
The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Karl Barth

Translated and annotated by

Michael Raburn

Introduction, translation, and annotations
copyright © 2002 by Michael L. Raburn.
All rights reserved.

Contents

Introduction	iv
Guiding Principles	1
1. The Holy Spirit as Creator	5
2. The Holy Spirit as Atoner	19
3. The Holy Spirit as Redeemer	47

Introduction

With very few exceptions, most Christians, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox, would at least give verbal affirmation to the doctrine of the Trinity. In examining many Trinitarian doctrines, however, it is often difficult to determine what meaningful role the Holy Spirit plays in any of the events discussed. The work of creation is most often thought of as the work of the Father, and the work of salvation is certainly seen as the domain of Jesus Christ, God the Son. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in some doctrinal formulae as at work in the life of the believer after conversion, i.e., in sanctification, but such an understanding is very far from universally held. Indeed, many Trinitarian theologies seem to have nothing meaningful for the Spirit to do. This is often reflected in creeds, catechisms, or statements of faith that deal extensively with the Father and the Son, and yet give only cursory treatment to the Holy Spirit.

Karl Barth recognized this tendency, and in 1929 he gave a lecture on the Holy Spirit aimed directly at those theologies that fail to recognize the Spirit's role in all things. Barth argues that the Spirit's work can be seen in the divine acts of creating, saving, and delivering humans for God. This method of thinking is

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

both fully Trinitarian and well in line with what one may find in Barth's *magnum opus*, *Church Dogmatics*. In that great work, Barth argues convincingly for the work of all three members of the Trinity in all three of these areas of divine involvement in human life. This really is a common sense, realistic approach: if God is a three-in-one being, then all three must be at work in any action the one God performs. Barth's genius is demonstrated in taking observations like this one that seem self-evident, and applying them with thorough consistency to all doctrinal issues. This small book serves as a perfect example of this theological method. It also serves to rattle one's thinking about the Person of the Holy Spirit, driving one to a fuller appreciation for all the members of the Trinity and the relationship that exists between them.

The purpose of this translation is to introduce the beginning theological reader to the Person of the Holy Spirit. Keeping that purpose in mind, I have chosen (for the most part) not to include Barth's own footnotes here. These were most likely a later addition by Barth prior to publication, which were not presented during the original lecture. Those footnotes identified the thought of various theologians, to which Barth was replying in the main text, but knowledge of these understood sparring partners is in no way necessary for one trying to grasp what Barth is saying. I have retained original footnote information that serves to cite any work Barth has quoted, although the text did not include full bibliographic information. In order to assist the beginner in actually grasping what Barth is saying, I have also included explanatory footnotes at various points where I felt they might be helpful in understanding the point being made in the text.

Arriving at a good English understanding of a German text often requires the translator to divide long sentences and paragraphs into smaller units. For this

Introduction

reason, the reader will notice that at times a new paragraph begins on the very next line, while at other times there is a space preceding the new paragraph. A new paragraph that has no extra space indicates a paragraph break I have inserted for your benefit, while a paragraph break which includes a space denotes a new paragraph in the original text. You will also note, in a few places, lines dividing the text into sections. These were in the original text and I have included them here as they mark a turn in the author's thought. I have decided against adding section headings, however, to avoid imposing my own interpretation of Barth onto you any more than necessary. Translation always involves interpretation (especially with German!), but the goal should always be to let the original text speak as much as possible.

I would like to thank all the people who have helped me in the production of this translation: Amy, my wife, and Emily and Katelyn, our daughters, for patiently waiting for me to finish another project, Terry Cross, for assistance with the Latin passages, Isaac Byrd for working so hard to get the book ready for the students, and James Marler for lending a hand. Any errors that persist in the work are solely my fault, and I would appreciate learning of any you spot. I hope this work serves to challenge your thinking about the Holy Spirit and the life you should live in response to that challenge.

Cleveland, TN
February 2002

Guiding Principles¹

1. The Holy Spirit as Creator

1. The Holy Spirit, in the event of his existence for humans, is the only reason that humans actually exist in the image of God. Thus the image of God is not and will not be an attribute of the created [human] spirit, on the contrary it is and remains the free work of the Creator in his creation, only comprehensible as grace, always incomprehensible to humanity.²

2. Christian life is human life that, through the Holy Spirit, is open for the Word of God. Therefore, The Holy Spirit represents, in his being and work, the subjective side in the event of revelation. That revelation, through Scripture and experience, imparts knowledge to the

¹ In this brief section, Barth gives us the outline for the entire essay, which can also serve as a quick reference or a handy study guide.

² Barth is saying that the divine image that we as humans bear is not our own possession, but is the continual work of the Spirit in us; we cannot understand these things on our own, we can only understand by the grace that the Spirit brings into our lives.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

human in order that, while the knowledge of what his Creator demands of him is not his own, it is made so in the Holy Spirit (through what is given in the Word).³

2. The Holy Spirit as Atoner⁴

1. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of grace, fights against the human hostility to grace – the attempts to justify oneself by works, which is a sin humans cannot get rid of, or even imagine themselves without.

2. Christian life means that by the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of humans, they have justification through the Word, for the sake of Christ; the justification through faith comes as repentance and as trust.⁵

³ What sets Christians apart, according to this statement, is that the Spirit works in us so that when we read the Bible, we are able to understand what it is God asks of us. Without the presence of the Spirit, the Bible would make little sense to us and would not lead us to a life pleasing to God. We are unable to accomplish these things on our own; we require the assistance of the Spirit in all aspects of living the Christian life.

⁴ The German word here (*Versöhner*) may be translated more properly as ‘Reconciler,’ but the focus of chapter two in this work is the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation. I have chosen ‘Atoner’ to reflect the meaning *versöhnen* has in connection with atonement (and *Yom Kippur* – the Day of Atonement) and the intention Barth has in emphasizing the Spirit’s role in what is often thought of as the work of Christ alone.

⁵ Barth is affirming that the Holy Spirit is the catalyst bringing us to repent and trust in Christ for salvation – these are the key elements that bring about faith. Thus, without this work performed by the Holy Spirit, no individual can come to faith or receive salvation.

Guiding Principles

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

1. The Holy Spirit is present for humans in God's revelation as the Spirit of Promise. In the Holy Spirit, that is, in the finality and futurity of the principle of his existence in the afterlife, the human is a new creature: God's child.⁶

2. Christian life is born out of the Holy Spirit as a new life in hope. Having been hidden with Christ in God the human always has a Conscience leading him into all truth, and because in freedom he is bound always in gratitude to God, he prays and always is heard while he prays.⁷

The Holy Spirit is God the Lord in the fullness of divinity, in the fullness of majesty and condescension, in the fullness of the hiddenness and revealedness of God. Our examination of the Holy Spirit and the Christian life will consist in a development of this statement in its diverse relations and in the respective application of the results on the concept of the Christian life.

⁶ It is the Holy Spirit that undertakes the task of transforming the convert into the child of God. This task is not complete until the believer reaches the afterlife, either by death or by the Second Coming of Christ.

⁷ While every human has a conscience, the one who believes in Christ finds that the Spirit speaks to the inner person in a way that is similar to the way one's conscience speaks.

1

The Holy Spirit as Creator

Augustine knew, what later idealistic theologians no longer rightly understood, that God's life, as it is named in the Bible as Spirit, Holy Spirit, is not identical with what we know of as our own created spirits, or our own inner life. He knew: "...neither are You the mind itself. For You are the Lord God of the mind..."⁸ Augustine asks with regard to God: "Who is he that is beyond the topmost point of my soul?"⁹ To those who praise the soul as "the highest good," he responds: "For he who extols the nature of the soul as the highest good, and condemns the nature of the flesh as if it were evil, assuredly is fleshly both in his love of the soul and hatred of the flesh; for his feelings arise from human fancy, not from divine truth."¹⁰ That sounds different and better, than when, at the end a long and boring account, Troeltsch does not refrain from equating the

⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, X.25.36.

⁹Ibid., X.7.11.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.5.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Holy Spirit with “the immediate religious fabrication of the individual.”¹¹

Of course, Augustine also looked for continuity between the uncreated Spirit and the created spirits. God is certainly not the soul according to his teaching. God is over the soul, more than the soul, and yet, according to Augustine, he is initially also in the soul, as its origin. Augustine claims this was originally known, is now forgotten, and with the assistance of grace can be remembered again perfectly well. “For we do not believe it as something new; but when we recall it, we admit that what was said was correct.”¹² Augustine seems to be asking, how would we come to know something that we have not already known beforehand anyway? How would our God become enjoyable and loveable as the highest good, if we did not have a perfect example of the blessed life anyway, like we also have other perfect examples in “the far back, hidden, and more secret caves of the memory.”¹³ For that reason, Augustine can

¹¹ Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*, 1925, p. 24. This quote represents a common trend in much of modern theology to equate the Holy Spirit with some aspect found within humans. For instance, Paul Tillich taught that if you search deep enough within yourself you would find the “Ground of Being,” which is the very foundation of your existence, and every other human as well. Once you have found this Ground of Being, you have found God, who resides within humans and nowhere else. Whether God actually exists within humans, or is manufactured as a product of the human psyche is a matter of debate within modern theology, but Barth’s first task in this chapter is to argue against this sort of thinking altogether.

¹² Augustine, *Confessions*, X.19.28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, X.10.17. In this passage, Augustine is arguing that even when he learns something new, he knows it to be true based on concepts already in his mind, even though he does not know how those concepts came to be there. They are not the products of his sensory experience, and yet he believes they are there. Here is a somewhat longer citation: “There they were, then,

The Holy Spirit as Creator

moan, “Belatedly I loved thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new, belatedly I loved thee.”¹⁴ But for that same reason, he can also exult, “For where I found Truth, there found I my God, who is the Truth.”¹⁵ Therefore, in the famous story of his last conversation with his mother, Monica, Augustine can describe himself as being on a long step ladder ascending to an ever higher transcendence attaining ultimately even the knowledge of God, if his efforts are also awakened and guided by grace, although he may also lose his step in enigmatic, mystical abstraction and intuition. As such, the great antagonist of Pelagianism did not feel the works-righteousness inherent in this concept of God. We quickly conclude, then, that even his concept of grace cannot be so clear-cut, that it could have made the Reformation superfluous. Still, it sounds captivating, when Augustine praises his achieved goal as: “the region of unfailing plenty,” and the, “one moment of knowledge,” where it is declared: ‘Enter into the joy of the Lord.’¹⁶

However, the focus of thought about the actual creation is not made clear in this line of thinking. To ignore the changelessness of the limits of space and

even before I learned them, but they were not in my memory. Where were they, then? How does it come about that when they were spoken of, I could acknowledge them and say, ‘So it is, it is true,’ unless they were already in the memory, though far back and hidden, as it were, in the more secret caves, so that unless they had been drawn out by the teaching of another person, I should perhaps never have been able to think of them at all?” While for Augustine the essence of God is not innate within humans (as in Troeltsch and Tillich above), the *concept* of God, or some degree of the *knowledge* of God is innate; Barth will argue that both views make the work of the Holy Spirit superfluous, and as such, must be rejected.

