

## **Maintaining the Lifeline of the Church Pastoral Education for the Ministry of the Spirit with the Word**

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“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty’ (Zech 4:6).<sup>1</sup>

In his discussion on confession in the Smalcald Articles Luther says, ‘God gives no one his Spirit or grace apart from the external Word that goes before.’<sup>2</sup> That bold claim of Luther is even more relevant today than when he first opposed three kinds of enthusiasm - the enthusiasm of the papacy, the enthusiasm of the Pentecostal spiritualists, and the enthusiasm of Islam. His insight provides the key for us to meet present challenges to the lifeline of the church, the transmission and reception of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of the gospel.

If we are to counter that attack we need first to recognise our own vulnerability, the weakness that has, so often, disabled us as pastors. Our weakness does not lie in our theology, but in our piety. It does not come from inadequate teaching about the Holy Spirit, but in our failure to apply it properly in pastoral theology and in our formation as pastors.

Take, for example, what seems to be happening in my own church! Many of our pastors - and most of the candidates for ministry - have not been catechised in classical Lutheran piety, but in charismatic spirituality. While they have, in most cases, received some instruction in the doctrine of Luther’s Small Catechism, their piety has not been shaped by it. By and large, they hold to Lutheran theology, but they have not been initiated into its liturgical and devotional enactment. They accept the authority of the Bible and are devoted to the Holy Spirit. The missing link, for them, is the ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit through hearing the Spirit-giving word of God and meditating on it.

And that seems to be a world-wide problem! All over the world we have Lutheran pastors who are not actually Lutheran in their practice. You can’t blame them for this, because, by and large, they have not been taught how to enact the gospel liturgically, devotionally, and pastorally in their training as pastors.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a paper given at the First Westfield House International at the High Leigh Conference Centre on August 18-21, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> SA 3, 3, 8:3. Later on in 9-10 he adds: ‘In short: enthusiasm clings to Adam and his children from the beginning to the end of the world – fed and spread among them as poison by the old dragon. It is the source, power, and might of all heresies, even that of the papacy and Mohammed. Therefore we should and must insist that God does not want to deal with us human beings, except by means of his external Word and sacrament. Everything that boasts of being from the Spirit apart from such a Word and sacrament is of the devil.’ See also *LW* 34, 286 and 40, 146.

The book in the New Testament that has the most to say about the formation of pastors for ministry is Paul's second letter to Timothy. It teaches about the handing on of the deposit of teaching to candidates for ministry as well as what is required of those who are preachers of the gospel. Yet that letter begins in a strange way. In 1:6-8 Paul gives this prayerful advice to Timothy: "*I remind you to fan into flame<sup>3</sup> the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of hands, for God did not give us a Spirit of timidity, but a Spirit of power, of love and of sound-mindedness.<sup>4</sup> So do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, but join with me in suffering abuse<sup>5</sup> for the gospel by the power of God.*"

Helpfully, Paul here connects three things. First, he links ordination with the giving of the Holy Spirit as a gift from God through the laying on of hands. In 1 Timothy 4:14 that endowment is associated with the word of God that was spoken to him prophetically by Paul and the other pastors that ordained him.

Second, Paul links the gift of the Holy Spirit with the empowerment of Timothy in his ministry. God the Father gave Timothy the Holy Spirit as a gift of grace to overcome his embarrassing timidity and to empower him to preach the gospel with love and sound-mindedness. And more than that! God also gave Timothy the power to suffer the abuse that comes from preaching the embarrassing gospel of the crucified and risen Christ.

Third, Paul encourages Timothy, in his daily devotions, to draw on the power of the Holy Spirit for his ongoing work as preacher, the power that was made available to him at his ordination. Daily ministry requires daily reception of the Holy Spirit. The picture that Paul uses is a fire, the holy perpetual fire on the altar of burnt offering at the temple, a fire that needs to be fed with firewood and fanned into flame each morning (Lev 6:8-13).<sup>6</sup> The Holy Spirit is that fire, the sanctifying fire that provides every pastor with the power and warmth and light to do holy work, the Lord's work.<sup>7</sup>

Well, the question is: how can as pastors to feed and fan that holy life-giving flame in their hearts, so that we can keep that flame alight in the church?

