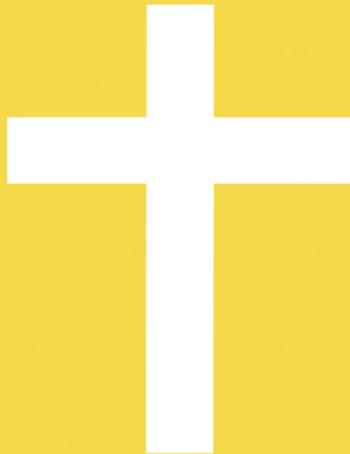


The Holy Spirit

Spirit of God and Counsellor of men



By
Josef Imberg

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In this little book about the Holy Spirit we follow the teaching of the Lutheran confession. Quotations are taken from the Small Catechism by Martin Luther /SC/, his Large Catechism /LC/, the Augsburg Confession /CA/, the Apology of that Confession /AAC/, the Smalcald Articles /SA/, and the Formula of Concord /FC/. Bible Quotations are from the RSV, Revised Standard Version, of the English Bible.

First edition 1982

New, revised edition 2001

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Printed in Sweden, Centraltryckeriet AB, Borås 2001

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF GOD

There is only one God, but he is known to us as Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. We often connect the creation of the world with the Father, the redemption and the salvation of the world with the Son, and the work of sanctification with the Holy Spirit. This is not wrong at all, but for the most part it is done for the benefit of our understanding. When we look at God's work in parts, it becomes easier for us to understand things which are at the same time a great unity and a great secret. Just as there is a great unity in God himself, there is a great unity in his work. The creation was performed by the one God, the salvation was performed by the one God, and so the furthering of salvation among men, sanctification, is also carried out by the same one God.

But how can we know God? The only way of knowing him is to turn to his holy Word, Holy Scripture. There he has revealed himself to us as Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one, but in him there are three "persons". The word "person" in this connection does not mean the same as when we speak about human beings, three individuals. The teaching about "three persons" in God has not been invented by theologians or by the Church. We have taken it over from the apostles who had found it deeply rooted in the Old Testament. They had found it e.g. in Gen 1:1-3 and in 1:26,

and also in the Psalms and in the books of the Prophets. Furthermore, they were taught on this matter by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and they handed this teaching over to us as a command from him: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with You always to the close of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). All the writings of the apostles are based on such teaching about God that he is one and that there are three "persons" in him: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (2 Cor 13:14).

The confession of the Church

The Christian Church must teach and believe about God in accordance with Holy Scripture. The teaching in the Apostolic Church in connection with Baptism has given us our earliest confession of faith in the Apostolic Creed: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen."

When this belief and confession was contradicted by false teaching in the beginning of the fourth century, the Apostolic confession was strongly confirmed by the Council of Nicaea

in 325 A.D. In its confession, finally worded in Constantinople in 381 A.D., it is taught in this way: "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man... And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the Prophets."

This belief and teaching has, in its turn, been confirmed by the Lutheran confession of Augsburg in 1530 A.D. ("Augustana"), where it is said: "Our churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the council of Nicaea *concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons*, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible; and yet there are three Persons, of the same essence and power, who also are coeternal, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

Our teaching and belief

If we stick to such teaching about God and the three "persons" of the one God we cannot go wrong in our Christian confession about God. "Here you have the entire divine essence, will and work depicted most exquisitely in quite short and yet rich words, wherein consists all our wisdom, which surpasses and exceeds the wisdom, mind, and reason of all men. For although the whole world with all diligence has endeavoured to ascertain what God is, what He has in mind and does, yet has she never been able to attain to /the knowledge and understanding of/ any of these things... Here in all three articles /of the Creed/ He has Himself revealed and opened the deepest abyss of His paternal heart and of His pure unutterable love" (LC).

No human being could have invented a thing like the teaching about Holy Trinity, nor can a human being ever understand or grasp it completely. It remains a secret which cannot be fully penetrated by our thoughts. That is already the case in matters concerning the creation of the world, the fall, salvation, and eternal life. But it is still more so, when it comes to the question of who God is, his essence, and Holy Trinity, three persons in one Godhead. It has been quite clear to the Christian Church from the time of the apostles that this is a great secret. She has marvelled at God's wisdom and knowledge: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom 11:33).

Things we may understand

Although Holy Trinity is, in one way, a great secret, there are parts of this doctrine that we can explain fairly well according to Scripture. When we do that we will also find that Scripture to a great extent explains itself. We will find, as in many other cases, that Jesus Christ is "the Way" (Jn 14:6). It is round him everything is centred. We cannot understand even one word about Holy Trinity or the Holy Spirit, if we neglect his teaching or try to bypass him. He has said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father; ... I and the Father are one" (Jn 14:9; 10:30). The Father has not become man, but the Son has become man, and in him we can see what is in God. "We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father... No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known" (Jn 1:14,18). All grace from God, therefore, is offered to us in Christ, and in Christ only. But how can this grace come to us or be given to us? When Jesus was about to leave his disciples he told them this: "I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you... I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he

will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:7, 12-15).

