

## Pneumatology and the Cross: The Challenge of Neo-Pentecostalism to Lutheran Theology

Cheryl M. Peterson

The rise of neo-Pentecostalism is the most significant movement in global Christianity today, a force to be reckoned with. Neo-Pentecostalism can be distinguished from earlier Pentecostal movements by its global character and its message of prosperity. Although the global south is impacted the most by this movement, it is not unknown in the U.S., and in fact, many versions of the prosperity gospel were imported to the global south by the likes of U.S. preachers like Kenneth Copeland, etc. Though the core message of the prosperity gospel is the same in the north and the south, the difference in context raises particular concerns for the impact of this movement in the global south.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the danger of preachers using this message for their own gain, concerns are raised about the way that the prosperity message is preached by some preachers, especially those affiliated with the Faith movement: that to receive God's blessings, you must first give something to God.<sup>2</sup> But even with those who preach a more biblical understanding of "abundant life," the neo-Pentecostal movement worries Lutherans for other reasons, some of which hit closer to home.

Many in the global south are threatened by neo-Pentecostalism's ability to attract members away from the Lutheran churches.<sup>3</sup> People are leaving Lutheran congregations because they are not preaching about transformation in real concrete ways. In Tanzania, the lack of attention to the Holy Spirit is cited as one reason that Lutherans are leaving their churches to join the new charismatic groups. Other churches have so adopted the Pentecostal message that it's difficult to see what is still Lutheran about them.<sup>4</sup> The recently published volume of the Lutheran World Federation critically engages theological and ecclesial issues raised by the newest wave of Pentecostalism, especially as it is impacting countries in Africa and Latin America.<sup>5</sup> This is the second time that the LWF has

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<sup>1</sup> Faith K. Lugazia, "Empire's Export of Prosperity Theology: Its Impact on Africa," in *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections*, Theology in the Life of the Church, Vol. 1, ed. Karen L. Bloomquist (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2007), 181-191. See also Isaac Phiri and Joseph Maxwell, "Gospel Riches," *Christianity Today* (July 2007); internet online; <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/july/12.22.html>; accessed 12 March 2009; Paul Gifford, "Expecting Miracles: The Prosperity Gospel in Africa," *Christian Century* (July 10, 2007); internet online; <http://christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=3494>; accessed 12 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For a thorough examination of this form of neo-Pentecostalism, see Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> North American Lutherans have not noticed/taken Pentecostalism as seriously perhaps because the numerical impact is not (yet!) as great as in the global south, though we would do well to take pay more attention to popular prosperity and prosperity-lite preachers like Joel Osteen especially in light of the current economic recession in the U.S. In these trying economic times, the message of prosperity is bound to attract even more people.

<sup>4</sup> Bitrus, *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*, Theology in the Life of the Church, Vol. 4, ed. Karen L. Bloomquist (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2008), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

theologically engaged the Pentecostal movement.<sup>6</sup> However, in the history of the Lutheran World Federation, the Department of Theology and Studies has not produced a study on the Holy Spirit except by way of responding to the charismatic and neo-Pentecostal movements.<sup>7</sup> In fact, these studies are the only cases in which the LWF took up the Spirit as a theological topic. It would seem that the only time that Lutherans have critically engaged pneumatology is when we have been challenged and/or threatened by the ideas of others.

Lutheran responses might be grouped together in three categories:

The first focuses on the question of mediation and the means of grace, that is, whether or not the Spirit works in an unmediated way apart from the proclamation of the Word and the sacraments of the church, whether God can reveal God's will through means such as bodily postures, dreams, prayers, etc., as many in the Pentecostal movements not only claim but emphasize. This revisits the debate between Luther and Karlstadt (who Luther accused of swallowing the Holy Spirit, "feathers and all").<sup>8</sup> [As an aside, Luther's concern for anarchy is also at play here; the Spirit cannot work apart from structures/means, i.e. create disorder. The idea of the Spirit instigating revolution was anathema to Luther; his social context shaped him to fear anarchy above all.]