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<sup>3</sup> This term seems to be Pauline invention. It combines the notion of rekindling fire on a hearth with the idea of keeping a living, life-giving fire alive.

<sup>4</sup> In Greek the same word is used for sound-mindedness and sexual self-control. Its opposite is insanity. The New Testament uses this Greek word in its various forms for the sound-mindedness and spiritual sanity of a redeemed person. The emphasis does not lie on autonomous self-control, as most translators seem to imply, but on clear-sighted self-appraisal. At its most literal level, it describes the mental sanity of a person who had been freed from a demon (Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35). But sound-mindedness is also used to describe the spiritual sanity of a person with a clear conscience. Christ redeems us from our ungodliness and disordered passions so that we may live 'sound-mindedly' (Tit 2:12). Sound-minded people have a clear sense of themselves and their situation in the world, a sense of sober self-appraisal that comes from faith in Christ and the knowledge of God's grace (Rom 12:3). Its awareness of God's judgment leads to prayerfulness (1 Pet 4:7). Sound-mindedness is both a gift of the Spirit (2 Tim 1:7) and a requirement for all Christians, whether they are male pastors (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8), women at prayer (1 Tim 2:9, 15), older men (Tit 2:2), younger men (Tit 2:6), or older or younger women (Tit 2:4-5).

<sup>5</sup> See 2:3; cf. 2:9; 4:5.

<sup>6</sup> See John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary, Concordia: St Louis, 2003, 146-149.

<sup>7</sup> See the use of the image of the Holy Spirit as fire in Acts 2:2; Rom 12:11; 1 Thess 5:19; cf. Luke 12:49; 24:32.

# 1. Ministry by the Power of the Spirit

In John 6:63 Jesus says: ‘The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and life.’ That short sentence summarises the connection of the Holy Spirit with God’s word. By his word God speaks his Spirit to us and breathes his Spirit into us. The association of ‘spirit’ with spoken words was obvious to all Hebrew and Greek speakers in the ancient world. For them ‘spirit’ meant ‘life-breath,’ the ‘life-power’ that was evident in breathing. Speaking used breath to form words and to carry them into the ears of the hearer. So breath and speaking went together. The power of a person’s speech depended on the life-power of the person that was conveyed by the words that were spoken.

So too with God the Father! So too with Jesus his Son! The risen Lord Jesus spoke the Spirit to his apostles when he commissioned them (John 20:22). And he stills speaks the Spirit to us, the Spirit who speaks the word of God to us (Heb 3:7; 10:15-17; Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Since his words are filled with the Spirit, they do what they say. His words are effective and powerful (1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12). When he speaks, the Spirit acts through his words. The performative power of his words depends on the Holy Spirit that energises them and those who hear them. When he speaks he speaks with the Holy Spirit; his words convey the Spirit.

That too, as you all know, is the teaching of the Book of Concord.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Augsburg Confession teaches that since ‘the Holy Spirit is given through the Word of God’ (AC 18, 3), God has appointed ministers to teach the gospel and to administer the sacraments as the means by which ‘the Holy Spirit is given who effects faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the gospel’ (AC 5). That word is the external word,<sup>9</sup> the embodied word, the word that is heard in the reading of the Scriptures, spoken in the absolution, proclaimed in the sermon, sung in the liturgy, and enacted in Baptism and in the Lord’s Supper.<sup>10</sup> It is the lifeline of the church because it is the means of the Spirit. So then the ministry of the Word is ‘the ministry of the Spirit’ (2 Cor 3:8). It is empowered by the Spirit to convey the Spirit to the faithful people of God through his Word.

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<sup>8</sup> For the bestowal and work of the Spirit through the word, see AC 5:1-4; 18:3; 28:8; *Apol* 4§135; 12§44; 24§58, 59, 70; SA 3.3.3§3-13; LC 2§38, 42, 58; FC Ep 2§1,4, 13, 19; 12§22; FC SD 2§5, 38, 48, 52, 54, 55, 56, 65; 3§16; 11§29, 33, 39, 40, 41, 76, 77; 12§30. See also Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* Oliver and Boyd: Edinburgh and London, 1955, 170-192) for the treatment of this topic in Lutheran Orthodoxy.

