom of Satan', so Luther would insist, according to Prenter, 'and then one's whole empirical piety is nothing other than the condemned works of the Law . . . The righteousness which counts before God is not man's real piety but Christ's alien righteousness. The new man which is born anew by water and the Spirit is that man who in faith takes refuge in Christ'.⁹ Such was Luther's teaching because such was Luther's experience, confirming the revelation of God's Word. Luther's spirituality was the outcome of his emancipation by the Holy Spirit. He was freed from the shackles of the Law—for him the penitential system imposed by the Roman Church was simply another form of Judaism—and now shared what Paul describes as the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:21).

The Nature of Spirituality

Luther defines 'one who is spiritual' as 'a Christian who has the Spirit of Christ' (LW 40:29). He frequently repeats the terms 'spirit', 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' in his writings. For him spirituality has to do in essence with the operation of the Holy Spirit on the human spirit in bringing it to life in the new birth and developing that life in sanctification. In his exposition of the Magnificat (1521) Luther recognizes three constituents in man's nature—body, soul and spirit—but adds that there is a further division of each of these three, and the whole of man, into two parts—namely, flesh and spirit. This latter, says Luther, is a division of qualities rather than of nature. The spirit, in the tripartite analysis, is regarded by Scripture as 'the highest, deepest, and noblest part of man' (LW 21:303). By it he is enabled to lay hold of what is otherwise incomprehensible and invisible—eternal reality. It is, in short, 'the dwelling place of faith and the Word of God' (LW 21:303). It is the regenerate spirit, moreover, which animates the soul and energizes it so as to realize its full potential.

In the same treatise Luther proceeds to illustrate his anthropology from the structure of the Jewish tabernacle as detailed in the Book of the Exodus. In this approach he is carrying on the allegorical tradition of the scholastic exegetes which on other occasions he repudiated. The tabernacle, or tent of meeting,

⁹ Prenter, *op. cit.*, 224,225.

comprised three separate compartments. The first was the holy of holies—God's residence, in which there were no lights at all. The second was the holy place with the seven-branched candlestick and lamps. The third was the outer court, open to the sky and the sunlight. In the tabernacle, according to Luther, we have a figure of the Christian man. His spirit is the holy of holies, where God dwells in the darkness of faith. There man believes what he neither sees nor comprehends. Man's soul is the holy place with its seven lamps—'all manner of reason, discrimination, knowledge, and understanding of visible and bodily things' (LW 21:304). Man's body is the forecourt—'open to all, so that men may see his works and manner of life' (LW 21:304). Although it is God's intention that man should be sanctified in every part, nevertheless the focus of the Holy Spirit in a human life is the spirit which, when awakened, is supremely sensitive to the divine overture. It is in this area of interplay between God's Spirit and the believer's spirit that the heart of spirituality lies.

Christians are living letters, as Paul reminds the Corinthians (2 Cor. 3:2). It is not ink that Christ uses in his pen, that is, his ministry, Luther declares. He comes with the Holy Spirit and his gifts, as we read in chapter twelve of First Corinthians. 'The ink is the proclamation which He writes through the apostles; and the Holy Spirit transmits this message through us. Christ is the author who inscribes the message in our hearts, not with ink; no, the beautiful letters of the Holy Spirit are faith and hope; they flow from His pen as fiery and living letters' (LW 22:472).

This interaction between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit, which is the essence of spirituality, makes possible the intimate union of the believer with God in Christ. Luther's comment on John 14:20 is relevant here. 'At that day', Jesus tells His disciples, 'you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you'. After Christ's Ascension and the outpouring at Pentecost they will learn and realize, as Christ's followers have done down the centuries, through the Holy Spirit and their own experience, that as the Son is in the Father, so believers are in the Son and the Son is in them and that thus they are inseparably united (LW 24:137). The German phrase means blended into one—literally, mixed as ingredients in one cake. In John 17:22,23 our Lord prays that Christians may be one with himself and the Father—that is, as Luther puts it in a Maundy Thursday sermon in 1523, 'one body, one thing, one cake' with the Father and the Son (WA 12:486). Luther goes even further as he identifies the indwelling Christ with the Christian's spiritual life. As Prenter explains, 'it is

the risen and living Christ Himself who vicariously lives that life which alone deserves to be considered as our spiritual life'.¹⁰

Having indicated the relationship between the Spirit and spirituality, as Luther apprehended it, we must proceed to review some of the pressure points, so to speak, where the impact of the Holy Spirit is most apparent in the spiritual development of the believer. We shall discover that we are touching on areas and aspects of the Spirit's ministry which are still widely discussed today.

