

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO “THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT”

Primary Reference: *GA Minutes* 1971: 104-117

Denomination: PCUS

Key Words: Holy Spirit, Baptism with the Holy Spirit, Glossolalia

I. CERTAIN CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE OF THE SPIRIT

A. There are a number of people in historic Protestant churches—and most recently in the Roman Catholic Church—who have had an experience which they call “the baptism of (with, in) the Holy Spirit,” or sometimes “the filling of (with) the Holy Spirit.” This experience has been so meaningful and vivid to those who have gone through it that they have difficulty putting it into words: “a new relationship, a deeper encounter, a closer walk.” Many speak of it primarily as an extraordinary sense of God’s reality and presence, and lay claim to a praise and adoration of God hitherto unknown to them. At the same time they often testify to a new bond of community with those who have had the same experience, and a heightened desire and capacity to bear witness to the gospel. In all aspects of life they claim a deeper love, joy, and peace. Frequently they testify to a multiplicity of “charismata,” such as “speaking in tongues,” prophecy, healing and so on. Many claim that “speaking in tongues” was the primary manifestation of their “filling” or “baptism,” for it has been either an immediate accompaniment of their experience or has followed some time later. They usually disclaim an interest in the spectacular as such; rather, their testimony is to the reality of God, a deeper awareness of his presence, and the wonder that the Holy Spirit has filled their being.

As these people seek to understand what has happened to them, they generally speak of it as an occurrence within their Christian life. Usually they think of themselves as having been believers for a long time; hence, they do not interpret this experience as entrance into faith but as something beyond. Sometimes they speak of salvation *and* being “filled with the Spirit.” They claim that both could (and sometimes do) occur at the same moment, but for most of them there has been a separation in time. Frequently this “baptism with the Spirit” has occurred after the laying on of hands; but this is not true in all cases. For most of these people the testimony is that—with or without the laying on of hands—the experience occurred after extended prayer and seeking. Some speak of this event as a transition within their Christian experience, from the state of Christ’s (or the Spirit’s) being *with* them to his being *in* them. Others say that the transition is rather to be understood as a fuller realization of what was already within them. In any case, these people feel sure that they have entered into a new and exciting life in the spirit.

B. The events which we have enumerated have raised some critical problems for our Church, and especially for those congregations in which the events have occurred. In the first place, we have tended to stress the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer as uniting the believer to Christ and thereby bringing to him God’s grace in salvation. Justification has been viewed as the initial work of the Spirit in applying to man the benefits of Christ’s work, and sanctification as the ongoing work of the Spirit in completing the divine purpose by transforming a human life more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. But in this contemporary experience of the Spirit there seems to be testimony to an additional working of the Spirit that goes beyond the initiation of Christian life (justification) and its progress (sanctification)—a “baptism” or “filling” with the Holy Spirit. The critical question here is how, in the light of the Biblical witness and the Reformed tradition, this understanding is to be adjudged.

In the second place, problems of another kind also arise from the situation to which we have referred. When some members of a congregation claim special pneumatic experiences, or claim extraordinary gifts—e.g., healing, speaking in tongues—the peace, unity, and fellowship of the Church may be seriously jeopardized. Differing views of the Spirit and his work may give rise to a schism between those who claim a Spirit baptism and those who do not, or between those who recognize the validity of such claims and those who do not. Obviously our Church ought to provide some guidance in these matters

where strong differences of opinion may result in contention and the disruption of the Church's work.

Manifestly, any valid guidance that can be given on this, or on any other subject, must be derived from the teachings of Scripture, and must be evaluated in the light of the Standards of our church. We shall therefore attempt to sketch what the Old and the New Testaments have to say with regard to the Spirit, and then to examine the teachings of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms, before proceeding to draw conclusions.

II. CONCERNING THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament offers no teaching regarding the Holy Spirit as a distinct person of the Godhead alongside the Father and the Son. On the few occasions when the term "holy Spirit" occurs (only Isa. 63:10f. and Ps. 51:11 [H. 13]), it is virtually a synonym for the person and presence of the holy God himself. But "the Spirit of God/Yahweh (the LORD)" is mentioned with great frequency throughout the Old Testament and clearly represents an important aspect of its understanding of God and his actions.

A. "Spirit" in General. The Hebrew word for "spirit," *ruach*, occurs approximately 375 times in the Old Testament. Although we are concerned here with the word only as it is applied to God, a few remarks regarding its usage in general would be helpful by way of background.

1. The basic force of *ruach* is physical; wind, breeze, air, breath. The word frequently has this sense in the Old Testament, e.g., Num. 11:31; Jer. 14:6; Gen. 3:8. From this physical force there develops quite naturally the metaphorical one: what is empty, vacuous, without substance, "windy." This meaning is likewise attested in the Old Testament (Isa. 41:29; Jer. 5:13; etc.).
2. Still with the physical sense of "wind, breath," *ruach* is used of the breath which is in man, which keeps him in life (e.g., Isa. 42:5, Ps. 104:29). It thus can denote the vital principle in man and beast (e.g., Gen. 6:17, 7:15, 22; Ecc. 3:19) and even on occasion, life itself (e.g., Job 12:10; Ps. 31:5 [H. 6], "Into thy hand I commit my *ruach*"). Note, however, that although men die when their *ruach* is taken away (Ps. 104:29), *ruach* is never used in the Old Testament to denote an apparition, a ghost, as "spirit" often is in English.
3. Most often, however, when "spirit" is used of man it denotes a dominant disposition, an impulse, a mood, feeling or temper (as in Gen. 41:8; I Kings 21:5; Num. 5:14; Hos. 4:12; Prv. 25:28; etc.). In this connection the Old Testament often depicts God as acting upon the dispositions of individuals or groups—for good or for ill—in order to accomplish his purpose. Thus he sent "an evil spirit" (i.e., bad blood) between the men of Shetchem and Abimelech in order to prepare for the latter's downfall (Jds. 9:23); or he sent "an evil spirit" (a demonic mood, a diabolical disposition) on Saul (I Sam. 16:14-23; 18:10; 19:9); or placed a "lying spirit" in the mouth of the prophets to entice Ahab to his ruin (I Kgs. 22:22f); or poured out "a spirit of deep sleep" (i.e., of stultification) on his own people (Isa. 29:10). On the other hand, he "put a spirit" (i.e., an anxiety) in the Assyrian king to turn him from Jerusalem (Isa. 37:7; II Kings 19:7); he "stirred up" the spirit of the Medes against Babylon (Jer. 51:11), and that of Cyrus to decree the restoration of the Jewish community (Ezra 1:1); he likewise "stirred up the spirit" of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the people to undertake the building of the temple (Hag. 1:14). We see, thus, that God not only confers his Spirit upon men (below), but moves upon their spirits for the accomplishment of his purpose.