A second response is to raise the concern that the prosperity gospel offers nothing more than another theology of glory which neglects the cross. Interestingly, this is raised by some from within Pentecostalism (and by historians sympathetic to the movement like Allan Anderson). Here Lutherans have an important contribution to make, though we tend to keep the cross in the second article and not the third—which betrays a general problem with much Lutheran theology, which is that we do not know what to do with the Spirit. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Third, we view the engagement with Pentecostalism as an invitation to think more deeply about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Lutheran tradition, usually but not always in contrast to how Pentecostals understand the work of the Spirit. Usually this means taking a fresh look at what Luther said about the Spirit and emphasizing a Lutheran teaching on the Spirit's work.<sup>9</sup> But even this tends to focus the locus of the

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<sup>6</sup> Carter Lindberg, *Charismatic Renewal and the Lutheran Tradition*, LWF Report 21 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1985). The Lutheran *Church in Tanzania published a study in 2003: Charismatic Renewal in Africa: A Challenge for African Christianity*, ed. Mika Vähäkangas and Andrew A. Kyomo (Nairobi, Kenya: Acton, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> In the history of the LWF, over the three periods of theological reflection, one can see a shift in topics and concerns from the "second article" (justification) to "first article" (creation, justice, God's law). Perhaps we are entering a new period in which we need to focus more on the third article, the Holy Spirit? Engagement with and need to respond to Pentecostal theologies and engagement with other religions/pluralism are areas that seem call for a more robust pneumatology.

<sup>8</sup> My own take on this emphasis of the Reformers is this: If the concern is for certainty (we can only be assured that the Spirit works through these means), that seems to be one thing; if on the other hand, we want to say that the Spirit is unable to work through means other than those given in the churches (Word and Sacrament), this does not seem to be a biblical idea (e.g. John 3).

<sup>9</sup>Examples include the Lindberg volume, and the article by Hans Peter Grosshans in the 2008 LWF study.

Spirit's activity on the individual believer and mostly frames the question in 16<sup>th</sup> century categories and concerns.

However, in each case, it seems that Lutheran theological engagement with the Holy Spirit is too often driven by fear and concern. There are valid concerns, of course: a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross; a caution about claiming that the Spirit works apart from the traditional means of grace (i.e. through dreams, ecstatic movements, directly through unmediated mystical experiences, etc); and the commodification of grace and the Spirit's work (be it through tongues or material prosperity—as signs of blessing). However, because our primary response has been negative – do not speak of the Spirit this way; do not insist that the Spirit can work this way, etc. – Lutherans have missed an opportunity to engage the issues and questions raised by these theologies in a more positive or constructive way. Why are people so drawn to these churches? What are they seeking in their lives? And what is it that they feel they are not receiving from Lutheran congregations? How can we proclaim the good news in this challenging context?

This paper offers a twist on the third response: What would a Lutheran engagement of the Spirit look like in view of the questions people are asking today that lead them to embrace the prosperity gospel—be it in Africa, Asia, Latin America or the United States? In other words, the task I am taking on myself is not, “How do Lutherans respond to what we consider problems in charismatic or Pentecostal theology?” but rather, “How do we respond to their challenges to *our* theology?” hat Luther and the other Reformers wrote about the work of the Spirit is not unimportant and irrelevant, but it does not directly engage the questions that people are asking about the Spirit today. There are things that we can still learn from the Reformers, concerns that remain valid for Lutherans today as in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and yet we cannot hide in the 16<sup>th</sup> century out of fear of the challenges we are facing.

This paper will not focus on the means by which the Spirit works, but on the proper work of the Spirit itself. The paper will explore Lutheran pneumatology in light of the Reformers' teaching; in the engagement with the charismatic movement of the 1970s in the U.S. and Europe, and finally in the engagement with the current neo-Pentecostal challenge. I will offer some tentative thoughts regarding how Lutherans might respond more constructively to the challenges raised by neo-Pentecostalism for our theological tradition.

### **Pneumatology in the Reformation**

There is no particular article devoted exclusively to the Spirit in the Augsburg Confession, Apology, Smalcald Articles, or Formula of Concord. The most extended treatment of the Holy Spirit in by Luther in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, which will be discussed briefly below. However, references to the Holy Spirit's work appear throughout the Book of Concord, most notably in articles on justification, good works, repentance, etc. There are two concerns that appear over and over in the Confessions: the Spirit does not work apart from external means; and the Holy Spirit is a gift that both creates faith and is received with faith by the believer which works renewal in us; in other words, we cannot do good works apart from the working of the Spirit. These concerns reflect a concern about how grace was received, both in terms of the means of grace and the role of the believer and the church. The concern was addressed on fronts: in terms of the means by which it was received (contra the Enthusiasts) and also the role that the believer played in receiving grace, in terms of the exercise of free will and doing good works (contra the Papists).

