ESCHATOLOGY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

What is the nature of the Spirit in the salvation-history of the Bible? If the Spirit points emphatically to the future, what are some of the more relevant implications of this emphasis? Some answers to these questions are proposed in this faculty lecture which was delivered also at Calvin and New Brunswick Seminaries.

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One of the promising signs pointing to the spiritual renewal of the church in our time is the growing and widespread concern for the doctrine and practice of the Holy Spirit. The theological response is reflected in current theological writing and the practical response in the so-called "New Pentecostalism." ¹

In all of this renewed emphasis and interest, however, there is still a disconcerting, neglected factor, namely, the eschatological character of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. To my knowledge, there have been only three attempts in the last fifty years of New Testament study to treat eschatology and the Holy Spirit relationally. ² This neglected factor is surprising in view of the repeated assertions of scripture which


make this relationship one of the prominent features of revelation. As far as scripture is concerned, to say eschatology is to say Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit comes to view as the one who fills past and present with the magnitude of the future. It will be then the purpose of this study, first, to indicate the eschatological character of the person and work of the Spirit, and secondly, to indicate some bearings of this on facets of the life and thought of the church today.

I

In reviewing the biblical data in support of this close link between eschatology and the Spirit, we do well to heed the suggestion made long ago by Vos and begin with the Old Testament background of our New Testament teaching. Vos pointed out that the Old Testament data may be exhibited along four lines of thought. First of all, there is the prophetic promise that before the coming of the great and terrible day of Jahweh, there will be special manifestations and signs of the Spirit which will proclaim the imminent arrival of the long awaited final age, as in Joel 2:28ff. This is the Spirit’s premonitory work, heralding the arrival of the future world. In the second place, there is a line of thought which definitely locates the presence and power of the Spirit within the eschatological age itself, inasmuch as the Spirit equips the messiah for the tasks of his messianic office (Isa. 11:2; 28:5; 42:1; 51:1). In the third place, there are several passages which bring the Spirit into connection with the messiah’s people and the new future life of Israel, as in Isaiah 32:15-17; 44:3; 59:21; Ezekiel 36:27; 37:14; 39:29. In this line of thought, the Spirit is the source of the life and transforming power for land, nation, and people. And finally, there are numerous passages in which the Spirit is the comprehensive formula for the sovereign, supernatural activity of the Godhead in the sphere of history and humanity, and this data encourages the expectation that the Spirit will function with like importance in the final age. While the Old Testament reveals far more than this respecting the Spirit, it will be conceded that Vos is correct in his insistence that the Old Testament makes prominent this link between eschatology and the Spirit. It is in the future new age that the Spirit will give free reign to his presence and power, and this background is important for understanding the New Testament teaching.

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the tie between eschatology and the Spirit. It is not without significance that the Qumran people also appear to have viewed their numerous water baptisms as but preliminary to a baptism of the Spirit in the messianic age (1 QS iv. 20f; ix. 10f; CDC xv. 4).

It is these earlier materials which set in proper perspective what the New Testament says about the Holy Spirit. Here we encounter all the previous associations of the Spirit and the messiah, the Spirit and the new age, the Spirit also as forerunner of the great day of the Lord, the Spirit and the consummation of all things. Our gospels make it quite clear that the Holy Spirit is one of the presuppositions involved in the coming of the messiah and his kingdom. By the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ came to birth in our world (Luke 1:33; Matt. 1:18, 20), was equipped for his messianic office at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32, 33), and the latter a most significant endowment, because it came at the end of an aeon when, by the admission of the rabbis, the Spirit had been notably absent. Jesus' victory in the temptation of the wilderness (Mark 1:12, par.), his entry upon his official ministry (Luke 4:14), his inaugural address (Luke 4:18ff), his exorcisms (Matt. 12:28 and par.), the dunamis by which he taught and ministered (Luke 4:14f), all are brought into prominent connection with the Spirit. Only one datum surprises the reader of the Synoptics, and that is the paucity of reference to the Spirit in the teaching of Jesus. Only eight references are recorded, and their authenticity has been alternately challenged and defended. This considerable reticence about the Spirit, however, has a precise parallel in Jesus' reticence about his messiahship. Fuller revelation of both the kingdom and the Spirit were impossible in his teaching.