B. The Spirit of God/Yahweh

1. The word *ruach* when applied to God may have as wide a range of meanings as does *ruach* in general. Although some of these are not directly germane to our discussion, we shall briefly mention them.
 - a) Even when used of God, *ruach* may retain its primary sense and denote the wind, as when God piled up the waters of the Red Sea by the "blast" (*ruach*) of his nostrils (Exod. 15:8). Frequently, however, "wind" (or "the breath of Yahweh" or "the blast/breath of his nostrils/anger," etc.) is used as a metaphor for God's wrath as he comes to judge (e.g., Isa. 11:15, 40:7, Jer. 4:12f.; Hos. 13:15; Job 4:9).
 - b) Again, God's *ruach* may denote the "breath" which God infuses in man (cf. Gen. 2:7), giving him life and sustaining him in it (e.g. Job 27:3; Ps. 104:29f.). In such passages man's breath is spoken of as "the spirit of God" which is the source of his life, but which is finally withdrawn so that he dies (Job 34:14f.; Gen. 6:3). Sometimes, indeed, the "breath" of Yahweh is extended to denote God's creative power in general, and is made synonymous with his "word" whereby he brought all things into being (Ps. 33:6).

c) Most frequently, however, the term “ruach (Spirit) of God/Yahweh” is used to denote a mysterious divine energy, or charisma, which from time to time came upon men and possessed them, enabling them for the performance of certain specific tasks. This usage of the term is, of course, central to our interest here. The Spirit is always depicted as manifesting itself in unusual powers, gifts, and abilities of various kinds. Sometimes this might be exceptional artistic and technical skill, as when Bezalel was filled “with the Spirit of God, with ability, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship” in order to undertake the preparation of the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exod. 31:3; 35:31). Or it might be an extraordinary understanding and wisdom such as that which enabled Joseph (Gen. 41:33f.) or Daniel (Dan. 5:14) to interpret dreams and other divine revelations. Indeed, wisdom and understanding generally can be spoken of as a gift of the Spirit (Job 32:7f.). But although the gifts of the Spirit were considered exceedingly diverse, and not confined to any single class of people, in the overwhelming majority of its occurrences “the Spirit of God” is associated with the charismatic leaders of Israel’s early period, and with prophetic inspiration.

2. The Spirit and Israel’s Leaders. Israel’s leaders prior to the establishment of the monarchy were said to be men who were filled with the Spirit. This is true of Moses (Num. 11:25) and Joshua (Num. 27:18). In the case of Moses this involved the gift of prophecy, for when “some of the spirit that was upon him” was placed upon the 71 elders, they prophesied. But the Spirit also conveyed the gifts of leadership, for when Moses laid his hand on Joshua to appoint him as his successor we are told that Joshua “was full of the spirit of wisdom,” so that the people obeyed him (Deut. 34:9).

But the possession of the Spirit is associated especially with the Judges. Here the Spirit is conceived as an invading divine power, a charismatic fury, which seized the Judge and inspired him to rally the people and lead them to victory over their foes, and in some cases enable him to perform feats of superhuman strength. Thus the Spirit of Yahweh “came upon” Othniel (Jds. 3:10) and Jephthah (Jds. 11:29), and “took possession” of Gideon (Jds. 6:34, lit. “clothed itself” with him), enabling each to win mighty victories for Israel. Samson’s career began when “the Spirit Yahweh began to stir him” (Jds. 13:25), and when the Spirit “came mightily upon him” he was able to kill a lion with his bare hands (Jds. 14:6) and perform other feats of valor and prodigious strength (Jds. 14:19; 15:14). Saul also stood in the line of the charismatic Judges, for we read (I Sam. 11:6) that, when danger threatened Israel, “The Spirit of God came mightily upon him” and inspired him to rally the clans to battle. In none of these cases are we to think of the Spirit as a permanent possession of the Judge, but rather as a power from God which came to him in moments of emergency; it was not something that was with him always, still less could he pass it on to a successor, as Moses did to Joshua. In the case of Saul we are specifically told that because of his disobedience the Spirit was taken from him, and an “evil spirit” from God sent in to its place (above).

Although David is spoken of as a man of the Spirit (I Sam. 16:13), it is with him that the line of charismatic leaders ends; thereafter king followed king by dynastic succession, and no other ruler in Israel is said to have possessed the Spirit of God (though in Zech. 4:6 it is promised that Zerubbabel will be enabled to complete the temple by God’s Spirit). But the ideal of the Spirit-endowed ruler was treasured as a promise for the future. The time will come (Isa. 28:6) when God himself will be “a spirit of justice—and strength” to Israel’s rulers. There will come an ideal king, “a shoot from the stump of Jesse,” upon whom “the Spirit of Yahweh shall rest” (Isa. 11:1-2); and this Spirit is characterized as “the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh” (i.e., the presence of God’s Spirit will endow the coming king with all these graces). Likewise, God’s Servant, whose task it is to bring God’s salvation to the nations, will have God’s Spirit upon him (Isa. 42:1; cf. also 61:1).

3. Prophecy and the Spirit. The Spirit also manifested itself in prophetic inspiration. As we have seen, when some of the Spirit that was on Moses was transferred to the 70 elders, they prophesied, as did Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:25, 29). Balaam likewise gave his oracles under the influence of the Spirit (Num. 24:2). When Saul met a band of prophets who were prophesying to the sound of music, the Spirit of God “came mightily upon him,” and he too prophesied (I Sam. 10:5f., 10). The ecstatic nature of such experiences is evident from I Samuel 19:23f., where we read that Saul stripped off his clothes and lay naked on the ground all day and all night “prophesying.” Elisha was gripped by God’s “hand” (RSV “power”) while a minstrel played and, in that condition, uttered an oracle (II Kgs. 3:15). Sometimes the Spirit is considered a quasi-physical force which carried the prophet from one place to another, like a great wind blowing the leaves (I Kgs. 18:12; II Kgs. 2:16; Ezek. 3:14, 8:3; 11:1; 43:5). So closely, indeed, were Spirit possession and prophetic utterance connected that it was possible to

speak of the prophet as “the man of the spirit”(Hos. 9:7); it was God’s Spirit that spoke through the prophet’s mouth (II Sam. 23:2; I Kgs. 22:24). Spirit possession was primarily associated with ecstatic prophecy, and (outside Ezekiel) is seldom mentioned in the books of the classical prophets; but even Micah could say, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of Yahweh, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8).

4. The Spirit and All Israel. Although it is occasionally stated that God’s Spirit was with Israel in the wilderness days (Isa. 63:11; Neh. 9:20), the Spirit is never depicted as being bestowed on the people as a whole, but only on certain exceptional individuals. But the hope is expressed that the time will come when all Israel will receive the Spirit. Moses expressed the wish that all God’s people might be prophets (Num. 11:29); and Joel announced the time when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, and all would in fact prophesy (Joel 2:28 f. [H 3:1 f]). But the outpouring of the Spirit will bring not merely the gift of prophecy; it will bring to Israel a new spirit of obedience (Ezek. 36:26f.; cf. 37:14; 39:29), and a new loyalty and devotion to God (Isa. 44:3-5), a spirit of “compassion and supplication” (Zech. 12:10). Indeed the gift of the Spirit is the sign and pledge of the fulfillment of his covenant promises (Isa. 59:21) and of the new future that God has prepared for his people (Isa. 32:15).