<sup>9</sup> Note the words of the condemnation in AC 5, 4: ‘Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external (embodied) word of the gospel through our own preparations, thoughts, and works.’ Luther explains what he means by ‘the external Word’ most fully in SA 3, 3, 8, 3-13. It is the opposite of ‘the internal word’ that is received by the enthusiasts who believed that they had God speaking his words in them. In contrast to this exaltation of immediate spiritual inspiration Luther taught that the Spirit was mediated through the external Word, the embodied Word. It is telling that his teaching on the external Word comes in the article on confession which focuses on the value of private absolution as God’s spoken word of pardon to the sinner. By the use of this term he refers to the written words of the Sacred Scriptures that are preached and heard in the Divine Service, the words that are spoken in the Absolution and enacted in the Sacrament of the Altar, the words that are meditated on and assimilated in daily devotions.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion on the close connection between the external word and the ministry of the word, see Norman Nagel's essay on ‘*Externum Verbum*: Testing Augustana 5 on the Doctrine of the Holy Ministry’, *Lutheran Theological Journal* 30/3 (1996), 101-110.

This teaching of God's word as the means of the Spirit affects us in our ministry in two ways. It affects what we do as pastors as well as how we do it.

First, if we are to bring the Holy Spirit to people, we need to do everything with the word. Everything that is done by the word and in consonance with it is performed by the power of the Holy Spirit. The work of that pastor is consecrated by the most holy word of God.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore holy work, God's work. So we do not just preach and teach with the word; we baptise and commune with the word; we absolve and bless with the word; we pray and praise with the word; we confirm and ordain with the word; we deliver people from the unclean spirits and deliver Christ to them with the word; we minister to people and perform all pastoral acts with the word.<sup>12</sup> When we work with the word we work with the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

But all that needs to be done in faith, for we can only give as we ourselves receive from God. And we act in faith and exercise our faith when we pray according to the words and promises of God. We take him at his word and ask for what he wishes to give us in his word. We may pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit because Jesus has promised that God the Father will give his Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13). What's more, when we pray according to God's word, we pray by the power of the Spirit (Eph 6:18; Jude 20). So in Acts 6:4 the apostles quite rightly hold that devotion to the ministry of the word went hand in hand with devotion to prayer.

All this has far-reaching implications for our work as pastors. These are summed up by Paul's advice to Timothy about the use of the God-breathed, Spirit-filled Scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:14-17. The inspired Scriptures equip us as pastors for our work by teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training us in righteousness.

Second, the teaching of the word as the means of the Spirit affects how we work as pastors. We who bring the Spirit to others must ourselves operate by the power of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> We receive that power from the word of Christ that instituted the ministry of word and sacrament.

Now as you all know, the Augsburg Confession teaches that Christ himself has instituted the ministry of the gospel. That important claim is part of a larger argument about the life and work of the church. Whenever Luther and his fellow reformers touched on any matter of doctrine or practice, they asked who instituted it, and how. In their discussions they always distinguished those things that were divinely instituted from those that had been established by human tradition and authority. In

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<sup>11</sup> See Luther's remarks on this in his explanation of the third commandment in the *Large Catechism* (§ 91-94).

<sup>12</sup> See Luther's remarks in *LW* 40, 21: 'But the first and foremost of all on which everything else depends, is the teaching of the Word of God. For we teach with the Word, we consecrate with the Word, we bind and absolve sins by the Word, we baptize with the Word, we sacrifice with the Word, we judge all things by the Word.'

<sup>13</sup> See Luther's definition of what is spiritual in *LW* 37, 92: 'Thus, all that our body does outwardly and physically, if God's Word is added to it and it is done through faith, is in reality and in name done spiritually. Nothing can be so material, fleshly, or outward, but it becomes spiritual when it is done in the Word and in faith. "Spiritual" is nothing else than what is done in us and by us through the Spirit and faith, whether the object with which we are dealing is physical or spiritual.'

