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The Lively Work of the Spirit in the Reformation

JANE DEMPSEY DOUGLASS

Historians all too seldom turn their attention to the Reformers' understanding of the Holy Spirit, yet something profoundly significant happened to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Reformation. Theologians like Luther and Calvin, though quite traditional in their view of the person of the Holy Spirit—because they found the tradition biblical—nonetheless reframed the understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in the church and the world, giving the Spirit a new immediacy in the lives of believers. It is this lively work of the Spirit on which we will focus our attention.

First, I will sketch the context of thought about the role of the Holy Spirit in the Western later Middle Ages and in the broader swath of the varied reformations of the sixteenth century to provide us with perspective. This survey will, of necessity, be a bare outline rather than a detailed analysis, but it will remind us of the vitality of the theological ferment of the Reformation period. Then I will turn to the reinvigorated understanding of the Holy Spirit's work that Luther and Calvin shared. This attention to parallels between Luther and Calvin reflects the spirit of the still new relationship of full communion between Lutheran and Reformed churches in the USA. Finally, I will offer some additional examples of Calvin's way of expressing the lively work of the Spirit.

Though comparatively little attention has been paid to the Reformers' understanding of the Holy Spirit, only the confident certainty of the Spirit's working in their lives gave them the courage to challenge so fundamentally the errors they saw in the church of their day.

THE LATE-MEDIEVAL CONTEXT

The Western church of the later Middle Ages inherited from the early church a doctrine of the Trinity in which the Holy Spirit was understood to be fully divine, one of the three persons of the Trinity. The Apostles' Creed, a Western baptismal creed rooted in the early church but probably not in its final form till around the seventh century, was widely used all through the Middle Ages in the Western church for instruction. It associated the work of the Holy Spirit with the new life in the church after baptism and with the new life after death: "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

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In the ecumenical Nicene Creed, more precisely called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381, the article on the Holy Spirit is longer. Along with most of the elements found in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed includes elaboration of the life-giving role of the Spirit, an expansion of the affirmation of the Spirit's divinity, a new mention of the Spirit's speaking through the prophets, which has been understood as a reference to the inspiration of Scripture, and a new emphasis on unity: one holy catholic and apostolic church, and one baptism. The Nicene Creed gradually came into occasional use in the West in the early Middle Ages as a eucharistic creed and, after the sixth century in the West, increasingly included the *filioque* clause: the Spirit proceeds from the Father and from the Son.

There were no major challenges in the late-medieval period to the role of these ancient creeds as pillars of orthodoxy, despite much scholastic discussion of the Trinity. In the West, young people to be confirmed were officially expected to know the Apostles' Creed, along with the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer. These ancient creeds shaped the common understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit.

One might wonder about the impact of Joachim of Fiore and the Spiritual Franciscans with their vision of the age of the Holy Spirit. But Joachim's work had been declared heretical in the thirteenth century, and the Spiritual Franciscans who lived on into the later Middle Ages challenged the church far more on issues around the ideal of voluntary poverty. Again, one might think of the late-medieval mystical group known as the Brethren of the Free Spirit. But it came to be seen as heretical for its antinomian and pantheistic tendencies rather than for a direct theological challenge to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Spiritualistic tendencies in the Renaissance provide fascinating material for analysis, but with perspectives often rather far from the center of the history of Christian doctrine or the beliefs of ordinary people north of the Alps.

In fact, the work of the Holy Spirit, whose coming at Pentecost was seen as

marking the beginning of the church, came to be thought of by medieval theologians as especially concerned with the church as an institution, guiding it and preserving it from error. Of course, the Holy Spirit could also be thought of by the scholastics as uncreated grace, in distinction from the created grace infused into the soul with the sacraments. But for the individual Christian, it was created grace, infused grace, which was the primary support of the Christian life, received with the sacraments and necessary at the end of life for transition to purgatory and to heaven. By the gracious provision of God, if one went to the sacraments without harboring mortal sin as an obstacle to their working, one could expect to receive infused grace. No special act of faith was necessary because of the *ex opere operato* character of the working of New Testament sacraments. In this scholastic understanding of the sacraments, created or infused grace has replaced the early church's sense of the immediacy of the Holy Spirit's action. For Thomas Aquinas, though God is the principal cause of grace in the sacraments, the sacraments themselves are the instrumental cause.

