Charismatic Theology and the New Testament

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Since there is need to limit the subject announced, let me say at the outset that it is not my intention to attack or defend certain contemporary charismatic experiences and practices. While the Holy Spirit is not foreign to my Christian faith and life, I do stand outside the experience and practice of speaking in tongues. This being so, I have no experiential basis for evaluating the reality and validity of the many claims being made today for such spiritual experiences and practices. Like every other renewal movement in the history of the church, the present charismatic movement offers both peril and promise. It is my observation that in circles where there is a strong liturgy, polity, and theology, the movement appears as a good experience, creating a new sense of Christian community, a new caring and sharing in faith, hope, and love, and it is a happening that is affirmative and positive. In other circles, including our own, the experience meets with antagonism, creates division and tension, and is, unhappily, factional and negative.

There is reason to believe that a church such as our own, possessing a well-defined liturgy, polity, and theology, is well designed for containing and incorporating those whose faith has been revitalized by some kind of recent charismatic experience. Surely the church has before it challenges and tasks more important than opposing enthusiasm and spontaneity. Christian diversity should be respected when it involves individual Christian experience. Here the counsel of the Apostle Paul is appropriate:

Let us no more pass judgment on one another, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. . . . Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. . . . Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God (Rom. 14:13, 19; 15:7).

Attitudes of uncompromising hostility and negativity, whether on the part of charismatics or non-charismatics, are not only deplorable but contradictory of the claimed leading and presence of the Holy Spirit. If charismatic renewal brings into our midst only a steady proliferation of small groups to live somewhere out on the periphery of the church, it will be due to the failure of both church and groups to evidence what both profess: "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life."

I trust that you will share my optimism when I say that I am hopeful of better things in our own beloved church. If there is any truth to the old adage that wisdom keeps company with age, then the oldest Protestant Church in America with a continuous existence should be possessed by this time of enough wisdom to meet the challenge of the charismatic movement. After all, the old Dutch church has found grace at long last to accommodate itself to speaking English. And we have been able to
welcome with good grace those who speak German, Hungarian, Italian, and Spanish, and so why not those who speak in yet "other tongues?" Do not dismiss or mistake my optimism too hastily, for it is a thinly disguised plea for understanding, and for a real attempt at "eagerness" to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

There are obstacles, of course, which stand in the way of an immediate realization of this goal. One of them is the amazing diversity of the charismatic movement itself. It is commonplace today to distinguish between older, classical, or traditional Pentecostalism and so-called Neo-Pentecostalism. The new Pentecostals, for the most part, are very definitely new. Most of them choose to remain within their familiar denominational structures. They do not practice speaking in tongues in public worship but reserve it for private devotions or for the special mid-week prayer service. Many of them do not insist on speaking in tongues as a necessary proof of Holy Spirit baptism. In some circles, the renewal movement seems to be a new awareness of the Spirit’s presence and power which prompts prayer, speaking and singing in the Spirit, and a new joy in the pursuit of sanctification and service. Their charismatic experience—in contrast to older forms of Pentecostalism—is seldom introduced into the customary liturgy of the established church. If the Neo-Pentecostalist adheres to this new model, then it appears that his new experience can be theologized as an "infilling of the Holy Spirit," and incorporated into our biblical understanding of the doctrine of sanctification.

Not all charismatics, however, are concerned to remain integrated with their familiar church liturgy, polity, and theology. Some insist upon making an absolute of their new found charism and demand it of all other Christians as the sine qua non of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Some make so much of their new experience that they assume, all too hastily in many instances, that they were not Christians at all before the experience and inadvisedly have themselves re-baptized. Carried away by their own enthusiasm and zeal, they separate themselves from previous Christian association and fellowship under the persuasion that they are called to higher things. And when "preferring one another in honour" gives way to a spirit of controversy, militancy, and rupture, then we must conclude, albeit reluctantly, that it may be best to agree to disagree and go our separate ways.

