

INTIMATIONS OF A PNEUMATOLOGY

IN THE DOGMATIC STUDIES OF

G.C. BERKOUWER

by

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A B S T R A C T

G.C. Berkouwer is one of the foremost representatives of the Reformed theological tradition in Europe. His Studies in Dogmatics is a formidable body of work which ranges over the larger part of all Christian doctrine. A lacuna which has however been perceived is the absence of a specific work on the Holy Spirit and consequently, a developed pneumatology. What is evident though, is that Berkouwer's theology is highly trinitarian and that in every saving and gracious action of the Godhead, he demonstrates the life and activity of all the persons of the triune God. Seen from this perspective, the person and work of the Holy Spirit permeates the whole corpus of Berkouwer's writing.

Berkouwer is always an authentic and orthodox representative of his own ecclesial tradition as well: commonly a tradition which in keeping with the best of Reformed church genius, has tended to be notable more for its developed Christology than for its pneumatology. Berkouwer's contribution is that he is able to expand and extrapolate on this same tradition without ever deviating from its fundamental teaching. In so doing he has enriched many of its values with new perspectives on the Holy Spirit's active role in salvation.

The primary reason why his dogmatical studies have a pertinence for the present is because of the growing influence of other more extreme schools of thought on the flanks of Christianity. There is an active socio-political brand of theology on the one extreme that in turn is more than offset by an enthusiastic pentecostal groundswell on the other. In the face of often strident appeals for attention from these wings, Berkouwer counters with an orthodox and highly scholarly analysis of scripture and the traditional doctrinal position of the church.

The pneumatology that emerges from his teaching demonstrates the gracious and constant outworking of God in the individual, the church, and the universe. A foundation is laid for encountering and receiving this comprehensive teaching in all its aspects especially in the preached word. The Spirit's activity is especially affirmed in the sanctification of man and in the inspiration of the scriptures. His divine creativity is constantly active not just in the church and its sacraments, but also in His anticipatory work for the future consummation.

Whenever Berkouwer has not fully expanded any doctrine, he has nonetheless invariably given sufficient pointers for others to follow and build upon. There remains such that can still be utilized and explored in his writings about the Holy Spirit.

FOREWORD - A PNEUMATOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

After centuries of neglect the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit, known as pneumatology in theological circles, has come into growing prominence in the twentieth-century. Far from being the forgotten person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is now proclaimed with a vigour which, in the thought of some, is long overdue. This prominence has resulted, latterly, in a sometimes traumatic introspection taking place within the Christian communities of Rome and the Reformation.

The purpose of this dissertation is to discover what there is of pneumatology in the writings of G.C. Berkouwer with a view to establishing a base from which to observe current developments. Berkouwer is for many the representative European thinker of the Reformed tradition and his writings are a powerful bulwark for orthodoxy even beyond his own denomination.

1. A Brief Review of the Place of Pneumatology in Reformed Theology Since the Reformation

The position of the Reformed churches is interesting and there has been a growth of insight from the days of B.B. Warfield (who wrote during the early years of the twentieth century) to those of G.C. Berkouwer. It must be remembered that the Reformers, such as Zwingli, Calvin and Knox, had little interest in the gifts of the Spirit. They apparently assumed that the so-called "extraordinary" gifts of the Spirit like prophecy, healing and speaking in tongues were no longer relevant because they were of a temporary nature and limited to Apostolic times. Their disinterest, if not distaste for these manifestations (also reflected in the opinion of Roman Catholic thinkers of that period) can be accounted for by the historical impact of the various waves of spiritual enthusiasm which

swept over Europe for time to time.⁽¹⁾ These enthusiastic movements included the Montanists of the second century and the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century.

In the modern period the notion that such gifts ceased in the Apostolic times became accepted dogma in orthodox Presbyterian/Reformed circles. A case in point would be the writings of the biblical and theological scholar, B.B. Warfield. He expended considerable effort to prove this contention and his book, Counterfeit Miracles (1918) and its reprint Miracles: yesterday and today: real and counterfeit (1965), still make a convincing and popular case against the excesses of enthusiasm. Warfield's approach has generally been accepted as true up to the present time. Hendrikus Berkhof, for instance, deals with the whole question of the variety of the charismata in only two pages of his work on the Holy Spirit.⁽²⁾

His treatment of Pentecostalism, though, is not as unsympathetic as that of Warfield's.