5. In the Old Testament, then, the Spirit is not distinct from God, but represents God himself in one aspect of his activity toward his creation. God is in his nature “spirit” and not “flesh” (Isa. 31:3). The Spirit of God is indistinguishable from God in his work as creator (Isa. 40:13), and the presence of the Spirit with God’s people is equivalent to the presence of God himself (Hag. 2:5). As the Psalmist said, “Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11 [H. 13]); and again, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” (Ps. 139:7). To have the gift of the Spirit is to be in the presence of God

III. CONCERNING THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. “*Spirit*” in General. The New Testament word for spirit, *pneuma*, has many of the same general associations as the Old Testament word *ruach*. Its basic sense is that of a movement of air, a wind, a breath. By reason of its use to designate the breath of a living being, it accrued to itself the meaning of the vital principle of life or animation. It is then used generically to denote a simple essence which is without material substance, and thus may mean a human soul (in this sense often an equivalent of *psyche*), an angel, or a demon. Sometimes it carries the general idea of a disposition or influence, an affection, emotion, or desire.

B. *The Spirit of God*. As the term is applied in the New Testament to God, however, it takes on a special meaning. Much of this special meaning is determined by the fact that the writers of the New Testament, as the early Christians generally, were thoroughly schooled in and influenced by the Old Testament Scriptures. It is only natural, therefore, that “the Spirit of the Lord” or “the Spirit of God” (sometimes simply “the Spirit”) occupies a special place in New Testament thought. By virtue of the prominence it has in the New Testament, the particular expression “Holy Spirit” was adopted by the post-apostolic church, the concept developed doctrinally and used in creeds through the centuries, and is the term most popularly used today by Christians (as evidenced by our own Confession of Faith, especially Chapter IX).

1. From the New Testament standpoint, the most significant divergence from the Old Testament usage and meaning appears in the fact that the Holy Spirit is now inseparably connected with Jesus Christ. The nature of this connection is stated in various ways. Among the most prominent are the following:

- a) The Gospels of Matthew and Luke state that the Spirit was uniquely active in the conception of Jesus (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35).
- b) The Spirit descended upon Jesus in a special way at the time of his baptism (Mark 1:10 and parallels).
- c) After his baptism Jesus was led (driven) by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted (Mark 1:12 and parallels).
- d) The deeds and words of Jesus are due to the Spirit’s presence with him (Luke 4:18), and according to Matthew (12:28) his exorcisms are explicitly by the power of God’s Spirit.
- e) The Gospel of John, in which the Spirit figures most prominently, presents Jesus as the one who will send the Spirit upon his disciples (1:33; 16:7), and the giving of the Spirit by the risen

Lord is reported among the resurrection stories (20:22).

f) The Apostle Paul states outright: “The Lord [i.e., Christ] is the Spirit” (II Cor. 3:17).

g) The first epistle of Peter identifies the Spirit of the Old Testament as “the Spirit of Christ” (1:11).

h) There are numerous New Testament passages in which the “Spirit of Christ” is used as a synonym for, or interchangeably with the “Spirit of God” or the “Holy Spirit” (for example: Acts 16:6, 7; II Cor. 3:17, 18; Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:6; Philippians 1:19; I Peter 1:11).

2. Moreover, the unique place occupied by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is further determined by the faith of the disciples that in the events of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the new age had dawned. It was noted above that the messianic king for whom Israel looked was to be one on whom the “Spirit of God shall rest” (Isaiah 11:1-2), and the faith that Jesus was the Messiah is the basis for the New Testament’s close association of the Spirit with Jesus. Also, when the Spirit is said to have descended upon the followers of Jesus on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), it is clear that this event is portrayed as a fulfillment of the eschatological hope of the Jews. Peter’s speech (Acts 2:14-36) cites the words of Joel 2 to the effect that the “last days” have now come, and God is now pouring out his Spirit upon his servants, enabling them to prophesy (see especially Acts 2:16-18). These two aspects of the New Testament concept of the Spirit are merely two of the most basic out of a multitude of ideas which point up the fact that the Spirit is to be understood as an eschatological reality. His presence is not only the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations, but, as we shall also mention again below, the guarantee of the completion of God’s purpose in the future.

3. Since the Spirit is an eschatological reality, and because the church is to be seen as the eschatological people of God, the New Testament also teaches that there is a special connection between the Holy Spirit and the church. Although possession of the Spirit is sometimes said to characterize individual Christians and to work through them in a sense not common to the whole body (see below), the most common concept of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament is that he is present in and among *all* believers. It is not so much, therefore, a matter of an individual’s special relation to God which is expressed by the concept of the Spirit, but the relation between God and his church (“church” being understood here as the body of believers, and not simply the earthly institution). The Spirit is present in *every* believer and *sanctifies* them *all* (Romans 8:9-11; I Cor. 6:19; I Peter 1:2). He is the bond of unity, the power which makes the wholeness of the body a reality (I Cor. 12:4-11, Eph. 4:1-16). Moreover, the Spirit equips church members with gifts, gifts which may seem on occasion to set apart the possessor of the gifts from other believers; but these gifts of the Spirit are always seen in the New Testament as special talents and abilities provided for the purpose of carrying out the church’s mission (as in Acts 2:1 ff. and throughout Acts), or for the purpose of edifying the whole body of believers (Cor. 12:14; Eph. 4:1-16). Never are they to be understood as a ground for boasting or personal glorification. The giver from whom they come is the same Spirit who dwells in all (emphatically in I Cor. 12:4 ff.). Nowhere in the New Testament is there a basis for considering these gifts as a mark of special “spirituality” or a greater degree of piety. Although Paul, for example, may speak of the Corinthian Christians as “spiritual men” (*pneumatikoi*), he makes it clear that their spirituality is not to be understood as an achievement on their part, something of which they may be proud and boastful (see I Cor. 2:14—3:4, and 4:6-7). According to John’s Gospel, “It is not by measure that he gives the Spirit” (3:34).

4. The work of the Holy Spirit is also quite variously expressed in the New Testament. The Christian life arises out of the fact that Christians are “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-8), or from the fact that the Spirit “falls upon” people (as in Acts 10:44, reiterated in 11:15). The Spirit convicts of sin, and it is through the power of the Spirit that men are enabled to turn in repentance and faith to Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-38). By the spirit men have access to God the Father and are built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22). Paul repeatedly characterizes the whole manner of the believers’ life as life “according to the Spirit,” or by using a similar phrase (e.g., Romans 8:4, 5, 6, 10, 14, 16; Galatians 5:16, 25; etc.); and for him the life of faith is nothing other than life “in the Spirit” or led “by the Spirit” (e.g., Romans 8:9, 13, 14; 9:1; Galatians 5:16, 18, 25; etc.). According to John, the Spirit testifies to Christ and his words in the hearts of believers (John 14:26; 16:14); or, to put it another way, he testifies to “the truth” (14:17, 15:26; 16:13), but “the truth” is none other than Christ himself (14:6). The active presence of the Spirit bears concrete results in the believers’ lives; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). The Spirit acts as the believers’ advocate before God (John 14:16, 15:26; 16:7), interceding for them also in prayer (Romans 8:26 f.). He attests that the believers are indeed God’s children and heirs of

his grace (Romans 8:14-17), and serves as the guarantee of all that God will bestow upon them in the future (Roman 8:23 ; II Cor. 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The Spirit is also active in the work of sanctification. By the Spirit all believers are sanctified (I Peter 1:2), and the sanctifying Spirit enables believers to be changed into the likeness of Christ “from one degree of glory to another” (II Cor. 3:18). The Spirit at work among all believers is constantly summoning them to growth in Christ and obedience to his will.