At present, however, Neo-Pentecostalism is so amorphous and free-wheeling that it defies description and most surely does not possess anything like a normative theology. This may be due to its recent development, its subjectivity, and considerable diversity of expression. Anyone who assumes that he understands Neo-Pentecostalism will be quickly disabused of his arrogance by reading a little of Walter J. Hollenweger’s 572-page handbook on The Pentecostals. Since it is a movement, however, or better still, a spirituality, and still lacking an adequately articulated theology, opportunities for fruitful discussion and study are still with us. If willing, churches and charismatics in our own theological tradition have before them an opportunity to discuss and study together this new spirituality, and to explore together its place in the framework of Reformed thought. If this does not take place, charismatics will have no alternative but to resort to theologizing their experience in terms of
older, traditional Pentecostalism, and this will be regrettable.

One of the spokesmen for charismatics in the Roman Catholic Church, Kilian McDonnell, sees the situation this way:

One of the major problems of the charismatic movement has been a lack of critical exegetical literature. There has been much use of Scripture, and much popularizing with various appeals to Scripture, but little serious exegetical study. Charismatics in the historic churches have taken too uncritically the exegesis and theology of classical Pentecostalism. Classical Pentecostalism has its areas of strength—evangelism, to mention only one—from which the historic churches might learn. But it would be a grave mistake to take over classical Pentecostal exegesis without a careful examination. This "grave mistake" which Kilian McDonnell deplores is being avoided in some circles. Theologians in the various traditions are at work seeking to explore the biblical and theological groundings available for interpreting this new spirituality. Two or three outstanding Pentecostal theologians are also busy seeking to furnish the charismatic movement with a definite theology. These men are Walter J. Hollenweger, a former Pentecostal and presently serving as one of the secretaries of the World Council of Churches; Arnold Bittlinger, a Lutheran and Professor of systematic theology in Schloss Craheim, Germany; and David J. de Plessis, who for many years has been the well-known roving ambassador of Pentecostalism. If these men are able to exercise any appreciable influence, charismatic theology will take on an identity and structure quite different from that of traditional Pentecostalism. Sister Josephine Massingberd Ford of the theology department in Notre Dame University, along with McDonnell and others, is devoting considerable time and writing to providing Roman Catholic charismatics with a theology that will enable them to incorporate their experience into the broad framework of Catholic tradition. A Special Committee on the Work of the Holy Spirit, appointed by the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, brought in a report in 1970 which was likewise constructive and positive. Much of this theological activity is viewed with suspicion by oldline Pentecostals and, in some instances, with outright opposition.

In our own Reformed Church in America tradition, there has appeared to date no indication from our theologians how they would conceptualize "speaking in tongues" within the broad framework of Reformed theology. Since no encouragement has been given that there exists even the possibility of incorporating this experience within our doctrinal categories, most charismatics among us become either extremely defensive and separatist or extremely apologetic and intimidated, and in both instances they are resorting to traditional Pentecostal theology for assistance.

In the face of this situation, there appear to be two tasks which need to be pursued with vigor and courage, one negative, the other positive. The positive task will require from us a position on the reality and validity of "spiritual gifts" in the church today, and then some clear indication on how and why they can or cannot be interpreted and incorporated into our particular theological tradition. With customary generosity, I would like to nominate my faculty colleagues for giving some leadership to the pursuit
of this task. Before this can be done, a negative task must precede it or be undertaken concurrently, that of clearing away difficulties and misconceptions of the subject which are arising from the resort to the exegesis and theology of old-line Pentecostalism. My task this morning I conceive to be the latter—clearing away some current exegetical misconceptions with regard to spiritual gifts, by setting them in the light of other ways of interpreting and reading the New Testament.