Underlying these questions, of course, was the larger issue of the foundation of our hope and salvation.

The Reformers stressed the passivity of the believer in the event of justification, leading much later traditional Protestant thought to reduce the Spirit's role to applying the work of Christ to individual believers through a subjective appropriation of faith, itself a gift of the Spirit. The Spirit's most proper work is to bring people to faith through the preaching of the Word.<sup>10</sup> Even though Luther himself seems to stress the centrality of aspect of the Spirit's work in his explanation of the Third Article, he has much more to say about the Spirit's work in the life not only of the individual believer but also the Christian community.<sup>11</sup> He begins by stating that "being made holy is nothing else than bringing us to the Lord Jesus Christ to receive this blessing [the redemption won for us by Christ on the cross], to which we could not have come by ourselves."<sup>12</sup> Holiness is described in this section in terms of the gift of faith, i.e., a knowledge and understanding in the hearts of individual believers of the benefits won by Christ for his people on the cross. The Holy Spirit reveals and proclaims the Word of God, "through which he illuminates and inflames hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it and persevere in it."<sup>13</sup>

However, Luther goes on to emphasize the communal –and transformative – aspect of this new life that Christians receive through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Believers are simultaneously incorporated into the holy community as "a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses."<sup>14</sup> Further, Luther states that "[this holy community] possesses a variety of gifts, and yet is united in love without sect or schism."<sup>15</sup> In addition to the gift

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<sup>10</sup> As Jeffrey Mann states in a recent article, "The essence of the Holy Spirit's activity" is to create faith in the sinner." Jeffrey K. Mann, "Luther and the Holy Spirit: Why Pneumatology Still Matters," *Currents in Theology and Mission* (2007): pp\_\_\_\_. For a discussion of the Protestant appropriation of pneumatology to the "subjective side" or "subjective realization" of reconciliation, see Michael Welker, *God as Spirit*, 43-44. Neo-scholastic Catholic theology has also interpreted the role of the Spirit in more passive, Christological terms, relegating the work of the Spirit on the one hand, to the indwelling of the faithful, as the created grace given through the sacraments that enables them to lives of obedience and virtue, and on the other hand, to the indwelling of the magisterium, as the source and authority of its apostolic teaching so that the faithful are not led astray. See Bradford Hinze, "The Spirit in a Trinitarian Ecclesiology," 350. The Spirit was at work, Hinze notes, but "only within the restrictive limits established by the institutional and hierarchical concerns that predominated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" (352).

<sup>11</sup> One of the contributions of Regin Preter's study of Luther's pneumatology is to show how Luther did not speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of a grace or holiness that can be commodified, and thereby possessed in some way by the believer, but rather as personal presence, or as I prefer "relationship." Ratzinger and other later would speak of the spirit *as* relationship—I would prefer the person/agent of relationship within God, who draws us into God's love and life, and who draws us into relationship with each other where we can experience that new life in community. The Spirit is neither the possession of the individual nor the community, but works from outside of us and between us to draw us into the community of new life created by the winds of the Spirit, calling people to faith and into communion and mission.

<sup>12</sup> *BC*, 436. Here Luther refers not only to the work of the Spirit in bringing us to Christ, but the church as the "mother" who begets and bears each Christian through the Word, i.e., a community of new birth

<sup>13</sup> *BC*, 436.

<sup>14</sup> *BC*, 438.

<sup>15</sup> *BC*, 438.

of faith, Luther also speaks of “its fruits,” which the Spirit produces.<sup>16</sup> By these means, faith and the fruits of the Spirit, the holy community grows and becomes strong. The primary blessing believers receive in the holy community is the “full forgiveness of sins, not only something that is received by God but something lived out in relationships with others, in the ways that “we forgive, bear with and aid one another.”<sup>17</sup> Luther speaks of spiritual growth as a communal and eschatological reality. Although we are now only “halfway pure and holy,”<sup>18</sup> the Holy Spirit will continue to work in us, increasing holiness on the earth through the church and the forgiveness of sins, until the last day, when there are only perfectly pure and holy people. As Luther states, “The Holy Spirit continues his work without ceasing until the last day, and for this purpose he has appointed a community on earth, through which he speaks and does all of his work. For he has not yet gathered together all of this Christian community, nor has he completed the granting of forgiveness.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, holiness, for Luther, is marked by relationships of forgiveness and fruits (see also his commentary on Galatians); it is not something that one possesses but is rather the movement of the Spirit in a community that lives by the promise of forgiveness and reconciliation it has received through Christ.