—The eight references are: the warning against the blasphemy of the Spirit, Mark 3:28-30 and par.; the promised guidance of the Spirit in the coming time of persecution, Mark 13:11 and par.; the legislation about casting out evil spirits by the Spirit of God, Matt. 12:28 and par.; the reference to the inspiration of Psalm 110 at Mark 12:36 and Matt. 23:43; the promise of the Spirit in answer to prayer, Matt. 7:11 and par.; the baptismal command in the last commission, Matt. 28:19; the reference in Jesus' inaugural address at Nazareth, Luke 4:16; and the charge to the apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Pentecostal outpouring, Luke 24:49.

ministry because both were contingent upon events still future, the impending and distant future.

The Fourth Gospel reveals Jesus to us as the possessor of the Spirit (1:32; 3:34), and as the giver of the Spirit. Sent from the Father and the Son (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 20:23), the Spirit will be another *parakletos* (14: 16, 26; 16:13-14), who will be the interpreter of Jesus' word and work and therefore the Spirit of truth (14:17; 15:26; 16:13), and the source of the believer's new and eternal life (3:3; 7:37-39). The fuller manifestation of the Spirit awaits, however, the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. Exalted to the right hand of the Father, Christ bestows the gift of the Spirit upon his followers (Acts 2:33). All the details of the Pentecost narrative bear an eschatological character: the *ephapax* nature of the event, the bestowal of the Spirit upon all the members of the church, the church as the apostolate or mission of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:26, 27; 37:14; Joel 2:28), the list of the peoples and nations (significant reversals of the lists in Genesis 10 and 11), the one common language (Isa. 66:18, 19; 28:11; 1 Cor. 14:21; Test. Jud. 25:3). And yet neither John's Gospel nor the Book of Acts confine the Spirit to any framework of completely realized eschatology. Contrary to considerable scholarship in our day, the Fourth Gospel does not abandon the future outlook for one of the completely realized presence. The numerous references to the Spirit and eternal life never lose sight of the eschatological reserve.8 The promise is given that the Spirit will abide with the disciples not only during the interim between the ascension and the parousia, but forever (14:16, 17). And so clearly is the Spirit's work still future that John says flatly that the world is incapable of receiving, beholding and knowing him (14:17). For Luke also, the events of the ascension and of Pentecost bear both a present and a future significance. When Luke entitles Jesus *archegos tes zoos* "the author/leader of life" (Acts 3:15; 5:31), he clearly means the resurrection life of the future which broke into the present in the historical event of Jesus' resurrection.

The letters of Paul make clear beyond all dispute that for him the new age and the era of the Spirit are one and the same. W. D. Davies has probably exaggerated the point, but nonetheless makes a good one when he says, "It is doubtful if the mere acceptance of the messianic claims of Jesus in itself would have made much difference to Paul. What leant reality to the messianic claim of Jesus was the presence of the Spirit, the advent of the power of the Age to come."9 Believers now within the dispensation of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8) enjoy the *koinonia* of the Spirit,

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8 Calvin (*New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to St. John*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) in his comment at 6.27 rightly observed that "we must receive the gifts of the Spirit that they may be tickets and pledges of eternal life."