¹⁴ Ibid., X.27.38.

¹⁵ Ibid., X.24.35.

¹⁶ Ibid., IX.10.24,25.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

time, together with the good that is in this truth, does not make that which the human can find (mostly by happenstance) God the Creator.¹⁷ The discontinuity between God the Lord and humans must mean, especially in light of the proportion of Creator to creature, that between being Lord and being lorded over there exists such an irreversibility, that the idea of God as an object of our memory must be ruled out. Knowledge of God is distinguished when, as a genuine and radically new revelation, it confronts what the human has already (though not originally) known. 'Creature' is strictly understood as the wonder of another reality willed and superimposed by God, a different reality from His own reality, and one that has a place and a continued existence beneath His own reality by the power of His love. Because of this, there can be continuity between God and humans (a true analogy of being), by virtue of the fact that He, the uncreated Spirit, can be revealed to the created spirits. Not that the revelation is given to the creature as such, on the contrary it belongs only to the Creator, though it

¹⁷ Barth is saying that the thoughts of humans are bound by our confinement to the space-time continuum, a confinement which does not alter in this life, and which contains the good of encouraging humility in us. Part of that humility is understanding that thoughts we create in and of ourselves cannot ever be said to be God or to accurately represent God. How can we describe something accurately that lies entirely outside our realm of existence? Even now I am speaking in terms of space (and time) – I cannot help but do so – but such terms are wholly inappropriate to describe the God of the universe. We must use such words as we have, but we must also always remain cognizant of the fact that our words do not even begin to capture the wonder of the reality with which we are concerned here. Perhaps the poets come the closest to putting these things into words, but they are also the ones most vexed by the inadequacy of their own words.

The Holy Spirit as Creator

comes in a *manner suitable* to the creature.¹⁸ It cannot, then, be understood as an original giftedness of the creature, on the contrary, only as a second wonder of God's love, as an inconceivable, undeserved, divine blessing. The human, being already a creature, does not find himself in the place from which he can inspect and determine his relationship to God (in some sort of scheme of the unity of similarities and differences) and also understand himself as "being open to that which is above," and thus also credit his own realizations to be the revelation of God.¹⁹ If we are to take the deity of the Creator Spirit seriously, then we have to understand, that "unto God the beings (of the created spirits) were created," and, "in the image of God humans [were created]," are not merely ideas dormant within, and safely suitable to us. On the contrary, we only have them in the strict sense that they always first "come" to us, namely in the event of revelation, which is the coming of the Spirit of Creation as One who exists for us, not as something we make, but as something we are given, not as the fulfillment, but as the promise. Grace is our being created, and grace is also our "being created unto God." However, grace is always and in

¹⁸ This is a critical point throughout all of Barth's writings. Even when God reveals Himself to humans, that revelation remains divine property. We can never think of a revelation as our own possession, even (and especially) the revelation given in the text of Scripture. The Bible remains forever God's book, which means not only that God was involved in its production, but also that He retains all rights regarding its interpretation and use. We are not at liberty to use Scripture to defend our own pet theological positions; Scripture must only be used as a means for God to communicate *His truth to us*. The Bible is not a sourcebook for theological proof-texting; it is the place where the uncreated Spirit tries to communicate to our own, created spirits.

¹⁹ E. Przywara, *Religionsphilosophie katholische Theologie*, 1926, p. 22, n. 67.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

every respect God's work and action, happening in each moment of time, in which God wills to be gracious to us, and is gracious, and His grace becomes apparent. However, it is never a natural attribute of our own, as if we could already know this beforehand. Every other approach means, whether secretly or openly, in its presuppositions or in its conclusions, a reinterpretation of the Holy Spirit as something other than the Creating Power of our own spirits.

We turn now, on the basis of this first clarification of the concept of "Holy Spirit," to the second key phrase of our theme. What does "the Christian life" mean? When, where, how and by whom does living become Christian? We have to answer this question, not historically, not psychologically, not sociologically, but theologically, and that answer cannot be in doubt: it comes precisely when God wills to be gracious to humans, and is gracious, and His grace becomes apparent to them. Thus, precisely when God speaks His Word to them, then Christ is also there for them as the Crucified and Resurrected One. We can describe this as a moment chosen by God, as an event occurring in God's own freedom, and we can also describe it as the human state of openness and preparedness for the grace of God, as one existing for Christ and hearing the Word of God. Therefore, we have not spoken of this as an arbitrary act of humans. Rather, if we envision this as the subjective side of the central concept of revelation, we can see the special work of God the Spirit, in the wonderful outpouring of love in the Holy Spirit. According to a well-worn image of the ancient church, in the event of revelation the Holy Spirit is, "the finger of God, by whom we are sanctified."²⁰ He is the Paraclete, who not only appeals on our behalf, but also

²⁰ Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, c. 28.

The Holy Spirit as Creator

speaks to us so that we must hear the speaking God. Therefore, it is out of the question to think that we somehow open, prepare, and set ourselves up for participation in this event. Our participation in the event of revelation is in itself the quintessential event of divine action. This is the fundamental significance of the Holy Spirit for the Christian life.

Christian life is also at all times created life. The Christian, constituted as such through the action of the divine Word and Spirit, is not first and foremost the child of God, or even the justified sinner, on the contrary the Christian is still only this or that human creature, still both bad and good. And as the Word of God always grabs a hold of him in his human state, since it is the Word of his Creator anyway, so it is that the preparation of the Holy Spirit meets him in his human creaturely nature as well, because, He, the Paraclete, is also the Spirit of the Creator, as we have tried to understand just a moment ago in His difference from the created spirits.²¹ Today's lecture will be concerned precisely with the significance of the Spirit of God for the Christian life.²² It is certain that this

²¹ Barth is making the point that the Christian life does not involve becoming removed or detached from the normal human life. When we become Christians we do not cease to be humans, we remain, in many ways, the same persons that we were before. God created us as humans, loved us as humans, extended grace to us as humans, and went so far as to become human Himself. While Barth is not advocating that we should revel in our sinfulness, he is saying that we should not be ashamed of our humanness. The Spirit meets us where we are, as we are, and communicates to us as human beings, with all the glory and shame that existence entails.

²² The text from which this translation arises was originally given as a lecture in Elberfeld, Germany at a theological conference on October 9, 1929 as a counterpart to another lecture given by Barth's brother, Heinrich, a philosopher,

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

significance does consist in that the human as such, in his created existence as human and as a particular human becomes opened, prepared, and equipped by God for God. “By the Spirit for the Word,” means precisely this: ‘by God for God.’ And this phrase ‘by God’ already concerns humans, and always will.

The undreamed of wonder of the love of God is true: God has created us. We have a place and a continued existence beneath the reality of God. But precisely because it is an undreamed of wonder, since we have our existence in the absolutely blinding light of the existence of God as our Creator (out of nothing no less), precisely for that reason we cannot understand our own existence, not even in Augustine’s phrase, “beings created unto God.” We certainly know what life in this moment is like, but what a life in obedience to God is like in this moment, a life congruent to that which is life created by God, that we do not know. I certainly know that I am this or that man, one who is even now situated in this or that external or internal condition, but what my calling (given to me by God) is at this moment, that I do not know. I certainly know that there must be order, I also know about fixed orders, that there are valid and standard orders for me in this moment, which allude to the created order of God and are legally binding for me. But what specific duty this signifies, as an order of God, for my marriage, my family, or even just for me, that I do not know. And if I thought I was able to know all this, and did what I knew, there would still be one thing I would not know: whether my action would be anything like a good action, let alone one conforming to the truth itself. This issue has nothing to do with human sin at all. It is

entitled, “The Question of the Spirit in German Idealism.” The two lectures were published together in 1930 under the title *On the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*.

The Holy Spirit as Creator

already a given in those very interminable differences between the created spirits and the Creator Spirit, which by no means is a result of sin, but is based on the very fact of creation. The continuity between God and me as a created being does not rest, however, in me as a secured attribute, as we have seen. It is not a given, on the contrary, it exists in God's provision. Since, living as God's creature, I do not know what is good, namely, what is divinely good, therefore, it must be told to me through the second wonder of God's love, that is, through God's revelation. It is the duty of the Word, through which this is being said to us in the most concrete way.

But how would it help me, that it is told to me through the Word what is good and what the Lord requires of me, if I do not allow it to be said to me? This is precisely the point: do I allow the Word to be told to me by opening my created spirit upward? Of course not, I have neither the skill nor the power. On the contrary, this is precisely the provision of the Holy Spirit, who continually makes us listen to the Word of the Creator.²³ The Word of the Creator is the one indivisible Word of the scriptural proclamation of God's revelation, so long as it encounters me in my creaturely limitations and at the same time in a definitively concrete way. That is, so long as it makes me bound to confess the necessity of God's standard and regulative command for my existence in this moment, both externally and

²³ Barth includes this quote in a footnote at this point: "The Holy Spirit, too, works within, that the medicine externally applied may have some good result. Otherwise, even though God Himself make use of the creatures that are subject to Him, and in some human form addresses our human senses, whether we receive those impressions internally or in some external appearance, still, if He does not by His own inward grace sway and act upon the mind, no preaching of the truth is of any avail." Augustine, *City of God*, XV.6.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

internally, even in the decidedly varied combinations of the different contingencies of this life. In all these contingencies of life, the Word of the Creator commends me to a life of obedience. Even in the inestimable antagonism between life and life – as man or woman, as an older or younger person, as a member of this or that nation, as individuals brought up in this or that way, in work, in marriage, in the family – in each moment the Word of the Creator explains what this and that means or else does not mean, and whether my action, hopefully done in heeding this definite call (despite all the questionability and uncertainty in which I also do it for myself), is considered by God well done or perhaps not well done.

Now, with respect to the hearing of this Word of the Creator, there are two things to bear in mind. First, we cannot accept that everything our creaturely existence assures us is an internal or external necessity is therefore in principle the Word of the Creator.²⁴ Second, the scriptural proclamation of God's revelation is not merely a piece of data, not a collection of ready-made decrees and standing judgments, and not the Word of the Creator in such a way that it makes our necessities into the commands of God. The supposedly certain knowledge that identifies the necessities our

²⁴ Barth uses the phrase "internal and external necessities of our creaturely existence" to refer to those feelings, urges, and senses we often have concerning things we think we should do or not do. His point is that we cannot say that all of these feelings are the result of the Holy Spirit dealing with us. Some of them certainly are, as this is the most common way that the Spirit uses to communicate to us, but we must reflect critically on our own feelings to determine when the Spirit is speaking to us, and when we are merely experiencing a human sensation. Making such determinations can be difficult, yet we must do so if we are to hear the Word of God that the Holy Spirit is speaking to our spirits.