We should, however, note a late-medieval exception to this view. Bonaventura and Scotus both speak of God's covenant that God will accompany the believer's participation in the sacraments with God's own working directly upon the soul. The infusion of grace comes from a directly creative act of God in the soul. Scotus believed that because God alone had power to create, the direct cause of grace could only be an act of God.

We often hear about the intense search for immediate experience of the holy in late-medieval religious culture. Think of the enthusiasm for mysticism, for relics and the tangible connection they offered to Christ and the saints, for pilgrimages to holy sites in search of healing, miracles, or blessing. Think also of eucharistic piety. Though anxiety about proper preparation for receiving the Lord's body in communion limited the frequency of lay communion, there was great eagerness for *seeing* the rite of elevation at the moment of consecration in the Mass. Processions through the streets with the consecrated host on certain holy days, and the development of the service of benediction where the host as Christ truly present is revered in a monstrance, visible to all, provide evidence of the popular eagerness for an immediate relation to the holy.

These trends continued into the period of the Catholic Reformation. Roman Catholics saw no need to reform their own teaching on the Holy Spirit. Where Roman Catholics were in polemic against Lutheran and Calvinist Protestantism, we do not seem to find the Holy Spirit explicitly at the center of the debate. Roman Catholics do attack Protestant understandings of the role of faith, an issue that for Protestants relates closely to the Holy Spirit, but the attacks are not framed by the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

THE CONTEXT: THE RADICAL REFORMATION

Certain centers of the Radical Reformation provide the most dramatic break

with a traditional understanding of the Holy Spirit. Thomas Müntzer, in his famous “Sermon before the Princes” of 1524, derides other clerics’ inexperience with the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit as he insists that the Spirit is daily pouring forth new revelation.

This is now the character of almost all divines with mighty few exceptions. They teach and say that God no longer reveals his divine mysteries to his beloved friends by means of valid visions or his audible Word, etc. Thus they stick with their inexperienced way (cf. Ecclesiasticus 34:9) and make into the butt of sarcasm those persons who go around in possession of revelation, as the godless did to Jeremiah (ch. 20:7f.): Hark! Has God just recently spoken to thee? Or hast thou recently asked at the mouth of God and taken counsel with him: Hast thou the Spirit of the Christ? This is what they do with scorn and mockery....He [who has not the Spirit] does not know how to say anything deeply about God, even if he had eaten through a hundred Bibles!¹

A very different sort of challenge to orthodoxy came after the 1540s from anti-trinitarian thinkers and movements within the Radical Reformation stream, like Servetus and the Socinian movement. Yet these protests against trinitarian theology were focused more on christology than on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

THE CONTEXT: ZWINGLI AND MARIE DENTIÈRE

There were also challenges to medieval theology with regard to the *work* of the Holy Spirit by theologians who did not question the tradition of the ancient creeds and who did not believe that the Spirit was providing new revelation. In a theological stream quite close to Luther and Calvin was Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich. Zwingli claims to have come to his evangelical reformation theology independently of Luther by 1516, by reading the Scriptures and through Erasmus’s influence, and he developed a powerful doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit. In his treatise “Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,” Zwingli speaks vividly of the power of the word of God: “These passages from the New Testament will be quite enough to show that the Word of God is so alive and strong and powerful that all things have necessarily to obey it, and that as often and at the time that God himself appoints.”² The liveliness and the clarity of the word of God is due to the work of the Holy Spirit: “God’s Word can be understood by a [human being] without any human direction: not that this is due to a [person’s] own understanding, but to the light and Spirit of God, illuminating and inspiring the words in such a way that the light of the divine content is seen in [God’s] own light.”³ The treatise concludes

¹Thomas Müntzer, “Sermon before the Princes,” in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George Huntston Williams and Angel M. Mergal, Library of Christian Classics 25 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957) 54, 58.