and this is one of the distinguishing marks of the church (Acts 2:42; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). God's people are the temple which the Spirit indwells as his home (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:22), and therefore the catholicity and unity of the church are spiritual (1 Cor. 12:13). This unity of the Body of Christ is consonant, however, with a rich diversity of gifts bestowed by the Spirit upon the church: charismata, "grace gifts;" dia­koniai, "services;" and energata, "workings/accomplishments" (1 Cor. 12:4). From beginning to end, the life of believers is owing to the Spirit (Rom. 7:6; 8:9); illustrative of this is their sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18; 2 Thess. 2:13) and the pledge of their glorification (Rom. 8:14-17). Meanwhile all faith (2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 5:5), freedom (2 Cor. 3:17), hope (Rom. 15:13; Gal. 5:5), joy (Rom. 12:17), love (Rom. 15:30; Col. 1:8), peace (Rom. 14:17), sonship (Rom. 8:15) and strength (Eph. 3:10) are due to his divine power. It is by the Spirit that the believer confesses Christ's Lordship, lives, walks, and prays. Since a full exposition of Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not our purpose here, let us allow the above data to stand as typical of his doctrine and turn to the manner in which he viewed this activity of the Spirit.

Paul's data on the Spirit has two important aspects: the christological-soteriological and the eschatological. The first aspect falls outside the proper limits of this study, but constraint is upon me to make room for at least one comment about it. In our Reformed theology we have often been less careful and successful than was the Apostle Paul in maintaining the unity of the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit. Paul clearly attributes the same soteric activity equally to Christ and to the Spirit. Christians are said to be justified "in Christ" (Gal. 2:17) and "in the Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:11), circumcised, sanctified and sealed in both (1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 15:17; Eph. 1:13; 4:30; Col. 2:11; Rom. 2:29). Believers have their joy, faith, love, peace and fellowship both "in Christ" and "in the Spirit" (Rom. 8:39; 14:17; Gal. 3:26; Phil. 1:8; 1 Col. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14). At Galatians 2:20 Christ is said to be the power and ruling principle of the new life, and the same is ascribed to the Spirit at 5:16-22. Both indwell the believer and are affirmed to be the assurance of his eternal life (2 Cor. 1:22; Col. 1:27). These parallels could be greatly multiplied. All of them have their explanation not in Paul's failure to distinguish between the ascended, exalted Lord and the Spirit, as contended by some scholars, but in his insistence that at the resurrection Christ entered upon a new stage of existence in which his kingly work is henceforth identified with that of the Spirit. The key passage here

is Romans 1:4 where Paul describes Jesus as "descended from David according to the flesh, and constituted Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead." At his resurrection and ascension the eternal Son of God entered upon a new epoch in his kingship and was so endowed with the Spirit that without confusion of the distinct persons he could identify himself with the Spirit and be known as "a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45) and "the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18). In his present work as exalted Lord and Head over all things, he communicates all his saving benefits through the Spirit. The person and work of the Spirit are the connecting link between Christ and the Christian in every respect. This explains not only the soteriological parallels previously mentioned, but also some troublesome and difficult statements of Paul such as: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8:9b), "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3), and "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:17). At this point, I fear that we allow to fall apart what Paul kept together, the forensic and the pneumatic. When some throw the whole weight of emphasis to a theology of justification and others to a theology of regeneration with each theology engendering an unique kind of piety, there is bound to emerge the confused impression that there are two systems of salvation. This never happens in Paul who takes care to distinguish but never separates the forensic and the pneumatic.12

But returning to the main consideration in this study, even the present activity of the Spirit is not without its clear eschatological reference. In Pauline theology, the Spirit belongs primarily to the future. This comes to light in Paul’s qualification of the present activity of the Spirit as proleptic in character. In the passage already quoted, Romans 1:4, Paul connects Christ’s new kingly power and enduement with the Spirit with "resurrection from the dead." This interesting phrase "ex anastaseos nekron" ("out of resurrection from the dead"), refers both to Christ’s own resurrection and the new aeon inaugurated by his resurrection, that new order of things in which the resurrection of the many is bound up with the resurrection of the one. This one resurrection opens the old aeon to the powers of the new one, to be sure; but the resurrection still belongs to and points to the future. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). The present work of the Spirit is but the a parcel "first fruits" (Rom. 8:23), the arrabon "down-payment/initial install-