5. There are in the Book of Acts five references to the coming of the Holy Spirit which demand special note. These are particularly important because of the problems of interpretation which they raise, and because many of those who claim or recognize a phenomenon of the present days as “baptism of the Holy Spirit” also lay special emphasis on these passages. The texts to which we refer are as follows:

- 1) Acts 2:1-42 The Pentecost account;
- 2) Acts 8:4-25 Samaritan converts receive the Spirit;
- 3) Acts 9:1-18 Saul of Tarsus is “filled with the Spirit”;
- 4) Acts 10:1-48 The Spirit falls on Cornelius and his household; and 11:1-18
- 5) Acts 19:1-7 The Spirit comes upon those at Ephesus who had previously known only the baptism of John.

In the Pentecost narrative it is clear that we are to understand the disciples’ being “filled with the Spirit” as the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:5 (“before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit”), and also the word of John the Baptist in Luke 3:16 (“he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire”). Here the disciples are empowered by the Spirit to be the witnesses Jesus had commanded them to be (Acts 1:8), and the church is thus launched upon its mission. So much is clear. The problem with which we are faced is whether we should view the disciples as having received the Spirit some time after their initial coming to faith in Jesus as the Christ. Though the writer seems not to have been concerned with that question, it is still a legitimate one for us to ask.

In one way the answer points in the direction of a wide separation between coming to belief and receiving the Holy Spirit. The disciples had believed in Jesus for a long time. Many of them had followed him throughout his earthly ministry, and at least some of them recognized him as the Messiah. So viewed, we have to say that coming to belief and the gift of the Spirit were widely separated in time.

But it is possible to look at the matter in another way. The passage reaches back ultimately (via Acts 1:3-5) to Luke 3:16 (and parallels), where John the Baptist promises that Christ “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” Though all the Gospels record this saying (the Synoptics verbatim), none of them thereafter says anymore of baptism with the Spirit. It is only in Acts 1:3-5, after the crucifixion and resurrection, that the theme is resumed. Jesus appears to the disciples, strengthens their faith (vs. 3), and promises that within a few days they will be “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” The crucifixion had been a shattering experience to the disciples; it left them confused, discouraged, not knowing *what* to believe (e.g., Luke 24:21: “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel . . .”; or vs. 38: “Why are you troubled, and why do questionings arise in your hearts?”). Moreover, it was only after crucifixion and resurrection that they could really believe in Christ as the risen Lord, and could fully understand the gospel they were to proclaim. And within a few days of their coming to full understanding and belief—and after several days of prayer—the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon them.

Whichever way the story is understood, it seems clear that this particular event of the disciples’ being “filled with the Spirit” is viewed as subsequent to their coming to faith in Jesus Christ. The filling with the Spirit came to those who already believe in Christ. There is suggested a kind of movement from initial to a more complete faith as background for the coming of the Holy Spirit. But the precise nature of the relation between this event and the disciples’ faith is not made explicit by the Biblical writer.

Acts 8:4 ff. envisions a rather different set of circumstances. Philip the Evangelist has proclaimed the gospel to the Samaritans; they believe and are baptized. However, these converts do not receive the Holy Spirit until later when Peter and John come down from Jerusalem, pray, and lay hands upon them. Here the coming of the Holy Spirit is clearly removed in time, and thus differentiated, from their conversion. The emphasis in the narrative, however, falls upon the fact that God, through the outpouring of his Spirit, thereby confirms the new turn of events in which people other than Jews are

being brought into the community of believers and so become involved in the mission of Jesus Christ. To Samaritan believers God also sends the Holy Spirit.

The narrative of Saul's conversion in Acts 9:1 ff. (Cf. 22:6-16; 26:4-18) is likewise significant in that there is a period of some three days between the crisis experience on the road to Damascus and his being "filled with the Holy Spirit." The difference here, however, is that there is no prior baptism followed sometime later by the reception of the Spirit. Rather, after his encounter with the Lord and three days of blindness, prayer and fasting, Saul is visited by Ananias who lays hands on him to receive the Holy Spirit and, following this, baptizes Saul. Although there is a separation in time between the crisis experience and reception of the Holy Spirit, once again the precise relationship between the crisis experience and coming to faith is not made explicit. Saul's being "filled" with the Holy Spirit is clearly for the purpose of his becoming a "chosen instrument" to carry the gospel to men and nations.

In Acts 10:1-11:18 where the Holy Spirit is described as falling on Cornelius and his household, this is represented as occurring at the time of their conversion. While the gospel is still being proclaimed by Peter, the Spirit is poured out upon these Gentiles, and baptism is administered thereafter. It may be noted that Cornelius before this event was said to be a "devout man" who "with all his household . . . prayed constantly to God." Following the outpouring of the Spirit, Peter finds himself unable to refuse baptism, since he recognizes that the same thing has happened to the Gentiles that occurred at Pentecost. The Gentiles also, through the reception of the Holy Spirit, have become a part of God's witnessing community.

In Acts 19:1 ff. a group of people—apparently converts of Apollos—who know only the baptism of John, are baptized by Paul in the name of Jesus, and receive the Holy Spirit with the laying on of Paul's hands. The writer clearly sees the case of these "disciples" (notice the word used in 19:1) as differing from others: they had "believed," yet their belief and instruction were imperfect and incomplete; they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. Thus Paul baptizes them—this time in the name of Jesus—and the Spirit comes. We may say, therefore, that in this instance the people involved occupied a sort of middle ground between unbelief and mature faith. What is important for our concern is that the reception of the Spirit is at some distance from their early conversion, and though it occurs in conjunction with their baptism in the name of Jesus, it is described as following thereupon.

This brief survey has dealt with various situations in Acts which treat of faith (baptism, conversion) and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Several of these passages have suggested a view that would allow for a separation in time, and thus a clear differentiation, between an initial act of faith or conversion and the reception of the Spirit. One passage has demonstrated a coincidence between the two. But it should be reiterated that even the initial act of faith itself is a work of the Spirit. What seems to be said in most of these passages is that additional manifestations of the Spirit, while presupposing faith and conversion, are bestowed for specific ministries.

Also it is to be noted that, though faith in Jesus Christ is invariably depicted in Acts as the context for the gift of the Spirit, other matters such as prayer and the laying on of hands are regarded as important preparation for the Spirit's coming. In some instances, as noted, there is also a kind of maturation in faith before the Spirit is received. Obedience is mentioned in one instance (Acts 5:32) as needed for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The total picture suggests that the Holy Spirit is given in the situation of believing openness, growth in faith and obedience and concern for other persons.