For the convenience of *Word & World*’s diverse readership, I have chosen to quote and cite widely available English translations of texts wherever possible, rather than the original-language sources. Unfortunately, most of these translations do not use inclusive language.

²Ulrich Zwingli, “Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God,” in *Zwingli and Bullinger*, ed. G. W. Bromiley (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) 71.

³*Ibid.*, 78.

with advice about coming to a “true understanding of the Word of God and to a personal experience of the fact that you are taught of God.” The last four points here are that

...when you find that the Word of God renews you, and begins to be more precious to you than formerly when you heard the doctrines of [human beings], ...when you find that it gives you assurance of the grace of God and eternal salvation,...when you find that it crushes and destroys you, but magnifies God himself within you...when you find that the fear of God begins to give you joy rather than sorrow, it is a sure working of the Word and Spirit of God. May God grant us that Spirit.⁴

For Zwingli, when the word is lively and powerful and transforming, it is intimately associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who gives the gift of faith and calls believers into the church, allowing them to hear the gospel truly. So far-reaching are Zwingli’s doctrines of the freedom of the Spirit and predestination that he envisions Socrates and some other great classical figures with the biblical saints in paradise. In the sacraments it is the inner spiritual experience of trust in God’s mercy through Christ that is Zwingli’s prime concern, and it is that assurance in the heart “towards God and joy through Christ” which is the meaning of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.⁵

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One last example from the broad Reformation context is the author of the first history of the Reformation in Geneva, published in 1536, the year in which Geneva declared itself a reformed city. The author is Marie Dentière, a former abbess in Picardy, by then married to a former priest turned evangelical missionary. Together they had been working for several years to convert the city of Geneva to the gospel. One of Marie’s tasks was preaching to the nuns in their convents. Though Roman Catholics called Marie a Lutheran, she was really more influenced by Zwingli.

Though she does not figure in standard church-history textbooks, the city of Geneva on November 3, 2002, observed the addition of four new names engraved on its imposing Wall of the Reformers at the edge of the old city, the first addition, I believe, since the monument’s erection almost a hundred years ago. The monument’s statues are of leaders of the Reformed tradition from many countries, beginning with Geneva in the sixteenth century, but the names of other Reformers, like Luther, are included. Three of those newly added are from the pre-

⁴Ibid., 93-95.

⁵Ibid., 258-259; “Of Baptism,” in Bromiley, *Zwingli and Bullinger*, 170.

Reformation period: Jan Hus, leader of the Czech Brethren; Valdès de Lyon, leader of the Waldensian movement; and John Wycliffe of England. The Czech Brethren and the Waldensians, from the sixteenth century till the present, have identified themselves with the Reformed tradition. The fourth newly added name is that of Marie Dentière of Geneva.

Marie's history of the conversion of Geneva is more a theology of history than merely a chronicle. She gives a vigorous account of how God rescued the city from its terrible oppression, oppression both by the Roman Catholic priests within the city and by its Savoyard neighbors, through the preaching of the word of God. She understands that the word of God is so lively and active and powerful that no evil force can withstand it. God "has only to speak the word, and the thing is done."⁶ The city's liberation came by the grace of God without any human merit, like the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, at the moment when things were at their worst. The struggle was between those who fought against God and God's word and those who loved God's word. In the spirit of the Magnificat, Marie describes how the city's life has been turned upside down. The powerful priests have fled, and in their grand homes have been housed the poor and hungry and oppressed, now cared for with justice. It is interesting that nowhere in this history have I found an explicit reference to the Holy Spirit. In Marie's later writing such references appear. Here she speaks of the word of God or of God and his word. She understands, as Zwingli does, that the powerful word of God is indeed the Scripture vivified by the presence of God, the gospel. The construction of Marie's story makes clear that the word preached is not a mere text but the very presence of God in their midst by means of the Spirit.