Thus all grace will have to come to us through the work of this Counsellor, or "Comforter". This is possible, because he makes us partakers of Jesus Christ and of the grace he has acquired through his suffering and death. When the apostle writes: "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20), he admonishes us to take advantage of the help of the Holy Spirit. He wishes to lead us to Christ and to make us partakers of the grace of God, acquired by Christ. How that is done, that is what we have to explain in this short exposition about the Holy Spirit.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

Either we think of the Spirit as eternal God, or of the Spirit that has been revealed among us and is working in the Christian Church, he is the Spirit of Christ. Sometimes we say that the Christian Church was founded at the first Pentecost, sometimes we say that she was founded when God gave his promise about salvation through "the Seed of the woman" (Gen 3:15). In the same way we may say that the Holy Spirit was given at the first Pentecost, or we may say

that the Spirit has been at work through all ages. Both ways of speaking are correct, both with regard to the Church and with regard to the Holy Spirit. But how can it be so?

Holy Spirit was before the world

The Holy Spirit was at work before the world was created, and he took part in the creation of the world (Gen 1:1-3). Thus creation is the work of the three persons of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit "was moving over the face of the waters"; when God said: "Let there be light" the Word was at work (Jn 1:1-5). But the Spirit of God was not fully known among men in spite of such work. Since he is the Spirit of Christ he could not be known properly before the work of redemption and salvation was completed by the Son of God. Therefore it is taught about the sending of the Spirit in this way in the Christian Church: The Father was to send the Spirit in the name of the Son and for his sake, because the Spirit was to teach the disciples of Christ everything and to bring to their remembrance everything he had said. But the Spirit had been working before that time also. When the people of the Old Testament were brought to believe, and when the disciples believed in Christ even before his suffering and death, the Holy Spirit had created that faith. But the full work of the Spirit could not start before Christ had suffered and died and risen from the dead, or before he had sent his Spirit in the new way: "He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the

Father, which, he said, 'you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 1:4-5).

It is not only the Spirit who was given in this way, first in a preliminary way, and then, when the time was ready for that, in a full and complete way. The same can be said about the Son, Messiah, the Christ. Before he became man and was born by the virgin, he was known in a certain way by the prophets and the other men of God in the Old Testament. It is said about these "fathers" that they were "baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:2-4). This same Christ came fully into this world "when the time had fully come" (Gal 4:4). Then "the life was made manifest, and we saw it" (1 Jn 1:2). This happened when Christ became man and was born among us. In the same way the Holy Spirit worked among the fathers, so that by faith "the men of old received divine approval" (Heb 11:2) and were saved by faith in the unseen Christ (11:13-16). But the Spirit was given in full by the time of the first Pentecost (Acts 2).

Why the Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ

This is done for several reasons. He leads to Christ and opens up the Holy Scriptures to show us what has been said and promised about Christ, the Messiah: "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" (Jn 16:13-15).

When it is repeated many times that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, this is not done to diminish the glory of the Father. This glory is one and the same, it is indivisible. But we do not know the Father until we know the Son, because God is "the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim 6:15-16). But this Lord of lords "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14). The three "persons" of God Almighty all share in this work. But since "the second person", the Son of God, is the only person of the Godhead who has become man, everything in our teaching must be centred round him, just as the New Testament has been written for this purpose: "to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us" (Lk 1:1).

When the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ this is done to stress the importance and fullness of the work of redemption, completed by Christ. This is not done to make the Son greater than the Father. The three "persons" of the Godhead share the honour of the redemption work just as they share the honour of the creation. They are given honour and glory

accordingly: the grace and love and fellowship are one undivided work of salvation (2 Cor 13:14), just as the Father and the Son are one and have given us their Spirit who is called both "the Spirit of the Father" and "the Spirit of Christ" (Jn 14:16,26; 16:7; 14:18).

The sending of the Spirit

But how can we explain, then, what happened when the Holy Spirit was sent, or what the relation is between the three "persons", Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit? Two words particularly are used to explain the *unity* and *difference* between the Spirit and the other two "persons" of the Godhead. These words are used according to the teaching given by Jesus himself: "When the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me" (Jn 15:26). The two words are "send" and "proceed". The word "send" is used both about the Father and about the Son. They have sent the Holy Spirit into the world, to the Church, and to the disciples. Thus the Holy Spirit is sent both by the Father and by the Son. It can also be said about the Spirit that he "proceeds" (goes out) from the Father and from the Son. It is confessed in this way in the Nicene Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified." The word "proceed" is

used to stress that the Spirit was neither created, nor "born" into the world.

This Spirit is working up to "the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), to accomplish everything according to God's word and promise. We have already said that the work is one, shared by the three "persons" of the Divinity, although for clarity's sake we may divide it and speak about it in parts, e.g. creation, redemption, and sanctification. But when we try to understand this work of the tri-une God we have to remember that he himself can never be fully understood by us in the present time. We understand him only partly, only by pictures and comparisons or "in a mirror dimly", not "face to face" (1 Cor 13:12). But it is the work of the Holy Scriptures, and of the Church, and of the Holy Spirit to help us understand as far as possible what is an "inexpressible gift" (2 Cor 9:15). This gift is the love of God, become known to us through his Son. The Holy Spirit gives testimony to the Son by creating in men faith in Christ and steadfastness in that faith to the end. Through the work of the Spirit we obtain fellowship with the Father and with the Son. This is easily said and easily written but it is the great secret of the Christian faith and eternal salvation (Rom 16:25-27).

3. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HOLY SCRIPTURE

It has taken a very long time to write all the books contained in our Bible, the Old and the New Testament. How long time,

it is impossible to say, although we know that between Moses and John the Apostle there is a span of about 1500 years. The authors who have penned the books of the Bible must have been quite many. Some of them have been writing in their own hand, some have regularly or occasionally used skilled assistants, to whom they have dictated their message (Jer 36:4; Rom 16:22; 1 Cor 16:21).

In spite of the long period of writing and the great number of authors, living under different ages and conditions, the Bible is one book, having one grand view and one great message: God's holy will, his Kingdom, and salvation through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

How is it possible?

In other cases we cannot even think of such a thing: a great number of authors working on a great number of books over a very long period, and the final result being only one book with the same message. We find it would be impossible. Yes, but the Bible has not appeared in the same way as other books. This depends upon the fact that the Bible is Holy Scripture, God's Word. Although the different authors have taken their part in this work, each one in his turn and in his time, the common outcome of all this is God's work: "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:1-2). How can we explain,

then, that all these authors have managed to fit into this wonderful scheme, so that out of 66 minor books there comes one great book, the Bible, being Holy Scripture and containing God's message to us and to all the world? Well, the explanation is not to be found with the human authors, neither in their hearts or minds, nor in their ability or skill. Even if we say that they believed in God and were devoted to their call and ministry, that is not enough. It would not be true to say that they found it necessary to write and then decided on what to write. In many cases it has been the other way: *they would have preferred not to write, and very often they would have liked to write in a different way* (Jer 20:7-9; Is 6:1-8). The Bible says that the authors have been called and guided by God, sometimes even forced, to write what God wanted them to write. He has done this through his Holy Spirit: "You must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God" (2 Pet 1:20-21).

This is in total agreement with the promise given by Jesus Christ himself before his suffering and death. He said that he would not abandon his disciples by leaving them desolate (Jn 14:18). Instead he would come back to them in a new way by giving them his Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit would be to make them remember everything he had told them (Jn 14:25-26; 16:12-15). This promise covers the work of the apostles and evangelists to tell the Church and the world the

facts about the life of Jesus Christ, about the Kingdom of God, and the work of salvation through his holy Christian Church.

How can this be explained?

The work of the Holy Spirit in connection with the writing of the books of the Bible has been called Inspiration, meaning "breathing of spirit" or putting spirit into something. The word has been taken from a statement by S:t Paul: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16).

When we try to understand what this "inspiration" means, there are two opposite views we must avoid. On the one side some people have thought that the authors, when under the inspiration of God, were will-less, almost unconscious, having thus given up their normal ability and personality, being only the tools or hands of the Spirit who was writing through them. This theory is very one-sided and is against what Scripture itself tells us. On the other side there is a theory that the authors have been given a theme or message by God which they worded and penned to the best of their understanding and ability. This means that the general idea about the subject was given to them, but the words have come from themselves. Such a theory must be abandoned, because it does not agree with God's Word either.

Instead we have to explain Inspiration in this way. There are two sides of it, God's side, and the human side. In one way God is the author of the holy scriptures right through, not of the general ideas only, but of the sentences and words as well. The holy Scriptures, therefore, do not *contain* God's words, *they are God's Word*. But on the other side the holy scriptures are human work. The sentences have not been taken down by an invisible hand or by a secret force moving the willing or unwilling hand of the writer. The scriptures are truly written by human hands, holding the pen, writing in ink on papyrus sheets or on scrolls of parchment (Jer 36:18; 3 Jn 13; 2 Tim 4:13). Thus in the outward, visible way Holy Scripture has been written, worded and penned in the same way as ordinary books and letters. But, before this was done and while it was going on the Holy Spirit was working with these authors so as to move them, direct and guide them, or else their writings would have been just like other human writing work. But how did the Holy Spirit do this? First by calling the authors. That is not the same as calling them to be believers or apostles. The inspiration goes a step further. There were apostles who did not write anything, as far as we know. But those who were called to be witnesses in writing were blessed and guided in two ways. They were told what to write and to write exactly that. That is called *the positive side* of the inspiration. But they were also guided in order not to slip with their tongue or pen, i.e. they were prevented from making mistakes. That is called *the negative side* of the inspiration. "Negative" here has no negative meaning. It is a

positive word, showing that our Lord Jesus kept his promise to his disciples: "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

This can be explained in another way, according to another promise by Jesus. He had said to his apostles: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my *witnesses* in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is the task of a true witness to state facts as they are, without adding or taking anything away (1 Jn 1:1-4; Rev 22:18-19). The task of the apostles, therefore, was to put forward to the congregation a true picture of Jesus Christ, showing himself, his word and deeds, his Church, the way of salvation, etc., in a true way, without adding or taking anything away. Thus it is possible even today, as the apostles are true witnesses, and their scriptures have been inspired, for anyone to obtain true information and guidance.