Luther and the Enthusiasts

Before dealing with these issues, however, a further historical comment is called for. We have seen how Luther's concept of spirituality was originally conditioned by his reaction to the inadequacies of the traditional pattern of devotion within the unreformed Catholic Church. From 1520 onwards, however, Luther found it necessary to resist influences from another quarter altogether. He felt compelled to distance himself from those he dubbed enthusiasts, or fanatics, who began to emerge within the ranks of Protestantism. He tended to lump them all together indiscriminately as Anabaptists, but, as David Wright has shown in a recent study, the primary reference appears to be to the radicalism of Karlstadt, Müntzer and Zwickau prophets which threatened the stability of the church in Wittenberg and elsewhere at the time of Luther's enforced retreat in the Wartburg Castle.¹¹ Indeed, he slipped out to deliver a series of sermons and eventually wrote at some length *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525).

'When we say "Spirit"', Luther declares, 'we do not mean a fanatic or an autodidact, as the sectaries boast of the Spirit' (LW 27:20). These extremists 'who make much ado about the Holy Spirit' appeared on the scene of their own accord, Luther complains (LW 23:227). They were convinced that the Holy Spirit had inspired them in their antics and that God communicated with them directly (LW 23:349). They even imagined that they were superior to Scripture and could indeed improve upon it (LW 23:230). These are the 'erring spirits', against whom Paul

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹¹ David F. Wright, 'Luther's Quarrel with the *Schwärmer*', in *Christian Experience in Theology and Life*, ed. I. Howard Marshall, Edinburgh, Rutherford House Books, 1988, 57.

warns Timothy (1 Tim. 4:1), 'who profess spirituality, call themselves spiritual, and claim to be of the Spirit and in the Spirit' (LW 35:137). In their unbalanced over-enthusiasm they have 'devoured the Holy Spirit feathers and all', as Karlstadt had done (LW 40:83). But with all Karlstadt's repetition of the words 'Spirit, Spirit, Spirit' 'he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come' to believers (LW 40:147). He and his like want to teach not so much how the Spirit comes to us, as does the Word of God, but how we may come to the Spirit. 'They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind,' Luther adds with fine and pertinent irony (LW 40:147).

As Prenter helps us to realize, the gravamen of Luther's charge against the heavenly prophets is that they turn the divine order upside down.¹² God deals with us outwardly in the gospel and the sacraments and inwardly through the Spirit and his gifts. But the basic issue involved has to do with the relationship between the external and internal dealings of God. Luther insists that God decreed that the outward must come first and the inward afterwards and dependent on the outward. The enthusiasts reversed that order, looking for the inward apart from the outward and indeed dismissing the outward—the Word and sacraments—as unessential. Such are the penetrating insights which control Luther's mature teaching about the Spirit and spirituality.

The Beginnings of Spiritual Life

Luther recognizes that the new life of the Christian has its source in the new birth. There can be no spirituality apart from regeneration. The believer is born again through the seed of the Word. 'How does this take place?' Luther enquires. 'In the following way,' he replies. 'God lets the Word, the gospel, go forth. He causes the seed to fall into the hearts of men. Now where it takes root in the heart, the Holy Spirit is present and creates a new man. There an entirely new man comes into being, other thoughts, other words and works. Thus you are completely changed. Now you seek everything from which you formerly fled; and what you formerly sought, that you flee' (LW 30:44; cf. LW 24:226). A new creation (2 Cor. 5:17) implies not merely a change of clothing or of outward appearance, like the donning of

¹² Prenter, *op. cit.*, 248; cf. Vilmos Vajta, *Luther on Worship*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, E.T. 1958.

a monastic habit. It is a total renewal of mind and outlook effected by the Holy Spirit. 'There is no other way, path, or street leading to heaven than that of water and the Holy Spirit', Luther argues. 'We must be born again through these' (LW 22:303).