Perhaps these comments about Zwingli and Marie Dentière clarify what I mean by the Reformation "reframing" the understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in the church and the world, giving the Spirit a new immediacy in the lives of believers. I am using the term "the Reformation" now in a narrower sense than before when I also spoke of the Radical Reformation and the Catholic Reformation. By "Reformation" here I mean that group of mainstream Protestants that sometimes is called, not entirely helpfully, the magisterial Reformation. It includes Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, Bucer in Strasbourg, Melancthon in Germany, Bullinger in Zurich, and many others with similar but not identical views. They use somewhat different language, reflecting varying theologies. For example, some will speak more of the Spirit of God, others more often of the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit that makes Christ present. Nonetheless, they are making quite similar theological moves.

Many of the elements in this process of reframing the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit are not new. The traditional trinitarian God of the ancient creeds,

⁶Marie Dentière, *La guerre et deslivrance de la ville de Genesve*, ed. A. Rilliet, in *Mémoires et documents publiés par la Société d'histoire et d'archéologie de Genève*, XX (1881) (Genève: Jullien, 1879-1888) 340. Cf. Jane Dempsey Douglass, "Marie Dentière's Use of Scripture in Her Theology of History," in *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 227-244.

with the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity, is taken for granted in the Reformation churches, and the Apostles' Creed is used liturgically and for instruction. A good example of the reframing is the way Luther in his catechisms closely follows the third article on the Holy Spirit in the Apostles' Creed, yet adds his own emphases. He sees the Spirit as the sanctifier: calling believers to the gospel, sanctifying them through baptism and daily repentance, incorporating them into the

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church (understood as the community of saints), and preserving them in true faith to eternal life.⁷ Calvin in his 1545 catechism also follows the Creed closely but brings his own special emphases on the unity of the church and on the distinction between the visible church and the company of the elect.⁸ Both Luther and Calvin in this context, from their new evangelical perspective, reaffirm the traditional teaching that outside the church there is no salvation.⁹ As we saw with Zwingli and Marie Dentière, the Reformation reappropriated Augustine's doctrines of predestination and prevenient grace, which were decidedly minority opinions in the later Middle Ages; but they are placed in a new context. There is nothing new about deep respect for the word of God. Augustine also taught that the Spirit enlivens the text so that it is fruitful. Late-medieval preaching flourished, with profound respect for the Scriptures, but its function tended to be pedagogical, leading sinners to the sacrament of confession where they would encounter the grace of God.

But in the Reformation stream in which Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, and Dentière will move, many of the sources where late-medieval Christians sought spiritual immediacy were almost entirely set aside. Zwingli even approved the removal of art and music from the churches so that the word of God could be heard more clearly, with fewer distractions. Luther was more sensitive to the laypeople's piety and permitted the stained-glass windows, the sculptures, the paintings, the vestments, and music to remain for those who found them important aids to feel the presence of God. Calvin arrived in a Geneva where many of the churches had already been violently “cleansed” of their “idols” by the Bernese troops who had helped to liberate the city, and where music in worship had been forbidden by the Zwinglian missionaries. He was happy to leave the church walls bare, but he reintroduced music by setting the psalms to new tunes with no previous associations.

⁷Martin Luther, “The Small Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959) 345 (hereafter *BC*); “The Large Catechism” in *BC*, 415-420.

⁸Calvin, “The Catechism of the Church of Geneva,” in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954) 102-107, especially 102-104.

⁹Luther, “Large Catechism,” in *BC*, 416. Calvin, “The Catechism of the Church of Geneva,” in *Theological Treatises*, 104.

Nonetheless, through the work of the Holy Spirit these theologians found God immediately present to them in the reading of the word of God and in the reception of the sacraments. Without the Spirit's work directly in their hearts, they believed there would be no faith that could hear the word or receive the grace of the sacraments. Luther says in the "The Large Catechism": "The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it he illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it."¹⁰ Calvin says:

For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in [human] hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.¹¹

Unlike Thomas Müntzer, the mainstream Reformers understood the Holy Spirit to be "bound" to Scripture, enlivening it to make it gospel, not pouring out new revelation.