6. The expression "baptism of (with, in) the Holy Spirit" calls for further elaboration. Except for Mark 1:8 (see parallels in Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) the expression is peculiar to Acts. The Gospel passages report the words of John the Baptist thus: "I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Yet Jesus is nowhere represented as "baptizing with the Holy Spirit" during his earthly ministry. The theme is taken up again in Acts 1:4-5, where the risen Christ, after making reference to the words attributed by the Gospels to the Baptist, promises his disciples that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit within a few days. One further use of the expression is found in Acts 11:15-16, where Peter, referring to the event of the Spirit's falling on Cornelius and his household, says, "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

It is evident that "baptism with the Holy Spirit" is viewed as occurring in the coming of the Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost and later upon Cornelius and his household. When these events take place, it is said that the Spirit was "poured out" (2:33 and 10:45), or the Spirit "fell on" certain

persons (10:44; 11:15); and those “baptized with the Holy Spirit” are said to be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4) and to have “received the Holy Spirit” (10:47). It would seem clear, by implication, that the other narratives in Acts about the Samaritans, Saul of Tarsus, and Ephesians, where the language is that of the Spirit’s “falling” or “coming,” and their “receiving” or being “filled” with the Spirit (8:16, 17:9; 19:2, 16), likewise refer to fulfillments of the promise of “baptism with the Holy Spirit.”

It is also to be noted that “baptism with the Holy Spirit” is not to be equated with baptism with water. Baptism with water is associated from the outset with repentance, forgiveness of sins, and therefore conversion. For example, according to Mark 1:4-5, John the Baptist comes “preaching a baptism of repentance [*metanoia*—“turning about,” conversion] for the forgiveness of sins,” and people are “baptized in the Jordan River, confessing their sins.” The same association of water baptism with conversion and forgiveness is found in words of Peter on the day of Pentecost:

“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. . .” (Act 2:38). But, as earlier noted, John the Baptist says, in the words of Mark 1:6, “I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit”; and the promise is echoed in the words that conclude Acts 2:38—“and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

“Baptism with the Holy Spirit” is associated with such symbols as fire and wind (e.g., note Matthew 3:11, “. . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” and the imagery of Acts 2:2-3), and points particularly to the investment of power. Basic to all that occurs in Acts thereafter in reference to “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (or the “outpouring,” “falling,” “coming,” etc. of the Spirit) are the words of 1:8—“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. . .” Here it is emphasized that, as a result, the disciples will be able to bear witness to Christ (“. . . and you shall be my witness . . .”). In the various accounts of the coming of the Spirit in Acts immediate signs, particularly tongues and prophecy, often occur (Acts 2:4, 17; 10:46; 19:6). These all would seem to represent the coming of the Spirit for empowerment; to bring forth a mighty testimony to God’s great deeds.

To conclude, in the Book of Acts the expression “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (and similar terms) points not to the forgiveness of sins (symbolized in baptism with water) but to the endowment of power. It is not necessarily identified with conversion. Only those who turn in faith and repentance to Christ may receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit—His power, gifts, etc.—but the actual turning is not necessarily the only point at which this baptism may occur (although it must be insisted that faith and repentance are themselves the work of the Spirit). But in Acts, this baptism of the Spirit invariably assumes faith, repentance, conversion, and the like. The Spirit is given, according to Acts, not only to convert but to empower. However, the concern of Acts seems clearly to be that of showing how one community after another is empowered by the Holy Spirit in the widening outreach of the gospel. Whoever receives this special endowment is enabled thereby to extol God mightily, to witness with great force, and to give to the world extraordinary demonstration of God’s presence and activity. It must be repeated, however, that the teaching of Acts with regard to the Holy Spirit is not to be read in isolation from the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. For example, a similar expression to “baptism of (with, in) the Holy Spirit” is used by Paul in I Cor. 12:13: “For by (or “in”) one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” Here the baptism of the Spirit brings about the unity of all believers in Christ.

7. Statement was made in the Introduction of this report that the central issue is not only “baptism of the Holy Spirit” but also the various “spiritual gifts” or manifestations which may follow this event. Accordingly we now move on to the New Testament witness in this regard, and, in so doing, deal again primarily with the Book of Acts wherein occurrences of this “baptism” or reception of the Spirit are narrated. In the five accounts earlier discussed we may now note that three of these specifically record spiritual manifestations: Acts 2, 10, and 19. According to Acts 2:4, immediately after the disciples at Pentecost were “filled with the Holy Spirit” they “began to speak in other tongues.” In the story of Cornelius and his household, Peter and those with him recognized that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles: “For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God” (Acts 10:46). Following Christian baptism and the laying on of Paul’s hands, the Holy Spirit came upon the Ephesians, and “they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). There is no direct reference to any spiritual gift or manifestation in the account of the Samaritans in Acts 8 or Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. It is evident that the one sign appearing in all the other narratives (Acts 2, 10, 19), that of tongues, represents a kind of ecstatic utterance (so New English Bible in reference to Acts 10 and 19 translates “tongues of ecstasy”). Even in Acts 2, where the record might suggest that the tongues spoken were foreign languages, the ecstatic element also appears (thus the accusation, “They

are filled with new wine,” verse 13). This ecstatic speech is depicted also in close connection with praise (10:46; cf. 2:11) and prophecy (19:6). Since there is no reference to tongues, praise, or prophecy in Acts 8 and 9, it would be concluding too much to say that the writer of Acts assumes any particular spiritual manifestations invariably to accompany the reception of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, it seems clear that the writer of Acts does view speaking in tongues as undeniable evidence that the Holy Spirit has been given.¹

The writings of Paul express a viewpoint which is concerned with another aspect of the Spirit’s activity. Thus the spiritual gifts of which he speaks are not connected with such events as Acts reports, but are regarded as manifestations of the Spirit’s continuing life and work within the church (see, for example, Rom. 12:6-8; I Cor. 7:7; I Cor. 12-14; cf. Ga. 5:16-26). The same understanding is found also in Ephesians 4:1-16 and I Peter 4:10-11. Moreover, in the discourses of Jesus in John 14-16, which are replete with promises concerning the coming of the Spirit and his future work among Jesus’ followers, no mention is made of the kind of events we have seen in Acts; rather, the view of the Spirit and his work to be found here is much more closely akin to the thought of Paul.

8. This leads to the recognition that the New Testament also bears witness to the outpouring of the Spirit at various points in the lives of believers. It may occur at the initiation of the life of faith and/or at later times. According to Acts, the Christian community, already having received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and now coming under persecution, prays earnestly for courage to witness, and, as a result, are again “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:23 ff.). The same thing occasionally is said to happen to individuals. Peter, standing to testify before the rulers of the Jews, is “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 4:8), and Paul according to Acts, had before been filled with the Spirit, Peter at Pentecost and in Damascus.

It is also to be noted that certain persons are described in Acts as “full” of the Holy Spirit. The “Seven” who were chosen to serve the early church, as well as Paul’s companion Barnabas, are singled out as men who were “full of the Holy Spirit” (see 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24). This statement, not made of all the Christians, would seem to emphasize the importance of spiritual endowment for leadership of the early community.

Alongside these references in Acts must be placed other New Testament references to such things as the fruits of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, walking by the Spirit, life in the Spirit. The writer of Ephesians admonishes, “And do not get drunk with wine . . . but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . .” (5:18, 19). Thus here is challenge to the church to be filled with the Spirit, whereby there is continuing enhancement of life in Christ. The Corinthians are encouraged by Paul to “earnestly desire the spiritual gifts” (1 Cor. 14:1), and the Colossians are prayed for that they “may be filled with the knowledge of his [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9). Such statements as these suggest that within the Christian community there is the continuing possibility of, and need for, growth in life in the Spirit.