I

Let us begin with the nature of the Pentecost event itself of Acts, chapter two, and the relationship between the Acts account and the Pauline materials on charismatic gifts. One is constantly dismayed to find expressions and phrases being regularly shuffled back and forth between these two literatures, despite the fact that they are written by different authors with their own theologies. Bent on harmonizing them, some resort to adjusting the Book of Acts to the Corinthian letters, and others Corinthians to the Acts. Few seem to be aware that the prominent terms for spiritual gifts, charismata, pneumatika, are restrictedly Pauline and do not occur at all in the Book of Acts, not even once. And not all are aware that the phrase “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is a phrase from the gospels which occurs twice in the Book of Acts, but that it is hardly a Pauline one. While the interrelationships of Acts and the Corinthian letters are easily a study in themselves, let me content myself with two observations. The first is that the Pentecost description of Acts, chapter two, and Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12-14 are two accounts of related but different phenomena. Those who read the Book of Acts in the framework of older Pentecostalism readily assume that what happened then is an obligatory model for us today. They insist on the repeatability of what is termed “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” as a post-conversion experience, the initial evidence of which is “speaking in tongues,” and all of this based on data from the Book of Acts. We can by-pass, for the present, differences among charismatics today with respect to some of these items, but hardly the assumption that what took place then must happen now in any place or time. Too much is built subsequently on this assumption—that there are two kinds of Christians, those who have “the baptism with the Spirit” and those who do not; that there are two kinds of churches, those which are full-gospel churches, and those which are still located somewhere between Easter and Pentecost, living behind closed doors, knowing that Jesus died and rose again, but knowing nothing of the reality of Holy Spirit baptism. Outside of establishment Pentecostalism, few Christians read Acts, chapter two, in this fashion. Moreover, the assumption that everything that happened then must happen now is altogether unwarranted. Everything in the Bible is authoritative, but not all is normative. Some things happened then which ought not to have happened, and other things happened once and were never meant to happen again. The latter is the case with the Pentecost-event. The author of Acts himself understood the event eschatologically, something that happened once and once-for-all. Speaking of Luke’s theology at this point, Hans Conzelmann says, “in the quotation from Joel in the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:17ff.), the Spirit is thought of as a sign of the End.”6 The
quotation, as you recall, reads:

This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ... (Joel 2:28-32).

Not only Joel but other Old Testament prophets present the activity of the Holy Spirit primarily in terms of an expected future time when the Spirit would be the key presence and power in three relationships. He is presented first in relationship to the messiah, empowering and equipping him for his messianic task. At Isaiah 11:2, a seven-fold blessing of the Spirit is granted the coming king of peace, and at Isaiah 61 we read:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me and sent me to preach good tidings to the meek; to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to prisoners, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of the salvation of our God (Isa. 61:1,2).

Another prophetic association of the Holy Spirit in the future is with the people of God (Isa. 32:15-17; 44:3), and especially in Ezekiel the refrain occurs repeatedly, “And I will put my spirit within you and you shall live” (Ezek. 36:27; 37:14; 39:29). Another relationship is with renewed nature and the world, and with special manifestations and signs of wind and fire as mentioned by the prophet Joel (2:28ff.). Many years ago Geerhardus Vos reminded us that in the Old Testament and the New, to say Holy Spirit is to say eschatology.” Messiah, the messiah’s people, the world, these are the associations which must come to mind when we read Peter’s sermon on Pentecost in Acts, chapter two. “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel” (2:16). Therefore it is significant that John the Baptist introduces the messiah Jesus with the repeated witness, “I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mark 1:8; John 1:33). Matthew and Luke read “Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11; Luke 3:16). Therefore it is significant when Jesus himself is baptized at the river Jordan that the Holy Spirit comes upon him and remains with him (Matt. 3:16f.; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34). Therefore it is significant at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon the assembled church, that Peter says, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:32f.). Jesus is the author and giver of the Spirit, and you will observe from this point forward that the New Testament is constantly sensitive to this truth and speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ.

