

THE HOLY SPIRIT

TRANSLATION

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(During the nineteenth century, various Pentecostal movements or “baptism in the Holy Spirit” movements had blossomed across America. In January 1901, a man by the name of Charles Fox Parham, who ran a Bible school in Topeka, Kansas, began teaching that according to Acts 2, speaking in tongues was the true and only confirmation that one had received the Holy Spirit. What transpired became what many have called the beginning of the twentieth century Pentecostal Movement in America. In a short time, the movement spread to Los Angeles as the famous Azusa Street revival and has continued spreading ever since.

It may be purely coincidental that the following article on “The Holy Spirit” was Sverdrup’s address that same year to the 1901 Annual Conference in June in which he discusses what he believes to be the proper function of the Holy Spirit. Coincidental or not, the care in which he lays out the biblical basis for the work of the Holy Spirit is quite stunning as a rebuttal—especially his approach to the Acts 2 account near the end of this translation. Here Sverdrup views the “violent rushing wind,” “tongues of fire,” and the ability “to speak with other tongues” as manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s work in the context of missions, not as a witness to some “Second Baptism” of the Holy Spirit. In fact, in a later article, Sverdrup specifically questions the veracity of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Topeka, Kansas: “Does the congregation begin in Topeka or in Jerusalem?” (See Sverdrup Journal, vol. 9: 91).

However, most readers of the translation below will be moved by Sverdrup’s overwhelming belief in the biblical work of the Holy Spirit as a call to repentance, justification, and sanctification of the believer rather than as a side issue involving some tongue-speaking movement. —LOD)

Source: Message presented to the 1901 Annual Meeting of the Lutheran Free Church; recorded in the Annual Meeting Minutes, pp. 97-110; from *Professor Georg Sverdrups Samlede Skrifter i Udvalg*, 4:377-387.

In the short time available for an opening address, it isn’t easy to cover or even touch on all the questions this subject raises. We must limit the talk, and so it is without question suitable to the purpose and fruitful for us to confine our discussion to the Spirit who was given on the festival of Pentecost and His activity from then on. And so we fix our sight intently upon that great Gift—the freedom and life of the congregation—which is, of course, the same as the Holy Spirit’s work in the time from Pentecost to the return of the Lord.

When Jesus says in Luke 11:13: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” He in that question wisely meant that the Holy Spirit is the gift above all gifts for humanity, the truly good Gift, which humanity can pray for and can receive, the highest good we can receive in this present time. And in the same way, He also has said that the Holy Spirit is a gift that can only be received from the Father and can only be received in answer to prayer.

Already this word of Jesus must seriously move us to desire the gift of the Holy Spirit. And when in John’s Gospel, we read Jesus’ promises and testimony, we see how necessary the Spirit is and how blessed and splendid a Gift the Holy Spirit is. Further, when we see how certain and sure it is that the Spirit will come after He [Jesus] has gone and will be His substitute on earth and His children’s Advocate and Comforter, so much more must our desire be kindled to be sharers in the Holy Spirit.

Consider what Jesus said to Nicodemus about the Spirit: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” [John 3:5].

And in Capernaum: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing” [John 6:63].

And in Jerusalem at the festival: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water’” [John 7:37-38]. But here He was speaking about the Spirit that those who were in Him would receive [in the future], for at the time the Holy Spirit had not yet come since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

And in particular we remember what Jesus said about the Spirit in the night when He was betrayed, when He wished to comfort His disciples in the overwhelming sorrow and disappointment that His departure would cause them. There He promised the Spirit as His true Successor among the disciples, who even better than Himself could lead them, teach them, comfort them, protect them, and work through them, because the Spirit would enter their hearts and be with them for all time. This Jesus spoke about in John 14:16-17: “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [. . .]; *that* is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you.”

And in John 14:26: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.”

And in John 15:26: “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.”

Also in John 16:7-15:

“But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you;

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now.

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

He will glorify Me, for He will take of mine and will disclose it to you.

All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of mine and will disclose *it* to you.”

With all these words in mind, our hearts may well burn through, having Christ’s promises poured out upon us individually. And to these words, we may add the words Jesus spoke concerning the Spirit after His resurrection in Luke’s Gospel, 24:49: “And behold I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

And in Acts 1:4, 5, and 8: “Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, ‘Which,’ *He said*, ‘you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. . . . But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.’”

We have set down these noteworthy promises at length in order that it will be easier to understand what the band of disciples waited for and what they received on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and what we have received in part, and can receive in part, and what we in all circumstances need in order to be part of God’s living congregation.

Based on these promises and the report of what occurred on the day of Pentecost and afterward as well as what was recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles and the history of the Church, it is evident that the Holy Spirit is

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

sent to the disciples in order to fashion the Body of Christ and through that to continue Christ’s work in the world to the salvation of souls and the coming

of God's kingdom, to His own glory and praise. Because Peter says of the risen, ascended Jesus in Acts 2:33: "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear."