In light of these statements it is evident that the New Testament witnesses both to the importance of being “filled” with the Spirit and the possibility of further bestowal of the Spirit. In the former case there is both the challenge to such filling (“be filled . . .”) and the depiction of certain Christians as “full of the Spirit.” In the latter instance there is represented additional “filling” wherein is renewal of boldness to witness, the power to discern evil, and the like. There is, all in all, in the New Testament, the continuing challenge to live in the fullness of the Spirit.

9. Finally, the New Testament does not make its claims of honor for the Holy Spirit on the basis of the Spirit’s “supernatural” character. Other spirits, evil in disposition and activity, are not only admitted as existing, but are set in opposition to the Holy Spirit and his purposes (e.g., I Tim. 4:1; Rev. 16:13 f.; Eph. 2:2; I John 2:22; 4:1-6; 5:7 f.). The Holy Spirit is to be honored and trusted, to be regarded as the Spirit of God who alone is the object of faith, not simply because he is spirit, but because of his unique identity as the Spirit of God or of Christ. In the same way, Paul teaches that the value of spiritual gifts is not to be judged by how “supernatural” or extraordinary they are. I Corinthians 12-14 makes it clear that those gifts are most to be desired which are most efficacious in the edification of others. The unusual quality of a gift does not make it a “higher” gift or its possessor a more spiritually mature Christian; rather, the more excellent gift is the one which excels in loving service. Among the long list of spiritual gifts the Apostle mentions several activities which are in no way extraordinary—viz., teaching, helping, administration (I Cor. 12:23)—but which are nonetheless important for the mission of the church.

IV. CONCERNING THE SPIRIT IN THE STANDARDS OF OUR CHURCH

The teaching about the Holy Spirit in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms is found in a number of places and also gathered together in one chapter of the Confession entitled “Of the Holy Spirit” (Chap. IX). We shall briefly summarize, making use of the pattern of Chapter IX.

A. The nature of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is fully God, and therefore, “to be believed in, loved, obeyed, and worshiped throughout all ages.” At the same time as One who proceeds from the Father and the Son, He is a “third person,” and accordingly has His own distinct personal reality and work. (See also Chap. II, 3.)

B. The activity of the Holy Spirit in relation to the world, revelation, and the proclamation of the gospel. The Holy Spirit is “the Lord and Giver of life,” active in the work of creation (see also Chap. IV), and is to be recognized as the source of goodness, purity, and holiness wherever found among men. It is the Holy Spirit who moved the prophets to speak God’s Word and the writers of Scripture to record it infallibly (see also Chap. I). This same Spirit continues particularly to act in the proclamation of the gospel, accompanying it with “persuasive power.”

C. The work of the Holy Spirit in redemption. The Holy Spirit brings about conviction of sin, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ (see also Chap. XII). Accordingly, the Holy Spirit “unites all believers to Christ” and “dwells in them,” whereby they receive “the Spirit of Adoption and Prayer” (see also Chap. XIV). The Holy Spirit as the “Sanctifier” works in the lives of believers, performing various functions, until the day of final redemption (see also Chap. XV).

D. The relation of the Holy Spirit to the Church. The Holy Spirit who dwells in all believers and thus unites them to Christ also unites them to one another in the church (see also Chap. XXVIII). The Holy Spirit “anoints” ministers, “qualifies” officers, and “imparts various gifts and graces” to church members. He also gives efficacy to the “ordinances” of the Church (word, sacraments, worship—see also Chaps. XXIII and XXIX-XXXI). Finally, the Holy Spirit preserves, increases and purifies the church until it is at last “made perfectly holy in the presence of God.”

Since the central question of this report has to do with “the baptism of the Holy Spirit,” its relation to conversion and/or baptism with water, we may now note in more detail the teaching of the Standards in these areas. The crucial matter concerns whether it is proper to view a possible separation in time between conversion and/or baptism with water and a “baptism” or reception of the Holy Spirit. In order to deal with these matters, we shall consider, in order, baptism with water, conversion, and baptism with the Spirit. Thereafter we shall note the teaching of the Standards on “spiritual gifts” and further bestowal of the Holy Spirit.

1. Baptism with water is to be done in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Chap. XXX, Baptism, as a sacrament, is both sign and seal of the grace of God (ingrafting into Christ, remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, resurrection) so that “by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost” (Chap. XXX, 6). Baptism with water accordingly is more than are presentation and confirming of God’s grace: it is also the means or channel of that grace to be conferred by the Holy Spirit. But note that the Confession says that grace is conferred only “by the right use” of this ordinance.

Two other points are also relevant: First, the Confession teaches that the efficacy of baptism is “not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered” (Chap. XXX, 6), that is to say, the grace conferred may yet be in the future or it may, alternatively, already have been conferred before baptism. This statement would seem to be related particularly to infant baptism (which is mentioned in the same section), and provides for the efficacy of such baptism to be appropriated at a later date. Second, the Confession denies baptismal regeneration in two ways: Persons may be regenerated without baptism, and not all persons baptized are regenerated—“grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it [baptism] as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated” (Chap. XXX, 5). It may be observed that among the proof-texts cited in the Confession for this double statement are Acts 10:45-47 and Acts 8:13, 23, the former having to do with Cornelius and his household who receive the Spirit before baptism, and the latter relating to Simon the magician who despite his baptism remains “in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.”

It is evident that, according to the Confession, the grace of God-bringing about remission of sins and regeneration—while closely identified with baptism is not bound to it. What is conferred in baptism may become efficacious by the Spirit at a later time; without baptism there may be salvation; and not all baptized are also regenerated.

2. The word “conversion” is not frequently used in the Standards. It is to be found, as such, in the Confession of Faith only in Chapter XI on “Free Will.” Here it is said that in regard to salvation man is “not able by his own strength to convert himself”; rather it is “God [who] converteth a sinner.” In Chapter XII on “Effectual Calling,” though the word “conversion” is not used, what the word signifies in terms of a “turning” is found in such a statement as that wherein God is said to call men “by his word and Spirit . . . enlightening their minds . . . taking away their heart of stone . . . renewing their wills . . . so as they come most freely . . .” (Chap. XII.1). All of this occurs through “saving faith” (the title of Chap. XVI), which is described as “the grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls: by “the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts”; and through “repentance unto life” (the title of Chap. XVII), whereby a person through the conviction of the Holy Spirit “so grieves for, and hates his sins, as to turn from them all to God.” When the word “conversion” appears in the two catechisms, it is used in connection with reading the Scriptures and preaching. The Larger Catechism, Question 4, speaks of the Scriptures as having the power “to convince and convert sinners”; and in Question 159 it directs those who preach God’s word to his people to do so “aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.”

The concern of the Standards thus is for a total change of man—mind, heart, will, a faith that saves, and repentance that is unto life. It is through the Holy Spirit, in conjunction with the word, that this transformation comes about.