LUTHER AND CALVIN

Let us now reflect on four of the theological areas where Luther and Calvin both feel in new ways the immediacy of the Spirit's work.

First is the nature of faith itself. While for late-medieval theology, faith, one of the theological virtues, could be either infused through the sacraments or acquired by human effort, for the Reformation, faith is a direct gift of God through the Holy Spirit. Luther in his "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans" describes the nature of faith:

Faith...is something that God effects in us. It changes us and we are reborn from God, John 1 [:13]. Faith puts the old Adam to death and makes us quite different [people] in heart, in mind, and in all our powers; and it is accompanied by the Holy Spirit. O, when it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is. It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good work to do. Rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it....Faith is a living and unshakeable confidence, a belief in the grace of God so assured that a [person] would die a thousand deaths for its sake. This kind of confidence in God's grace, this sort of knowledge of it, makes us joyful, high-spirited, and eager in our relations with God and with all [humankind]. That is what the Holy Spirit effects through faith.¹²

We see here that the Holy Spirit is working in the sinner to transform the person, to bring about a rebirth. With the gift of faith comes "unshakeable confidence" in the grace of God and joyful relations with God and with all humanity.

¹⁰Luther, "Large Catechism," in *BC*, 416.

¹¹Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics 20 and 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) I.vii.4.

¹²Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans," in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1962) 23-24.

Where Luther describes, Calvin defines faith. “Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”¹³ Here the emphasis is on the knowledge of God’s favor to us, the knowledge of the truth of the gospel, and the confident, firm belief in both that is revealed to minds and sealed upon hearts by the Holy Spirit.

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Each of the writers would incorporate elsewhere the elements that the other includes here. Overall we have a picture of the Holy Spirit’s work that transforms, informs, and creates unshakeable trust directly in the heart of each believer.

Second, both Luther and Calvin drew from their understanding of the Spirit’s gift of faith the conviction that believers can have the assurance or certainty of salvation. That certainty is founded on the Spirit’s work: those who receive the gift of faith are the elect, predestined for eternal life and called into the church. The ongoing reality of human sin cannot threaten this certainty. This is a radical departure from earlier Catholic teaching and from the Catholic Reformation. Roman Catholic doctrine taught that no one could have the certainty of salvation except by a special revelation, because one could not know whether one would in fact be in a state of grace at the moment of death. Occamistic theology, the dominant school in Luther’s day, doubted that one could even be certain that one had received forgiveness and the renewed habit of grace in the sacrament of penance, because one can never be sure that one is fully contrite and therefore properly prepared for the sacrament. As evidence of the radicality of the teaching by Luther and Calvin of the certainty of salvation, the decrees and canons of the Council of Trent on justification condemn the “vain confidence” of heretics that their sins have been remitted and “rash presumption” that one is among the number of the predestined.¹⁴

Third, both Luther and Calvin understood that the fruitful reception of the sacraments, receiving grace in the sacraments, requires faith and the Spirit’s working. Roman Catholics attacked this teaching as undercutting the superiority of the sacraments of the New Testament, which work *ex opere operato*, over those of the Old Testament, which required faith on the part of the recipient. Both Luther and Calvin found it easier to explain their position with regard to the Lord’s Supper than with regard to baptism, to the delight of the sixteenth-century opponents of infant baptism.

¹³Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.7.

¹⁴For the decrees and canons of Trent on justification, see *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith (Louisville: John Knox, 1982) 408-424, especially 413, 416, 422.

Fourth, both Luther and Calvin understood the function of preaching differently than it had been understood in the later Middle Ages. Late-medieval preaching abounded, and it was often received with enthusiasm. Preaching had been displaced from the Mass, however, and it normally took place on Sunday afternoon or daily during Advent and Lent. The role of the preacher was to teach the people from Scripture, to help them identify their sins, and to send them in contrition to the sacrament of penance where they could be absolved from mortal sin and receive a new infusion of grace, and to the Mass where they could also receive grace.