### **Lutherans Respond to the Charismatic Movement (1986)**

In addition to questions about the Spirit’s mediation, the charismatic movement of the 1960s and 1970s raised questions for Lutherans about the content of salvation itself. The challenge was this: how do Lutheran churches understand charismatic experiences within the framework of the Scriptures and Lutheran confessions, especially with regard to the question of salvation? For example, does “baptism in the holy spirit” challenge a Lutheran view of salvation? Or can Lutherans appropriate insights from this renewal movement within its theological framework? The question seemingly raised by the charismatic movement is whether the realization of a changed/transformed life is itself salvation (i.e., is salvation something that is acquired), or a result of salvation? How do we connect the experience of transformation with the Lutheran teaching on justification?<sup>20</sup> Does this shift the focus from God’s work to our work?

An LWF report on charismatic renewal was published in 1985 in response to the controversy stirred up by the charismatic movement of the 1960s in Europe and the U.S.<sup>21</sup> The study, authored by Carter Lindberg, begins with a survey of responses of LWF member churches in U.S., Norway, and Germany (the GDR). The rest of the book summarizes a longer work published by Lindberg on renewal movements from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present in which parallels are drawn by between the charismatic movement and previous renewal movements in Protestantism, especially Germany

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<sup>16</sup> BC, 438.

<sup>17</sup> BC, 438.

<sup>18</sup> BC, 438

<sup>19</sup> BC, 438.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, a purely forensic understanding of justification does not do justice to the Lutheran Confessional teaching on this doctrine.

<sup>21</sup> Lindberg, *Charismatic Renewal and the Lutheran Tradition*, LWF Report 21 (Geneva: LWF, 1985).

Pietism.<sup>22</sup> The study affirms the need for the ongoing renewal of the church while offering a pointed critique of Charismatic theology from a traditional Lutheran perspective.

For example, Lindberg posits that the criterion from a Lutheran perspective for any renewal movement is the doctrine of justification, which for Lutherans remains the chief article of faith. The focus must remain on God's action in Christ through the Holy Spirit that comes to us "extra nos." Too often renewal movements "become critical of all forms of externality and attempt to interiorize religious certainty by emphasizing the experience of God acting in me"<sup>23</sup> Then the inner experience of the Spirit rather than on the promise given "extra nos" becomes the basis for certainty and to understand the content of the salvation and new life given in Christ. The study affirms the traditional Lutheran emphasis on the external means of Word and Sacrament for the Spirit's work and also appeals to Luther's theology of the cross, which warns against any attempts to ground certainty of salvation in anything other than the cross, which opposes all efforts to ascend to God, "whether they be speculative, ethical, or experiential."<sup>24</sup> Any claim to assurance of salvation on the basis of anything other than faith (whether that be a "born again experience," speaking in tongues, etc.), must be resisted.

These critiques are not misplaced, at least from a Lutheran perspective, but I found it frustrating that the charismatic movement was not engaged on its own terms or even that the reasons for its attractiveness to Lutherans was not given much attention. The final six-page section of the study does do some of this, suggesting that in spite of the theological pitfalls of this movement, there are some contributions it could make to the Lutheran tradition. As Lindberg states, "When all is said and done about charismata, what the charismatics see missing in the life of the church is the appropriation of the power to lead a new life"<sup>25</sup> in terms of a renewal of the whole person. This, to me, is the heart of the issue: what difference does Christ's victory on the cross make for people's lives today? However the Spirit's work is manifested in the life of the believer (e.g. through particular spiritual gifts), it seems to be that their primary concern is to concretely realize a "changed life," a life made new by the Spirit, raising the believer from the old ways of sin to the new life promised in Christ.<sup>26</sup>

A point that is not often made—and one that initially seems counter-intuitive to me, at least—is that for charismatics, it is important that the renewal of the whole person happen through the church as community. Killian McDonnell writes, "Unless the role of community is grasped, one has failed in to understand what the renewal is saying. It seems to me that the primary consequence

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 33-40. In fact, the study draws heavily on a longer work by Lindberg, *The Third Reformation? Charismatic Movements and the Lutheran Tradition* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983). The first part of the LWF study reviews LWF member church responses to the Charismatic movement.