Inspiration is a great secret

It is hidden to us how the inspiration worked in detail with prophets, apostles, and evangelists. But we should not be bothered too much by our failure to understand all. The difficulty is the same all over the line: How is it possible for Christ to be God and man? How is it possible for him to give us his body and blood in Holy Communion under bread and wine? In such cases, which are beyond our understanding, we

may say as Job: "I know that thou canst do all things, and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted... Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:2-3). This humble attitude is the only proper way of approaching God, his ways or work. "For with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:37). That must apply also to God's dealing with men in giving us his Word.

A humble attitude towards the Word of God first of all will have to consider what stand Jesus himself has taken with regard to the Word of God. He said that David has written his psalms "inspired by the Spirit" (Mt 22:41-46). He also defended himself against the most sincere temptations by the Devil with the words "It is written" (Mt 4:1-11). And with regard to the Old Testament as a whole he says: "Truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (Mt 5:18). If Jesus could quote any words from the books of Moses, from the prophets or from the psalms, and call them "inspired" by the Holy Spirit, how would it be possible for us to correct him, the Lord of lords, and teach or believe differently?

Inspiration

If we study Holy Scripture with the above-mentioned points in mind we will find them supported by some clear facts. When the apostles are writing they treat the same language,

Greek, in different ways, all very personal. If the Holy Spirit had used them as tools only, they would have written the same kind of language, with the same type of sentences and words. Now it is not that way at all. One writer writes in an easy, plain way, which is natural to him and according to his ability. Another writes in a more strict and literal way. And that is how they were as writers, individually, even before they were writing for God. And the Holy Spirit took them on as they were. He did not change their style or break down their personality. But, in spite of all that, what they wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was the word of God, and still is the word of God (Mt 10:20; Lk 10:16; 1 Thess 2:13). The Word of God, we can say, has come to us in a very human way, it has become "flesh", but it is the Word of God.

God's Word has power over us

We can feel that power. It is "the inner testimony of the Word of God". The word of God is not like the word of man (1 Thess 2:13). When we receive the Word of God, listen to it and take it to our hearts, it proves itself to us as a true and strong word, as God's word. A similar thing happens with human words, if they are true and spoken by reliable people. But it is much more so with the Word of God. If the holy scriptures had been worded and penned just like other documents, they would not have such power over us. Jesus himself has taught us about this power in his Word. He said: "If any man's will is to do God's will, he shall know whether

the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority" (Jn 7:17). That applies to all the teaching of the Bible.

Christians of all times have found this power in the Word of God. When searching the holy scriptures (Acts 17:11) they have been placed before Jesus as the Son of God, they have found how he told them the truth about themselves (Jn 4:29), and they have marvelled: "No man ever spoke like this man!" (Jn 7:46). And when they have listened to the words of grace and forgiveness, they have believed them to be true words from the Lord Jesus himself: "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Lk 5:20; Jn 20:22-23). And from there they have realized there is a step further in the testimony of the Holy Spirit: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus... You have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:1, 15-16).

The Holy Spirit is for ever connected with the Word of God. And therefore, where the Word of God is found, really and truly, there we find the Holy Spirit. And also, where the Word of God and the Holy Spirit are found, there we also find Christ. "For where /the Holy Spirit/ does not cause /the Word/ to be preached and made alive in the heart, so that it is understood, it is lost...; for where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit who creates, calls, and gathers the

Christian Church, without which no one can come to Christ the Lord" (LC).

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

The work of the Holy Spirit is not yet completed but has to go on all the time. "This, now, is the article which must ever be and remain in operation. For creation we have received; redemption, too, is finished. But the Holy Spirit carries on His work without ceasing to the last day. And for that purpose He has appointed a congregation upon earth by which He speaks and does everything" (LC).

By these words it is said that the Holy Spirit is to be found somewhere and that he works for a definite purpose and with special means. The purpose has been explained in this way: "We believe in Him who through the Word daily brings us into the fellowship of this Christian Church, and through the same Word and the forgiveness of sins bestows, increases, and strengthens faith, in order that when He has accomplished it all, and we abide therein, and die to the world and to all evil, He may finally make us perfectly and forever holy; which now we expect in faith through the Word" (LC).

Thus for the continued work of the Holy Spirit the Holy Christian Church is needed. In this Church it is possible to find the knowledge about Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, and

in this Church we can find the means that can bring us to him. "For He has created us for this very object, that He might redeem and sanctify us; and in addition to giving and imparting to us everything in heaven and upon earth, He has given to us even His Son and the Holy Spirit, by whom to bring us to Himself. For ... we could never attain to the knowledge of the grace and favour of the Father, except through the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the paternal heart, outside of whom we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But of Christ we could know nothing either, unless it had been revealed by the Holy Spirit" (LC).