The Holy Spirit as Creator

own existence as divine in origin, and the confident grabbing at the Bible as if it were a repertoire of ethical statements, are both founded on the same level of arbitrariness. Both would assume that a dormant secured continuity exists between the created spirits and the Creator Spirit, which we must note is not adequate for this relationship. On the contrary, the scriptural proclamation of God's revelation must become for us the voice of the living God, as God says the same things to us that He said through the mouths of the prophets and apostles once and for all. In the same way, the internal and external necessities of our existence must acquire the character of divine instruction, duty, and promise only through divine encouragement. That means that theological ethics cannot be done in such a manner that we think that we are able to know what God's command is, either by referring to the alleged truth contained within creation, or even by referring to this or that verse of Scripture. Theological ethics, like all of theology, has to serve the Word of God. It must not tread the path of using the Word of God for the construction of a human law. Theological ethics must be made well aware of the fact that God's Word is God's Word, and it has to be pointed out that the relative necessities of our creaturely nature can only *become* God's Word to us in light of the scriptural proclamation of the revelation of God's Word. Ethics, however, must not decide on these things, in and of itself, because the concern of the Word of God ultimately belongs to God alone. Any ethic that thinks it can know and establish the commands of God the Creator sets itself on the throne of God. It blocks and poisons the well and is more devastating for the Christian life than all the movie theaters and nightclubs combined.

In saying all this, we are also saying that hearing the Word of the Creator God, which makes human life

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

into Christian life, is not the work of humans, on the contrary, it the work of God, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Just as our spirits cannot produce the Word of God, our spirits also cannot receive it either. We are able to hear verses of Scripture or even some biblical theology, whether of our own make or that of another, along with the voice of our own or a stranger's life experience which that contains. But we are not able to hear the Word of God. Of course, one may hear something and take it to mean that God said it to him, especially when it agrees with his own particular religious ideology, whether conservative or revolutionary. One may even come to believe, on the foundation of his 'confirmed' message, that he can direct and control his life and the lives of others. And the more this turns out to be a spotless, detailed, practical, and 'Christian' program, the more he has surely missed hearing the Word of the Creator. The tendency to shift in one's own human spirit is true even of the Christian, and it is all the more dangerous for the Christian to be this way. Christians are very enthusiastic, faithful, devoted, and full of good will. But this enthusiasm is sometimes to the left or to the right, in following the will of the Pope, or the will of the Anabaptists, reactionary or revolutionary; it is elusive, that is, it is a spirit that eludes what God has really said. There is no remedy for this evasiveness. How else could a created spirit receive the Word of God, except according to its own framework, as a symbol of its own principles, whether realistic or idealistic, whether conservative or revolutionary? How should one, understandably – very understandably armed with Scripture and experience, not end up helplessly raving back and forth in the confines of the possibilities of which he can conceive, like a hungry hyena in its cage? (Mark this: this also exists in the hearts of Lutheran, Reformed, or biblical Christians and theologians.) How

The Holy Spirit as Creator

can one who is inebriated by his own principles realize that, according to Ecclesiastes 3.1f, “There is a time for everything?” What those possibilities now involve is not regulated by human choice and will, like the wise choice of Hercules at the crossroads was, but is regulated by the hidden but true and just choice of God. How can such a person comprehend that every “moral ideology” tastes like human vanity and not like divine truth? How could that person comprehend that to hear God’s Word must mean to hear God Himself? For such comprehension, which is also continuity with God, one must possess the ability to receive God’s Word, but one cannot possess such ability, thus God’s Word *must always be made suitable* for us. An absolute miracle must happen to each one, a second miracle in addition to the miracle of our own existence, if that life is to truly be a Christian life, which ought to be a life of hearing the Word of God.

The human believes in the Holy Spirit, Who encounters him in the scriptural proclamation of the revelation of God and shows him the way created for him. Beyond all ethical reflection that can only serve the present, in the Holy Spirit the human hears God’s Word and he is not lost in the darkness of his human ignorance. We can neither awaken nor educate ourselves to this hearing; we can neither achieve nor maintain it for ourselves. We have, in what we hear, no security, no self-made guarantee of truth, other than that which has been given to us to hear itself. We can only really hear in the act of hearing, in the divine certainty within our human uncertainty, which corresponds to the fact that this hearing is the miracle of God. The human can and must concede that we can only pray for the ability to hear: “I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me.”²⁵ Only in

²⁵ Psalm 119:19, NIV.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

the miracle of the Holy Spirit are they not hidden from us. But who could and would even pray for such revelation, if it was not already made apparent to him that he even prays by the miracle of the Holy Spirit.²⁶

²⁶ Thus the Spirit plays a vital role in creating our existence. Without the work of the Spirit which Barth has described in this chapter, we would not be spiritual beings. We would not be able to hear God speaking to us at all. For Barth this is part of what it means for humans to be created in the image of God. We exist as spiritual creatures, or created spirits, because the Holy Spirit continually creates spirit within us. This becomes the access point for God to communicate divine truth to us. We must understand, however, that such truth remains the sole possession of God and is only given to us only for the purpose of convicting and maturing us. We may often find that we are able to use these truths in ministering to others, but only after the Spirit has used it to minister to us, and only when the Spirit directs us to assist others in this way. Divine truth never serves to exploit or manipulate others, or to force them to conform to an ideology or standard of conduct that we have established. The Spirit deals with all humans individually as He sees fit; it is not our place to usurp the Spirit's authority and disrupt the manner and timing of God's work within another life.

2

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

The holiness of the Holy Spirit does not refer to a *difference* that exists from the created spirits. Stated concisely, the holiness refers to the Spirit's opposition toward the serious and radical perversion and sin of the created spirits. The human can defy the grace of God; he can shut out the Word and the Spirit of His Creator. Not only can humans do this, in fact they often do. We have to concern ourselves here with the mystery of this ability. The "mysterious iniquity" always exists, at its deepest depth, in that we do evil. But evil is unbelief: we do not allow the work of the Word of the Spirit to fall on us. When this work does happen to us, it becomes immediately apparent that not only are we, as created beings, powerless to do it – which we find to be true as well – but also that we stand opposed, supremely unwilling to have the work done. The boundary between God and humans, which until now we have seen as a boundary of the created nature, now takes on a second color, so to speak, in form and power: it is simultaneously the boundary between the One who deals with us in truth and righteousness as our King,

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

and us, the ones who are like rebels in His kingdom. This is His kingdom, because *God* reveals *Himself* to us, and we, as His creatures, live by the words that come out His mouth, since He can only be revealed to us through Himself. And this is our rebellion, that we always want all that is noble, helpful, and good, if that is what must be, but not if that means allowing ourselves to be opened, prepared, and equipped by God for God. *Grace* is God's kingdom. Our hostility toward God, that evil that we do, is our *hostility* even towards *grace*, our hostility towards "God Himself," as Luther says, "Our own lust to be gods prevents us from accepting the true God."²⁷ Of course, this does not exclude the hearty friendship that many have for various self-generated concepts of God or for this or that religious-moral ideology.

First of all, sin must be taken seriously. It is the "lawlessness" found in 1 John 3:4, it goes against the law it is under and is measured according to, which is the revelation of the living God Himself. Grace is understood precisely as the atonement of those sins, and is powerful enough to even overcome the hostility toward grace. The Holy Spirit, then, is not understood merely as some spirit of the true, good and beautiful, but only as the very incomprehensible Holy Spirit, the Atoning Spirit of God, the One engaged in this struggle and victory of grace over the hostility to grace in humans. The hostility to grace is visible in humans as actual and real acts of sin. In overcoming our radically evil hatred toward the revelation of the living God, "God Himself" becomes the location of all divinity in our companionship with God; this is the work of the Holy Spirit in the atonement. This work, however, must be seen in its fundamental and irrevocable discrimination

²⁷ Quoted by H. M. Müller, *Faith and Experience in Luther*, 1929, p. 19.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

against all which is merely our own work. Whenever human work, in any pretext or form, is made the requirement for human companionship with God, then the Holy Spirit is forgotten, and sin is employed to overcome sin. This happened in the ancient church in the Greek, and later in the Pelagian, teaching of the free will of humans as the pivot point in their relationship to God. But this is also evident whenever the bride of Christ abandons her godly calling for a homemade wedding dress, when she distinguishes first, a healing performed by Christ of the wound of original sin, and second, a healing of the wounds of sinful acts after baptism, which are performed through her own works of righteousness and mercy.²⁸

Augustine was the first to insist on a halt to this ruinous teaching, but even so, not without bringing in the foundation of another very dangerous conception along the same lines. In his struggle with the Pelagians and the semi-Pelagians, he described the willing, the accomplishing, the receiving, and the preserving of grace – the foundation and persistence of the Christian life – as the free unmerited work of the Holy Spirit. He taught justification through faith and identified faith unequivocally as the gift of God. He also described

²⁸ Barth is referring to an old, common belief that Jesus only died on the cross to take away the original sin imposed on us as an inheritance from Adam. This understanding further holds that all sins after this must be atoned for by our own good works. This is the basic teaching behind the Roman Catholic doctrine of penance, but the tendency towards works-righteousness has, and continues to be, a danger for all Christians of every type. Barth makes it clear that we cannot hope to expunge our sins with other acts of sin, which is precisely what our charitable acts become if we are doing them with the idea of currying divine favor. We must always remember that we are wholly dependent on God for the salvation we have received.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

works and meritorious works as the undeserved gifts of God. But unfortunately, Augustine also undeniably sought to locate justification in the directly accessible reality of the new obedience. He not only collapsed sanctification with justification, he merged justification *into* sanctification, understanding grace as “the inspiration to good will and works,” and faith as an impartation of human self-ability to will and accomplish what the law commands.²⁹ He had an uncanny fondness for Paul’s statement, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”³⁰ He assumed that in the other writings of Paul faith powerfully existed in love like this, so that there can be no doubt: Augustine had seen, in this fervent love, the measure, criteria, and decisive content of faith.³¹ One dare not ignore that Augustine could also be very reserved in expressing himself concerning the near permanence of this infused righteousness of love in the life of the Christian. He also earnestly accentuated that, apart from the initial instilling of grace, the necessity also existed of an ever-renewed forgiveness for the Christian to remain in this justifying sanctification. Finally, he did not forget the eschatological limitations of even those works-righteousness acts done by the grace of God. But these

²⁹ Augustine, *Treatise on Rebuke and Grace*, 3.2.

³⁰ Rom. 5:5.

³¹ Barth is pointing out that Augustine used Rom. 5:5 as a basis for understanding what Paul meant *every* time he used the word faith. In Augustine’s mind, faith was measured by works of love, those acts of humans that fall under the term ‘works-righteousness.’ Augustine’s teaching was better than what Pelagius had offered, because he did affirm that God provides the power to do the works through grace. But he maintained that human effort was still necessary to secure salvation and viewed salvation as a gradual process of becoming sinless in this life. These are precisely the teachings that the Reformers fought against in their day, and that we see Barth fighting against here.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

reservations cannot alter the definite content of his teaching: that the requirement for the communion of sinful humans with God consists in a conversion that gradually raises one to a sinless state by the power of God's grace.