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The Reformation restored preaching as biblical exposition to the normal Sunday worship service as an essential part of worship. Both Luther and Calvin desired preaching of the word and sacrament in every Sunday service. Heiko Oberman has described the new Reformation view of the sermon in this way:

For the Reformers the sermon had certainly also a didactic and paraenetical function—but only because and insofar as the kerygma forced for itself a way to the heart and mind of the congregation: not a *preparation* for the encounter with the sphere of the holy but the *decisive* encounter with the Holy One himself. The sermon does not inspire good inclinations, but moves the doors of heaven and hell. It is *the apocalyptic event*—apocalyptic in the pure sense: that which reveals—with its double connotation; it reveals God and devil alike....Luther said that the most dangerous task in the world is that of preaching the Word: Where Christ appears the devils start to speak.¹⁵

In the preaching of the word, the Holy Spirit places believers directly in the presence of God.

SPECIAL ASPECTS OF CALVIN’S VIEW OF THE IMMEDIACY OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK

I include now some examples of special expressions of Calvin’s view of the immediacy of the Spirit’s work. The first two illustrate how seriously Calvin takes the tradition that the Spirit proceeds from the Creator as well as the Redeemer.

First, the Spirit upholds the creation in every moment. Without the Spirit’s constant and very specific activity, the created world would cease to be. Calvin says:

In six days, therefore, the creation of the world was finished, but God’s administration of it is still continuing, and God incessantly works in maintaining and preserving the order of it. As Paul teaches us, in God we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28); and David teaches us, that all things stand so long as the Spirit of God enlivens them, and that they would cease as soon as he would withdraw his activity (Ps 104:29). Nor is it only by a general providence that the Lord

¹⁵Heiko A. Oberman, “Reformation, Preaching, and *ex opere operato*,” in *Christianity Divided*, ed. Daniel J. Callahan, Heiko A. Oberman, and Daniel J. O’Hanlon (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 223-239, at 224-225.

maintains the world which he has created, but he arranges and regulates every part of it. In truth, by his assistance, he especially preserves and protects believers whom he has received under his promise of care and guardianship.¹⁶

Second, the Holy Spirit is not only the source of sanctifying graces for those called to faith, but also of general graces given to whomever the Spirit wills, gifts of reason and understanding, of knowledge of the arts and sciences, gifts given for the common good of humankind. “It is no wonder, then, that the knowledge of all that is most excellent in human life is said to be communicated to us through the Spirit of God.” These gifts should be respected. “[I]f the Lord has willed that we be helped in physics, dialectic, mathematics, and other like disciplines, by the work and ministry of the ungodly, let us use this assistance. For if we neglect God’s gift freely offered in these arts, we ought to suffer just punishment for our sloths.”¹⁷

Third, we see Calvin’s characteristically Reformed understanding of the bond of the Holy Spirit that makes possible true communion with Christ in the Lord’s Supper:

[T]he Lord bestows this benefit upon us through his Spirit so that we may be made one in body, spirit, and soul with him. The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us.¹⁸

Christ’s ascension to heaven does not preclude this communion, since by the Holy Spirit believers are lifted up to heaven to seek Christ in the glory of his kingdom with their eyes and minds.

This kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits. Thus Christ is not prevented from exerting his power wherever he pleases, in heaven and on earth. He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body. In short, he feeds his people with his own body, the communion of which he bestows upon them by the power of his Spirit.¹⁹

Calvin is eager to make clear that the heavenly mystery of Christ’s presence does not depend on one explanation.

[G]reatly mistaken are those who conceive no presence of flesh in the Supper unless it lies in the bread. For thus they leave nothing to the secret working of the Spirit, which unites Christ himself to us. To them Christ does not seem present unless he comes down to us. As though, if he should lift us to himself, we should not just as much enjoy his presence! The question is therefore only of the manner....Let our readers decide which one is more correct.²⁰

¹⁶Calvin, “Commentarius in Evangelium Ioannis,” in *Calvini Opera* 47 (Brunsvigae: A. Schwetschke et filium, 1892) 111.