The faith that justifies—so crucial in Luther's thinking—is itself a product of the Spirit's operation. It is he who gives and creates faith through the Word (LW 38:86). Faith is itself 'the gift of God that is infused in the heart by the Holy Spirit' (LW 27:28; cf. LW 34:109; LW 49:62). That gift is 'bestowed by the strength of the Spirit' (LW 19:87). The only true and living faith is created within us not by our own strength, but by God's Spirit (LW 36:301). Luther repeatedly describes faith as 'the work of the Holy Spirit' (LW 2:267)—indeed 'the work of the Holy Spirit alone' (LW 14:59). The promise of the Holy Spirit is given through faith and conversely faith is granted through the Holy Spirit, purchased by Christ's merit on the cross (LW 27:263). The Christian life begins, continues and reaches its consummation in faith. To believe in Christ 'and to die in that faith', Luther declares, is 'the office of the Holy Spirit' (LW 17:219). As Gordon Rupp has reminded us, Luther's emphasis on the hiddenness of faith may occasionally echo the language of mysticism and the negative way, 'but it is always in connection with faith, and with the work of the Holy Spirit, and never an intellectual and spiritual exercise within a man's unaided power'.¹³ There is a profound difference between a merely historical faith—believing that certain saving events did in fact occur—and an experienced faith in which salvation becomes real for the individual. Luther is convinced that only experienced faith, brought about by the Holy Spirit, is capable of enduring (WA 20:395; cf. WA 20:395,399,420).

Luther firmly holds that the Christian believer may enjoy what the writer to the Hebrew calls 'the full assurance of faith' (Heb. 10:22). He attributes it, as Paul does, to the witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirit confirming that we are indeed children of God (Rom. 8:16). Luther anticipates John Calvin in laying stress on the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit by which the heart can and should believe 'with complete certainty that it is in a state of grace and that it has the Holy Spirit' (LW 26:379; cf. LW 37:366). This assurance is something more than an intellectual demonstration or the acquisition of philosophical certainty. It is an existential conviction, confirming the reality of being as constituted in Christ. At the same time Luther rejects the subjectivism of

¹³ E. Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God: Luther Studies*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1953, 211.

the enthusiasts and emphasizes that the inward witness of the Holy Spirit is balanced by the external witness of the Word. According to Luther, the enthusiasts, like the Romanists, speak only speculatively about the Spirit's witness (LW 26:383). The latter even defended the propriety of doubt and denied that it is possible to be certain of being in a state of grace and of possessing the Holy Spirit (LW 24:129; cf. LW 21:38 n. 13). Luther confesses that this was once his own attitude when he was in the monastery. If someone had asked him, 'Are you convinced that you have the Holy Spirit?' he would have joined others in replying, 'God forbid! How could I be so presumptuous? I am a poor sinner. To be sure I have done this and that; but I surely do not know whether it satisfies God' (LW 24:130). But Luther was later led to reject such mistaken diffidence as a 'dangerous doctrine' and a 'wicked idea' which only served to undermine the gospel and repudiate 'all the blessings and gifts of the Holy Spirit' (LW 26:377,388). 'Let us thank God, therefore,' he concludes, 'that we have been delivered from this monster of uncertainty' (LW 26:387; cf. LW 26:388—'the plague of uncertainty').

It is not surprising that, in view of his own definitive experience in the Tower, Luther should place considerable emphasis on the illumination of the Spirit. It should be realized that for him this was more than an intellectual enlightenment, though that was involved. Luther recognized such illumination as the source of all spiritual discernment and of faith. 'Our nature is so corrupt,' he declares, in his Lectures on Genesis (1535-1536), 'that it no longer knows God unless it is enlightened by the Word and the Spirit of God' (LW 2:124). 'It is indeed true that the Holy Spirit alone enlightens hearts and kindles faith,' Luther observes in the same commentary, and then inserts a significant proviso: 'but He does not do this without the outward ministry and without the use of the sacraments' (LW 4:72). That reservation was made with the enthusiasts in mind, since they were inclined to abandon the gospel and the usual means of grace and were constantly 'on the look out for extraordinary illuminations' (LW 4:125).

Luther clearly places the reception of the Spirit at the outset of the Christian life. God has promised that those who believe in Christ and call on his name 'shall at once receive the Holy Spirit' (LW 44:241). And again, 'a man who denies himself and calls upon Christ in genuine trust is certain to receive the Holy Spirit' for 'where Christ's name is, there the Holy Spirit follows' (LW 44:241). Luther elsewhere makes it plain that Christians 'receive the Holy Spirit from the Word and hearing' in the moment of regeneration (LW 8:249), along with the forgiveness of sins (LW

8:45–6). The Spirit, who is received by faith (LW 30:215), is also received on belief (LW 26:274). ‘Therefore, wherever there is a Christian, there is none other than the Holy Spirit’ (LW 24:89).