<sup>23</sup> Carter 35; see also 41-51.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 21.

of the resurrection and of Pentecost is not the exercise of the gifts but community formation.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit works to edify the Body of Christ with its gifts, to build up the Body, not in the first place to “make a better you” (to quote the title of one of Joel Osteen’s books). This seems very much in line with how Luther describes what it means to “be made holy” in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed, as discussed above.

### **Lutherans Respond to the Neo-Pentecostal Movement (2008)**

Many of the characteristic practices of earlier charismatic and Pentecostal movements also mark the neo-Pentecostal movement (e.g. Spirit baptism, belief in spirits and dreams, holy living, Spirit-filled worship) but what is distinctive about the new Pentecostalism is the emphasis on success and prosperity that is experienced not only spiritually but also materially.<sup>28</sup> As noted above, there is great concern about the new emphasis on material prosperity, especially since most Prosperity Gospel preachers do not address structural reasons for poverty. For many such preachers, theirs is a very individualistic message: the church becomes a means to an end for believers to find spiritual and material success. As Ibrahim Bitrus puts it, God is viewed as the “master servant of human needs.”<sup>29</sup>

While it is easy to want to dismiss this movement as nothing more than a new theology of glory (which in many cases, it is), Lutherans must engage the issues raised by this movement if we wish to proclaim the gospel in a way that is relevant to the questions and concerns of people today. The 2008 LWF study suggests several reasons why Lutherans are being drawn to neo-Pentecostalism. I want to focus on two that have theological import for our theological heritage: first, because Lutheran churches do not focus enough on the Holy Spirit as the giver of life, and second because Lutheran pastors tend to emphasize suffering rather than victory when preaching about the “theology of the cross.”<sup>30</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit as the Giver of Life**

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed refers to the Holy Spirit as the “giver of life.” In the catechisms, Luther speaks of the benefits of God’s grace as “life, salvation, and the forgiveness of sins.” Lutheran theology tends to focus on “forgiveness of sins” as the content of the gospel promise. For Gerhard Forde, the gospel in sum is the promise: “You are forgiven.” Certainly, forgiveness of sins is at the heart of what it means to be justified and any understanding of “new life in Christ” must have at its center the gift of forgiveness which reconciles us to God and one another. And of course, this gift is received by “faith alone,” not by a renewal of life manifested in acts of charity and good works. This is central to our Lutheran understanding of the gospel.

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<sup>27</sup> McDonnell, cited in *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>28</sup> Ibrahim Bitrus, “The Influence of Neo-Pentecostalism in Nigeria,” in *Lutherans Respond to Pentecostalism*, 81.; David Van Biema and Jeff Chu, “Does God want you to be rich?” *TIME*, September 10, 2006; internet online; <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1533448,00.html>; accessed 12 March 2009. Early Pentecostals did not emphasize the material aspect of prosperity in the same way. See Coleman, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Bitrus, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Bitrus, 86-87.

Classical Lutheran theology has avoided emphasizing spiritual growth and transformation largely because of the dangers of lapsing into “theology of glory.” The concern is that once we take the focus off the cross of Christ and put the focus on those who are justified, we are in danger of promoting a theology of glory centered on human achievement and of confusing this age with the next. Lutheran theology traditionally puts the focus on what God has done for us (past tense) on the cross and generally avoids addressing what difference that makes for how we live today (present tense) except as it points us to our future in Christ. Gerhard Forde’s theology is representative of this perspective. For Forde, the new life given in justification is experienced passively as a promise that is given by God (whereby we are freed from the law). Because this rebirth is an eschatological event, one lives in anticipation of this reality by faith and hope. As one is reborn in faith, “one will see how much one is a sinner and will be until the end. One will see that one is not yet a ‘Christian.’ One will see precisely that one has no particular advantages over those who are not yet reborn. One will see one’s solidarity with the rest of the human race and wait in hope until the end.”<sup>31</sup> For Forde, then, sanctification is “getting used to justification.” By faith, believers are given the end and the goal of existence, and can begin to believe in the goodness of being God’s creature, waiting “for the time being” for God’s kingdom to come. The Spirit’s work is to keep the believer in faith and hope so that she can anticipate this “end.”