It is the coming of the Messiah and the coming of the Holy Spirit that in Luke’s theology close out the old age and inaugurate the new age and the new covenant. And once introduced, they do not need to be introduced again. The “baptism of the Spirit” does not refer to a salvation-history event that is as unrepeatable as the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, or ascension of Jesus. And when so interpreted, the heavy symbolism of the Pentecost narrative begins to make eminently good sense. The symbolism has a strong Jewish coloring which has always captured the attention of
readers. The festival itself, of course, was Jewish. The features of wind, fire, and tongues were precisely those of Old Testament prediction. And when Peter begins his sermon, it is with the words: “You men of Judea and all that now are living in Jerusalem” (Acts 2:14). The closing out of one age and the beginning of a new age was familiar language to a people long conditioned in a doctrine of the two ages. At the same time, the sign-character of the event did shift attention to the differentia of the new age, that God’s covenant and grace were being opened to all the world, and that the mission of the church is to proclaim God’s mighty deeds in the world’s languages. Speaking in other tongues (lalein heterais glossais) along with the other associated phenomena of Pentecost were not the content of the event but signs pointing to the fulfillment of what had been promised. That by “other tongues” Luke means foreign languages in which the gospel is to be preached seems fairly obvious from the narrative. Luke stresses a two-fold amazement by those who heard this speaking. First, they were amazed to hear spoken their own native languages (tei idiai dialektoi [2:6,8]) without any need of an interpreter. And in the second place, they were amazed to hear Galilean Jews speaking these languages. Because of the foreign language emphasis in the narrative, some scholars have seen here a counter event to the Genesis story of the scrambling languages at Babel, but this need not detain us now.

When we turn to I Corinthians 12-14, we confront a related but quite different reality. Glossolalia in Corinth has some well-defined characteristics. Speaking in tongues is but one of many spiritual gifts present in the Corinthian church. All the gifts are endowments bestowed for the enrichment and edification of the body of Christ. Glossolalia is not immediately understood either by speaker or hearers, and necessary to the use of the gift in public worship is still another gift, that of interpretation of tongues. Unless an interpreter is present, Paul cautions against allowing the exercise of the gift in community worship. At Corinth, tongues appear to be basically a personal, individual experience (14:4), one in which the speaker edifies himself (14:4), and therefore, from the standpoint of the Christian community, it is of less importance than prophecy which is immediately intelligible. These two accounts, then, Acts and I Corinthians 12-14, should not be hastily harmonized. The nature, purpose, and function of tongues vary in the books and theologies of Luke and Paul.

There has already emerged in our discussion a second exegetical misconception, and that relates to the precise nature and definition of glossolalia. What does it mean to speak in tongues (lalein glossais)? And likewise, what is meant by such terms as “spiritual gifts” (charismata, pneumatika)? Some real, in-depth study of New Testament terminology makes one realize that answers here are tentative and uncertain. For glossolalia alone, scholars have come up with such diverse proposals as real, extant foreign languages, as dialects of known languages, (as oracular utterance needing interpretation) as a recitation of Scripture, as a form of prayer, as song, as gibbonish, as heavenly or paradisical speech. The New English Bible, with either incredible omniscience or amazing courage, translates tongues (hai glossai) consistently as “ecstatic utterance.” And this inability to agree on the precise nature of what Paul is talking about is as characteristic of charismatics as of professional scholars. It is a little embarrassing, therefore, to consent to the confidence of those
who claim that the charismatic activity going on today is exactly that which is reported in the New Testament. Furthermore, it is not always observed that the terms charismata and pneumatika are not exact synonyms in Paul.19 This should be clear from Romans 1:11 where Paul makes pneumatikon modify charisma, and says he “wants to come to Rome in order to impart some spiritual charisma.” Charisma (charismata) stands for some concrete expression or realization of divine grace (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; 7:7; 12:4, 28-31), and is so broad a term that it embraces every kind of divine grace from God’s saving grace in Christ to particular gifts granted Christian believers (1 Cor. 12:4). While it is used most frequently for the gift of healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28, 30, 31), Paul uses it also for sexual continence and says, “I wish that all were as I myself am. But each one has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another” (1 Cor. 7:7). The word pneumatikon, on the other hand, appears to be restricted to gifts of inspired perception or speech and their interpretation (1 Cor. 12:1-4; 14:1ff.). In a careful study of “Spiritual Gifts in the Pauline community,” E. Earle Ellis has shown convincingly that the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14 are almost always in some form connected with inspired speech or prophecy.20 Pneumatics pray and sing in tongues, they prophesy, they interpret these forms of speech and discern the origin of it (1 Cor. 14:29, 30-31). Therefore, charismata and pneumatika are not synonymous and this misunderstanding should be corrected. In the light of this distinction, it is unfortunate that the word charismatic has gained such currency in our time, because pneumatic would be far more accurate, biblically speaking.