The Sanctifying Spirit

It has sometimes been wrongly assumed that, because Luther regarded justification by grace through faith as the article of belief by which the Church stands or falls, he consequently paid less than adequate attention to the doctrine and experience of sanctification. A thorough scrutiny of Luther’s writings demonstrates that this is in fact far from being the case. As Prenter points out, Luther sees the Christian’s life as a constant progression and not as a standing still.¹⁴ Justification is thus not to be regarded as a once-for-all provision but as a sustained right relationship with God. In this context, Luther is fond of quoting Revelation 22:11—‘He who is righteous, let him be righteous still’.

Holiness lies at the heart of authentic spirituality, as Luther sees it. Siggins has reminded us that for Luther sanctification does not normally mean the process of moral purification or improvement, which is taken to be its chief connotation in post-Reformation theology.¹⁵ Rather, as accepted in the biblical sense, the holy is that which is separated or set apart for God. Sanctification has to do less with man’s endeavours to attain perfection than with God’s readiness to work in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). What Luther calls ‘this one true sanctification’ is contrasted with ‘another sanctity, fabricated and false’, represented by a system which Luther believed to be vitiated by the taint of works-righteousness (WA 31.ii.6.).

Luther recognizes the Holy Spirit as ‘the Spirit of sanctification’, as he is designated in Romans 1:4 (LW 25:147). That title is attached to him as indicating the effect of His ministry. He is the Spirit who is holy himself and who makes others holy. Commenting on the clause in the Apostles’ Creed which confesses belief in the Holy Spirit, Luther writes: ‘With these words we affirm that the Holy Spirit dwells with Christendom and sanctifies it, namely, through Word and sacrament, through which He works faith in it and the knowledge of Christ’ (LW 24:168). And if the reference to Christendom might seem to suggest a hint of the impersonal, Luther goes on to declare that ‘this also makes Christians holy before God, not by virtue of what we ourselves are or do but

¹⁴ Prenter, *op. cit.*, 70.

¹⁵ Siggins, *op. cit.*, 154.

because the Holy Spirit is given to us.' (LW 24:168). 'Men assume that the Holy Spirit sits high above in heaven,' he continues, 'while we are down here on earth and have to obtain holiness ourselves by means of our life and works' (LW 24:169). It was this misconception which gave prominence to a defective monastic piety paying lip-service to holiness without actually producing it. 'In the devil's name,' Luther asks, with justifiable vehemence, 'of what good is a holy order that does not make anyone holy? Or what other purpose do the orders serve than to wring admiration from the people and to hinder or divert them from recognizing and receiving the true holiness that is given by the Holy Spirit?' (LW 24:169). If we ourselves could attain to holiness by our own efforts, Luther adds, we 'would not need the Holy Spirit at all; but since we are sinful and unclean in ourselves, the Holy Spirit must perform His work in us' (LW 24:169).

'To the faithful is given the Holy Spirit,' Luther asserts, 'who cannot be inactive when He is in your hearts' (LW 16:51). The Holy Spirit is alive and not dead. As such he is continually active—'always doing something'—and his chief work lies in the area of progressive sanctification (LW 12:378). 'The Holy Spirit must make me holy and sustain me', Luther declares (LW 14:172). He sanctifies daily through the abolition and purging of sin (LW 41:143). The gift of the Spirit within grows continuously (LW 12:382). He 'does not let us rest but makes us willing and inclined to do all that is good and earnest and diligent in opposing all that is evil' (LW 38:126). Through the Holy Spirit of promise God works in our hearts enabling us to appropriate His provision and so begin to obey him, 'receive power and strength to overcome the terrors of sin and death, and obtain His protection against all the might of the devil' (LW 13:290). In Part Three of his magisterial treatise *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), Luther deals with holiness as a distinct mark of God's people. In them, he says, Christ lives, works and rules *per redemptionem*—that is, through grace and the remission of sin—whereas the Holy Spirit does *per vivicationem et sanctificationem*—through daily purging of sin and renewal of life. The outcome is that believers no longer remain in sin but are equipped, and indeed obliged, to lead a new life of righteousness (LW 41:144).