In the background of this teaching is the concept of God as the Creator standing in a resting, secured continuity with whoever already knows God as the origin and quintessence of his own truth and goodness. This "God" can clearly reconcile us with himself. Humans can set themselves in agreement with *this* "God," just as Augustine depicted in his dreadful *Confessions*. With this "God" secured in such agreement, humans can then also leisurely drift into a Christian philosophy of history, as was done in *The City of God*. On this same ground stands the medieval understanding of justification – or rather sanctification, and on this ground also stands the doctrines of Tridentine Catholicism.³² And while the Reformers held to his doctrine of predestination, the admirable anti-Pelagian polemic of the church fathers, and the other valuable achievements of his theology, they failed to warn loudly and vigorously against the sweet poison that is meant, when Augustine says "grace." Thus it quickly happened, that this sweet poison soaked into Protestant theology and sermons, and the wholly different approach of the Reformers themselves became corrupted to an unrecognizable condition.³³

³² Tridentine Catholicism refers to the official doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church that were produced at the Council of Trent (1545-63), held in response to the Reformation.

³³ Barth is demonstrating that although the Reformation undertook to free itself from the Roman idea of attaining salvation through works, by looking to Augustine for support, the Reformers accepted the theology that serves as the basis of Catholic theology. When Augustine says "grace," he means God removes original sin and gives us the power to do good works so

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

In modern times, the Protestant doctrine of grace is almost completely a variation of the Augustinian theme, so that the reconciliation of humans with God “is from both, that is to say, from the will of man and from the mercy of God.”³⁴ Expressed in modern terms, this means, it is “the combination of divine gift and human creative action.”³⁵ And it is not a good sign for the present state of things, or for the portrayal of Luther, of all people, that we are now celebrating the inauguration of a so-called Luther Renaissance – I am thinking of Karl Holl – which has its center and apogee in fostering a so-called analytical understanding of the concept of justification (not without the usual “synthetic view” of God’s act and the human experience), which is too German in its dissolving of justification into sanctification. Why is all of this not good? Why is the Augustinian doctrine of grace poisonous and ruinous for the Church? Because at first it lifts up this “synergism” as right, and then ultimately places it in a position of power. Because, much more subtly and dangerously than Pelagianism and the Greek doctrine of freedom, it places the personal work of humans – all of their internal and external works-righteousness of morality, mysticism, and all human holiness and meritorious endeavors – under the rubrics of predestination, grace, and the highest humility, and thereby simultaneously sin is spoken of as holy and the majesty of grace is undone.

that we can remove subsequent sins ourselves. This is not merely a Catholic doctrine, or a Pelagian doctrine, it is a recurring tendency of all sinful humanity, which shows how deep our hostility toward the grace of God really is.

³⁴ Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 32. This work is also known as *Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*, (translated by Albert C. Outler) which is divided into chapters and sections. This quote appears in chapter 9, section 32 of that version.

³⁵ Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*, p. 343.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

It is simply not true to conclude that in this way the Holy Spirit is the Atoning Spirit of God; that the Spirit imparts to humanity (as official Catholicism later, but correctly, interpreted Augustine) a “divine quality inhering in the soul,” and thus raising humans little by little, until they are made into non-sinners.³⁶ The spirit described in this manner is really the spirit of hostility against grace, an evil spirit, which must be overcome through grace and thus through the Holy Spirit. No praise of the honor of God and no testimony of humility changes anything here; whenever God’s grace and human work become only two sides of the same coin, so that instead of “Holy Spirit,” one can simply turn it over, and just as well say “conviction,” “religious passion,” “moral earnestness” or even “human creative acts,” then humanity has been abandoned and handed over to sin.³⁷ When sin can be fundamentally overcome through “the inspiration of a good will,” and then dismantled practically by degrees, it is not *serious* sin. This may heal a wound, but it will not resurrect a dead man. And Augustine really only saw sin as a wound, an interference inside the undisrupted continuity of humans with God. For example, he called pride “living according to the created good”, which he rightly and positively refused to do himself, and boldly described evil as only “the absence of good,” whose substantial unity with the good was not seen as threatened even by the devil.³⁸ Sin really is only a wound if, according to the Tridentine understanding, it is only “a change for the worse,” or according to Schleiermacher it is “the power and work before the direction given by the God-

³⁶ *Roman Catholic Catechism*, II.2.38.

³⁷ The passages in quotation marks in this sentence represent terminology used by some modern theologians to refer to the Holy Spirit.

³⁸ Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.5.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

consciousness has emerged in us,” or according to A. Schweizer it is “merely remaining sunk in naturalism,” or according to Biedermann it is the “the finite I willing itself to remain in its natural finitude,” or according to A. Ritschl it is “selfish seeking of the good of a lesser state,” or according to Lüdemann it is “the natural extension of the given individuality driven by its will to self-assertion.”³⁹ In all of this, sin is not so bad because it is labeled, overtly and expressly, as a deficiency of the internal economy of the created human nature, but not really as an offence against God.

Another result of all this – one I do not see in Augustine – but in some of his modern followers, is the comfortable view that “the hostility follows from the freedom and character development of the ethical spirit,” which absolutely was intended in the plan of God.⁴⁰ On the basis of such theology, this interference in one breath is thought to exist, and in the next breath casually thought of as having been removed. All of their talk about the “seriousness of sin” does not change anything; they really have not spoken of the seriousness of sin, for we can as little think of it as removed, as we can heal a dead man. We can as little *think* of it as removed, as we can in fact *remove* it ourselves. A dead man can only be *resurrected* and serious sin can only be *forgiven*. We cannot bring about a removal of our sin through a superficial change of the human attitude,

³⁹ Note that these definitions regard sin as a *lesser good*, not really as something bad, heinous, or detestable to God. Decret. *sup. pecc. orig.* 1; Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, §67; A. Schweizer, *Glaubenslehre* (2nd edition), p. 378; Biedermann, *Dogmatik* (1st edition), §767; A. Ritschl, *Justification and Reconciliation* (4th edition), p. 335; Lüdemann, *Dogmatik*, 2:397.

⁴⁰ Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre*, p. 306. Troeltsch is saying that God included sin in the divine plan because it works to build our ethical character, therefore sin is a good thing.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

despite how the doctrine of justification is described in Augustine or Holl. We must *believe* that this is *God's* action, without having seen it. Whatever we can make clear to ourselves is always our own work. It remains our own work, even when we place it under the rubric of grace and clearly make it into certain, potential, immanent changes, that is, into superficial changes of the human attitude. Even the inherent working of the spirit, which we would make into the Atoning Holy Spirit, is not only the created spirit in its closed-mindedness toward its Creator, but also in its faithlessness, in its stubbornness, and in its humble self-righteousness. In all of this, the created spirit remains itself and will not hear of anything radically different than its own work and potential changes; this is the spirit of hostility against grace, which is properly, truly, and seriously sin. The more that it conceals its true nature by hiding behind the vocabulary of grace, the louder it speaks of “the supernatural poured inside of us,” and “the divine actuality,” and “the forceful, wholehearted divine will of the community which converts us,” the more sinful it is. Indeed, the spirit of the true, good, and beautiful, or the spirit of love, or even the spirit of holiness combined with goodness, in which humans have a share more or less, is certainly an evil spirit when it is upheld in place of the Holy Spirit. Making this evil spirit the conqueror of sin is like putting the fox in charge of the henhouse. By contrast, standing in *opposition* to this spirit is the Spirit of our actual atonement with God – the Holy Spirit.

We now ask again what it means for the Christian life for the Holy Spirit to be the finger of God, the subjective side in the concept of revelation. In the miracle of the love of God, we are allowed to participate

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

in God's word, and God goes beyond His existence as our Creator and makes His companionship with us as sinners. It is also the miracle of undeserved mercy, that is, we are not able to usurp it as a characteristic of our own spirits, we cannot even think like this. Therefore, at this point – and here even more emphatically than before – Augustine must be rejected. In light of the opposition between grace and sin, the significance of the Holy Spirit for the Christian life lies, with particular succinctness, in that He is the Spirit of *Jesus Christ*, the Son of God crucified in the flesh for us, or (which says the same thing), the Spirit is the Word of the Father spoken to us. If Jesus Christ the Crucified, or the Word of the Father, is our atonement, then this means that our works are categorically removed. And if the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, or the Spirit of the Word, then the Spirit cannot be the unfortunate spirit of our own works.

The Reformers had called righteousness foreign and external; they emphasized without restriction that righteousness approaches us from the outside and is made suitable to us through the grace of God. (They also exhibited this same understanding in reference to the reality of our sanctification, the problem of our obedience, and even the gifts of the Holy Spirit.) “We are not allowed to send him a messenger, on the contrary, He has come to us Himself personally.”⁴¹ This is the paradox (the necessary paradox) that they dared to put forward: that to understand the impartation of this righteousness, which is communicated directly into the character of humans, we must be left out of the equation: “God cares for it in such a way that there is

⁴¹ Martin Luther, *Sermon on Luke 1:26f*, Erlangen Edition, vol. 6, p. 206. This edition will be noted as EE hereafter.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

nothing from our side.”⁴² They rejected not only the crude works-righteousness of popular Catholicism, but also the works-righteousness of the truly educated, the great theologically shrewd and deep-souled Dominicans and Franciscans of the Middle Ages, with their works-righteousness of infused love as the explanation for the gracious companionship between God and humans – a definition absolutely contrary to grace. The Reformers’ perception of what constitutes the Christian life through the Holy Spirit may be summarized in the statement: *humans are justified through faith in Christ alone.*

If we were correct in the earlier consideration we engaged in concerning the antagonism between the divine Spirit and human spirits, then it should be that, in what is now said concerning the dedication of grace to the sins of humans, we will not stray the width of a fingernail from this Reformation insight. “God will not allow us to depend on something or trust our hearts to something that is not Christ in His Word, however holy and full of spirit it may be.”⁴³ “Otherwise, we will not be able to serve true theology.”⁴⁴ What does this mean for our supposition that the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of the Son, or the Word, opens, prepares, and equips us for this Son or for this Word of God?

It is clear from what we have said to this point, that the office of the Holy Spirit must be, above all, a *disciplinary* office, not in spite of, but indeed because, He is the Atoning Spirit of God.⁴⁵ Humans, even

⁴² John Calvin, *Sermon on Gen. 15:6*, in *Corpus Reformatorum*, vol. 23, p. 706.

⁴³ Luther, *Sermon on Luke 2:42f*, EE, 11:26.

⁴⁴ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, 1:21.