But if the Holy Spirit is to bring us to Christ, how is it to be done? Here we have come to another very important point in the teaching about the Holy Spirit: the Word of God and the Sacraments are needed to bring us to Christ: "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake" (CA).

Deviations about the Holy Spirit

Many have fought against this kind of teaching, although it is strongly founded in God's Word. They have said: Isn't this too strict and formal? Cannot the Holy Spirit work in other

ways also, without using the Word and the Sacraments? In our confession there is a very clear answer to such questions. It says: There are so many spirits which call themselves holy without having any connection at all with God or holy things. The people who allow themselves to be carried off and guided by such spirits may think that they are acting in God's name and out of "love", but it is a false love and fervour, often called "enthusiasm". Against such "love" and "fervour" we must warn strongly: "In those things which concern the spoken, outward Word, we must firmly hold that God grants His Spirit or grace to no one, except through or with the preceding outward Word, in order that we may /thus/ be protected against the enthusiasts, i.e., spirits who boast that they have the Spirit without and before the Word, and accordingly judge Scripture or the spoken Word, and explain and stretch it at their pleasure"; such people "wish to be acute judges between the Spirit and the letter, and yet know not what they say or declare" (S A).

Many people also listen to "voices" inside or outside themselves and claim that what they have heard comes from the Holy Spirit. After that they think that they can act accordingly with regard to their marriage, church membership, personal vengeance, or other cases of a very doubtful character. There is, however, a safe rule if anybody is tempted in such a way: a "voice" speaking against God's Word never comes from the Holy Spirit, because God does not speak against himself.

The dangers mentioned here are not fancied ones. There are dangers that will exist all days since we are all human beings. We were all born "enthusiasts", after the first fall. "In a word, enthusiasm inheres in Adam and his children from the beginning /from the first fall/ to the end of the world, /its poison/ having been implanted and infused into them by the old dragon, and is the origin, power /life/, and strength of all heresy /false teaching/... Therefore we ought and must constantly maintain this point; that God does not wish to deal with us otherwise than through the spoken Word and the Sacraments... The prophecy came not by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (SA).

How the Holy Spirit comes to us

The Word and the Sacraments are found only in connection with the Christian Church. "Paul has defined the Church precisely in /such a/ way, Eph 5:25-33, that it should be cleansed in order to be holy. And he adds the outward marks, the Word and Sacraments. For he says thus: Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish... The Church signifies... the congregation of saints, who have with each other the fellowship of the same Gospel or doctrine and of the same Holy Spirit, who renews, sanctifies, and governs their hearts" (AAC).

Sometimes people have tried to point out some sort of collision between these two doctrines about the Church and the Spirit. They have said: If it is a work of the Spirit, how can it be closed up inside the Church? What will remain of the Spirit and its free work then? Our confession shows that there is no collision of that kind: "Learn, then, to understand this article most clearly. If you are asked: What do you mean by the words: I believe in the Holy Spirit? you can answer: I believe that the Holy Spirit makes me holy, as his name implies. But whereby does He accomplish this, or what are His method and means to this end? Answer: By the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. For, in the first place, He has a peculiar congregation in the world, which is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God, which He reveals and preaches, /and through which/ He illumines and enkindles hearts, that they understand, accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it" (LC). This Christian Church or congregation is further explained to show how through it the Holy Spirit will carry out the work of salvation and lead us to eternal life: It is a Church "under one head, even Christ, called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, one mind, and understanding, with manifold gifts, yet agreeing in love, without sects or schisms. I am also a part and member of the same, a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses, brought to it and incorporated into it by the Holy Spirit by having heard and continuing to hear the Word of God, which is the beginning of entering it" (LC).

If the beginning of this life is the Holy Spirit working among us, we shall have to consider further, first how the Word and the Sacraments are used by the Spirit as means and tools, and then how the individual human being becomes "a sharer and joint owner of all the goods" that God wants to give.

5. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE SACRAMENTS

According to the teaching of Jesus himself there is only one way leading into his Kingdom and his Church, Holy Baptism: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). For that reason he gave his apostles this command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20).

Some people have tried to work out a difference between the Sacrament of Baptism and the Kingdom of God. They call Baptism a rite, an outward matter only, whereas they consider the Kingdom of God to be a spiritual thing, a matter of the heart, and of faith and belief. When they look upon it in that way they manage to make faith necessary for entering the Kingdom of God, Baptism not being necessary. Such thoughts are wrong, because Jesus has connected the Kingdom with Baptism. We must always ask what Christ has taught and commanded. "What is the kingdom of God?"

Answer: Nothing else than what we learned in the Creed, that God sent His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, into the world to redeem and deliver us from the power of the devil, and to bring us to Himself, and to govern us as a King of righteousness, life, and salvation against sin, death, and an evil conscience, for which end He has also bestowed His Holy Spirit, who is to bring these things home to us by His holy Word, and to illumine and strengthen us in the faith by His power" (LC).

Such words cannot be applied to listening to the Word only or to faith only. The very entrance into the Kingdom and the life comes by Baptism and faith, not one of the two, but both: "Therefore, if you live in repentance, you walk in Baptism, which not only signifies such a new life, but also produces, begins, and exercises it. For therein are given grace, the Spirit, and power to suppress the old man, so that the new man may come forth and become strong" (LC).