The three principal Christian virtues are faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13). They were recognized as being of primary importance in scholastic theology after Augustine. They are, however, incapable of achievement through the efforts of unaided man or through attempted conformity to the Law. Only the Holy Spirit can impart these qualities as he applies the merits of Christ's

death. It is for this very reason that he is called the Sanctifier and the Lifegiver. We need to consult the Word of God to remind us of the moral law and check 'how far the Holy Spirit has advanced us in His work of sanctification and by how much we still fall short of the goal, lest we become secure and imagine that we have now done all that is required' (LW 41:166). Yet again, Luther insists that Christians must 'constantly grow in sanctification' and always become new creatures in Christ. This he says inevitably means to grow, and to do so more and more (LW 41:166; cf. 2 Pet. 3:18). On the other hand, Luther is aware that there are limits to perfection in this present life. We cannot match the obedience of the sinless Christ, but we must persistently strive to reach the goal, under his redemption or remission of sin, 'until we too shall one day become perfectly holy and no longer stand in need of forgiveness. Everything is directed toward that goal' (LW 41:166). Nevertheless, even now 'it is Christ's will to make people holy and pious in body and soul through the Holy Spirit and not let them remain in unbelief and sin' (LW 41:169).

The Baptism and Filling of the Spirit

There is widespread theological discussion at present about the baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit. Recent contributions by such scholars as James D. G. Dunn, F. D. Bruner and Thomas A. Smail have aired the problems involved in arriving at a satisfactory conclusion as to how the biblical and historical evidence is to be interpreted.¹⁶ Some consideration of Luther's understanding of this still relevant area of spirituality may prove useful.

Luther has relatively little to say specifically about being baptized in the Spirit but much more about the filling of the Spirit. In his devotional bedside manual *The Fourteen Consolations* (1520), written to provide a spiritual antidote for the Saxon Elector Frederick the Wise in a distressing illness, Luther alludes to three kinds of baptism—by water in the sacrament; by the Spirit apart from such an administration; and by the shedding of blood in martyrdom (LW 42:142 n. 22; cf. Lk. 12:50). Baptism by the Spirit was generally held to refer to repentance and thus to be

¹⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, London, S.C.M. Press, 1970; Frederick D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1971, 56–129, 225–286; Thomas A. Smail, *Reflected Glory: The Spirit in Christ and Christians*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1975, 134–152.

associated with the inception of the Christian life. Commenting on John 1:33 in a sermon preached at Wittenberg in 1537, Luther relates the believer's experience of baptism in the Spirit to the water baptism of Jesus as he embarked on his ministry, and the promise then made that he was to baptize with the Spirit (LW 22:177). The fulfillment of that promise was realized on the day of Pentecost and is sealed to the individual in regeneration. In contending that a Christian has no need of elaborate rites and ceremonies to launch him into the new spiritual life, Luther decides that the only precondition is that he should be baptized by the Holy Spirit and receive faith through him (LW 22:286). It is noticeable that Luther speaks here of baptism by the Spirit, whereas in other passages he recognizes Christ as the one by whom believers are baptized with the Spirit (LW 22:171,179). In other words, the Spirit is sometimes seen as the agent and at other times as the element. For Luther, however, the crucial factor is that 'we were rescued from the realm of darkness through the baptism of the Holy Spirit' (LW 22:454). Remission of sins and being baptized with the Spirit are closely linked. Indeed, Luther can speak in one breath of our baptism in Christ 'baptizing us with the Holy Spirit and with forgiveness' (LW 22:179).

Throughout his exegetical writings Luther identifies individuals who were 'filled with the Spirit' or 'full of the Spirit'. The list is lengthy. On occasion he employs similar descriptions in connection with group categories, as for example patriarchs (LW 2:193; LW 4:304; LW 8:92), prophets (LW 2:255), and apostles (LW 8:249). Christ is presented as possessing the Spirit in unique fullness, bestowed on Him 'without measure' (LW 22:487; cf. Jn. 3:34). 'In Him the Holy Spirit does not dwell piecemeal, as He does in others', Luther claims (LW 22:487-8). The Spirit is present in Christ in His entirety and believers in their turn are beneficiaries in that they now receive 'from this illimitable Spirit' (LW 22:488). Since the Spirit dwells perfectly in Christ, Christians too are filled with the Spirit through him (LW 22:488). We may enjoy the possession of grace and of the Holy Spirit without measure because of him (LW 22:489). Christ's fullness becomes ours, Luther explains, not in our nature and person, as with him, but by faith (LW 22:495). 'Wherever the Lord is there the Spirit is: yes, there is all' (LW 22:495).

However, in Luther's view the filling of the Spirit is never regarded as final. It is a maintained condition. Dealing with Galatians 3:5, and its reference to the continual supply of the Spirit, Luther suggests that it is as though Paul were saying: 'It was not enough that God gave you the Spirit once. But the same

God has always abundantly supplied and increased the gifts of the Spirit, so that when you have once received the Spirit, He might always grow and be more efficacious in you' (LW 26:219). According to Luther, all believers possess the first-fruits and earnest of the Spirit, but not all yet enjoy the fullness (LW 40:55). They have the Holy Spirit, but not altogether (LW 12:382). The final fullness is reserved for heaven itself, when 'we shall be like Him' (LW 12:382; cf. 1 Jn. 3:2).