<sup>14</sup> See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.

doing this they were concerned with the divine foundations for the life of the church; they sought to discover and maintain the lifelines of the church.

The purpose of this approach to doing ministry has, I think, not received the attention that it deserves from us who are the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation.<sup>15</sup> It is, of course, true that the concept of divine institution was not invented by the Lutheran reformers, nor is it limited to them. It goes back to the Old Testament and to the work of the Jewish rabbis. It is a key term in Calvin's theology. Yet for all these it functions as a legal-theological term. The assumption is that by his holy ordinances God authorises certain agents to act in his name; by his ordinances he gives them the legal warrant for what they do in his name. The accent in this understanding of divine institution therefore falls on active obedience and legal responsibility.

While Luther and his followers do not disagree with them on the legal character of divine institution, they disagree with them on its function. They understand it evangelically and liturgically as God's ongoing provision for the church and for its faithful work. By instituting what is necessary for the life of the church, God does not establish a chain of command for its government, but the way by which he delivers his gifts through people to people. Take, for example, Luther's teaching on baptism as given in his catechisms. By instituting baptism Christ empowers it with his word and Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> The same word that institutes the rite of baptism produces the new regenerate life of the baptised by the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Christ's words for the institution of Holy Communion do not just give us the warrant for what we need to do; they consecrate the bread and wine as the Spirit-filled body and blood of Christ and so deliver their benefits to those who put their trust in them.<sup>17</sup>

So if something is instituted by Christ through his apostles we can be sure that it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. When we faithfully do what Christ has given us to do in his word, we can be sure that we operate by the power of the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Spirit is the ministry of the word.

This understanding of divine institution, I hold, is the presupposition for the Lutheran rite of ordination as well as for our work in the ministry.<sup>18</sup> The divine power for ministry, its empowerment by the Holy Spirit, comes from God's word,<sup>19</sup> his mandate for our ministry. Thus we ordain with the word of God and prayer;<sup>20</sup> through the use of the words of institution that provide the mandate for the ministry<sup>21</sup> God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to those who are ordained. And the significance of that, like baptism, lasts for a lifetime. Each day we as pastors rely on those foundational words

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<sup>15</sup> The best summary that I know is given by Heinz Eduard Tödt, 'Institution,' *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* Vol 18, Gerhard Müller (ed), Walter de Gruyter: Berlin & New York, 1987, 206-220.

<sup>16</sup> *LC* 4, 6-31, 47-63.

<sup>17</sup> *LC* 5, 4-32.

<sup>18</sup> See John W. Kleinig, 'Ministry and Ordination,' *Lutheran Theological Journal* 36/1 (2002): 25-37.

<sup>19</sup> See *FC SD* 11§77: 'the Holy Spirit wills to be present with his power in the Word and to work through it.'

<sup>20</sup> The careful and illuminating ritual analysis of the Lutheran rite of ordination by Ralph F. Smith in *Luther, Ministry, and Ordination Rites in the Early Reformation Church* (Peter Lang: New York, 1996) does not appreciate the function of the Word in ordination and its connection with prayer for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit on the ordinand.

<sup>21</sup> According to the Confessions, the words of institution that provide the mandate for the ministry of word and sacrament are Matt 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:44-49, and John 20:21-23.

for empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Each day Jesus speaks his inspiring Spirit into us by saying, 'Receive the Holy Spirit;' each day he commissions us by his word and empowers us with the Spirit to administer the keys; each day we can pray for consecration and empowerment by the Holy Spirit in the work of ministry.

## 2. Learning to Receive

In 1983 Edward Farley published an illuminating historical study on the nature of theological education called *Theologia*.<sup>22</sup> In this study he shows how, under the influence of the Enlightenment, theological education changed from the lifelong training in a way of life, the formation and equipment of men for ministry, to the academic study of theology as a science with four disciplines, the three theoretical disciplines of exegetical, historical and systematic theology and the practical, professional discipline of pastoral theology. In this approach practical theology involved the teaching of the skills and functions for leading a congregation in its worship and work.