3. “Baptism by the Spirit,” as such, is referred to only in the Larger Catechism, Question 167. This question deals with “the needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism.” According to the Catechism this “is to be performed by us all our life long.” Illustrations of this are given such as “being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism . . . by growing up to assure of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in this sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized . . . and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.” This statement makes clear that baptism by the Spirit is to be understood in close connection with baptism by water; indeed, that it is not actually by water itself but by the Spirit that we are baptized into the body of Christ.

Accordingly, we may note that the Catechism lays stress on baptism by the Spirit as referring not so much to pardon of sin, and like blessings, but to the uniting power of the Spirit whereby we become one body with others. It may be added that there is some suggestion here that the effectuality of this baptism is not limited to the moment when the sacrament is received. Thus even as we are to “grow up” to assurance of pardon, so through walking in brotherly love, are we to come to express our baptism by the Spirit into the one body.

4. It is evident that the Standards envision the possibility of separation in time between baptism with water and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Whether this is understood in terms of a baptism with water that only becomes efficacious at a later time by the Holy Spirit, or as an aspect of that into which one may grow, there may be many years between. The Standards do not, however, seem to consider a possible separation in time between conversion and the reception of the Spirit, since the critical question, emerging especially from the practice of infant baptism, is the relationship of such baptism to its future efficacy, whether thought of as appropriation of grace, conversion of the whole man, or baptism into the one body. What is important for our consideration in this report, however, is that the Standards recognize a differentiation, and the possibility or chronological separation, between baptism with water and baptism with the Holy Spirit. The latter may precede the former, or may follow it.

5. “Spiritual gifts” have little mention in the Standards. We have already noted that statement in the Confession’s chapter on the Holy Spirit (IX) to the effect that the Holy Spirit “imparts various gifts and graces” to the members of Christ’s body. Outside of this reference in Chapter IX (a chapter not in the original Confession), there is nothing to be found about spiritual gifts in the Standards. The Larger Catechism also makes reference to “gifts and graces”; however, the giver there is described as the exalted Christ who “furnisheth his ministers and people with gifts and graces” (Q. 54). The Shorter Catechism is silent about spiritual gifts and graces.

6. Finally, the matter of further bestowal of the Spirit or of gifts of the Holy Spirit is not directly mentioned. The closest approximation would seem to be that of Larger Catechism, Q. 182, where the Spirit is described as helping in prayer by “quickening in our hearts (although not in all persons, nor at all times in the same measure) those apprehensions, affections, and graces, which

are requisite for the right performance. . . .” There is also reference in the Larger Catechism, Question 75, to the “powerful operation” of the Holy Spirit in sanctification whereby God’s chosen are in time “renewed in their whole man after the image of God” by various “saving graces” within being “stirred up, increased, and strengthened as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise into newness of life.” Hence, there is some picture of further operations of the Holy Spirit in the direction of quickening and renewal.

V. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

An evaluation of contemporary events involving a “baptism of the Holy Spirit” must begin, as the structure of the report implies, with the guidance furnished us by the Scriptures. At the same time we are called upon to give serious heed to the doctrinal Standards of our denomination. Likewise it is imperative that we seek to understand what is deeply involved, and at stake for those who claim to have had such a “baptism” within their Christian experience, and particular “charismatic” manifestations. The Scriptures remain our primary source; yet our understanding of Scripture depends upon the illumination provided by the Spirit himself.

Our study of the Old and New Testaments, however, has revealed no single consistent doctrine of the Spirit which is now immediately applicable to the contemporary situation; nor has it furnished us with a simple straight line of doctrinal development of this regard. Moreover, we must avoid the temptation to improve on the concept of the Spirit through any speculative theory drawn from other sources. Hence, our point of departure in this task can be no other than the New Testament’s close identification of the Spirit with Jesus Christ. As Christians we must be guided first of all by God’s self-revelation in Christ, testing our understanding by the Scripture’s testimony to him who is our Lord.

A As we seek to give an expression of our faith in the Holy Spirit that will be an aid in comprehending the experiences which have prompted the present study, there are several basic principles which we must bear in mind. First, as the Scriptures repeatedly affirm, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the holy God, the God of the Bible. All our speech about the Holy Spirit is therefore speech about God. We shall make no attempt to define the concept of “spirit” in general and then move to an understanding of the Holy Spirit based on our ideas about the essential properties or characteristics of “spirit.” Rather, our task is to discern the meaning of God’s action, in the person of his Spirit, in the lives of his people.

Second, as the New Testament makes clear, and as Calvin aptly reminds us (*Institutes*, III, i. 4), there is no understanding of the Spirit apart from faith. This means that all our statements about the Holy Spirit are in essence affirmations of faith. They are not “factual” statements in the sense that they purport to give objective data or information which may then be tested for accuracy by scientific means. In speaking of the Holy Spirit we speak *from* faith to faith.

Third, since the Holy Spirit is the spirit of the God whom we know only through Jesus Christ, we are compelled, in regard to the contemporary spiritual phenomena, to “test the spirits to see whether they are of God” by the measure of their confession of Jesus Christ (I John 4:1-3). Nothing that contradicts what we see in Christ can rightly be regarded as the activity of the Spirit; on the other hand, whatever bears witness to Christ and his work of the redemption of mankind exhibits the incontrovertible evidence of the Spirit’s presence.

B With the foregoing principles in mind, and with constant reference to the Biblical teachings, the Standards of our Church, and the contemporary situation, the Permanent Theological Committee offers the following statement for the guidance of the Assembly.

1. The greatest emphasis in the Bible, and the most prominent aspect of our Reformed tradition, is to be found in the work of the Spirit in bestowing upon man all the benefits of God which come to him in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ is the way whereby all benefits are received, such as justification, sanctification, and eternal life (I Cor. 6:11; John 3:16; Confession of Faith, XVI, 2), and through the Holy Spirit this salvation is a reality.
2. The Holy Spirit accordingly dwells in all who thus believe. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him (Rom. 8:9). Thus it is impossible to speak of a transition within Christian existence from the state of Spirit’s being with to being in. The Spirit indwells all Christians.
3. Baptism with water is a means of grace whereby the grace of salvation is not only offered but conferred by the Holy Spirit (Confession, XXX, 6). However, according to the Confession, the significance of baptism is not tied to the moment of administration, for, though God’s saving

grace is conferred thereby, such grace may become efficacious at a later time, or it may have become efficacious earlier. For example, there are those who do not come to an appropriation of this grace (especially if baptized in infancy) until a later date. Calvin speaks (particularly regarding infants) of being “baptized into future repentance and faith” (*Institutes* IV, 20), and urges that this should fire us with greater zeal for renewal in later years. From this perspective it is possible to say that baptism with water may very well be separated from salvation, or at least from full entrance upon it. Though baptism is a channel of God’s grace, this grace is not automatically efficacious. Accordingly, there may be special need in the Reformed tradition to lay stress on later occasions (such as entrance into communicant membership) on which God’s grace may also be appropriated. Reformed teaching about baptism must be held in creative tension with all that is also said about the importance of conversion and regeneration, and the practice of our church should be in harmony therewith.