Jesus is the Head, the congregation on the earth is the Body; the bond that unites them, the life that flows through them both, is the Holy Spirit, the Father's gift to the Son and the Son's gift to the congregation. And yet the Spirit isn't only the spiritual life of Christ and the congregation, but a living, divine Person; for otherwise Jesus couldn't call Him "another Counselor," who in His place would be with the disciples forever.

But if the Spirit is Christ's Spirit that the risen and ascended Savior sends to His members on earth, then it could be said that Christ's work is not ended at His ascension, but continues, expands, and is multiplied by His Spirit.

And if the Spirit is the spirit of the congregation, so it also follows that only where the Spirit is, there the congregation is, for only because the Spirit lives in the congregation does the congregation exist and work. As Christ loved the congregation and gave Himself for it "through the eternal Spirit," (Hebrews 9:14), so the congregation also returns Christ's love in the power of the same Spirit, and what binds these two is love—the eternal uniting bond which makes the two one.

As we look a little closer at how the Spirit of Christ, according the promise and according to the fulfillment, works from the festival of Pentecost on, we see that the Spirit is revealed first and foremost as

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

The living Truth is Christ Himself. Everything outside of Him is corrupted, deranged, and ruined by sin and therefore strays from and is fighting against the Truth. Only Christ is the reflection of glory and the picture of God's essence. Here sin cannot corrupt, nor can it destroy; much more, here as well is the answer to sin and the raising up of the fallen. Here once more is found the picture of God; here again is the true human life; here is the true wisdom, the right love. He is the Light in the darkness of the world; He is the bright guiding Star in the night. And because this Light will continue to shine in the world after He is taken up to the Father's right hand, He has sent the Spirit of Truth. This Spirit will make them children of Light, who open their hearts before Him, and through them He will work and bear witness everywhere in order to draw even more souls into the kingdom of Light.

Where He finds room in the heart, The Spirit of Truth works two things: faith and the desire to witness. When the Spirit reveals Christ to the heart, then clarity streams in with such power that it is as if the sun of springtime has come over the dark world. Then sin and guilt are revealed as never before, then every little stain is noticed, then the recognition of every sin becomes strong and deep so

that the heart trembles under it even as did those at Sinai in the wilderness; above all these sins is this—that “they do not believe in Me.” But then God’s unending love through Jesus Christ is revealed in the soul and blessed reconciliation is declared to the trembling heart, and the blood of Jesus becomes the poor sinner’s cleansing—all of grace, grace alone. Thus faith is created through the Spirit of Truth.

And where there is faith, the most gripping need and impulse to bear witness will follow. The light must shine, and he who has felt the working of the Spirit of Truth can do no other than witness to the truth. After one has experienced the Spirit of Truth, an awareness grows of the opposition between darkness and light in the moral senses of the words.

Anyone who has seen where his own life would have ended had he continued in darkness is gripped by a burning desire to stop as many as can be stopped from continuing on their blind path to destruction. And there arises an endless zeal to lead some of these unfortunates to the Savior’s way of life. That Spirit, which proceeds from Jesus, also draws to Jesus all whom it moves; and the love of God will always seek to create love for God in the heart.

Jesus says, “Because I live you will live also” [John 14:19]. Therefore, this is true also of the Spirit, whom He sends:

THE SPIRIT OF LIFE

All spiritual life among us comes through the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is sent to create the Body of Christ, He must give [it] the life of Christ, for a body without life is not a body, but a corpse. From the first weak movement in the soul, the first emotion in the conscience, until the life is made perfect in glory—all are the result of the Holy Spirit’s work. The Holy Spirit begins, continues, and completes the spiritual life in us. The Spirit works faith, the Spirit gives life, the Spirit creates the new child of God, the Spirit gives the new person strength and growth, the Spirit completes sanctification’s work in glory.

The Spirit’s work cannot be emphasized enough. For if we are mistaken and think either that the life in God from the beginning is our work or, at any rate, that later on growth comes because of our own work, it becomes inevitable that we will end up in spiritual pride and Pharisaism. Neither conversion nor justification, nor new birth nor sanctification are our work; they are all the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and they are entirely and completely of grace, so that the more we are sanctified, the more humble we become. If we then feel our shame deeply and genuinely and

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that all is of grace, we also come to see that our sanctification only goes forward as our old nature dies and is buried, obliterated, and crucified.

In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit in us comes to pass against the resistance of the flesh, which attempts to block and hinder the Spirit's work. Sin and death will always seek to shut out grace and life in us to the extent that they find room in the heart.