ment (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14); two metaphors with clear proleptic force. The same emphasis is secured by such conceptions as "the sealing of the Spirit" (2 Cor. 1:21, 22; Eph. 1:13, 14; 4:30), the believer's "sonship and future inheritance" (Rom. 8:17; 1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21). That the Holy Spirit belongs primarily to the future comes to light in Paul's explicit statements about the final kingdom, resurrection, and the eternal state. The final kingdom of God will consist in righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17). Just as now the Kingdom of God penetrates the present by the power of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5; Luke 11:13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), so in the consummation the Holy Spirit will be the pervasive and triumphant reality (Rom. 14:17). It is in this context that we understand Paul's exposition of the believer's resurrection body. Just as the Holy Spirit was the subject of Christ's resurrection (Rom. 1:4; 8:11), so likewise it is the Spirit who impresses upon the believer's resurrection body its threefold character of incorruption, glory, and power, and to such a degree that it may be spoken of as a "spiritual body" or a body ruled by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 15:40-44). G. Vos was so bold as to say that the "Spirit is both the instrumental cause of the resurrection-act and the permanent substratum of the resurrection-life." The small beginnings of life already worked by the Holy Spirit in the present age will be perfected in the consummation. "He who sows now to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). If the Spirit is now the first-fruits and the initial-installment of that which is to be, then obviously the Spirit will be the full reality of the consummation. Now as "partakers of the Holy Spirit" we have already "tasted the powers of the age to come" (Heb. 6:4, 5), but in the final time the whole man, body, spirit, and soul, will be perfected by the Spirit's power. Our present sanctification is "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), but our perfected sanctification will be a glorification by the Spirit in which we shall be "like him" (1 John 3:2), "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4c). If at the parousia the Lord Jesus Christ will change "our lowly body to be like (summorphos) his glorious body," then Calvin's proposal is most provoking. Calvin said that the life of the body of the risen Christ was the life of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit was the content and substratum of his life. This would lead us to expect the same for the resurrection life of the future body of the be-

11 It is interesting that even in modern Greek arrabonizo means "to betroth," arrabonizomai "to be betrothed," and boi arrabones "bethrothal."


liever. But the future of believers is controlled by the Holy Spirit because it is dependent upon the future of entire redemptive history controlled by the Holy Spirit. The final age is preeminently the age of the Spirit. The uniquely new thing about the future is, as Oscar Cullmann says so well, "that the Holy Spirit, the *pneuma*, will lay hold of the entire world of the flesh (*sarx*), of matter."\(^{16}\) To speak of the Spirit, then, is to speak in the same breath of eschatology.

II

The bearing of this data on the faith and life of the church today has so many facets that comment will need to be restricted to a few of the more pertinent areas. For one thing, implicit in this data is considerable criticism and correction of contemporary existentialism. Bultmann makes considerable of the future, but his future is an existential and not a calendar future. It is human existence moving forward resolutely toward its possibilities. According to Bultmann, this future is the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit means that man now possesses an authentic future, an authentic existence, and all objective reality of the Spirit's presence and power disappear from view. And so while Bultmann speaks of the Spirit as "the power of futurity" and as "the eschatological gift,"\(^{17}\) he has really replaced eschatology with eschatological existence and eliminated any real consummation of history in the future. Under the de-literalizing and de-objectivising of Paul Tillich's existential concern, there is a like disappearance of the Spirit's objective presence and power.\(^{18}\) Although quite distant from the theologies of Bultmann and Tillich, C. H. Dodd with his "realized eschatology" also illustrates failure to maintain the biblical polarity between the "already" and the "not yet" of the Holy Spirit. In Dodd's theology, final judgment, resurrection, eternal life and the parousia are deprived of almost all future content by making their fulfillment identical with the giving of the Spirit to the church. Every overemphasis on the present activity of the Spirit prompts the church to live too exclusively from the events that have already taken place.