It may be conceded that there is apparent ambivalence in Luther's treatment of these themes. Nowadays the debate is so advanced and refined that his observations may strike the modern reader as somewhat underdeveloped and even indecisive. It must be remembered, however, that Luther's comments are scattered throughout several mainly expository writings and that nowhere does he attempt a systematic analysis and coordination of his findings. Furthermore, it must be added that the Scripture itself reflects a certain tension in its handling of the relationship between the possibility and the realization of what is involved in the filling of the Spirit. It may well be that Luther's seeming vacillation arises in part from his concern to do justice to the paradoxical disclosures of the Word.

The Gift and the Gifts

The current phenomenon of charismatic renewal has ensured that attention should be drawn to the exercise of spiritual gifts as a facet of spirituality which has in the past been too readily overlooked. But if spirituality is to be defined in its broadest sense in terms of the contact between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man, then this factor cannot be neglected. It is certainly not bypassed in Luther. The activities of the enthusiasts on the radical perimeter of the Reformation—some of whom were more extreme in their behaviour than others—constrained him to guard against abuses and to arrive at a balanced biblical judgement. His conclusions will not prove to be irrelevant in our situation today.

Luther clears the ground for discussion by emphasizing the priority of the gift over the gifts of the Spirit. In other words, if we are to talk about spiritual gifts it must be recognized that the primary gift is that of the Holy Spirit himself. Any tendency to covet the gifts apart from the gift or to value the more spectacular manifestations of the Spirit above the Spirit himself is to be deplored and resisted. 'Without the Holy Spirit Himself,' Luther declares, 'there is no gift or grace satisfactory to God' (LW 14:172). That is from his 1517 exposition of the fourth penitential

Psalm (Psalm 51), as revised in 1535. Even earlier in his Lectures on Romans (1515–1516) he insists that it is not enough to have the gifts unless the Giver is also present (LW 25:296). That Giver behind the gifts is the Holy Spirit who is himself the gift of God. The gifts, however, must not be confused with the gift, even though it is not possible genuinely to possess the one without the other. 'For all other gifts . . . are given by the same Spirit but are not the Spirit Himself' (LW 25:296).

'The true Spirit dwells in the believers not merely according to His gifts'—this is a passing comment by Luther on John 14:23—'but according to His own substance. He does not give His gifts in such a way that He is somewhere else or asleep, but He is present with His gifts' (LW 12:377). The Holy Spirit is described by Luther in another passage as 'a living, eternal, divine gift and endowment' intended for all believers without exception (LW 37:366). With reference to Titus 3:6—a verse which indicates the Holy Spirit has been 'poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour'—Luther claims that the experience is independent of any emotional awareness of such an endowment. The Spirit's gifts are felt, he says, but 'one does not feel it when the Holy Spirit Himself is poured out richly' (LW 29:85). The gift of the Spirit is appropriated by faith which does not depend on feelings.

Although spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit, he himself is a gift from God as a legacy from Christ's death. The Holy Spirit was only bestowed after the victory of the cross, 'when in His body Christ had overcome all' (LW 23:375). This being so, Luther can repeatedly declare that the Giver of the Spirit is Christ (LW 16:119; LW 22:116, 488–90; LW 35:377; LW 37:95; LW 40:172). The Spirit is 'given through Christ' (LW 18:67; LW 51:110). It is Christ who sends the Spirit (LW 4:67; LW 13:20; LW 26:146). The Spirit as the gift of Christ is accepted through the preaching of the gospel and by faith (LW 40:82; cf. LW 20:51). Any alleged manifestations of the Spirit which are not in conformity to Christ are therefore spurious.

Luther acknowledges 'many gracious gifts of the Holy Spirit' (LW 22:65). They are, he says, 'very specific' (LW 20:35). He distinguishes them from any merely natural endowments however impressive (LW 2:305). He speaks about the gifts of the Spirit 'in the active sense' as over against 'the gifts of men', even though these latter talents may be devoted to God. Luther clearly identifies the 'true gifts of the Holy Spirit' (LW 4:201). He further differentiates between the ordinary and the extraordinary gifts. It is made clear that, while the fruit of the Spirit is to be looked for in

all believers, not all the gifts of the Spirit are in themselves universal. On the other hand, Luther regards certain gifts of the Spirit as being for all. Among these he lists the gospel, the ministry of the Word, Baptism, the Lord's Supper and absolution (LW 4:201; LW 8:182, 269). Above all, Christ himself is God's supreme gift to man (LW 8:269), especially in his atoning death. 'The blood of Christ must be counted among the gifts of the Spirit' (LW 8:257; cf. 1 Pet. 1:2). These great gifts of the Holy Spirit should be received, praised and proclaimed by all (LW 8:182). The gifts that are the most important and precious are those that lead to life, and they are available to every Christian.