4. “Baptism with the Holy Spirit,” as the Book of Acts portrays it, is a phrase which refers most often to the empowering of those who believe to share in the mission of Jesus Christ. The significance of “baptism with the Spirit” is also represented in terms such as “outpouring,” “falling upon,” “filling,” and “receiving,” being for the most part attempts to depict that action of God whereby believers are enabled to give expression to the gospel through extraordinary praise, powerful witness, and boldness of action. Accordingly, those who speak of such a “baptism with the Spirit,” and who give evidence of this special empowering work of the Spirit, can claim Scriptural support. Further, since “baptism with the Spirit” may not be at the same time as baptism with water and/or conversion, we need to be open-minded toward those today who claim an intervening period of time.² If this experience signifies in some sense a deepening of faith and awareness of God’s presence and power, we may be thankful.

5. We are called upon to recognize a work of the Spirit which involves the application of special gifts and benefits to the members of Christ’s church. The Confession of Faith suggests this in Chapter IX, 4 where, following the paragraphs on the Spirit’s work in redemption, the words, in part, read, “He calls and anoints ministers for their holy office, qualifies all other officers in the church for their special work, and imparts various gifts and graces to its members.” Here is a special work of the Holy Spirit of calling and anointing that is peculiarly related to the life of the believing community. We would add that it is important for the church constantly to bear this work of the Holy Spirit in mind so that there will be a continuing readiness for, and recognition of the calling, the qualifying and the imparting of the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit to the community of faith. Both a fresh confrontation with the biblical record and contemporary spiritual experience, we believe, are bringing us into a fuller understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit.

6. The “baptism of the Holy Spirit” may be signified by certain pneumatic phenomena, such as speaking in tongues and prophecy (Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6). In the Old Testament, as we have noted, the Spirit is understood at times as an invading power, a charismatic fury; also it is frequently associated with ecstatic prophecy. However since the Spirit came only to certain exceptional persons, this was quite limited. With the New Testament dispensation the Spirit is now available to all who believe in Jesus Christ. Hence such signs of this invading power as ecstatic language and prophecy could occur with anyone who has experienced this visitation. Clearly it would be a mistake to say that all upon whom the Spirit comes must manifest specific pneumatic phenomena. The Spirit usually manifests himself in other ways. However, that such extraordinary manifestations may occur—and in so doing give evidence of the Spirit’s working—is quite in accord with the witness of the New Testament.

7. There may be further bestowal of the Holy Spirit. “Baptism with the Spirit” signifies the initial outpouring of God’s Spirit wherein the community and/or person is filled with the presence and power of God. But also there may be later bestowal in such fashion as to signify implementation of the original event, whether or not accompanied by pneumatic phenomena (cf. Acts 2:4 with 4:31). This renewed activity of the Spirit ought not to be designated “baptism” (at least, the New Testament never uses this term for it), but as “filling,” wherein the empowering Spirit moves to renew the believer and believing community.

8. The bestowal and reception of the Spirit, or the gifts of the Spirit, do not suggest that some Christians have more of the Holy Spirit than others. Such expressions as “baptism,” “filling,” and the like point rather to the Spirit’s implementing activity: endowment for the witness to the gospel. The Spirit is active in all believers, and they may be “filled” with the Spirit in various

ways for the mission of the Church. It should be added that such expressions as “having” or “filled with” the Spirit are not to be construed as obviating the possibility and actuality of growth in grace and knowledge.

9. Both the coming of the Spirit himself and the various abilities or charismata which he may bestow upon men are, above all, to be received as the benefits of God’s free grace. Neither the Spirit, then, nor his gifts may be considered “possessions” of the believer; he does not own them, nor can he presume that they are, or will be, at all times (or at any given time) available. Each occasion on which the Spirit’s presence is known or his gifts made manifest is to be an occasion for new thanksgiving and praise to God. Hence, there should be no jeopardizing of the peace, unity, and fellowship of the Church because of special experiences of the Holy Spirit, but a rejoicing together in all those ways whereby God leads His people into fuller apprehension of the riches of His grace.³

10. An experience of the Spirit can neither be validated as such, nor evaluated with respect to its theological significance, by any scientific (i.e., psychological, sociological, etc.) means. It is to be acknowledged that such events, just as any other human events, may become the legitimate objects of scientific inquiry without prejudging the results of such inquiry. But regardless of the scientific conclusions which may be reached, the question of the theological significance of these phenomena will remain, and it may be answered only within the context of the Christian faith. The Corinthians’ ability to speak in tongues, for example, may have a perfectly good psychological explanation; but whether the Spirit of Jesus Christ was active in that phenomenon is a question which neither psychology nor any other science can answer. But this conclusion leads also to the observation that the extraordinary or unusual nature of an experience (and the same would apply to gifts) is no criterion by which to judge its significance for faith. Ecstasy is not in itself an unambiguous occurrence. Not every dramatic event, experience, or ecstasy is necessarily a work of the Spirit.⁴

11. It is clear that there is Biblical and Reformed witness concerning baptism of the Holy Spirit and special endowments of the Holy Spirit in the believing community. Of course, it is impossible to make any general pronouncement concerning the validity of particular claims made, since multiple factors may be at work. But where there is divisiveness, judgment (expressed or implied) on the lives of others, an attitude of pride or boasting, etc., the Spirit of God is not at work. However, where such an experience gives evidence of an empowering and renewing work of Christ in the life of the individual and the church, it may be acknowledged with gratitude. This means above all that Christ should be glorified, his own Spirit made manifest in human lives, and the Church edified. For such evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit the Church may rejoice.

NOTES

¹ So Alan Richardson in his *An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*: “St. Luke regards ‘speaking with tongues’ (*glossolalia*) as an unmistakable sign of the gift of the Spirit. . . .” (p. 119).

² We here call attention to the 1965 General Assembly declaration on “Glossolalia,” which includes this statement: “Scripture in several cases clearly distinguishes between a baptism with water and a baptism with the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; Acts 1:5). We would agree that, since Pentecost, baptism and receiving the Spirit belong together in a single experience (Acts 2:38). But both Scripture and Confession face the possibility that there may be a lapse of time between the two (Acts 8, 10, 19; Confession XXX, 5).”

³ The UPUSA Church 1970 declaration, “The Work of the Holy Spirit,” in the section entitled “Guideline,” begins thus: “We believe the Church needs to pray for a sensitivity to see the manifestations of the Holy Spirit in our world today. . . . We believe that those who are newly endowed with gifts and perceptions of the spirit have an enthusiasm and joy to give, and we also believe that those who rejoice in our traditions of having all things done in ‘decency and order’ have a sobering depth to give. We therefore plead for a mutuality of respect and affection.”

⁴ Compare this statement from the 1965 General Assembly declaration on “Glossolalia”: “*The gifts of the Spirit can be counterfeited or sought for the wrong motive* (I John 4:1). There is no reason to suppose that forms of utterance voiced at the prompting of the Spirit cannot be initiated or cultivated by men and women variously motivated. While there may be among us some who ‘speak in tongues’ as the Spirit gives them utterance, there may also be present among us those who, succeeding in the effort to ‘speak in tongues’ unwarrantedly assume their utterance to be an evidence of the Spirit of Christ. The gift may be sought and its counterfeit achieved from wrong motives.”