But we continue now with the point that we should not be so certain that we know precisely the character and nature of this pneumatic activity in the Corinthian church community. There is considerable elasticity in the conception of the prophet and of his activity. Here, both in Luke and in Paul, the prophet engages in prediction (Acts 11:28; 20:23; 25:22), pronouncement of divine judgment (Acts 13:11; 28:25-28), exhortation (1 Cor. 14:2; Acts 15:32), interpretation of Scripture (Acts 2:14-36; 6:9-11; 8:30-35; 18:24-28), teaching (Acts 13:16-34), and receiving of divine revelation (1 Cor. 14:30-31). This means that the work of the prophet overlaps with that of the apostle, teacher, exhorter, and elder.21 When it comes to such other gifts as “the utterance of wisdom,” and the “utterance of knowledge” (I Cor. 14:8), present-day charismatics as well as New Testament scholars exhibit considerable diversity of definition. Some of the gifts are immediately understandable, such as healing, teaching, working of miracles, administration, and such; but others are not as easily defined. In the face of this data, it is surely wise to urge some caution against too facile an identification of present-day charismatic activity with that of New Testament times.

A third misunderstanding which we do well to clarify is the strange idea that spiritual gifts are only extraordinary in character and exercised only by a spiritual elite in the churches. An examination of Paul’s letters reveals that they contain four different lists of gifts. Nine gifts are mentioned at I Corinthians 12:6-8, and eight gifts reappear later at verse 28. Tongues and the interpretation of tongues are listed in both passages of chapter 12. At Romans 12:6-8, seven gifts are mentioned and at Ephesians 4:11 five are listed, and in neither passage do tongues or interpretation of tongues
A total of twenty gifts appear in the four lists and characterize three great churches of the New Testament time. Moreover, the distribution and variety of the gifts is most instructive. Not all the churches share in all the gifts. In every list, however, some gifts are extraordinary while others are quite ordinary, such as teaching, generous giving, or deeds of mercy. The author of the difference is the Holy Spirit who “distributes to each as he wills for the common good” (I Cor. 12:7). The Spirit’s distribution in Corinth, however, was not satisfactory to the community. The more sensational, showy gifts were in greater demand than others. That glossolalia was out of hand in Corinth is suggested by the detail and length of Paul’s discussion and his quite direct approach in counseling. The counsel which he gave in the situation was firm but understanding. He refused to forbid tongues (I Cor. 14:39). He urged his readers to “earnestly desire spiritual gifts” (I Cor. 12:31; 14:1), and claimed that he was himself no novice in speaking in tongues (14:18). Yet he did not hesitate to bring the exercise of this gift under regulation, and in the course of this procedure he did not hesitate to rank all spiritual gifts in a hierarchy of importance, leaving tongues and their interpretation at the bottom of the list. The basis of his evaluation was that of benefit to the Christian community.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good (I Cor. 12:8).
Let all things be done for edification (I Cor. 14:26).
All things should be done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40).

It is the principle of edification that moved Paul to give higher marks to prophecy than either to tongues or to the interpretation of tongues, and to counsel restraint in the exercises of these gifts in public worship. I gather that Paul himself exercised these gifts frequently in private, otherwise I find it difficult to understand his word, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more (mallon pan tan humon) than you all” (I Cor. 14:18). It is worth observing also that Paul took occasion to warn the Corinthian community that what does not hold the head will not long hold the heart. Assuming as I do, that tongues in the church there was a form of Spirit-prompted prayer and praise, it should be noted that Paul did not commend such prayer as being in any way preferable or superior to prayer with the mind. Larry Christenson, one of the talented contemporary charismatics among the Lutherans, says this:

An utterance in tongues comes upward from the depths, but instead of being channeled through the mind, it by-passes the mind and flows directly to God in a stream of Spirit-prompted prayer, praise and thanksgiving. 22

The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, refused to place mind and spirit in antithesis, but said,

If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also (I Cor. 14:14-15).

And then he added, “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all; nevertheless in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (I Cor. 14:18-19). (Incidentally, it is at
this point that I would like to invite the reflection of my colleagues in historical and systematic theology, because I see lurking here the possibility of a bad construction of the relationship between nature and grace.)