The more extraordinary gifts, however, are not generally distributed but are individually apportioned according to the sovereign will of the Spirit, as indicated in 1 Corinthians 12:11 (LW 40:55). Such gifts were originally released at Pentecost but 'repeatedly thereafter' (LW 13:21). They belong to the Holy Spirit and not to the recipients. They are not to be regarded as proud possessions, since they are given 'not for our glory but for the good and welfare of Christendom' (LW 20:157). Although allocated to individuals they are essentially gifts to and for the Church as the body of Christ (LW 12:266). As such they are not for sale and cannot therefore be purchased by simony (LW 2:202). Nor are they to be treated as if they were 'inheritable goods' (LW 41:326). They are to be assiduously cultivated and should increase day by day, but 'they are not yet perfect since there remain in us the evil desires and sins that war against the Spirit' (LW 35:369; cf. Ps. 7:16; Gal. 5:17).

Luther takes note of the fact that among the various gifts displayed at Pentecost was the ability to speak with new tongues, by which he understands other languages (LW 26:203). Glossolalia, however, was a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, as Paul established in First Corinthians 14:22 (LW 26:374). Later on, when the Church had been gathered and confirmed by these signs, it was no longer necessary for such a phenomenon to continue. The Holy Spirit is sent forth in two ways, so Luther argues. In the primitive Church there was a manifestation to the senses. The Spirit descended on Christ at his baptism in the visible form of a dove. At Pentecost there was a sound like a windstorm accompanied by flashes as of lightning. But the Spirit is now sent into the hearts of believers, as Paul tells the Galatians in 4:6. His witness is inward and invisible and the special demonstrations of Pentecost have disappeared. No doubt because of radical excesses Luther was reluctant to recognize the gift of tongues as authentic. Of glossolalia as an aid to devotion he seems

to have known nothing, which perhaps is hardly surprising. In his first Lectures on the Psalms—the *Dictata super Psalterium* (1513–15)—he can even dismiss speaking in tongues as ‘nothing less than reading Scripture orally’ (LW 14:36)

The key passages in the New Testament cataloguing spiritual gifts and ministries do not figure prominently in Luther’s exegesis. 1 Corinthians 14 and Ephesians 4 are not the subject of major expositions but the coverage of Romans 12 is more detailed, though not yielding any unusual insights except perhaps in the treatment of prophecy. There Luther insists that, although new features may be disclosed, authentic prophecy will not go beyond the bounds of faith (LW 25:446; cf. Rom. 12:6). In his earlier Psalms Lectures Luther examines the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit as outlined in Isaiah 11:2,3 (Vulgate) and links them with matching references in the 119th Psalm (LW 11:444–6). He admits that the scheme is borrowed but does not hesitate to approve and adopt it. Wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, devotion or godliness, and the reverential fear of the Lord are identified with the fifth section of the Psalm from verses 33 to 40. The analogies are somewhat strained and Luther confesses that he is unsure about the order and applicability of the connections. In his Lectures on Isaiah (1527–1530) he deals again with the seven gifts and indicates that through them ‘the Christian man is equipped and a fit vessel for the Lord’ (LW 16:120). Luther also finds an allusion to the Holy Spirit and his gifts in the seven eyes of Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10 (LW 20:40–1,51).

The Fruit of the Spirit

In Scripture the gifts of the Spirit are checked and balanced by the fruit of the Spirit, as described in Galatians Chapter 5. Both in his earlier and later commentaries on the Pauline letter Luther deals with the subject at some length. Here is the evidence of genuine spirituality and the outcome of sanctification. This is the harvest the Holy Spirit produces in the field of the regenerate personality.