Important things about Baptism

There are some things we have to stress here about Baptism. One is the importance of the name of the Trinity. No baptism is valid unless it is performed in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is important for several reasons. One is that Jesus has commanded his Church to perform it that way. Another is that in Baptism we become united with the Father, the Creator and Preserver of the

world, with Jesus Christ, his Son, our Saviour, and with the Holy Spirit, our Helper (Jn 14:15-17) and Sanctifier.

The other thing we have to stress is that in Baptism we have received a promise that stands forever. That shows us what we have to do if we have left our state of grace, that means the grace of Baptism, and turned away from God. "Our Baptism abides forever; and even though some one should fall from it and sin, nevertheless we always have access thereto, that we may again subdue the old man. But we need not again be sprinkled with water; for though we were put under the water a hundred times, it would nevertheless be only one Baptism... Repentance, therefore, is nothing else than a return and approach to Baptism, that we repeat and practise what we began before, but abandoned" (LC).

A third point will be this: Baptism, although performed only once in our life, is not a passed thing. It is to be used as our daily dress: "Let every one esteem his Baptism as a daily dress in which he is to walk constantly, that he may ever be found in the faith and its fruits, that he suppress the old man and grow up in the new. For if we would be Christians, we must practise the work whereby we are Christians... If, therefore, we have once in Baptism obtained forgiveness of sin, it will remain every day, as long as we live" (LC).

The Sacrament of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar, Holy Communion, does not give us entry *into* the Kingdom of God as Baptism does. Instead it is the Sacrament for those who are already *within* the Kingdom of God. By giving them the forgiveness of sins in a visible form, in a sacramental way, under bread and wine, it gives them a token and a pledge that they remain in the grace of Christ. In an outward way this Sacrament is *a sign*. But this word must not be misunderstood. The whole Sacrament is a sign. But the bread and wine are not a sign of Christ or of his presence. *He is present*. When we receive the blessed bread and wine we receive him, his body and blood. "This is plain and clear from the words... *This is my body and blood, given and shed FOR YOU, for the remission of sins*. Briefly that is as much as to say: For this reason we go to the Sacrament because there we receive such a treasure by and in which we obtain forgiveness of sins. Why so? Because the words stand here and give us this; for on this account He bids me eat and drink, that it may be my own and benefit me, as a sure pledge and token" (LC).

As with Baptism we have to make use of this Sacrament by living in its grace. Holy Communion can be called "a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man. For by Baptism we are first born anew; but ... there still remains, besides, the old vicious nature of flesh and blood in man, and

there are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and of the world that we often become weary and faint, and sometimes also stumble" (LC).

Confession

In the teaching of the Church this act is sometimes called "the third Sacrament". Sometimes, though, it is not called a sacrament, due to the fact that there is no visible element or action as in Baptism or Holy Communion. But the most important thing in it is that God's grace is given to those who have been living in the grace of Baptism but have "stumbled". That means that they have sinned in such a way that they have lost the grace or fear that they have lost it.

It is most important that the Confession is brought back again into regular use in the Church. It can build up congregations and Christians, perhaps more than anything else we could think of as our own steps. There is such an importance and blessing in Confession, because "when His children depart from obedience and stumble, He has them called again to repentance through the Word, and the Holy Spirit wishes thereby to be /working/ in them for conversion; and when they turn to Him again in true repentance by a right faith, He will always manifest the old paternal heart to all those who tremble at His Word and from their heart turn again to Him" (FC).

How does Confession work?

Its first part is confession of sins, and its second part the proclamation of God's forgiveness. By this second part the Christian becomes re-instated in the state of grace, just as though there had been no sin. The sins are thrown behind God's back, "into the depths of the sea" (Mic 7:19), the sea of his bottomless grace and mercy.

Practically confession consists of the two parts mentioned, confession itself, and the administering of the forgiveness. This latter part is done in the name of the Trinity. The forgiveness is the work of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of Jesus Christ (Jn 20:22-23). To the pastors of the Church this ministry of forgiveness has been given, so that they can ask: "Do you believe that my forgiveness is God's forgiveness?" and then declare: "As you believe, so it be done to you. And by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Depart in peace" (SC).

6. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MAN

We have seen how the Holy Spirit works in the Christian Church, through the Word and the Sacraments, including Confession. Now we have to turn to the heart of man to find how the Holy Spirit works there to create faith and a true Christian life. We cannot come to faith by our own thoughts

or by our own power. Martin Luther says in his explanation of the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith" (SC).

From this explanation, as well as from the teaching of the Bible, it is clear that in the work of the Holy Spirit we can find a certain order, "the order of grace", according to which the work is carried out. It does not mean to say that a person can observe within himself the stages of this order while the work is going on. These things can be seen more clearly later on, after conversion, and still more easily with other people than with ourselves.