¹⁷Ibid., II.ii.16.

¹⁸Ibid., IV.xvii.12.

¹⁹Ibid., IV.xvii.18.

²⁰Ibid., IV.xvii.31.

Fourth, in one of Calvin's sermons on Pentecost he discusses the meaning of the text: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18). Calvin understands that this outpouring of the Spirit on all kinds of people—men and women, masters and servants, old and young—means that every Christian instructed by God is obliged in turn to teach others. "This is what Isaiah means when he says that each one should take the hand of his neighbor to help him to ascend into the holy mountain." God's teaching by the Spirit is not just for ourselves but to be shared with others. "It is true that all are not doctors for teaching; yet if we are Christians, we have been given enough with which to exhort our neighbors."²¹

"May God grant this grace not only to us, but also to all the peoples and nations of the earth."

Finally, again in a Pentecost sermon, Calvin emphasizes a theme characteristic of his preaching and not common in the sixteenth-century Reformation, a concern for all the peoples of the world. In fact, Calvin normally concluded his sermons with a prayer including this: "May God grant this grace not only to us, but also to all the peoples and nations of the earth."²² Calvin reminds his hearers of how divided the human family has been and how the diversity of languages from the Tower of Babel symbolizes this estrangement. But the Pentecost miracle of the Spirit's gift of tongues symbolizes the reunion of the human family:

Here is how the Spirit of God willed to use God's power in these tongues so that the name of God would be invoked by all, and that we would be made together participants of this covenant of salvation which belonged only to the Jews till this wall was broken down....All the more must we magnify and bless God's holy name, recognizing that the diversity of languages did not hinder God from declaring in all the world that God willed to receive those who formerly were estranged from God and to assemble them all as in his lap, till they will be gathered into the heavenly heritage.²³

Though these expressions are characteristic of Calvin, many of the ideas can, of course, be found in other Reformers.

We have explored some of the characteristic ways in which the Reformation of Luther, Calvin, and their colleagues has revived the sense of the lively and immediate work of the Holy Spirit, not only in the institution of the church, but also in the heart of the individual believer. In some cases, the Reformers' rereading of the gospel has placed them in sharp contrast to the tradition they had been taught.

²¹Calvin, "Quatrième Sermon de la Pentecoste," in *Calvini Opera* 48, 648-649.

²²Calvin, *Sermons sur le livre de Michée*, ed. Jean Daniel Benoit, *Supplementa Calviniana* 5 (Neukirchenvluyn: Neukirchener, 1964) 10, lines 29-30.

²³Calvin, "Premier Sermon de la Pentecoste," in *Calvini Opera* 48, 628.

It is always possible that the historian, focused on detail, will miss the broader implications of what is under study. In this case, we should ask whether for the Reformers it may not be exactly the confident certainty of the Holy Spirit's working in their lives, opening their minds and hearts to new understandings of the gospel, convincing them of their ultimate salvation by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, that gave them the courage to challenge so fundamentally the errors and sins they saw in the church of their day. They challenged at various times every ecclesiastical authority, challenged traditional readings of Scripture, challenged such well-established norms as the long canon of the Vulgate (in favor of the shorter Hebrew canon) and the text of the Mass, and in some cases challenged the secular authorities. We often forget how radical they were!

The Reformers found that when the Spirit bound them in obedience to their Redeemer and to the word of God, the Spirit also freed them to preach and teach and act boldly in the service of the gospel, far more boldly than any of them had initially intended. ⊕

JANE DEMPSEY DOUGLASS is the Hazel Thompson McCord Professor of Historical Theology, Emerita, at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey. Professor Douglass delivered this essay as the tenth annual Word & World Lecture at Luther Seminary, October 28, 2002.