It is, therefore, not an abnormal condition, but a normal condition for the believing soul to ask in agony: "How can I be a mature Christian when I, after so long a struggle in sanctification, still experience the wickedness of the flesh and evil desire within me?" Oh, yes, because only in the light does one see the clouds; in the darkness they disappear. Be glad so long as you can see the blemishes; the day you don't see them, blindness has covered the spiritual eyes, and the light has been extinguished by the night. The old flesh can never be good, and the day we don't see the evil, then the battle is over because the flesh has won.

Neither conversion nor justification, nor new birth nor sanctification are our work; they are all the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and they are entirely and completely of grace, so that the more we are sanctified, the more humble we become.

[The filling of] the Holy Spirit is the completion of sanctification. The question for us is: Will we really give the Spirit room and permit Him to rule over our will and our abilities so that He can make us one with the humble and suffering Savior,

inssofar as the flesh is forced back? Because of this we shall one day be able to bear the image of Glory forever.

Therefore, there are not any in the real evangelical church who believe that sanctification also is the gracious work of God's Spirit and who also entertain the doctrine of purgatory. If anyone pretends to truly believe the Gospel but then falsifies the teaching on sanctification so that it becomes more or less a work of man, he is consequently following the Catholic teaching on purgatory. For without full holiness, no one can see God, but no one has the boldness to maintain that human endeavor leads to perfect purity or holiness. Therefore, purgatory would still allow the one who dies unclean and imperfect, time and opportunity to become pure and holy before he meets God and judgment face to face. But if one takes seriously the notion that sanctification is by the grace of the Holy Spirit and that it is only imperfect here below because the body of sin stands in the way, we then understand what it means when our catechism says that sin is eradicated through a blessed death. For the blessed death does away with sin's power in the body and God's grace fills the soul, unhindered, with eternal life and awakens the body on the last day in a transfigured and glorified form.

Therefore, sanctification ends with glorification in the resurrection of the dead where God is all and in all, and thus the work of the Spirit is completed.

But many say, "What about the many admonitions about doing good works and laying aside the old nature and putting on the new?" If everything is the work of the Spirit, how do these admonitions apply to us? All these admonitions are warnings to us to follow and obey the Spirit's leading. The Spirit creates new life and new desire in God's children. The question is whether we will present ourselves with all we are and all we have to God's service and let the Spirit control. We are not our own in this matter, but God's; therefore, it is so much more necessary that we employ the strength and will which the Lord Himself gives us with fear and trembling unto our salvation and growth. (Philippians 2:12, 13). That is, with the admonitions to sanctification as with admonitions to believe, all are in agreement on this, that faith is God's gift and the work of the Holy Spirit; nevertheless, it is said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" [Acts 16:31]. But just as faith isn't created in us without struggle and doubt, so neither is sanctification accomplished in us without a struggle against the flesh and sin and the world, which sadly predominate and rule in our hearts. And the more God's Spirit finds room in our heart, so much more do we feel pain over the fact that there is still so much of our own will and our own mind left. Thus it has always been the complaint of the most awakened and holy Christians that they see themselves so far from that ideal of holiness which they behold in Jesus Christ, whom the Holy Spirit reveals to them.

So then, sanctification isn't the servitude of slaves, but life and strength from God, a holy gift, which, to be sure, brings with it the crucifixion of the flesh, from purity to purity, because it leads us steadily and always from grace to grace, for the Spirit of Life is also

THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER

Grace is not acquired without prayer, that is to say, without living desire and poverty of spirit. It is the Holy Spirit's doing to create the endless and self-denying longing after peace and reconciliation with God which a person feels especially in his time of awakening and conversion. It is also the work of the Holy Spirit to make those who walk in fear of God and faith feel so poor and needy that they long for God and His fullness as the deer for the springs of water. The image of God and His likeness seem so far away, and our conduct so imperfect. But it is at this time that prayers and sighs arise so much more sincerely from the soul's depth, and the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered, and our Lord Jesus Christ's grace and the Father's love sink down into the sorrowing and praying soul, and out of the soil made wet by tears, the living seed grows all the more strongly.

But the Holy Spirit's work benefits not only the single person. He is Christ's

Spirit and the Spirit of Christ's Body. Therefore, the Spirit appears in spiritual power after Pentecost as

THE SPIRIT OF THE KINGDOM

For the building up of the Body of Christ, or spiritual growth, consist of two equally significant and essential movements. The one is always the heartfelt union with the Leader, Christ; the other is the steady expansion and spread of Christ's kingdom on earth. This kingdom of Christ and God is spread through testimony or the preaching of the Gospel, which is done by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that enables Christ's disciples to be His witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria, and even unto the remotest part of the earth."