This way of learning theology, this way of doing theology, hinges on the distinction between theory and practice. Already in the Middle Ages theologians had argued a great deal about whether theology was part of the *vita activa*, the active life, something that was learnt by doing it, like apprentices in a trade, or part of the *vita contemplativa/speculativa*, the contemplative life, something that was learnt by reflection on it, like the study of philosophy. These theologians therefore distinguished between two groups of Christians. There were those who, like Martha, lived an active life of engagement in society. They got married, raised families, and did secular work in the world. Then there were also those who, like Mary, lived contemplative lives in religious orders and monasteries. They were called to devote themselves to meditation and prayer.

Luther is critical of both these approaches, for they both in their own way concentrate on human performance and religious self-development; they both contradict the life of faith; they both promote a piety of the law rather than a piety of the gospel.<sup>23</sup> He recognised that we most obviously try to justify ourselves before God and others by our practice of piety. We all too readily regard our participation in worship and the devotional life of meditation and prayer as something that we have to do apart from Christ and his presence with us. So we think of it as our duty, our work, our achievement, the product of our determination and self-discipline. And that sets us up for failure and spiritual disillusionment.

In contrast to these two ways of life, these two ways of doing theology, Luther advocated a third way, the *vita passiva*, the receptive life of faith in Christ and his word that involves suffering with Christ.<sup>24</sup> This involved the practice of receptive piety, the exercise of evangelical piety.

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Farley, *Theologia: Fragmentation and Unity in Theological Education*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 1983. See also the helpful historical analysis by Lawrence R. Rast Jr. in 'Historic Changes in Pastoral Education,' *Preparing Lutheran Pastors for Today. ILC-Theological Seminaries World Conference*. Paulo Moises Nerbas (ed.), Grafica da Ulbra: Canoas, 2006, 129-150.

<sup>23</sup> See WA 3, 275-277.

<sup>24</sup> See WA 5, 166: 11-19; 31/1, 518: 34ff; 38, 518: 12ff; 41, 56: 20-58:18. Luther's use of this term and its implications have been investigated by Christian Link, 'Vita Passiva,' *Evangelische Theologie* 44

In 1 Corinthians 4:7-8 Saint Paul confronts the enthusiastic members of the church in Corinth; since they were filled with the Spirit, they considered that they were masters of the spiritual life, possessors of spiritual powers rather than receivers of graces. In his response to their smug claims, he challenges them with these ironical words which touch on what is unique about Christian piety:

*What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings!*

Our whole life as the children of God, claims Paul, is a life of reception. We have been justified by the grace of God the Father. So we now live by faith in his grace. As pastors we have our ministry by God's mercy (1 Cor 4:1).<sup>25</sup> We administer God's grace by his grace. Since we believe in him we receive from him all that we need for our work. We receive grace upon grace from the fullness of the incarnate Christ.

Over the last forty years or so there has been much discussion in the church about the gift of the Holy Spirit. We have all, in some way, been touched by it. Some of the discussion has been about when and how Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit. This issue was put on the agenda by the teaching of the Pentecostal churches that there are two stages in our Christian journey. For them the first begins with the experience of conversion when we are born again as children of God; the second begins with our experience of baptism by the Holy Spirit, the infilling of the Holy Spirit for our empowerment in doing the Lord's work. The apparent proof of this, the initial evidence that it has occurred, is speaking in tongues. Every person who has spoken in tongues is regarded as a born-again, Spirit-filled believer. The link between infilling with the Spirit and speaking in tongues has been modified by some groups, but most Pentecostal churches still retain the teaching that each Christian must have a single, definitive experience of baptism by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast to this, the New Testament teaches that all those who have been baptised and believe in the Lord Jesus have received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). There is only one baptism (Eph 4:5) by which we are born again by water and the Spirit (John 3:5). We have all been given the one and same Spirit to drink (1 Cor 12:13). Yet from misunderstanding this teaching, we can also, all too readily, fall into the same trap as the Pentecostals by concluding that every baptised person has the Holy Spirit as a permanent possession that can never be lost.