This is, quite evidently, not the whole story of Reformed pneumatology which is more complex than being simply a response to the charismatic movement. However, the above does serve to set the scene for Berkouwer's thought. Berkouwer, although not primarily in dialogue with this "third church", did make one enigmatic statement, that could be expanded upon, if proof were needed that he was not entirely closed to the possibility of the charismata. He writes:

He who sees the miracles of Holy Scripture inseparably connected with the saving and redeeming activity of God knows that there can be no talk of a decrease

¹ H. Berkhof, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p.10

² Ibid., pp.91-92

or diminishing of the power of God unto salvation in the world ... He who thinks that ... miracles can no longer occur may seriously ask himself whether he thinks in terms of God's power over the world or from secret capitulation to determinism.⁽³⁾

Here Berkouwer is thinking of Liberal rather than Conservative opponents, although the point he is making is valid in both cases.

But, if he is not a theologian in debate with the "third church", what can we extract from his theological writings that is pertinent to the new world interest in the Holy Spirit? The main discovery that one makes after careful research into Berkouwer's thought is his biblical approach to the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer's teaching of the Holy Spirit is a consistent theme throughout his dogmatic studies. Here he presents the Spirit's work in creation and preservation, in reason and conscience, regeneration and sanctification, the church and its mission, sacrament and word and even in culture and history. It is these areas that will be dealt with in this thesis. Berkouwer tends to focus on the continuing and collective experience of the Spirit, and to a quiet dedication and growth of a spirit-filled life in the believer, rather than on individual and ecstatic experience. In this sense he has a contribution to make to any dialogue on pneumatology. This contribution has, however, to be retrieved from a large corpus of writing before it challenges the believer with any power.

Unfortunately too many of the issues he touches upon concerning the Spirit are left open-ended. The reader is occasionally given a promising view of something valuable that is left undeveloped and unfinished as for example in his work on general revelation and election. In those areas however where he does deal comprehensively with the role of the Holy Spirit, such as sanctification, scripture and the church, there is a real

³ G.C. Berkouwer, The Providence of God, pp 238, 242

contribution to an ongoing development of insight in pneumatology. It is principally these areas that will receive extensive elaboration in this dissertation.

2. Pneumatology - A Consistent Theme in Berkouwer's Thought

Berkouwer makes the point that the Spirit's person and work permeate every moment of the divine initiative in grace and the human faith response. This assertion he expresses as follows: "this is precisely the marvel of the work of the Holy Ghost - that he is the organ of this faith".⁽⁴⁾ He supports his statement with a quotation from Paul, "but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor. 6:11)." He brings his reader into line here with Paul's idea of developing faith in Romans, where Paul emphasizes desperation, acceptance, trust, responsibility and freedom in the Spirit. So from the first moment of salvation, the believer encounters the Holy Spirit.

Berkouwer notes further, that in Melanchthon's Loci of 1559, the word of God and the non-resistant human will are set side by side with the Holy Spirit.⁽⁵⁾ In thus adducing Melanchthon, Berkouwer wants to give the best possible balance to the over-estimation of faith as an independent spiritual achievement, which has the power to claim justification in its own right.

When Berkouwer looks at one of the most compellingly complex questions in theology, namely that concerning the work of Christ, he demonstrates how the believer is again in need of the Holy Spirit to impart correct understanding. Berkouwer gives the key to comprehending the work of Christ in

⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Justification, p.30.

⁵ Ibid., p.54.

these words:

Only the illumination of the Holy Spirit imparts the right insight into the profound significance of Christ's work, we realize the great danger connected with human interpretation and construction.⁽⁶⁾

He further emphasizes this observation, by adding the following:

Without the aid of the Holy Spirit it is possible to interpret Christ's work falsely and to reverse its meaning, just as the Pharisees explained Christ's casting out of⁽⁷⁾ the evil spirits as a demonic act. (Luke 11:15)."