⁴⁵ I have used the word ‘disciplinary’ to describe this office, but the reader should be aware that the original German word (*Strafamt*) carries the ideas of prison, punishment, and penal sentence. ‘Penal office’ might be the closest translation.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Christians, do not know that they are sinners, namely sinners against God. How should we know this? Through the Word which is clearly spoken to us. It points to the crucified Christ and says to us “Behold the Man!” If only we can see Him honestly as Pilate saw him, and not merely with sentimentality. One says the same thing, in saying: if the Holy Spirit “is to retain the name of Comforter, then He must only carry out His office for the one who needs and desires comfort, and yet for whom no comfort is to be found. For the Spirit cannot comfort the hard headed and arrogant hearted, because they have never tasted of the writhing of despondency.”⁴⁶ However, one must then add, that even this “writhing” and self-discomfort is the work of the Comforter. How can a person make himself be uncomfortable? How can he hear what will be said to him about himself in the cross of Christ? Sin is thus a little like righteousness in this respect: that without the revelation of God, they would only become human introspection. The fact that one is a sinner can only be accepted by faith, that is, only through the Holy Spirit is one able to hear the judgment that is spoken over him in the cross of Christ through the Word. “It is necessary

⁴⁶ Luther, *Sermon on John 14:23f*, EE, 12:252. When Luther speaks of the ‘writhing of despondency’ he obviously is referring to his own state before his discovery of justification by faith in Rom. 1:17. Prior to that halcyon moment, Luther had struggled through a long period of spiritual depression. Despite his status as a monk who had given his entire life for God’s service, Luther could not believe that his efforts had secured favor with God. He was convinced that God hated him, and that he could never measure up to the divine requirement. This writhing within his own soul led him to his great discovery, that justification cannot be earned, it can only be given freely. Barth is applying this basic truth to the issue of the role of the Holy Spirit in securing our salvation.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

for man to become a sinner spiritually. For it is not natural.”⁴⁷

But as this becoming is God’s work in us, so also is our understanding of what is contained in the concept of sin. It is not to be associated unequivocally with ethical matters. Because what a careless ethic unequivocally wants to name sin, can always be justice from God’s perspective, and vice versa. God alone is the law; only in God’s own concrete acts of commanding and prohibiting does He pronounce freedom and guilt. Obviously sin is never apparent as this or that action, on which we could lay our finger. On the contrary, sin is nothing other than resistance against God’s law, against His gracious pronouncement of freedom and guilt. God alone always knows in each instance which action can erupt into sin. God’s Word alone convicts us of this sin and God’s Spirit alone can make this Word to be truth for us.

However, the fact that this happens is really anything but natural and self-evident. Where the concept of sin is ambiguous, that is, in all of our own internal and external actions, we assert that we can undoubtedly acquire at least a relative sinlessness and righteousness. What comes closer to this than when we suppose we are doing well? This is precisely the point, the self-abandonment and defiance of this relative sinlessness and righteousness is used as security against the indictment of the Word of God. It is the refusal to accept that we must live by the mercy God; it is the embodiment of unbelief. It is the real sin, no other sin can compare to it, because it is the definitive sin of all sins. But who will accuse himself of this sin? Who can

⁴⁷ Luther, *Romans*, II:71. Luther and Barth are saying that on our own we do not even know that we are sinners. It is only by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit that we become aware of our great need for redemption.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

and will allow himself to say that he sins in the presence of God and against God? Who will confess that even our very best and purest efforts, with which we would protect ourselves against this indictment, are idolatry and paganism within Christianity, that “there is no middle anything between human works and knowing Christ?”⁴⁸

But even the fact that our reliance on human works is unbelief, sin, and paganism is not something we can accept through human works. The knowledge that we are recognized and condemned as enemies of grace through God’s law, and the knowledge that even in leading the best life we can, we are still opposing the law – this knowledge is not something that can be directly known by us. We have no certainty beyond our uncertainty. There is no remedy on earth for the delusion of works-righteousness. The Pharisaism of the disturbed and contrite tax collector, and the humble arrogance of the disabled worm Jacob are as impossible as every other Pharisaism. Repentance is not an undertaking in which we can reach the goal by our own ability. The Word of God can be the law to us: first it rightly topples us in our works-righteousness, then it condemns us, but in such a way that we do not realize our condemnation.⁴⁹ It does not become the law of life,

⁴⁸ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, II:192.

⁴⁹ Barth believed that we do not realize our predicament of having been condemned until after we have received redemption from it. He likened this to: “the legend of the rider who crossed the frozen Lake of Constance by night without knowing it. When he reached the opposite shore and was told whence he came, he broke down, horrified. This is the human situation when the sky opens and the earth is bright, when we may hear: *By grace you have been saved!* In such a moment we are like that terrified rider. When we hear this word we involuntarily look back, do we not, asking ourselves: where have I been? Over an abyss, in mortal danger! What did I do? The most foolish thing I ever attempted! I was doomed and

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

as it is described for instance in Psalm 119, because of us. It becomes so because of the Holy Spirit, if we do not commit the sin against the Holy Spirit; that is if we, in our unbelief, do not refuse the faith and therefore the true repentance.

Can we say anything different, if we now approach the matter from the other side in order to understand faith, which also constitutes the Christian life? Now we understand faith not only as repentance, but also as a practical, joyful, and sure reliance on the goodness of God, who convicted us of our unbelief through His Word and through the cross of Christ. Yes, faith is experience – experience of life, experience of the heart, and even experience of feelings. Yes, it is joy, because “if you believe, then your heart cannot keep from laughing freely, assuredly, and boldly because of the joy of God.”⁵⁰ “Because what can be said to be more glorious and better for a heart to desire, than that it should be given the gift of eternal life; that it will never again see death, and for all eternity will feel no privation, misery, sorrow, or temptation, but will know pure joy and an overflowing abundance of all goodness; to know that we have a gracious God who joyfully smiles on all of us, for we are His creatures.”⁵¹ Yes, it is certainly, “none other

miraculously escaped and now I am safe! You ask: ‘Do we really live in such danger?’ Yes, we live on the brink of death...But, we have reached the shore, the Lake of Constance is behind us, we may breathe freely, even though we are still in the grip of panic, and rightly so. This panic is but an aftermath. What a glorious relief to be told that there I was, in that darkness, over that abyss, on the brink of death, but there I am no longer.” [Karl Barth, *Deliverance to the Captives*, translated by Marguerite Wieser (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 38.]

⁵⁰ Luther, *Sermon on Titus 3:4f*, EE, 7.160.

⁵¹ Luther, *Sermon on John 3:16f*, EE, 12.331.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

than a persistent, undoubting, unwavering, sure confidence.”⁵²

But again, this is not some dormant secured fact; rather it becomes true in the act of divine giving. It is still trust and, in fact, trust in the *Word*. We trust that our serious sin is being taken away through the suffering and death of *Christ*. We trust in the undeserved inclusion of *His righteousness* in our flesh. We trust that *justification* is the incomprehensible, free donation of God’s favor. For faith “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” All of this indicates an action whose subject is and remains God and whose predicate is an unfulfilled concept conveyed upon us.⁵³ We are made righteous, so we find our righteousness only in Christ and not in ourselves. We also find that it is real, even though it remains hidden to us, in that it is revealed to us through the Word of God. Faith trusts, because it trusts in the Word of God, and thus it is experience, joy, and assurance.

But since what the Word says to faith is hidden, faith is hidden from itself. Because what do these things that we call experience, joy, and assurance have to do with coming to the realization of this glory and accepting it to be true? Where is there room in the tent for this guest? How can we regard ourselves as anything but a miracle performed by the Holy Spirit, in which we are made open, that is we are enabled to believe? The experience of faith struggles against all of our other possible experiences. Its joy struggles against the complete, radical, and hopeless misery, which is clearly found within each of us, and finds its overt expression in temptation. The assurance of faith struggles against the assurance of its opposite, the misery which is all humans ultimately can have on their own. It is not for

⁵² Luther, *Sermon on 1 Cor. 4:1f*, EE, 7.98.

⁵³ Heb. 11:1 (NASB).

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

nothing that we trust in the Word of the *cross*. There we meet the good God; there God steps in, supporting us and making us right for Himself. The cross is where God gives Himself to death in our flesh and where we find ourselves buried with Him in this death.⁵⁴ The yes is thoroughly hidden under this no.⁵⁵ The very fact that this conception of faith is, by definition, unbelievable, is only an insignificant symptom of the practical mystery of faith.⁵⁶ No one other than the *Holy Spirit* will make this mystery into real faith; our spirits can certainly not do so. This mystery of faith becomes concrete once we recognize that faith and *repentance*, in fact earnest repentance, for serious sin cannot be left behind for a moment as if it were already finished.

Even though through the Word we overcome by faith and have justification in Christ, we earnestly and entirely remain unrighteous in and of ourselves. Therefore, we must always realize and confess that our

⁵⁴ Rom. 6:4: “Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (NASB)

⁵⁵ Barth often used “yes” to refer to God’s acceptance of us, and “no” to refer to the judgment God passes on us as sinners. The thought here is along the same lines as footnote 49 above – that we only realize that we stand condemned once we have been pardoned. We only hear the “no,” once we hear the “yes,” even though the “yes” gets hidden by the “no.” The Holy Spirit works in us so that we come to hear the “yes.” Barth especially emphasized the crucifixion as the point in which both the “no” and the “yes” are most clearly heard. That event clearly demonstrates God’s rejection of sin (the “no”) and at the same time, God’s definite acceptance of us as sinners (the “yes”).

⁵⁶ Barth is going to use the term ‘hiddenness’ (*Verborgenheit*) repeatedly to refer to the fact that faith always remains something the Spirit does in us; at no point does it become our possession – we never fully understand it and we cannot make use of it on our own, without the abiding presence of the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

human unbelief will not stop. Even the Christian is “at once the sinful person and the justified person,” and the ability to overcome this irreconcilable contradiction does not lie inside of him.⁵⁷ It is not concealed in some inner sanctuary of his existence and it will not appear during his lifetime, not even in the most turbulent and deepest moments, not in his conversion and also not in his hour of death. On the contrary, it is the action of the Word of God, the action of Christ, which works internally to make him, the sinner, into the truly justified person. But even the acknowledgment of this contradiction and the realization of this overcoming are not our own concerns, on the contrary they are the concerns of the Holy Spirit.

The mystery of faith becomes painfully real in *temptation*, which exposes just how much reason we have to repent, even as Christians. Temptation introduces sorrow to the Christian life, since only the Christian can know that God does not owe him anything. The Christian (the person who is “at once the sinful person and the justified person”) comes to judgment, instead of to grace, if he horribly divides the source of faith from the object of faith, qualifying the human act of faith as the initial, actual faith.⁵⁸ If the experience of the joy and assurance of Christian trust leads the believer to think that “Christ breeds you and then leaves you stuck,” and this notion is allowed to remain, that is, if the Christian comes to suppose that the actual supreme Word of faith is the word he knows and has in his own self-generated experience, then his experience is only the experience of his own unbelief; even if the Word of God itself is perhaps there, it is not there for him.⁵⁹ Temptation more or less marks the

⁵⁷ Luther, *Romans*, II:108.

⁵⁸ God is both the *source* of our faith and the *object* of our faith.

⁵⁹ Luther, *Sermon on John 16:16f*, EE, 12:61.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

beginning of the end for human and religious capabilities. Temptation also more or less marks the coming of the freedom of God over against his own. If in temptation, faith triumphs over unbelief, then it is not the human nature, nor even the Christian nature that has won, but the Holy Spirit has won in him.

Even though temptation is an incessant threat hanging over us, we have the promise of his sovereign assistance as the Comforter. The one who knows, by the Spirit's gifts, by experience, joy, and the assurance of faith, will speak differently from the one who does not know. "The Holy Spirit is not doubtful."⁶⁰ Experience, joy, and assurance come from the Holy Spirit. Because of this, we have every reason to be very skeptical about anything that calls itself Christian but comes from us, and we must refrain from embarrassing ourselves by speaking in a boastful way about the gifts of the Spirit. Luther once took the words of Psalm 102:7, "I watch like a lonely bird on the rooftop;" and interpreted it: "Watching is adhering to the eternal goodness, looking and longing for it. But in this God is totally alone and nobody is with him, because they all sleep. And the psalmist says, 'on the rooftop,' as though he was saying: 'The world is a house, everyone in it is asleep and settled, but I alone am outside the house, on the roof, not in heaven, but also not in the world. I have the world under me and heaven over me, therefore between the life of the world and the eternal life I hang alone in faith.'"⁶¹ This is an accurate depiction of the Christian life, and demonstrates the significance of the Holy Spirit for faith as trust.