And remarkably it is this side or branch of the Holy Spirit's work that in particular moves forward in the signs that accompanied the Holy Spirit's outpouring at the feast of Pentecost. It is precisely the Holy Spirit's power for the extension of the kingdom and the conquest of the world for Christ which was symbolized by these accompanying signs. All three signs point in that direction:

"And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind . . ." [Acts 2:2].

"And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them" [Acts 2:3].

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance" [Acts 2:4].

These three outward, visible, and audible signs (Acts 2:33), which could be observed both by believers and unbelievers, by the congregation and the multitudes, are truly the signs of missions. What indeed could be a more fitting symbol of this new, strong, though unseen force, which by the Holy Spirit's power has come into the world, than the wind and the storm, which none can see, but whose works nonetheless are so evident?

In like manner, the Holy Spirit's power is the true strength of the kingdom by which both Jews and heathen, both the devil and the world, are overcome, a power through which bonds are burst in hearts that are bound, prison doors are thrown open, yokes are taken off people's necks, the power of darkness is destroyed, and the blessed, eternal kingdom of Light is extended. Let us take our place in the service of this power; let us work in its power for the cause of light and truth in the world!

The distributed tongues of fire, what else do they mean but the light and warmth which are themselves proof that ". . . the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). It is the fire of love, which makes it so that the power from God does not come to nothing, but to healing and life. The Holy Spirit is given in order to restore the lost image of God in mankind; and what is the image of God but love, since God is love? And it is not the kingdom of power and oppression that Jesus has

brought forth through His suffering and death, and it is not that that He will extend through His Spirit of His Gospel.

“The other tongues” are also a sign of missions, because when the multitude came together “each one was hearing them speak in his own language.” These Galileans spoke of God’s mighty works in such a way that people from all the corners of the world heard the message of witness “in our own language, to which we were born.” God’s Word in the mother tongues is mission’s right method, so that Abraham’s promise will be fulfilled: “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” [Genesis 12:3]. And through these means, the Great White Host will be created, which John saw as “a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’” [Revelation 7:9, 10].

But then the practical question comes to us: Can we also receive the Holy Spirit? Or, to put it another way: Can we also become the congregation?

And again we hear the blessed word of Jesus with which we began: “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” [Luke 11:13].

Yes, certainly there must be a way for us to receive “the Father’s promises,” “power from on high,” the Holy Spirit, who is pledged for our redemption. Otherwise, why did Christ come to this world—“Born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; crucified, dead, and buried; . . . ascended into heaven”—if He wasn’t to send the Holy Spirit and through Him to raise up the fallen, bring life to the dead, release souls from the devil’s power, restore His Kingdom, establish it over the world, and fulfill it in glory?

But how indeed can we receive the Holy Spirit? We must join the plea of the songwriter:

O Holy Spirit, dearly loved,
Both day and night we plead,
Come! Give us light and power
As those before us had,
When Christendom stood firm
Like trees against the foe,
Its beauty crowned with fruits like snow
And purple! Let this be so!¹

These words can surely be helpful in time of need if we seriously mean this lament. But how often only empty words and useless talk proceed from our mouths! The question, therefore, is this: How then shall our prayer for the Spirit be serious,

sincere, and of one accord, so that we may truly pray from the heart until we receive it?

We will close with some more precise words on this matter: All our work needs a renewal if it is again to go forward with power to be a blessing for our people.

The first thing needed is the entire, full, absolute recognition that here is our lack, and here is “the one thing needful” for our own souls and for our whole work.

And the second need follows from the first: That we turn from the world and worldliness in all our ways and all our work, so that we seek neither gain nor honor nor power in the work in God’s kingdom, but seek God and His kingdom, souls and their salvation; that we desire nothing more than that Jesus may increase and we may decrease.

And the third, which is in this case the most crucial, for without it there can be no talk of receiving the Spirit: That is, a steadfast, unwavering gaze on Jesus the Savior, and the determined, holy desire to follow in His steps in love, in faith, in devotion, in suffering, in undaunted witness to the truth, in patience and firmness until death. And when we finally catch a glimpse of our enormous lack compared to His kingdom and His purpose in suffering and the difference between Him and us, I wonder then if we would not see the need for a crushed heart and a broken spirit in which there is room for nothing but God’s Holy Spirit—that is, room for the Triune God.

May we live thus and so experience the poverty of our own spirit, and may the Lord also give us a taste of the kingdom of grace. And with the vision of God’s eternal love in Christ Jesus, may the Holy Spirit also make us His temple and live among us and urge us to all good work, so that we may all be equipped for the service to which He has called us, and help us in our work at home and abroad, so that we may take part in the building up of Christ’s Body and in the spreading of God’s kingdom unto the ends of the earth. Amen.

NOTES

¹ Sverdrup is quoting the third stanza of *Ak, Fader! Lad dit ord og Ånd*, written by the Danish hymn writer Hans Adolph Brorson in 1765. English translation by Carl Vaagenes.