Emphasizing the Spirit’s work to faith and hope in the life of the individual believer may be an important corrective to a theology of works righteousness, but it does seem to narrow the Spirit’s work in ways that are not only unbiblical but even more limited than Luther’s own brief presentation of the Spirit’s work in the Large Catechism. If salvation is to mean anything, it must make a difference in our lives today. Today people are yearning for salvation that is not only a future but a present reality. Indeed, we can affirm with Forde the eschatological reality of the gospel while proclaiming that the kingdom is in-breaking even now through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, in the liberating word that brings freedom. Is God working in our lives to do something more than bring freedom *from* guilt under the law and the law as a means of salvation, as Lutheran theology traditionally teaches? Can Lutherans find a way to speak of the Spirit’s work as offering us freedom *for* the new and abundant life offered in Christ? Lutherans are right to reject the transactional view of “abundant life” proposed by Faith Movement and other prosperity preachers (if you give God something, God will bless you in return); however, is not “abundant life” something that is also promised to those who are justified and renewed, as an aspect of the gift of new life that is promised to us? What about the ways that the Holy Spirit works in the “holy community” beyond the work of bringing individual believers to faith? We have already seen that Luther himself speaks of the Spirit’s work more broadly, to include reconciled relationships and spiritual growth in the community itself.

### **Suffering and the Cross**

Lutherans are quick to criticize prosperity gospel preachers because there is no mention of sin and the cross in their preaching. American Joel Osteen defends this omission because people already know too well the reality of brokenness and what they need to hear is a message of hope that points them to the possibilities of victorious and abundant living in the Spirit. Prosperity preachers in the global south are preaching to people who experience the suffering and pain of this life in even more

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<sup>31</sup> Forde, “The Christian Life,” *Christian Dogmatics, Volume 2*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, p. 450.

profound ways. In both cases, the message is one of victory over that reality by claiming the life with which God wants to bless them.<sup>32</sup>

In the 2008 LWF response to neo-Pentecostalism, Bitrus notes that because Lutherans emphasize suffering both in terms of God's self-revelation in Christ but also in terms of the Christian life (that is, suffering itself as a mark of the Christian life), the effect of many sermons in Nigeria, at least, has been to "accept rather than to question the unwarranted suffering of Nigerians or Africans as a whole. Therefore, when neo-Pentecostals preach prosperity, Lutheran members are easily attracted to such messages."<sup>33</sup> He suggests that while the theology of the cross remains central for Lutherans, suffering and prosperity should be viewed more dialectically. In other words, "it is not sufficient to tell people that God suffers with them; God is with us in our suffering, empowering us to change."<sup>34</sup> I agree with Bitrus and would point to the work of the Holy Spirit and the church as the "holy community" as ways to further address this from a Lutheran perspective.

### A Pneumatology of the Cross?

Luther has been criticized for failing to root his account of the Holy Spirit in the cross. While Luther defines the Holy Spirit formally as the third person of the Trinity, he defines the Spirit materially in anthropological terms; i.e., the Spirit is the one who "makes us holy."<sup>35</sup> The Spirit's work is interpreted as an application of the work of Christ to the believer, making the objective work of the cross a subjective experience of the believer through faith.

In his explanation of the Apostles Creed in the Large Catechism, Luther describes the Holy Spirit as a character in the narrative of salvation, which is centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the promise of new life offered to sinners through Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one who orients believers to the promise of the gospel, who makes the church a "holy community" through the gifts of forgiveness of sins and new life that are experienced not only personally but communally. This is more than a "subjective application" of the past work of the cross through faith. D. Lyle Dabney suggests that because Luther does not speak of the Spirit in terms of suffering and shame, he has not rooted his pneumatology in the cross. However, one could argue that at the center of the cross—and Jesus' own experience of the cross—was not only the pain and shame of his suffering, but also the liberating power of forgiveness and reconciliation. The Lukan narrative, rather than recording Jesus' painful cry of abandonment, has Jesus speak a reconciling word from the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Through the resurrection, this word becomes available to all who believe in him. Both Luke and John record their Pentecost events (Acts 2 and John 20) in terms that connect the Spirit with the forgiveness of sins. Thus, the gift of forgiveness itself flows from the event of the cross and resurrection. The

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<sup>32</sup> Osteen's best-selling books offer practical suggestions for achieving such personal transformation: *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential*; and *Become a Better You: 7 Keys to Improving Your Life Every Day*. Instead of a cross, Osteen's worship hall features a "gilded globe."