⁶⁰ Luther, *De servo arb.*, EE, VII:123.

⁶¹ As quoted in W. von Loewenich, *Der vorreformatorische Luther*, 1926, p. 24f.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Faith is when we allow God's mercy to grab hold of us, in which we can only understand repentance and trust as the work of the Holy Spirit. But for all this mystery, it is still *our own* faith.⁶² Atonement goes completely against the grain of our whole existence. We do not realize that it comes to us, catches hold of us, claims us for itself, and disturbs and upsets the closed circle of our own existence. This is the reality of *sanctification* or the problem of Christian *obedience*, which is what we will speak of in this section. The one who has ears to hear has already heard all there is to say here about those italicized words. Faith, with its experience of judgment and justification is the work of God, wholly hidden and absolutely miraculous. However, it is not an essence hanging around, over, in front of, or behind the real human. The one who would say this is so, would in fact be accurately describing temptation, but not the faith which either succumbs to or triumphs over temptation. "I believe" means I *exist* in faith. I have every reason to realize that my existing is not equivalent to my faith; that I can only believe in my existing in faith through God, and not through my own work. But as long as I believe I *exist* in faith. This is the statement of James, but it is also true of Paul, and no

⁶² This is typical of Barth's theological method. First, he states one side of a matter as forcefully as he can, in this case the fact that faith, salvation and trust are the work of the Holy Spirit in us, while we have no active role – in fact, we often find ourselves fighting against the Spirit's efforts. But then Barth will always turn around and state the other side of the matter with equal force. We have now reached that point in this book. Now that we understand that faith is never our possession, that the Christian life depends wholly upon the Holy Spirit, it is time to learn that this does not exempt us from actually living a Christian life. We must realize that this is our faith, that we have to do everything we can to live as Christians – all the while bearing in mind that we are still dependent on the Spirit to actually do what we must do, and be what we must be.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

Reformer – not even Luther – neglected it: there is no faith without works; there is no justification without sanctification. Justifying faith “is concrete faith, whether composed or incarnated.”⁶³ It is *not because* we do the works that we are justified. But we are not justified *without* works either. The Reformers did not neglect this statement. They testified, often in amazingly special ways, to the outpourings, gifts, and direction of the Holy Spirit on the construction of the Christian life. Even our own human existence testifies to the motivation, realization, and formation of faith in obedience. We see the truth of all this in the event where atonement through Christ becomes companionship between God and humans, according to God’s subjective Side. Therefore the concrete gift of the Holy Spirit becomes the reality of sanctification, and therefore, faith has works with it. These works are our existence, that is, our stepping out in action in each moment.⁶⁴ Faith cannot stand alone, it is always in each action proving itself or else not proving itself. To say that faith is abstracted from works, would perhaps be the better order, but it would leave faith an empty concept. This is identical to saying that faith has works with it, for it really does. And even this reality takes place in the Holy Spirit, in judgment and in the righteousness of the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is in the actions, He is especially the Spirit of Sanctification. The concept of sanctification cannot tell us *what* grace is. (This is the fundamental error of the Augustinian/Catholic doctrine that equates justification with sanctification, as well as any others that tend toward the Catholic position.) It can tell us, however, that grace is *real* for us, as well as

⁶³ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, I, 381.

⁶⁴ Barth makes a play on words here with the Latin word for existence *exsistere*, which literally means “to step forth.”

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

how grace is real for us. The *truth* of grace is our judgment and our justification, which falls vertically from above. Its *reality*, however, the reality of our sanctification, consists in that this verticalness cuts through the horizontalness of our existence. To the point, where our horizontalness is bisected by this verticalness – but this is really a mathematical point – then the problem of Christian obedience arises.⁶⁵

Let us linger for a moment on the reality of *sanctification*. This much is certain: the grace of the Word of God, in that it brings us to the hearing of itself, denotes our *limitation*. Real hearing, a hearing that really brings us to the awareness of an existence different from our own, a hearing that gives us a real opponent, can only be the hearing of the Word of God. With all other hearings, we ultimately hear in unlimited loneliness the echo of our own voice. But the Word of God judges us according to its *authority*. This is the “new light and flame” in the Christian, of which Luther had once spoken.⁶⁶ This limitation that has fallen on us, through our hearing the Word in faith, is not relative, on the contrary it is absolute; it is not abstract, on the contrary it is concrete. It is absolute, because it binds us to God, and it is concrete, because it binds us to our *neighbor*. The real binding, then, is love for God and love for our neighbor.

From what has been said to this point, we understand the demand that has fallen on us as a demand of the Holy God for our *sacrifice* and our *service*. Through sanctification we are forfeited to God

⁶⁵ ‘Horizontalness’ describes the human tendency to ignore or deny the existence of any reality above or beyond our own. By revealing Himself to us, God invades our reality and opposes this tendency. Once revelation falls on us, then we become aware of the need to obey God.

⁶⁶ Ibid., II:127. The Latin word for flame here (*flamma*) can also mean passion, much like our English euphemism ‘inner fire’.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

and obligated to our neighbor. We can say the same thing another way: our sanctification really means that we are called to be responsible in all areas of the created order (e.g., marriage). This calling is without retraction; rather it always finds confirmation for our existence in the valid order of creation. We are put in the *church* and in the *state* to be responsible; so that in all the spiritual and worldly orders of life of the kingdom of grace, we live out our existence as “at once the sinful person and the justified person.” We can reasonably reduce the concept of sanctification to this: since we are the ones whom God has forgiven, God’s own radical and powerful opposition falls on us. It refutes our own opposition to God, the opposition that creates unreality in us. This introduces a great, very positive, completely indispensable, and fertile trouble into our existence. The result is that we, as *believers*, as hearers of the Word of *God*, exist as people who do God’s Word, and indeed we cannot do otherwise.

This is where the problem of Christian *obedience* comes in. Do we give way before the divine opposition? Do we allow the great trouble to fall on us? Do we live for God and for our neighbor? Do we bring ourselves as a sacrifice and do we really serve? Right here is the problem, because we cannot do otherwise as ones who hear and also do the Word, realizing that in our status we really are holy and therefore in obedience. But on the other hand, that our obedience is so obviously hidden from us, just like our faith was hidden in repentance and trust, our obedience never becomes even partially clear to us. All this serves to demonstrate that grace is *real* for us. Everything else is veiled in the darkness of faith; only in the Word itself is there light. Luther hesitated to use the passive participle “sanctified” of Christians and wanted to replace it with “singled out,” in order to come nearer to the biblical

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

understanding of *hagios*.⁶⁷ The singling out of the Christian means, “the one who is born of God must be a different human than merely a judicious heathen or a clever, worldly person.”⁶⁸ Eliminating the trouble would leave faith not clearly implemented, neither externally, nor internally, neither toward other people, nor in the conscience. It is the trouble that falls on us which causes our actions to adhere more closely to the real action of our faith. For example, Luther expressed nothing more clearly than his concept that, in any event, good works consist in fulfilling the obligatory nature of our worldly “station,” as husbands, wives, servants, maids, etc. This is how we have to live for God and our neighbor.⁶⁹

However, this concept did not run through all of Luther’s thought; on the contrary, he could and had to say the opposite: in the cloister one can practice the faith and serve his neighbor very well, and still have the old Adam in him, wanting to adorn itself with the usually recommended conversion of the worldly station.⁷⁰ “Divine service comes not in works, rather in the word and command of God.”⁷¹ “Through all works and stations, faith remains entirely anonymous, because it makes disciples of those whom Christ has

⁶⁷ *Hagios* is Greek for ‘holy,’ which literally means ‘set-apart.’

⁶⁸ Luther, *Sermon on 1 John 5:4f*, EE, 8:220.

⁶⁹ Luther, *Sermon on Gal. 3:23f*, EE, 7:318f.

⁷⁰ A cloister is either a monastery or a convent, but the point being made here is also applicable to us. We cannot normally abandon our life-situation in order to seek after sanctification. Many times the Christian must keep the job, marriage, or other station that he had prior to salvation. But the Holy Spirit works through those stations to bring about His ultimate will for us. We must continually examine ourselves to ensure that we are allowing the Spirit to work true sanctification in us, and not merely building a prideful self-righteousness that is at least as sinful as anything else we could ever do.

⁷¹ Luther, *Sermon on Matt. 6:24f*, EE, 5:84.

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

loved.”⁷² Yes indeed, but because faith remains hidden in all works and stations, its actions are only real obedience to the extent that they compare to the word and instruction of God. Only in the Holy Spirit is it determined if the given action is obedience and not disobedience.

There is still more to say on this matter. One tends to speak of the incompleteness of Christian obedience, and rightly so, as long as we understand that obedience comes from faith, which is justifying us “because of Christ.”⁷³ Still, we do fail to achieve the completeness of the One whom we follow behind but fall short of; in comparison to Christ, we must depict ourselves perpetually as mere “beginners.”⁷⁴ Yes, we must stand in faith, but also in repentance, and in the knowledge of our unbelief. We must perceive that our “uncompleted” obedience is placed in God’s judgment, the One who has brought us higher, even though we still understand our incompleteness as disobedience and sin. Calvin, whose special concern was actually the reality of *sanctification*, reminded us (even more forcefully than Luther did) that in questioning the reality of our *obedience* and also our supposedly ever higher degree of seriousness, we not only find ourselves back at the beginning, but in fact, we find ourselves flung back into nothingness. We definitely must be mindful of this fact. Only in the Holy Spirit can the determination be made with respect to our purest, most well intentioned actions, whether they are and remain our own sin, or else by the power of continual divine forgiveness (which is incomprehensible to us), perhaps they were done the way God likes them to be done. The inner life, of which the poet sings, does not shine in unequivocal radiance

⁷² Luther, *Sermon on John 21:19f*, EE, 10:246.

⁷³ Luther, *Sermon on Matt. 5:20f*, EE, 4:347.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

for the Christian. The work, action, existence, internal, and external life of the believer are all certainly sacred, but they are so through faith, not through faith in itself, but only through faith in the Holy Spirit.

This leaves no defense and pleading, no third and middle mediator between Catholic and Protestant teaching. “Christian holiness is not active, but rather passive holiness.”⁷⁵ “Our works are without blame by the mercy and grace of God, not by our own nature. The one who abandons himself to this same mercy will be forgiven and good by faith. We must live half in fear of our works, but also half in comfort of the grace of God.”⁷⁶ This means that the Holy Spirit is the sole judge of what is or is not a Christian life. In the hiddenness of the Spirit it is true or not true. Each of us either has faith or does not have faith, and therefore we are either obedient and Christian, or else we are not. Therefore, our sanctification is a reality, but our obedience is a problem that we cannot resolve. We can only enter into its darkness again and again, just to be thrown each time upon God alone. We can perhaps make a sacrifice with our actions, but for that to result in us being called Abel and not Cain – that is not in our power. We can perhaps serve with our actions, but for that to result in it being said that we have really served God and our neighbor – that is grace. We can perhaps erect a “symbol of our companionship with God,” we can

⁷⁵ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, 1:41.