The Holy Spirit does more than illuminate the believer's understanding of this work. He is himself co-operative in it, in that He is its logical fruit and consequence.⁽⁸⁾ Concisely stated, the Holy Spirit illuminates in conversion and co-operates in sanctification. Berkouwer is careful not to confuse the work of the Spirit with the messianic work of Christ (namely the Christianizing of the world), but also will not have them separated out into two totally different movements or types. Christ's work goes forth as an historical power through the Spirit. This is implied in the close connection between Christ's ascension and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. This connection takes into full account the absolutely theocentric character of the entire messianic work. There is not in this area a sort of pneumatic-plus that is even slightly independent of the work of Christ.

Berkouwer also highlights the work of the Holy Spirit in the otherwise difficult doctrine of divine election. In election, man's freedom to decide, that is, the relationship between grace and salvation, is equally

⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, The Work of Christ, p.10.

⁷ Ibid., p.11.

⁸ Ibid., p.43.

a consequence of the Holy Spirit's work. Berkouwer states the connection succinctly in these words,

This indeed is the marvellous and inscrutable work of the Holy Spirit that in and through this superiority man really comes, is placed, in the realm of possibility, in this freedom. ⁽⁹⁾

Berkouwer has a dynamic view of election. Election is totally God's work but it is also completely man's work too. It is the role of the Holy Spirit in "drawing" man that ensures not only man's freedom but at the same time eliminates any notions of synergism. In support of this, Berkouwer contends that,

To hear, to learn, to be drawn, to be given, and then to come - that is the evangelic incursion of all synergism This absoluteness of giving, drawing and learning we meet not only in John, but also in the radical and exclusive testimony of Paul when he says for instance, that, 'no man can say Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3). ⁽¹⁰⁾

It can be seen then, that for Berkouwer, the Holy Spirit is not an overpowering force of coercion that submerges man's individuality but, on the contrary, He comes as a liberating invitation from God. Berkouwer's understanding of election devolves around election in Jesus Christ. Election is of GOD. Man is not involved in election except through faith, as a vehicle of God. From man's side, it is man who responds to election. Man is involved in that it is man's response, but it is God's faithfulness to His eternal covenant that is the ultimate determinant. (Rejection, on the other hand, is the result of man's sin and thus can never be put on the same plane. In rejection man is totally involved.) ⁽¹¹⁾ This leads Berkouwer on to deal with the thorny problem of the relationship between salvation and good works, that is the sylogismus practicus. He sees the

⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, Divine Election, p.48.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.49.

¹¹ Ibid., see pages 168, 190, 193 & 216. Berkouwer understands election in Jesus Christ only. See also his chapters on Election in Christ pp 132-171 and Election and Rejection pp172-217 for a full treatment of this

connection in the biblical association between justification and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. He is adamant that one cannot be divided regarding the connection between the christological and the pneumatological points of view. He explains:

I have been asked what I mean by the statement that the work of the Spirit is not a second mystery of reconciliation (in The Triumph of Grace). This expression does not imply any devaluation of the work of the Spirit, but only a rejection of the scheme: possibility-realization, in which the relatedness of the work of the Spirit to that of Christ is denied. I indicated this by saying that the work of the Spirit is filled with the mystery of reconciliation. ⁽¹²⁾

The relatedness of Christ's work and the Spirit's work is seriously affirmed in this quotation. By placing the sylogismus, then, in this divine context, Berkouwer can confidently hold that man's works cannot lead to self-justification or pride. Such a consequence does not exist for the reason that the sylogismus refers to the grace, power and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer leans heavily on Paul to elaborate this point. He holds that the indwelling of the Spirit is, for Paul, the impetus that leads man into a holy life. Realization of this indwelling of the Spirit urges Paul to make his fervent call to sanctification: "Your body, you know is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you since you received Him from God. (1 Cor. 6:19)" Paul speaks of the indwelling and power of the Spirit in connection with election (Rom. 8:23-29), sanctification (Rom. 27,28), glorification (Rom. 8:30) and weakness (Rom. 8:26). It is the Holy Spirit who searches the hearts of men and makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:27). ⁽¹³⁾

It is evident for Berkouwer there is a connection between the doctrine of election and of sanctification, but this is not a connection whereby man may deduce his personal election from his sanctification. Berkouwer can say,

¹² Ibid., p.295 footnote 6.