Luther begins his 1535 survey of Galatians 5:22,23 by remarking, as other expositors have done before and since his time, that the apostle Paul does not refer to ‘works of the Spirit’ as a precise contrast with ‘the works of the flesh’ which he has previously outlined (Verses 19–21). Instead, he adorns these Christian virtues with a worthier title and calls them ‘the fruit of the Spirit’ (verse 22; LW 27:93). They bestow unusual benefits because those who are equipped with them bring glory to God, who is their source, and also draw others to the gospel (LW

27:93). Luther goes on to claim that it would have been sufficient to name only love, 'for this expands into all the fruit of the Spirit' (LW 27:93). Hence Paul attributes all the fruit that comes from the Spirit to the love of God poured into the believer's heart by the same Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:4-7). If love is the hallmark of the Christian and the Church, it is all on account of the indwelling Christ and the Holy Spirit (LW 27:93).

In his 1519 commentary on Galatians Luther concludes, following the Greek text, confirmed by Augustine and Jerome, that there is no doubt that the apostle originally listed only nine items in this passage. The number was later extended to twelve 'as a result of the inexperienced industriousness' (LW 27:372) of some scholars. Jerome had added 'patience' as a marginal gloss but others inserted it in the text. According to Jerome, 'self-control' bore the meaning of 'moderation' and 'chastity', and these two were also included.¹⁷ However, the basis for such an extension is unsound not only because of faulty textual emendation, but more seriously because the medieval exegetes responsible for such additions failed to grasp the nature of the Spirit's fruit. They regarded the various elements as inherent qualities in the soul whereas Paul undoubtedly presents them as living effects of the Spirit spread out through the whole personality (LW 27:372).

More debatably, Luther takes 'spirit' here in Galatians 5:22 to signify the spiritual man rather than the Holy Spirit (LW 27:373). The antithesis with 'the works of the flesh' supports his contention, so he imagines. The flesh is the evil tree in our Lord's teaching, bearing only thorns and thistles. The spirit is the good tree that bears grapes and figs (Mt. 7:16-17). That is why Paul is careful to speak about the works and not the fruit of the flesh and equally about the fruit and not the works of the Spirit. Admittedly, there are apparently ambiguous passages in the New Testament where it is not altogether clear whether *pneuma* refers to the Spirit of God or the spirit of man when acted upon by the Spirit of God, but the majority of commenators would not consider Galatians 5:22-6 to be one of these, especially in view of verse 25—'If we live by the Spirit, let also walk by the Spirit'. Nevertheless, it remains the case that, even if it is agreed that one phrase 'the fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22 means the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit, it is as a result of the operation of the

¹⁷ Jerome, *Commentarius*, 446ff.; Augustine, *Epistolae ad Galatas expositio*, *Patrologia, Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, XXXV, 2140.

divine Spirit on the human spirit that the fruit is actually borne and made apparent in the believer's life. And, as we have been assuming from the outset, it is precisely in this dynamic impact of the Holy Spirit on the reawakened human spirit that the heartbeat of genuine spirituality is to be recognized.

In the nature of the case, within the limits of a single article our review has been incomplete and selective. Not all the ground has been covered by any means, for we have not directly considered Luther's reaction to mysticism or to sacramental piety, let alone the practice of prayer itself and the expression of corporate devotion in worship. We have preferred to treat spirituality on a broad canvas and to highlight those areas which are still talking points today. To what extent Luther's interpretation of Spirit and spirituality may be considered relevant in the contemporary climate of thought is no doubt a matter of divided opinion, depending in part on whether his theological presuppositions with respect to the sole authority of Scripture are acceptable to the modern mind. Given that definitive *prius*, however, those who wrestle with these issues in our time will need to search the Scriptures as effectively as Luther did in order to arrive at a consensus.

It is to be hoped that this study has gone some way towards answering a question raised by Marc Lienhard in an article which sought to assess Luther's place in the current ecumenical dialogue. 'Was not his doctrine of the Holy Spirit bound too exclusively to the actualities of the Word and Sacraments, to the neglect of the charismatic fullness which movements apart from official Protestantism, like Pentecostalism, rediscovered, perhaps with good reason?'¹⁸ As will have been gathered, I would not consider that tentative critique to be altogether justified, but having supplied the evidence it must be left for those who examine it to judge.

¹⁸ Marc Lienhard, 'La place de Luther dans le dialogue protestant-catholique actuel', in *Positions luthériennes*, Paris, 1965, 87.

Abbreviations

Quotations from Luther in the text of the article are identified in brackets as follows:

- LW. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1955-.
- PE. *Works of Martin Luther*, ed. Henry E. Jacobs, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg Press, 1915-1932.
- WA. *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J. F. K. Knaake, et. al. Weimar, Hermann Böhlau, 1883-. References to WA are only supplied where there is no English translation in either LW or PE.