⁷⁶ Luther, *Sermon on Good Works*, EE, 20:211. While it may seem strange to say that we should live only half in trust of God’s grace, the point Luther is making is a practical one that cannot be overlooked. We trust fully in the grace of God to save us and to work at conforming us into the likeness of Christ. But we must never allow this to turn into trust of our own ability to do good. The trust we have in God must be balanced by an honest, realistic, and vigilant mistrust of ourselves. We must always remember that “but for the grace of God, there I go.”

The Holy Spirit as Atoner

perhaps demonstrate it, we can perhaps give testimony to it. We are called to do all this. But the authenticity of our symbol, demonstration, and testimony is hidden, not in the inwardness of our “basic convictions,” not as the hiddenness of our heart; on the contrary it is hidden in God. This is completely removed from our hands. The Holy Spirit, the One who constructs Christian life out of human life, is the *Holy Spirit*. “Therefore I say, one must be able to see that we cannot joyfully insist on being of the Holy Spirit, and simultaneously defy the Spirit, like some arrogant, presumptuous zealots have done.”⁷⁷

In order to reflect on the main line in our train of thought, and in connection to the last quote of Luther above, allow me to pose a peripheral question as a practical conclusion. What if we decide to stand, not with Augustine, but with Luther and Calvin, agreeing that it is not appropriate to carelessly use the adjective “Christian” to refer to our always-victorious modern Christianity, as has become typical? Christian philosophy, Christian morality, Christian art - what do these mean? What are Christian personalities, Christian families, Christian circles, Christian political parties, Christian magazines, Christian clubs, Christian institutions, and Christian endeavors?⁷⁸ Who allows us

⁷⁷ Luther, *Sermon on Acts 2:1f*, EE, 8:310.

⁷⁸ It is quite telling that this is one of the most poignant segments of this book. The cheapening of the label ‘Christian’ is not a new phenomenon, but it is certainly a dangerous one. If we declare that our institution, ethic, philosophy, etc., is Christian, aren’t we implying that we have somehow codified the Christian stance on the matter at hand? Haven’t we then barred the Holy Spirit from moving us into a deeper understanding of whatever we have stamped ‘Christian’? Can we declare

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

to go around using this adjective so lavishly? We must know that in hiring out this adjective, it is deprived of its actual, earnest meaning, and we are deprived of all our authority as Christians. You may think this is a case of negligible (though extremely common) grammatical mischief, but the more you think about it the more you can see the inherent evil here. The presumption of using this adjective in this way belies a Christian works-righteousness which, according to Luther and Calvin, means that in such instances the Christian life suffers from the absence of the Holy Spirit. Would you agree that an earnest consideration of the office of the Holy Spirit with regard to the forgiven sinner must at least have the small consequence that, in the future, we will consider the gravity of allowing this adjective to float so freely from the mouth and from the pen? And could this minor exclusion not pull all sorts of other, very current, insights to it? Then, in the churches of Luther and Calvin at least, we could begin again to know what this promising symbol can mean.

anything to be in conformity with the person of Christ, without giving away our own sinfulness, arrogance, and unbelief? If we are using the term 'Christian' to mean something other than conformity with the person of Christ, then we should use a different term.

3

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

We have still a long stretch of road to walk in quite a hurry. Hurrying may not hurt anything though, since too many words can often cause a matter that has no breadth, but rather consists of a single point, to become diffuse. This is especially true when one focuses on understanding a matter in terms of the category of ontological thought, but that is not important here.

The holiness of the Holy Spirit consists thirdly and most importantly, in that He is present to our human spirits in God's revelation, in nothing other than an *eschatological* way.⁷⁹ As such, we describe this as the real, *positive* relationship the Spirit has toward us in

⁷⁹ Eschatology is a theological term referring to ultimate, eternal concerns, or in other words, what happens either when we die or the end of history comes. Barth is making the point in this chapter that the Holy Spirit always deals with us with this ultimate goal in view. The Spirit not only creates spirit within us and works to secure salvation for us, the Spirit also works to deliver us to God when our own end comes to pass.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

revelation, which shows the *true* nature of His continuity to the human spirit.⁸⁰ Thus, eschatologically, He is present to us as the Spirit of God the Creator and Atoner. But, beyond what has been said to this point, we now turn our attention to understanding the Spirit in a third connotation: as the Spirit of God the *Deliverer*.

What does it mean to speak of the “eschatological” presence of the Spirit of God in our spirits? It signifies both the boundary between God and us, and also the relationship between God and us. This is revealed and located in that, in His revelation to us, the Spirit *promises* to have His actual will with us in an ultimate and future sense. We must say that the promise concerns an absolute finality, a future in principle, because overcoming the reality of death, in whose shadow we presently exist, characterizes this promise. The absolute finality and futurity of God’s will for us beyond our death is our deliverance, demonstrated by the resurrection and eternal life. God is present to us in that He *promises* to be our Deliverer. The Word of God is also the Word of Promise, thus the Holy Spirit is also the “Spirit of Promise,” through Whom we are sealed until the day of deliverance.”⁸¹ What we have seen of

⁸⁰ In chapter one, Barth argued forcefully that continuity did not exist between the Holy Spirit and our spirits. His focus at that point was to stress that the Holy Spirit is not *identical* with our spirits, as much of liberal theology claims. In typical form, Barth now appears to be saying nearly the opposite of what he said earlier, but there is really no inconsistency here. Although the Holy Spirit is not identical with our spirits, the Spirit is constantly creating spirit within us, and revealing God to us in a positive, real way. This revelation always comes in an effort to achieve the Spirit’s goal in us: to conform us ever more into the likeness of Christ. Therefore, there is a continuity that exists between God and us – the Person of the Holy Spirit.

⁸¹ Barth refers the reader at this point to Eph. 1:13,14: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

His presence as the Spirit of creation and as the Spirit of grace is sufficiently characteristic of His presence as the Spirit of Promise. All of this is right in line with the statement that He is the Spirit the Deliverer.

We had to grapple earlier with the view that presupposes a standing continuity between God and humans. This was held by Augustine, the classical representation of Catholicism, but is also the prevailing opinion, whether hidden or open, in Protestantism. The danger of this view is that it threatens to make the human his own creator and atoner. We can now say that the whole Augustinian doctrine of humans being created for God and his doctrine of infused works-righteousness (and ultimately these doctrines are one and the same) would be acceptable and possible, if he had meant for them to be understood in eschatological terms. However, we cannot understand him in this way. What he says is clearly about a spirit of fulfillment, instead of about the Spirit of Promise, the Holy Spirit. To blatantly misjudge and reinterpret the absolute finality and futurity that is present to us in the Holy Spirit is to reduce it to something humanly obtainable on this side of death. To blatantly permit this incursion of the human spirit can only result in the complete loss of what has really been given to us.

However, this need not hinder us at this point from conceding that the plainly *warranted concern* of Augustinianism is to be allowed: to maintain that the Holy Spirit is really *present* to humans in God's revelation. This is what we mean by saying the Holy Spirit is eschatologically present, present as the Spirit of

your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.” and Eph. 4:30: “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (NASB)

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Promise. We must beware of those who more or less deny this presence. But we will hold fast, along with Augustinianism, to the statement of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the event of the divine revelation. For this statement to be a genuine theological statement, we must affirm the presence of the Holy Spirit in His whole *uniqueness*, in His difference from the created nature of the creatures. Our opposition to the abundantly gracious Spirit cannot be rescinded, therefore we have to understand that this presence is eschatological, it is the presence of the promise. However, God is revealed to us in our created and sinful nature; we receive His promise. The fact that we really are His creatures and that He really is gracious to sinners – these are only explanations of the given promise. The substance of the promise itself consists in this: we are released from the temporality of our created nature and from the contradiction of being “at once the sinful person and the justified person,” and eternally belong to Him.

God is not only in Himself the Alpha and the Omega; rather God is also the Beginning and the End – of us. Thus God still speaks to us, telling us that He is our Creator and Atoner. In telling us that He is our Creator and our Atoner, God is saying that He will have a future with us, ultimately and in principle. We exist for God, and thus also for ourselves, as the goal of this path of redemption He has made for us. But God has spoken from beyond the boundary of death to us – the ones who must die and cannot help but misjudge death as the payment for our sins. This is exactly why it is said to us as a promise. It is said to us, however, in the whole truth and reality of the Word, who is God Himself. And as it is said to us, we are born again as a new creature, “partakers of the divine nature,” children of God.⁸² How should it be otherwise? In the existence of His spoken

⁸² 2 Pet. 1:4.

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

Word, in the incarnation and resurrection of His beloved Son, God accomplished companionship between Himself and us, companionship like it exists between a father and his child. The revelation of God would not even be revelation, if it did not give us part of God's own being. How else would it ever be understood?

The words creation and atonement tell us that we are creatures, and also that God's grace is powerful over our sins, but they do not tell us that we are the children of God. But God cannot be revealed to us as Creator and Atoner without it simultaneously resulting in us being named His children. God creates us as His children, and thus He is our Deliverer. We are delivered by God, because God is revealed to us. Our divine future, the reality God intends for us in the end, is present to us through the Word. Therefore it is true: "Baptism makes the human whole once more, pure and blessed."⁸³ "When a person is baptized, he becomes for God as fair and bright as the love of the Son, so that no more sin remains, only pure and eternal righteousness, just as Christ said: 'The one who believes and is baptized is blessed.' Even though this is not externally evident, it is true all the same, so long as one leaves the judgment to the Word and to the shepherd's voice."⁸⁴ "Therefore the only thing left to do is for our Lord God to remove the wall that is still between us. This happens when we die, and then there is only pure heaven and blessedness."⁸⁵

This does not imply any limitation, but perhaps we need to refine our definition of the essential eschatological nature of the state of our deliverance. This is what it means to be delivered: to be the children of God with the wall still standing, which is the

⁸³ Luther, *Sermon on Titus 3:4f*, EE, 7:168.

⁸⁴ Luther, *Sermon on John 10:12f*, EE, 3:391.

⁸⁵ Luther, *Sermon on Matt. 22:1f*, EE, 5:178.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

boundary of death; thus, we have received the promise, but we are not in possession of its fulfillment. The perfect tense of we *have been* born again implies this, meaning nothing other than: 'we have been born again into a living *hope*.' The present tense of we *are* the children of God also implies this, meaning nothing other than: 'the kingdom of God has *come near*.' and: 'Your kingdom *come!*' and: 'Look, I stand *before the door* and knock!' and: 'We are well blessed, *yet in hope*,' and: 'The Lord is *near!*' and: 'We sigh within ourselves and *anticipate* being God's children.' Where in the New Testament is deliverance spoken of apart from both of these tenses: now we *are* the children of God and it has *not yet* appeared what we will become? Even the ones who are called Christ's *own* wait, like the servant waiting for his master, or the ten virgins waiting for the Bridegroom. It all comes to this: it is no small thing that we allow our understanding of the nature of deliverance to rest on both of these tenses.