The notion that we 'possess' the Spirit misreads the Scriptures and misapplies the teaching of the church. Even though Christ gives us his Holy Spirit through his word in baptism, we do not possess the Spirit, any more than a wife possesses her husband and his love because she is married to him. The giving and receiving of love in marriage is a life-long business that has its foundation in a single event, the ceremony of marriage. So too the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit has its foundation in baptism! We keep on receiving the Spirit daily for as long as we live; we cannot live the life of faith without doing so.

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(1984): 315-351, Oswald Bayer, *Theologie*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh, 1994, 42-49, and, most comprehensively, Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Thing: Theology as Church Practice*, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Note how in Acts 14:26 Paul and Barnabas were committed to the grace of God when they were commissioned for their work as missionaries (see also 14:23 and 15:40).

This is so because the Holy Spirit is a person, not a thing. A thing can be possessed, but not a person. That process of giving and receiving begins with a single event, just as breathing begins at birth and married life starts with a wedding. Just as a husband gives himself and his love to his wife on the day of their marriage, so God the Father gave us his Holy Spirit through Jesus on the day that we were baptised. But that's not the end of it. We who have been given access to the Spirit in baptism keep on receiving the Holy Spirit from God the Father for as long as we live here on earth. So, in that sense, we never possess the Spirit, just as we never possess the light of the sun. In fact, for the whole of our life as baptised people we keep on receiving the Holy Spirit. Paul therefore tells the Christians in Ephesus, people like us who have already been baptised, to 'be filled with the Spirit' (Eph 5:18).

The various aspects of the biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit make full sense only if we realise that Christ does not just give us his Holy Spirit once for all, at one point in our lives, but continually. Jesus is the fountain, the spring from which we receive the Holy Spirit, like drinking water from a tap (John 7:37-39). When he declares that his words are 'Spirit and life' (John 6:63), he tells us that he gives his life-giving Spirit through his word. He has been sent by the Father to give us the Spirit by speaking the Father's words to us (John 3:34). In Galatians 3:1-5 St Paul teaches us that we receive the Spirit by hearing God's word. So wherever God's word is proclaimed and enacted, wherever it is used in meditation and prayer, we can be sure that Christ is there giving the Holy Spirit for us to receive.

Since that is so, we go to church and have our daily devotions in order to receive the Holy Spirit. We go to church to be filled with the Spirit. This does not just happen as we hear the word of God in the Bible readings and the sermon, but also as we receive Christ's body and blood. They are our Spirit-filled, Spirit-giving food and drink for our journey through life (1 Cor 10:3-4). There we who have been baptised by one Spirit are given the same Spirit to drink (1 Cor 12:13). That, too, is why we do well to begin and end each day with meditation on God's word and prayer. Jesus encourages us depend on the Spirit by giving us this promise in Luke 11:13: "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him." If we are going to live by the Spirit and walk in the Spirit on our daily journey, we need to receive the Spirit day by day.

In keeping with this teaching on the ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit, Luther proposes an evangelical pattern of piety as reception rather than self-promotion in his influential *Preface to the Wittenberg Edition* of his German writings.<sup>26</sup> The practice of theology involves three things: prayer, meditation, and temptation. All three revolve around ongoing, faithful attention to God's word. These three terms describe the life of faith as a cycle that begins with prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit as the teacher of God's word, concentrates on the reception of the Holy Spirit through meditation on God's word, and results in spiritual attack by Satan who tries to drive the word from the heart of its hearer. Satan's attack, in turn, leads a person back to further prayer and intensified meditation. Luther, therefore, does not envisage the spiritual life as a process of gradual self-development, but as a process of ongoing

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<sup>26</sup> WA 50, 657-661; LW 34, 283-288.



reception from the Triune God. It turns proud, self-sufficient individuals into humble beggars before God.<sup>27</sup>

What is significant about this pattern of devotion is its concentration on the ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit. Practically speaking, the ministry of the gospel has to do with the practice of receptive piety. And that has two sides to it: prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit as the teacher of eternal life through the Scriptures and the ongoing reception of the Holy Spirit through meditation on the external word.