In "the order of grace", performed by the Holy Spirit in men, we use to mention the following particularly: the calling, the enlightening through the Law, the enlightening through the Gospel, conversion, justification by faith, regeneration, renewal and sanctification. All this ought to be explained further in a chapter of its own about faith. Here it may be sufficient to explain a few points about the work of the Holy Spirit in men.

Conversion

In conversion the work of the Holy Spirit is needed, because we cannot perform our own conversion or create faith by our own power. "Before the conversion of man there are only two efficient causes, namely, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, by which He works conversion. This Word man is to hear; however, it is not by his own powers, but only through the grace and working of the Holy Spirit that he can yield faith to it and accept it" (FC).

Why do we depend on the Holy Spirit and the Word of God for our faith and conversion? It is because "the unregenerate will of man is not only turned away from God, but also has become an enemy of God, so that it only has an inclination and desire for that which is evil and contrary to God... As little as a dead body can quicken itself to bodily, earthly life, so little can man, who by sin is spiritually dead, raise himself to spiritual life" (FC).

The work of the Holy Spirit is to lead us to Christ. We cannot know about him except through the Gospel, and we cannot understand the Gospel unless the Holy Spirit explains it to us. But understanding is not enough. The Holy Spirit has to lead us or bring us to Christ. "For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe in Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has

acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated /used/ and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Spirit to bring this treasure home and appropriate it /give it/ to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves" (LC).

What does it mean to "bring to Christ"?

It means that the treasure, acquired by Christ, must be received, and it can be received only when people come to him in faith to receive it from him. The treasure, acquired by Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, is a righteousness which is sufficient to cover all sins of the world and of all men. That righteousness he offers to us in his Word and sacraments. It is to be accepted by faith. When a Christian, through the forgiveness of sins, gets his share of the righteousness of Christ, and becomes free from the guilt of his sins, he also gets a share in the holy life of Christ. This new life will change the believer's heart and work and his daily life among men. As justified and born anew all Christians are called to lead a new life, to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15; Mt 5:14).

Where are the powers of man himself in all this? Before the conversion or regeneration man cannot cooperate with God, because after the fall there is a resistance in man towards God and his work. But it is "correctly said that in conversion God, through the drawing of the Holy Spirit, makes out of stubborn and unwilling men willing ones, and that after such conversion in the daily exercise of repentance the regenerate will of man is not idle, but also cooperates in all the works of the Holy Spirit, which He performs through us" (FC). After the conversion, therefore, there is a new situation: "As soon as the Holy Spirit... through the Word and holy Sacraments, has begun in us this His work of regeneration and renewal, it is certain that through the power of the Holy Spirit we can and should cooperate, although still in great weakness. But this does not occur from our carnal natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit has begun in us in conversion. This is to be understood in no other way than that the converted man does good to such an extent and so long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him" (FC).

This is to God's honour and praise

Although this work is done in our hearts it cannot be called ours so as to give honour and praise to ourselves. It is the work of the Holy Spirit right through, from the beginning to

the end. A Christian cannot come beyond this point in his Confession: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor 15:10). Even if we have cooperated with the Spirit of God after conversion, it is God who is "at work in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). "For when the Holy Spirit has wrought and accomplished /the conversion/, and man's will has been changed and renewed by His divine power and working alone, then the new will of man is an instrument and organ of God the Holy Spirit, so that he not only accepts grace, but also cooperates with the Holy Spirit in the works which follow" (FC).

Such works will follow, if the faith is a true faith which has been worked by the Holy Spirit. That is what we have to consider in the following passage about the Christian life. Let it only be said here that "such faith, renewal, and forgiveness of sins is followed by good works... We cannot boast of many merits and works, if they are viewed apart from grace and mercy, but as it is written, 1 Cor 1:31: "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord, namely, that he has a gracious God. For thus all is well. We say, besides, that if good works do not follow, faith is false and not true" (SA).

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Holy Spirit works among all members of the Church and the Christian congregation. Not even one is left outside. But

the person of every single Christian also consists of many members or parts. If the heart is mentioned more often than the rest it is only because it is considered to be the centre of the person, his life and activities: it is the Spirit who works in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in his heart through faith (Eph 3:16-17).

The individual Christian is sometimes described as consisting of body and soul, sometimes as "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess 5:23). Both ways are intended to cover the whole and the unity of man. Sometimes one part or member is mentioned, sometimes another in the exposition of sanctification. But the Holy Spirit wants to penetrate and sanctify the whole being, not only the heart, not matters of thought and faith only. When some people say that their body is not "spiritual" enough for the work of sanctification, perhaps it is better to say that they wish or prefer to leave the body free from being sanctified. But the Word says: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Thus the work of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, is intended to cover the whole being and all the life of a Christian. This is because of the work Christ has already accomplished: "He has now reconciled /you/ in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and

steadfast" (Col 1:22-23). Thus sanctification is connected with faith, because only a believer has the Holy Spirit and can become sanctified: "These things cannot occur until we have been justified by faith, and, regenerated, we receive the Holy Spirit: first, because the Law cannot be kept without /the knowledge of/ Christ; and likewise the Law cannot be kept without the Holy Spirit" (AAC).