¹³ Ibid., p.303.

and only in this way can we by the abundant power and guidance of the Holy Spirit be prevented from falling again, either on the right hand or on the left, in the abyss of misconceptions. (14)

The knowledge of electing God is not the outcome of rational considerations but is found when men walk in the way of truth.

Berkouwer is less convincing in his book General Revelation in demonstrating that such a form of revelation does indeed exist, he succeeds however in clearly identifying the Holy Spirit's work in special revelation. It is indisputable for him that the Spirit is the revealer. He writes:

It is, to the contrary, the marvel of faith that it unquestionably knows for certain to hear the revelation of God and every believer knows this certainty and hearing of the voice of the Lord do not emerge from one's own rational insight, but are the results of the irresistible power of the work of the Spirit. (15)

The Spirit is indeed the revealer, but is specifically the revealer of the Son. The Old Testament revelation of the messiah in prophecy truly pointed to Christ. Having made these few references Berkouwer does not adequately elaborate on them. He also does not elucidate any further on the role of the Spirit in phenomena like illumination, natural theology or even in general revelation. Berkouwer finally subsumes general revelation into special revelation in a way that is only partly satisfactory. He holds that:

The issue is not that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is inadequate and hence we must resort to a more general revelation; rather it is a matter of the light which the revelation of Jesus Christ, and a corresponding knowledge of faith sheds on the universal action of God in created reality. The relationship between special and general revelation is not a competitive one, but in special revelation our attention is focussed on the universality of God's action in relation to salvation and the Kingdom of God ... when we speak of general revelation of God, then we are concerned with the universality of God's actions in created reality. (16)

¹⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, General Revelation, p.88.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.286.

This statement situates all revelation ultimately in the perspective of special revelation. Berkouwer in fact holds that general revelation (God's acts in nature) can only be understood in the light of special revelation.

The object of this foreword is to show how widely the doctrine of the Holy Spirit permeates Berkouwer's work. Consequently the question of sin, and more specifically sin against the Holy Spirit, will also fall within its ambit. Scripture does not speculate on the origin of sin; its concern is rather with the situation of man and his guilt. Sin is not a matter of man's being wilfully conquered by external impulse because man, the sinner, is himself always actively engaged.⁽¹⁷⁾ It is because of this personalist element, "my sin", that Berkouwer does not deal with the problem of evil when he writes on the subject of sin, (that is dealt with separately in his book, The Providence of God).

The full extent of man's sin becomes apparent only in the gospel. It is here that we become aware of God's way of dealing with it. This is not to downplay the law and the judgement since Christ came to give us a "new law (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:20-21)".⁽¹⁸⁾ This law or commandment of Christ's reveals the fellowship of God in calling us to respond in repentance and joy to His offer of redemption. Yet the knowledge of sin is not the self-evident result of mere proclamation. There is no automatic and positive response to the word of proclamation. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts and convinces man of sin and the truth of God's word. The word is appropriated in faith alone by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. Our hearts are opened through the "sword" of the spirit, who makes the word efficacious in us. Berkouwer says the word is both a "sword" and "the sword of the Spirit".⁽¹⁹⁾ Yet the Spirit's reproof is not merely punitive since He also summonses us to repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ.