All this affects the way that we do our work as pastors. First, we need to build our daily pastoral routine around our devotions and pray each day for empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Second, we need to develop the practice of receptive piety by meditating on God's word as law and gospel for guidance and equipment by the Holy Spirit, praying together with Christ as guided by his word and the Holy Spirit, and by relying on Christ and his word for power in spiritual warfare. Third, we need to encourage our people to hear the preaching of God's word and to receive the sacrament in order to receive the Holy Spirit and live by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Holy Flame**

In the Old Testament the priests did not light the fire for the altar of burnt offering. It was lit by God himself. On the day that the divine service was inaugurated at the tabernacle, fire came from the Lord's presence in the Holy of Holies and kindled the wood on the altar (Lev 9:23-24). Each morning the priests on duty rekindled the fire with the coals from the previous day; each evening they covered them up with ashes to keep them alight overnight (Lev 6:8-13). Through that supernatural fire God manifested his glorious presence to his people; through that perpetual fire he sanctified the altar and all the offerings that were placed on it.

That heavenly fire prefigures Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit through his word. We who are the keepers of that flame do not generate it; we are called to tend it and to spread it abroad through the ministry of the word. We are also required to train others to keep the holy fire burning in the church. The life of the church depends on keeping that flame alight at all costs and despite the persistent opposition of Satan.

The trouble is that the Spirit's fire is hidden from us; it is a fire that is spread in a hidden way, from altar to altar, and from home to home. That heavenly fire is received through faithful participation in the divine service and kept alight by the practice of receptive piety. Its stewardship is all rather mundane and decidedly unglamorous. It is, in fact, so countercultural that the spread of the Spirit through the ministry of the gospel is regarded with contempt even within the church. And those who minister faithfully all too often suffer ridicule and abuse for their faithfulness.

That abuse comes from many different quarters; it comes from Pentecostal enthusiasm as well as from the liberal theology of inclusivity, from papal catholicity

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<sup>27</sup> For a more comprehensive analysis of this passage and its significance, see John W. Kleinig, 'Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio: What Makes a Theologian?' in *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 66/3 (2002): 255-67 as well as in *Preparing Lutheran Pastors for Today*, ILC-Theological Seminaries World Conference. Paulo Moises Nerbas (ed.), Grafica da Ulbra, Canoas, 2006, 11-37.

as well as from pragmatic decision theology. Yet all that opposition has this one thing in common, the dissociation of the work of the Holy Spirit from the external word of God.<sup>28</sup> Those who disconnect the Spirit from the word disregard the divinely instituted lifeline of the church. Despite their apparent zeal for the Spirit, they, quite unintentionally, dim and perhaps even quench the fire of the Spirit in the congregations that adhere to their teaching and practice.

So the task for those of us who are the heirs of the Lutheran Reformation is to tend the flame of the Holy Spirit through faith in God's word and to minister to others with the Spirit-filled, Spirit-giving word. We have nothing to fear from opposition to this enterprise. We have no reason to be embarrassed at the apparent insignificance of the gospel. Rather, we have good reason for sober confidence in what we are doing, confidence in the presence of the triune God with us, confidence in the God who, through the darkest times, has kept his holy flame alight in his church and in the hearts of its faithful custodians. We are not called to attack those who despise that hidden fire. Our task is to spread that fire, from person to person, through our devotion to God's word, as we are empowered each day by his Holy Spirit.

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<sup>28</sup> See Luther's sharp judgment on Karlstadt and his followers in *LW* 40, 147: 'Do you not see here the devil, the enemy of God's order? With all his mouthing of the words, "Spirit, Spirit, Spirit," he tears down the bridge, the path, the way, the ladder, and all the means by which the Spirit might come to you. Instead of the outward order of God in the material sign of baptism and oral proclamation of the Word of God he wants to teach you, not how the Spirit comes to you but how you come to the Spirit. They would have you learn how to journey on the clouds and ride on the wind.'