The beginning of the new life

The new life cannot start if it has not been created by the Holy Spirit. "Christ was given for this purpose, namely, that for His sake there might be bestowed on us the remission of sins, and the Holy Spirit to bring forth in us new and eternal life, and eternal righteousness... The Law cannot be truly kept unless the Holy Spirit be received through faith... Because the Law can only then be thus kept when the Holy Spirit is given" (AAC).

When we wish to explain the new life it is necessary to keep the following two things in mind. First, it shows itself in *a new obedience* towards God. A true Christian is willing to bring forth the good fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-24). Secondly, these fruits cannot appear through the decision or effort of man. They are the work of the Spirit when he is allowed to use man as a "vessel of mercy" (Rom 9:23). But what has to be done, then, on the believer's side to promote and encourage the life in the Spirit?

One thing is the willingness continuously to *receive the Spirit* and to be guided and trained in the new obedience. Such obedience cannot come without *prayer*. There must be a daily prayer of this kind: "Thy will be done." "We pray in this petition that it may be done among us also." This happens "when God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come" (SC). Thus it is a suitable prayer for every Christian: "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God! Let thy good spirit lead me on a level path! (Ps 143:10).

Another thing is the willingness to present oneself to God "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). It is not a matter of bringing body only, thoughts or prayers only, rather it is a matter of bringing oneself, spirit and soul and body, to God for a life in sanctification, by being "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:11). Every deviation from that line and purpose is to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph 4:30).

What is the new obedience?

It must cover all spheres of life. We cannot go into detail in this brief exposition, but let us mention a few sides of our daily life.

First, let us remember our *calling* or *worldly vocation*. Whatever our work is, provided it is a lawful and decent one, we have to remain in it (1 Cor 7:20) and be trustworthy (1 Cor

4:2). If we are not reliable or trustworthy in such outward matters, who will rely on us when it comes to more important matters (Lk 16:10-13)?

Secondly, let us remember our way of *speaking*. Is it a reliable yes and no (Mt 5:37)? By our tongue we ought to "bless the Lord and Father" (Jas 3:9), but also "so to speak and so to act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty" (Jas 2:12).

Third, let us remember the *service of mercy and love* among men. "Love" here concerns the daily mixing with people, and service and help of all kinds. It is important that we should not allow ourselves to give offence by failing in such matters. But "let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour" (Rom 12:9-10).

But there is another kind of "love" also, *love between man and woman*. It has to be real, genuine, Christian love. It has to be guided, purified, and blessed by the Holy Spirit. If it is not of that kind, it will defile and ultimately break down the life of the community. It is the calling of a man and woman who enter matrimony to live together in Christ and the Church, under the nurture of the Holy Spirit. It is a great calling. Their marriage and love should be a picture of how Christ loves his Church (Eph 5:21-33).

Fourth, let us remember that in all the life, things we have mentioned here and things we have not mentioned, there will

be failure at times and many shortcomings. We are on the way, but we are not "already perfect" (Phil 3:12). To be a Christian and to live in sanctification is to *go on being sanctified*, it is to obtain the forgiveness of sins every day. Not to ask for such forgiveness, that is not to be holy, it is to boast oneself, it might even be to remain outside altogether.

"Everything, therefore, in the Christian Church is ordered to the end that we shall daily obtain there nothing but the forgiveness of sin through the Word and /Sacraments/, to comfort and encourage our consciences as long as we live here. Thus, although we have sins, the /grace of the/ Holy Spirit does not allow them to injure us, because we are in the Christian Church, where there is nothing but forgiveness of sin, both in that God forgives us, and in that we forgive, bear with, and help each other" (LC).

The need of the Holy Spirit

All Christians need it. We are all different, but whatever is our state or our degree of sanctification we need this help. It must go on all the time. Therefore we ought to ask for the Spirit more diligently, and for a successful and blessed outcome of his work. That means a prayer "that this /the coming of the Kingdom/ may become effective with us, and that His name be so praised through the holy Word of God and a Christian life that both we who have accepted it may abide and daily grow therein, and that it may gain approbation and adherence among other people and proceed with

power throughout the world, that many may find entrance into the Kingdom of Grace, be made partakers of redemption, being led thereto by the Holy Spirit, in order that thus we may all together remain forever in the one kingdom now begun" (LC).

But it is begun only. We may not see it in glory in our lifetime or in this world, But it is part of our eternal hope and God's promise. "While sanctification has begun and is growing daily, we expect that our flesh will be destroyed and buried with all its uncleanness, and will come forth gloriously, and arise to entire and perfect holiness in a new eternal life. For now we are only half pure and holy, so that the Holy Spirit has ever /some reasons why/ to continue His work in us through the Word, and daily to dispense forgiveness, until we attain to that life where there will be no more forgiveness, but only perfectly pure and holy people, full of godliness and righteousness, removed and free from sin, death, and all evil, in a new, immortal, and glorified body" (LC). To that we will have to pray: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON,
AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT,
AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW,
AND EVER SHALL BE,
WORLD WITHOUT END.

AMEN