¹⁷ G.C. Berkouwer, Sin, pp 11-26.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.196.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 210

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God in action in Jesus Christ. The sin against the Holy Spirit is a deliberate denial of Christ's good works by attributing them to Beelzebub.⁽²⁰⁾ This sin, if ever it can be committed, is unpardonable. After Easter, when the full significance of Jesus' person and mission had become known, His apostles invariably described the message of salvation and its appeal in close pneumatological and christological terms. In this light, the sin against the Holy Spirit is seen as a deliberate despising of Jesus Christ and His mission.⁽²¹⁾ This matter at issue can be described as obstinate refusal and active contempt of the gospel after having received the knowledge of it. Berkouwer concludes that from an interpretative point of view the gospel references cannot be taken by themselves; it is only within the context of the salvation process that this sin can be understood. For this reason the mystery which surrounds the doctrine should be clarified through the preaching of the gospel. This is also important for pastoral reasons.⁽²²⁾

Berkouwer, in his dogmatic studies, emerges very much as a theologian of the Reformed tradition. Pneumatology is not a notable feature per se, but on the other hand, the Holy Trinity is. God always acts in concert, and as such, the Holy Spirit is never out of the foreground in each and every one of the doctrines. It will be necessary to clarify what is meant by the above statement, and discover in which of the doctrines the unique role of the Spirit in the Economic Trinity can be most clearly identified.

²⁰ Ibid., p.323 ff.

²¹ cfr. Hebrews 10:19.

²² G.C. Berkouwer, op cit., pp 349-353.

CHAPTER 1 - "I BELIEVE IN GOD - THE HOLY SPIRIT"

Berkouwer within the Context of Reformed Theology

For the Reformed Church, the central theme of theology is God. It is not man in his existential dilemma or possibility. It is not even Jesus Christ but God, who was uniquely present in Jesus Christ. The eminent Reformed theologian, H. Richard Niebuhr states:

To put it more exactly, Christian theology has to do with the Triune God who is creator of all things, who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ, and who, as the Holy Spirit is the Lord and Life giver and who speaks by the prophets.⁽¹⁾

It is important to grasp this fact if one wants to understand Berkouwer's theology. Reformed theology always has to do with the One God who is related to His creation in three ways. It is interesting to note that the great Calvin scholar, Emile Doumergue, insisted that Calvin was theocentric, not christocentric, in his theological work.⁽²⁾ If this is clearly understood, then it will be seen why Berkouwer has constructed his dogmatics in the way he has. He is being consistent with the best thought in his own tradition. In this tradition it is correct to say that God is indivisible and His work cannot be separated from His unity. It is also true to say that the God who creates is the God who redeems. He is also the God who gives life and speaks by the prophets. The type of pneumatology that arises would have little sympathy with so-called Charismatic movements of the sort that become absorbed in the introspect-

¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Unity of the Church", *Theology Today*, Vol. 3 (October 1946), 371-374, quoted in John N. Leith, Introduction to the Reformed Tradition, p.95

² Emile Doumergue, Jean Calvin, *Les hommes et les choses de son temps*, Vol. IV, p.428, quoted in John N. Leith, Introduction to the Reformed Tradition, p.95.

ive analysis of one's own psyche.⁽³⁾ The areas of theology which show the Reformed Church's most authentic identity, which distinguishes it from the Church of Rome, are the doctrines of Sacred Scripture and the understanding of the divine initiative operative in the justification and sanctification of man. It is mainly in these areas that the writings of Berkouwer give his fullest treatment of the person and role of the Holy Spirit.

To the outsider, Berkouwer appears as one of the most articulate voices of the Reformed tradition for his work ranges widely over the whole field of theology. The larger theological tradition of which he is part, beginning obviously with Calvin, has given sufficient attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It became in the course of time, however, a commonplace to contend that Calvin was more a theologian of the head than of the heart. This led to the development, in practice at least, of pneumatology becoming a muted area in Reformed teaching. Calvinism with its strong christocentric message seemed to show the work of the Holy Spirit as having no distinctive role apart from that of sanctifier. The Spirit is in no way an initiator; He is rather a humble, quiet servant. Is this, however, a true reflection of Calvin's theological position?

An accurate view of Calvin's theology can be found in his understanding of faith, which is from beginning to end, a work of the Holy Spirit. In his fullest and most formal definition of faith he declares:

We call it (faith) a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts

³ John H. Leith, "Introduction to the Reformed Tradition." This work by an American Reformed scholar is an example of the thinking described here. Nowhere is the Holy Spirit dealt with in isolation from the Holy Trinity.

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through the Holy Spirit.