<sup>33</sup> Bitrus, 86.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>35</sup> Dabney, "Naming the Spirit," 32.

Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead becomes the agent of this new life in the believers, a new life experienced in the present but which finds its eschatological fulfillment in the promised Parousia.

Luther's explanation of the third article, although referring to the event of the cross in the past tense and the work of the Spirit in the present tense, connects these two events in a larger narrative framework. The Spirit is the "character" who in this narrative "brings us to Christ" (which for Luther always meant the crucified Christ). The people are brought to Christ in order to be forgiven, and to receive new life and salvation, because as Luther insists elsewhere in the *Small Catechism*, "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."<sup>36</sup> As forgiveness is received, it is simultaneously shared and communicated to others; believers are forgiven and enabled to forgive others, through the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit. In this sense, one can say that justification also belongs to the third article, as Dabney himself argues elsewhere, "According to the witness of the New Testament, Christ has come not simply to convey a new status upon the dying but rather to reconcile those who are dead in trespasses and sin to the living God through a renewed gift of life in resurrection, and in doing so, to bring forth the new out of the old and thus create creation anew."<sup>37</sup> The agent of new life—from the very beginning to the end—is the Spirit of life.<sup>38</sup>

Following Luther's narrative framework, the Holy Spirit, then, is not subjective appropriation or personal possession with the attendant danger of "commodifying" the spiritual gifts; the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity who initiates our relationship with God in Christ and with each other as members of Christ's body, by bringing us to the crucified Christ to receive forgiveness, life and salvation. Likewise, the spiritual community does not possess the Holy Spirit, but is possessed by it. Sanctification happens *in* the spiritual community, as the Holy Spirit makes of us a community, holy through the living out of relationships in forgiveness of sins. Working through the means of grace, the Spirit is the one who relates us to God (which we appropriate by faith/trust) and to each other (which we appropriate in loving, forgiving relationships). Even as Luther speaks of the transformative power of the Spirit, the Lutheran concern for the alien nature of righteousness is retained, because this growth happens not as an internal growth of infused grace, but *extra nos* through the Word which brings forgiveness of sins and fruits of the Spirit that are experienced in the community in relationships.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, if we take Luther's cue from the Large Catechism, we must speak first and foremost of the Spirit's work as "life-giver" in the community, those gathered by the Word. This contrasts with the preaching of most prosperity gospel preachers which is often individualistic and concerned only with personal transformation and individual financial security. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in terms of how they serve the community, not the individual (even if

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<sup>36</sup> This quote comes from Luther's explanation of the Lord's Supper. See *BC*, 362.

<sup>37</sup> Dabney, "Justification of the Spirit," 67.

<sup>38</sup> As Dabney points out, "According to the witness of the early church, therefore, it is the Holy Spirit, the eschatological *Spiritus Vivificans* by and in whose power Jesus Christ has been raised to new and transformed existence." Dabney, "Naming the Spirit," 41.

<sup>39</sup> As we recall, Luther defines "full forgiveness of sins" both "in that God forgives us and that we forgive, bear with and aid one another." *BC*, 438.

the individual also experiences blessings as a result). Lutheran preachers, if we are to be biblical, can and must preach about “life and salvation” alongside of “the forgiveness of sins.” To preach about the promise of “abundant life in Christ” is not un-Lutheran if we, like Paul and Luther, root this promise in the community itself, for the building up of the body for our life and mission together.

Finally, the LWF in the past has explored the relationship of justification and justice in terms of rectifying relationships with God and with one another. Perhaps an even more important connection for Lutherans to explore is that between sanctification and justice. Justice is God’s work that brings us into right relationship with God; sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to bring renewal, transformation, etc., in our lives in a way that bears fruit for the neighbor and our communities. We are “made holy” for the sake of the world and its needs, not for our own sake. With the Reformers, we must agree that acts of justice—like any good work—does not lead to justification, but might we say that justice—*as a work of the Spirit*—is one aspect of “being made holy,” if with Luther, we understand holiness in terms of relationships that are marked by the living out of the forgiveness of sins and the fruits of the Spirit.