The understanding that we could possess would not be the ultimate understanding, but only some penultimate understanding, of which there are many. Even then, we would have to give those away in death, which is the end of all our possessions. And it would certainly not be in principle the understanding of the future, but only some understanding of the past, that in death would still leave us. What we could possess would certainly not be our deliverance. What we could possess would have to be visible internally or externally, but whatever is visible is also temporal and subject to the inevitable dialectic as is all temporality.⁸⁶ This subjection does not apply to our deliverance, our rebirth, the fact that we are children of God, or our participation in the divine nature. It does not apply to

⁸⁶ Barth is referring to the already/not yet dialectic described in the preceding paragraph.

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

them at all, because we understand that these concepts are implicitly eschatological, that is, they are precisely the substance of the promise that has come to us.⁸⁷ For the sake of the real, full assurance of faith and salvation, our deliverance must not be abstracted from the action of the Deliverer, it must not become merely an anthropological concept. Otherwise, it loses all meaning; it becomes empty, sentimental or conceited self-confidence. It is completely contrary to the biblical context to make deliverance a matter of Christian psychology; that is, to make it only a state human of understanding. Scripture describes deliverance as an “indescribable gift.”⁸⁸ It must all remain decided in the Word, in the Word spoken to us, but still in the *Word* and thus not in our possession, not in the carnal tentacles of our rational or even irrational capabilities of experience. For we are appointed as *heirs*, heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, according to Scripture. ‘Heirs’ clearly means that we are not owners, but the ones to whom possession is promised. It is our divine *future*, our *divine future*, yet it is present through the

⁸⁷ Barth is saying that any concept we can possess on our own cannot be the ultimate truth, because all our concepts, like ourselves, have the inherent limitation of being bound by space and time. The truths listed in this sentence are exempted from those limitations because they come to us from outside our temporal realm, i.e. from God in the form of the promise Barth is discussing. The point we must not miss is this: these truths are exempted from the limitations so long as we understand that we cannot possess them. We can only affirm their truth as God reveals them to us. As soon as we grasp at them to mold them to fit our own ideology, then we have certainly shifted away from the revealed promise of God and back to our own self-made, sinful concepts that are as limited as we are. If you learn nothing else from Barth, you must learn to adopt his amazing theological humility. There are very few ailments in the church today that would not be cured by that elixir.

⁸⁸ 2 Cor. 9:15.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

Word in our presence. But impatience wants to grab more than is given to us. The impatience of the misery of our created nature and the misery of being “at once the sinful person and the justified person,” wants to escape – escape to an island of blessedness, where it can hope for something better than blessedness, better than waiting and hurrying. This impatience should tell itself that it can only lose by grabbing for what is given to us: the Word, which is given to us so we can have faith and hope. It is not a little thing to pray: ‘Amen, yes come Lord Jesus!’ Even as you pray this, the other is already coming in fulfillment: ‘Look, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.’

But what does this outlined understanding of the Holy Spirit mean for the Christian life? Certainly this: a life lived through the Holy Spirit becomes a life lived in reception of the promise, a life lived in hope, a life lived as Abraham lived. Over and over in the confused temporality of our creaturely nature in the kingdom of nature, over and over in the struggle of spirit against flesh in the kingdom of grace, it gives finality, irrevocability, and definitiveness in the kingdom of glory. It gives? No, specifically, He gives, God the Holy Spirit. The finality and reality that He gives is ever coming, yet never already come, ever manna for today, but never to be preserved for tomorrow and the next day. The Holy Spirit is the Christianity of the Christian life. Just as He is the Giver, it is by His gift, no, by Himself the Giver (for we cannot distinguish between them), that we are given the finality, the reality, the victory, and the glory. But even then He is still wrapped in the hiddenness of His free love, because the life of the Christian has been

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

hidden with Christ in God. Allow me to explain this briefly under three headings.

First, in the Holy Spirit we have a *conscience*. It is an astonishing fact that theological ethics, which has had so much trouble with the concept of conscience, still has not come upon the simple idea of understanding it via eschatology. *Syn-eidesis* and *conscientia* – co-knowledge with God about what is good and evil, who else should have this but the one who is continually being born the child of God through the Word?⁸⁹ This child knows in his actions what the will of his Father is. This child may, can, and must say to himself what the Father says. This child is referred to even by the great Schleiermacherian horror: the God-consciousness in the human self-consciousness is no longer a horror, but is full of truth. This child looks over the present, and also over the dialectic of being “at once the sinful person and the justified person,” to the coming kingdom of his Father. This child will always be waiting and yet in a hurry.⁹⁰ Whether he is breathing in or breathing out, he is always living the right life. He may even have a few apparent principles (to the pure all things are pure), like idealism or realism. He might be a conservative or a liberal. He might be a pietist, but he may just as likely be a communist. Whatever he is allowed to be, that he *must* be. Enthusiasm is not

⁸⁹ These Greek and Latin terms (respectively) both nominally mean ‘conscience,’ although the history of the discussion over what they may mean in a more detailed way is a long tale indeed. For our purposes here, Barth is taking them both quite literally as co-knowledge.

⁹⁰ Barth has referred to this waiting/hurry dialectic a few times now. He wants us to see that we should always live in patient expectation of the Lord’s return, but we should also be as busy as we can, hurrying to spread the Gospel since the end could come at any moment.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

forbidden for him – nowhere is it written that God has a preference for home-baked bourgeois capabilities – but if he is enthused, then he is enthused just as the prophets were, who ranted and raved. He will speak loudly, this child, and he will be a missionary, whether he wants to or not. He will not allow himself to be brought to silence through any tactic and mechanism of the church or the state in which he lives, or through any autonomous laws, human movements, or events. He will even gladly, in the last resort, be always in the minority, and ultimately he will be completely alone. When he speaks, he does not ask what the hearers want, or what will bring him prosperity, or what will bring out the crowd. He speaks, because he must speak. Who is this child? Who has such a genuine and true conscience? Is it you or I, this one or that one? I have not said that. If I had, I would be teaching the Augustinian understanding, and thus denying the promise as a promise. We know in ourselves that we are not this child. This child is in the strictest sense our future, our future reality in God. It always demonstrates arrogance, sentimentality, and tackiness when someone appeals to his conscience. If someone has a conscience then they do not appeal to it, they listen to it, and they allow it to speak to them. This is only saying that in the Holy Spirit of the promise, we *are* the children of God, and we *have* a conscience.

Second, in the Holy Spirit there is *gratitude*, as the sum and embodiment of real obedience that is pleasing to God. In the kingdom of the creation we are laborers, in the kingdom of the atonement we are subdued enemies, but in the kingdom of deliverance we are, once again: children of God. The one who is really grateful does not think that he must repay what is given to him. He testifies about it freely. The children of God are grateful and therefore they are free. The laborers and

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

the donkeys remain at the bottom of the mountain, the friends of the bridegroom wait outside the bridal chamber, “Martha has to remain outside and in the kitchen, going around doing housework,” as Luther so enthusiastically said.⁹¹ Gratefulness means delivered obedience. It is delivered from the fear of divine wrath and the convulsion of the human tendency to try to make everything all right. It is delivered because instead of being bound, it renders obedience gladly, because we do not obey based on some moral coercion of our undelivered conscious or subconscious nature. Who is grateful to God? Who is a free child of God? I have not said it is any certain people. I have not said that the Christian is now at once grateful and *has* the freedom of the children of God. If I had, I would again be teaching Augustinian doctrine, even if in form it is thoroughly Protestant as well. We know our undelivered conscious and subconscious natures well enough to know that we are not in ourselves the children of God. The gratefulness and freedom of the children of God is truly ours ultimately, it is our future reality. I have said that, “the comfort of divine acceptance makes gentle, merry, agreeable humans, for whom all things go well.”⁹² But: “nature cannot do this, only the seed of Abraham, Christ in His glory, makes such people by His grace and the Holy Spirit.”⁹³

Third, in the Holy Spirit we pray. It must be said, even of *prayer* that it can only be understood from the standpoint of eschatology. The human who presupposes that he is the subject needs to know that so far he is not,

⁹¹ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, II:184. The servants and donkeys at the base of the mountain refers to the story of Abraham going up to sacrifice Isaac in Gen. 22:1-19. The story of Martha in the kitchen is found in Luke 10:38-42.

⁹² Luther, *Sermon on Isa. 60:1f*, EE, 7:350.

⁹³ Luther, *Sermon on Gal. 4:1f*, EE, 7:266.

The Holy Spirit and the Christian Life

that is, he is only the subject in the promise. The child of God can talk with God the Father and he does. He speaks with God and considers not only the reality of his speech, not only his hearing, but also his being heard. The actions of humans are unquestionably in God, as the God to whom we belong. He understands himself when he realizes that only God can understand him. Then he takes the voice and what is spoken seriously, which was spoken over him at his baptismal. Then father Eli will always think that he is drunk, and he will always be a mystery to himself. He really prays in earnest, and all the more when he is in temptation, that is, when his own religious capabilities, which are in opposition to God, melt away in his hands. He really prays in earnest, when all the power, passion, and skill of his prayer savvy melts down to a simple 'Our Father.' Certainly that does not fulfill the "sense of prayer" as a bold, internal capability, and it has nothing to do with the helpless sigh of one engaged ultimately only in deep concentration. There is nothing right or wrong contained in a sigh. "But these sighs, which we can barely sense, Paul calls these the ineffable crying and sighing, which fill heaven and earth...it fills the whole of heaven so much, that the angels think they have never heard anything other than this crying...that God Himself hears nothing else and that it also drowns out the sounds of everything else."⁹⁴ Why? Is it because the one sighing is engaged in contemplative, powerful, and passionate prayer – with the usual proviso that grace has made this his natural ability? That would once again be Augustinian doctrine. The miracle of prayer – and that is something other than the infused grace of learning how to pray properly – is the advocacy of the Holy Spirit for the one praying. It is the Spirit sighing, certainly in *our* mouth, but as *His* sighing. The Spirit

⁹⁴ Luther, *Galatians*, EE, II: 169f.

The Holy Spirit as Deliverer

takes the sober person, or the drunken person, or the pedantic person, or even all rolled into one in the religious person – the one who prays in himself and to himself – and makes each one into a person who *really* prays. Where will we rest in an emergency, unless we know beforehand that, as the children of God, we can pray and have grace not only as an advocacy of God for Himself with us, but also for us with Himself? Otherwise how would we know that we have the ability to pray as the children of God in God's promise? But this is already known: "saying the word 'Father' in the heart with meaning is more eloquent than anything Demosthenes or Cicero could articulate."⁹⁵ What ground does Luther have to make this audacious assertion? Only this, he knew humans, with all their weakness and wickedness, do not understand the divine seriousness in some profoundly religious experience, but only in the religiously insignificant sighing. We are the born again children of God, and it has pleased God to take this sighing and with it to take the burden of the human upon *Himself*. The most important point here is the presence of the Spirit as the promise.

⁹⁵ Ibid., II:181.