Elsewhere in the Institutes, and even more explicitly, faith is seen to be more of the "heart" than the brain, pertaining more to disposition than to understanding. In support of this Calvin affirms:

For faith is much higher than human understanding. It will not be enough for the mind to be illuminated by the Spirit of God unless the heart⁽⁵⁾ is also strengthened and supported by His power.

These quotations from the Institutes lend credence to the opinion of those scholars like B.B. Warfield, who have come to the conclusion that Calvin, more than any other Reformer, can be referred to as the theologian of the Holy Spirit.⁽⁶⁾

It is therefore important to remember that this is the intellectual matrix into which Berkouwer must be placed, and that he is true to his Calvinist roots. Calvin taught the work of the Holy Spirit as a fundamental part of his theology. In his stress on the freedom and sovereignty of God, for example, he demonstrates that our whole existence is the result of the gracious work of God's Spirit. He writes:

It is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and earth.⁽⁷⁾

An echo of this is found very imaginatively in Berkouwer's book, Faith

⁴ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion III, 2, 7. N.B: all four of Calvin's books are found in the two volume translation of the "Institutes" by Henry Beveridge - see bibliography.

⁵ Ibid., pp III, 2, 33.

⁶ For an adequate treatment of Calvin's teaching on the Holy Spirit see Chapter 4, ("Theology and the Reformed tradition") in John H. Leith, "Introduction to the Reformed Tradition", pp 86-130.

⁷ Ibid., I, 13, 14.

and Perseverance, especially in the chapter on perserverance and prayer.⁽⁸⁾ The questions that arise out of the preceding are, firstly: Is it true that in the post-Calvin Reformed tradition the work and reality of the Holy Spirit is largely ignored, and is this also the case with Berkouwer? The second question is, does Berkouwer have a theological profile of his own or is he merely a faithful apologist for his tradition? The answer to the first question can be demonstrated quite firmly by discovering that there is a solid underpinning of pneumatology to all his writings. The second question will be answered by seeing Berkouwer in a two-way debate with, on the one side, a thinker from his own tradition, Karl Barth, and on the other side a Roman Catholic who will assess what distinguishes Berkouwer's thought from his own.

Initially, however, it is important to understand Berkouwer as an orthodox spokesman and thinker within a specific tradition. To do this, he must be placed where he belongs, that is within a broad and universal view of the Reform milieu. It is from this milieu that his theological stance is derived.

Calvin has already been mentioned, and it is appropriate to cite him, because for Berkouwer he is the normative mentor. Calvin's most original contribution to discussion about the dynamics of the Spirit in revelation was his doctrine of the "Internal witness of the Holy Spirit",⁽⁹⁾ in which he holds that neither the written word nor the proclaimed word has any power apart from the secret working and witness of the Holy Spirit. For Calvin, a key category in the Christian life is that of regeneration. In his commentary on John he says that "Faith flows from regeneration as

⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance, pp 147-153.

⁹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, 7, 4-5; I, 9,

well as newness of life and other gifts of the Holy Spirit."⁽¹⁰⁾

The Reformed scholar, I. John Hesselink, maintains that whereas, in terms of accent, Luther could be called the theologian of justification, Calvin might well be labelled the theologian of sanctification.⁽¹¹⁾ Hendrikus Berkhof writes that Calvin's famous third book of the Institutes, entitled, "The way in which we receive the grace of Christ", contains great riches in the field of pneumatology, many of which have not yet been uncovered by the Reformed Churches.⁽¹²⁾ Berkhof quotes with approval, Calvin's words, "The Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."⁽¹³⁾

Calvin's doctrine of the Church and sacraments are also areas in his theology that could be used to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit. It is important to note that Calvin was very much the churchman in the sense that he had no hesitation in using Cyprian's dictum that, "for those to whom God is father, the church may also be mother."⁽¹⁴⁾ Furthermore, Calvin's view of the church is very Pauline. It is a union between the head and members, Christ and the believers, in love and in the Spirit. The church is, in short, the realm of the Holy Spirit, to such a degree that it could be termed as pneumatocracy, that is, the sphere where the Spirit rules. These ideas find a muted emphasis in Berkouwer's own writings about the church.⁽¹⁵⁾

¹⁰ John Calvin, Commentary on John:1:13, quoted in I. John Hesselink, On Being Reformed, p.76.