This same criticism, however, applies to certain evangelical forms of subjectivism in which the Spirit's present activity in regeneration and sanctification are made to terminate on pietism, perfectionism, moralism, organizationalism, etc. Even in our own Reformed circles one may meet with some who are more interested in the regenerated person as such, than in the grace of God of which his regeneration speaks. And while none in the Reformed tradition have dared to go so far as to absolutize

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\(^{16}\)Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, pp. 141, 237.


this regenerated person, some have spoken of him in terms that suggest an autonomous self-sufficiency which, in turn, often finds expression in the demand for completely separate Christian organizations wherever possible. Our Reformed symbols, however, maintain a good balance between the future and present work of the Spirit, and reflect the inescapable tension between the two found in the New Testament data. There is no mistaking the proleptic emphasis given by the Catechism to the Spirit’s present activity when it says that “even the holiest of men make only a small beginning in obedience in this life,” or when giving reasons why the Ten Commandments ought to be preached it says, “that we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature . . . become more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ . . . that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.” In the exposition of the petition “thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer, we read “that is: so govern us by thy Word and Spirit that we may more and more submit ourselves unto thee.” This language about the “more and more,” “the small beginnings of obedience in this life,” correspond to the “already” and “not yet” of the New Testament revelation concerning the Spirit, and should effectively preclude any premature seizure of promised glory and perfection.

Implicit in the biblical data also is a criticism and corrective for the individualism and Pentecostalism of our day. According to the Scripture, the first and primary associations of the Spirit are with Christ and his church. The ordo salis is Christ, church, and then the Christian believer. Only when the Spirit’s work in the individual is set in the light of these larger and primary relationships will we be enabled to see what is right and what is wrong with the individualism and Pentecostalism of our day. The almost tidal-sweep of the Pauline references to the ethical and soteriological aspects of the Spirit’s activity also serves to correct any undue attention to ecstasy and glossolalia.

No answers to the above theological imbalances, however, will be found by drawing the faith and life of the church about an undue futurism. The history of theology shows that it is possible to react so negatively to all subjectivisms, that the Spirit’s regenerating and sanctifying work almost disappears from view. Premature seizure of glory and perfection may be unbiblical, but a one-sided futurism is equally so. Simply because the harvest of the Spirit is still future, we are not permitted to disparage or ignore the actuality of the first fruits. The New Testament

10Heidelberg Catechism, 44:114
20Ibid, 44:115
21Ibid, 44:123. Cnf. also Belgic Confession, xxiv, and Canons of Dordt, Articles xi-xiii.
is forcible in its directives to follow after holiness (Heb. 12:14; 2 Cor. 7:1), to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph. 4:15), and to take up courageously the Christian warfare (Eph. 6:13ff). After all, we too belong to a Pentecostal church which daily witnesses to the presence and power of the Spirit.

Faith does bear visible fruits and evidences itself in good works.\(^{22}\) We do not oppose activism per se, only the activism that divorces itself from grace and gratitude. The imperatives of the New Testament follow upon its indicatives in the same way that eucharistia follows charis. An exaggerated futurism can never do justice, exegetically and theologically, to what Scripture declares about the realities of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification.

While few and selective in number, the “isms” listed above do illustrate the impact on the faith and life of the church which follows from the failure to interpret the Holy Spirit within a proper eschatological framework. Unfortunately there is no single exegetical or theological methodology which can safeguard the church from breaching this tension between the “already” and “not yet” of the Holy Spirit. When one follows the discussions on this subject by some of our Netherlands theologians, two salutary impressions emerge.\(^{23}\) The one is that it is difficult to shun all one-sidedness and do real justice both to present eschatological reality and to eschatological prospect. The other is the importance for the church today to find its nature and life in the Holy Spirit as the one who fills the present with the magnitudes of the past and future.

\(^{22}\) *Heidelberg Catechism*, 32:86; *Belgic Confession*, xxiv.