Having made these remarks, it is important to add, however, that Paul’s attitude toward spiritual gifts in the Corinthian situation is positive. While nowhere does he encourage the strange idea that every Christian should speak in tongues, nevertheless his aim was to regulate, not eliminate the charism of tongues. On the other hand, Paul is decidedly negative to any idea that believers with spiritual gifts are a superior breed. On occasion, Paul can distinguish between a spiritual and a carnal Christian (I Cor. 3:1, 3, 4), but never in terms that would suggest that one is Spirit-baptized and the other not. What Paul does say is, “For with one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews and Greeks, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (I Cor. 12:13). Or again, “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (Rom. 8:9). What Paul is saying here is clear: if you are in Christ you are in the Spirit, and you have been and are Spirit-baptized. In fact, “the baptism of the Spirit” is a most unfortunate phrase to use for a post-conversion, second blessing of the Spirit. In both Luke-Acts and Paul, every Christian is a charismatic, and every believer has his or her charism or more than one (I Cor. 12:4; 7:7; 12:4, 9, 28, 30, 31). Gifts are in no way essential to salvation, and gifts do not make us in any way better than other Christians. And nowhere are we encouraged to entertain the idea that all should speak in tongues in order to demonstrate their spirituality.


As students of the Greek Testament know, Paul phrases these questions in such a manner that the clearly-expected answer is “No.” Therefore, if anyone among us as a Spirit-baptized, Spirit-led Christian is persuaded that tongues are not for him or her, and that the Holy Spirit is working in his life in other ways, then there is nothing in the New Testament that says you are less a Christian than your charismatic neighbor. On the other hand, your neighbor’s decision to seek the gift and to exercise it is a decision to be equally respected.

Paul has a word at this point which should appear more frequently than it does in our preaching and teaching. It is his word at Ephesians 5:18:

Do not get drunk with wine, but be constantly, daily, filled and refilled with the Spirit” (plerousthe en pneumati).

While a believer who truly commits himself to Christ receives the Holy Spirit into his life, and while it is axiomatic in the New Testament that one cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit, there is a constant need to be filled and refilled with the Spirit. At Galatians 5:25 Paul writes, “If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk.” There is no experience or possession of the Holy Spirit that makes the believer autonomous or self-sufficient, that sets him up in business for life. The heart of the New Testament theology of the Spirit is man’s lack of self-sufficiency and his need to be constantly renewing his life in faith, gratitude, and love. And it will not do to major
on the Spirit’s gifts and by-pass the fruit of the Spirit, described by Paul in Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against these there is no law (vv. 22-23).

Here the word for fruit or harvest (καρπός) is in the singular, and the significance is that the full fruit of the Spirit is for every Christian. The words for gifts (χαρίσματα—πνευματικά) are plural, because they are not designed for possession by any one individual or church. The gifts contribute to the benefit of the community when wisely exercised, but the fruit of the Spirit is essential to salvation. Paul can write to the church at Thessalonica, “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (I Thess. 4:3). And Jesus said, “He who abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (John 15:5). Without the fruit of the Spirit, the gifts will wither and die away. I believe it would be helpful in our churches today if there were more explicit preaching and teaching on the origin, nature, and progress of the Christian life, and greater emphasis upon the Pauline truth that in Christ we have the fullness of blessing that some are mistakenly seeking beyond Christ.

This last remark leads me to mention one more area of misunderstanding in so much of present-day discussion about charismatic renewal, and to suggest that it likewise deserves our probing and study. It has to do with a tendency I observe in much contemporary speaking and writing to pull apart Christ and the Spirit, to set over against each other water-baptism and spirit-baptism, and consequently to encourage the idea that there are two or three well-defined stages in the Christian life or even distinct systems of salvation. Not all charismatics are fostering this misunderstanding. For example, Christian Krust, commenting on a confession of faith drawn up by the Müllheim Association of Christian Fellowship in Germany has said:

The attempt to present the baptism of the Spirit as a second spiritual experience, to be fundamentally distinguished from rebirth, has no basis in Scripture.23

Other charismatics, however, are much more apt to settle for the more common Pentecostal position which can be illustrated by what Ralph M. Riggs says regarding the experience of Spirit-baptism:

It is as distinct from conversion as the Holy Spirit is distinct from Christ. (The Spirit’s) coming to the believer at the baptism is the coming of the Third Person of the Trinity, in addition to the coming of Christ, which takes place at conversion.24

The suggestion that there is something more for the believer in the Holy Spirit than he already has in Jesus Christ meets with solid opposition in the New Testament. To the dissatisfied Galatians who wanted to supplement faith in Christ with something more, Paul wrote, “If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also walk” (5:25). Paul did not command them to seek a second blessing or a third or even a new baptism of the Spirit, but reminded them that they had received the Spirit when they first believed, and now they should walk by the Spirit in whom and by whom they had come thus far. To the dissatisfied Colossians who wanted something more mystical than simple faith union with Christ, Paul wrote:
In him (Christ) dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him you are made full—complete (2:9-10).

Having been made full or complete in Christ, what more could they want? The only fulness there is—the whole fulness of God (Pan to pleroma theotetos somatikos) is already located in Christ, and believers who are in Christ are in him in whom all the fulness dwells, and therefore to suggest that believers should seek something more outside of Christ was the heresy that threatened the church at Colossae.

The New Testament never encourages the subordination of Christ to the Holy Spirit or suggests that they are set in antithesis to each other. Nowhere is the relationship between Holy Spirit, Christ, and Church set forth with greater clarity than in the Gospel of John. There, the glory of Jesus, which is his self-giving love at the Cross, is the necessary prelude to the giving of the Spirit, because it is to be the whole work of the Holy Spirit to effect the realization of Christ’s glory in his people. In this gospel, Jesus teaches that the Spirit has no other task than to witness to him (14:26), to glorify him (14:14), to take up his work as revealer of truth (16:13) and giver of life (7:37-39). The Holy Spirit has no name, no purpose, no work, which is independent of the person, word, and work of Jesus.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all 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 (16:12-16).

As over against Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit is self-effacing and self-sacrificing.

His subjective work in the believer is not a repetition in us of the objective work of Christ, but rather a work of identifying us with the work Christ has done for us. And if it be thought that this may be peculiar to Johannine theology, let me assure you that it appears just as forcibly in Pauline thought. Paul attributes the same soteric activity equally to Christ and the Spirit. Believers are said to be justified “in Christ” (Gal. 2:17) and “in the Spirit” (I Cor. 6:11), consecrated “in Christ” (I Cor. 1:2) and in “the Spirit” (Eph. 4:30). Believers are sealed (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), righteous (I Cor. 6:11; Phil. 3:8, 9; Rom. 14:17) in both. Believers have in both their life (Eph. 2:1; Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:11), their joy (Phil. 4:4; Rom. 14:17), their hope (I Cor. 15:19; Rom. 5:5; Gal. 6:8), their fellowship (I. Cor. 1:9; II Cor. 13:14). The person and work of the Holy Spirit is the life bond between Christ and believer in every respect. He is the one whom John V. Taylor characterizes as “the invisible go-between God” the effect of whose coming is—communication, awareness.24 This is why neither Luke nor Paul can conceive of a Christian apart from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit-filled, Spirit-possessed life always has this character—an incomparable awareness of Jesus Christ. There is in the New Testament no experiencing or honoring of the Spirit that is not at one and the same time an experiencing and honoring of Christ. One can have as much of the Holy Spirit as he has of Christ, and of Christ as he has of God.

The seeking of experience for experience’s sake, even the experience of the Holy Spirit, is unbiblical, irreligious. If the character of the Holy Spirit is his self-effacing,
self-sacrificing for the sake of Christ, perhaps we should recognize the Holy Spirit in action in the caring and sharing of Christ’s people, in the fellowship of the forgiven and forgiving church, where Christ alone is given the pre-eminence because such is the task and testimony of the Spirit.

2 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
9 The connection between Pentecost and the world mission of the church was the subject of Harry Boer’s thesis, Pentecost and the Missionary Witness of the Church, Franeker: T. Wever, 1955. See also his further use of the theme in Pentecost and Missions, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
20 E. Earle Ellis, ibid., pp. 128-144.