¹¹ I. John Hesselink, On Being Reformed, p.76.

¹² Hendrikus Berkhof, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p.22.

¹³ John Calvin, Institutes III, 1, 1, quoted in Hendrikus Berkhof, op cit., p.22.

¹⁴ John Calvin, Institutes IV, 1, 1.

¹⁵ cfr. G.C. Berkouwer, The Church, pp 88-98.

The role of the Holy Trinity in Calvin's doctrine of the sacraments is equally prominent. He brings the Spirit in consistently whether he is writing about baptism or the Lord's supper, and, for him, the Spirit's activity is described in these words: "He who brings the grace of God with Him, gives a place for the sacraments among us, and makes them bear fruit."¹⁶

As the scope and purpose of this chapter is not primarily to outline Calvin's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but to illustrate the historical and theological matrix that nourished and inspired Berkouwer's thought, it is sufficient to summarise Calvin's theological position on the Holy Spirit.

The construction of his Institutes is interesting from a pneumatological stance. After having dealt with Christ and the redemption in the second book of the Institutes, Calvin gives as the heading of the third book, "The way in which we can receive the grace of Christ. - what benefits come to us from it and what effects follow." In this book he deals with the subject's faith, regeneration, penitence, the life of the Christian, justification, good works, Christian liberty, prayer and predestination.

What is pertinent is that he shows here how the believer is the centre and recipient of the Spirit's gifts. The heading of the fourth book reads, "The external means or aids by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein." For Calvin, these external means or aids are: church, preaching, sacraments, church discipline and state government. Again, what clearly emerges is that the church is more than an outward, though very important, means to the encounter between the Spirit and the individual. This was in itself an important discovery

¹⁶ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, IV, 14, 8.

(17)
and its influence on Berkouwer is evident in his volume on the church.

What emerges convincingly from Calvin's thought, even in summary, is that he did not ignore the vital work of the Holy Spirit. But what of his successors? It seems as if his vital sense of the Holy Spirit died out in later generations, especially in the period of seventeenth century scholasticism.⁽¹⁸⁾ A significant fact, of course, is that it is precisely in Holland, Berkouwer's home country, that a special interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was revived. The influential name in this field is again one of Berkouwer's special mentor and countryman Abraham Kuyper author of the monumental classic, The Work of the Holy Spirit, which he completed in 1888. The book has undergone several translations and reprinting since that time. This gives some indication of its popularity and influence.⁽¹⁹⁾

This interest in the Holy Spirit by Dutch theologians has continued down to the present time. Mention has already been made of Hendrikus Berkhof's work. Less well known is the late O. Noordmans, whose popular meditations on the Holy Spirit was widely translated into European languages. There is also A.A. van Ruler, who is considered the theologian of the Holy Spirit par excellence. Outside of Berkouwer's immediate Dutch circle of influence, the best known modern Reformed work on the Holy Spirit is George S. Hendry's The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology, but it is uncertain what influence, if any, he has had on Berkouwer.

¹⁷ cfr. especially Section 3, "The Apostolicity of the Church", pp 221-278, in The Church.

¹⁸ I. John Hesselink, op cit., p.77.

¹⁹ The English translation was made in 1900 for Funk and Wagnalls. The latest English reprint is by Eerdmans, 1979.

Berkouwer's pneumatology can be extracted from almost every one of his volumes, and reflects a commitment to the article of the creed, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life who spoke by the prophets." This credal formula provides the categories under which his work is investigated in the main body of this writing. In considering it this way, what will emerge is that Berkouwer insists on the link between the Spirit and the Word contained in scripture. It is fidelity to the Word that is the true sign of the Spirit's presence. In approaching Berkouwer's writing from such a perspective, it is seen that his dogmatic studies can be liberating in comparison with the more traditional approach, that virtually limited the sphere of the Spirit's work to the church and the inner witness of the believer. This older approach seemed to be constantly in danger of placing the Spirit at the beck and call of the Church's institutions as for example in the Roman Catholic tradition.

Berkouwer does indeed accept all the important orthodox beliefs about the Holy Spirit. A study on his pneumatology could have been written out under the traditional headings such as: nature of Spirit (third person of the Holy Trinity), mission of Spirit, role of the Spirit in the Church/Individual/Universe, signs and gifts of the Spirit's presence and so forth. It is more relevant however to see where Berkouwer is at his best, that is, where he injects new life again into an older Reformed theology by his emphasis on the biblical idea of the Spirit as God in action. For him, as indeed for Calvin, the Spirit is the divine achiever. What this means is seen in the following quote. Calvin in writing of the particular characteristics of each of the divine persons of the Trinity says,

This distinction is that, to the Father is attributed the beginning of action, the fountain and source of all things, to the Son, wisdom, counsel and arrangement in action, while the energy and efficacy of action is ascribed to the Spirit. (20)

²⁰ John Calvin, Institutes, I, 13.18.

This, with a few qualifications, is also Berkouwer's position. The breadth and depth of this position is made apparent if one considers not only personal prayer and the intercession of Christ, but also the prayer of the Holy Spirit and His unique role in the perseverance of the saints. Christ who prayed for his own before He was taken up again to the Father, brightened their future with the promise of another comforter (John 16:7f). This would be the spirit of truth who would actively lead the faithful into all truth. He would come in Christ's name and would abide with us forever (John 14:16).⁽²¹⁾ Obviously, Berkouwer would not teach that the consolation of the Holy Spirit replaces that of Christ; he is far too trinitarian in his theology for that. For him, there is a profound connection between Christ as paraclete and the Holy Spirit as paraclete. He writes:

We hear that the Holy Spirit, the other paraclete shall be sent by the Father in the name of Christ (John 14:26), and that the Spirit would testify of Christ (John 15:20). And Christ in His office as paraclete brings His work to complete fulfillment - not that this office is not important in its own right, but rather that his work reaches completion when the Spirit of Christ comes to dwell in his church. Because the Spirit of Christ is sent by the Father, the Spirit will thus abide with the Church forever. And therefore, when we consider the perseverance of the Saints we must also consider the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, in the Church of God.⁽²²⁾

For Berkouwer, this means that the gift of the Spirit is always related to the ongoing power and activity of God, especially in His Church. He demonstrates scripturally the particular areas of life and relationship in which the believer encounters the life of the Spirit. Believers are continually admonished in relation to the indwelling of the Spirit and should not quench this (1 Thes. 5:19). When in danger of sin they are reminded that they are the temple of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 6:19;

²¹ G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Perseverance, p.148.

²² Ibid., p.149.

Rom. 8:9, 11). The Spirit's work includes all life, the children of God are led by the Spirit (Rom. 8:5). The Spirit witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God (Rom. 8:16). Likewise the Spirit prays with us to make up what is lacking in our prayers and also awakens in our hearts the great longing felt for the coming glory. (Rom. 8:23; Gal. 4:6; Rom. 5:5).⁽²³⁾ Finally, God's ultimate victory in His creation can never be understood in human terms alone, not even in the life of the individual believer. For this victory is possible only because of the Spirit's prayer which transcends all our weakness. Berkouwer, therefore, emerges as an interpreter of the Reformed tradition.

The central theme of his theology is not man, even man in his existential possibilities, but GOD. This is not just the creating and redeeming God but also the God who gives life and "speaks through the prophets". Consequently the doctrine of Holy Scripture, which deals of the revealing God who speaks through his prophets, stands in a place of fundamental importance to the understanding of Berkouwer's pneumatology. For him "Faith and scripture is never understood formalistically, but is seen as clearly connected with the testimony of the Holy Spirit."⁽²⁴⁾ and it is this declaration concerning the Holy Spirit that requires study.

²³ Ibid., p.150.

²⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture, p.105.

CHAPTER 2 - "WHO SPOKE BY THE PROPHETS"

The Holy Spirit and Sacred Scripture

A. The Nature of Holy Scripture

The role of the Holy Spirit in special revelation was accorded its fullest treatment by Berkouwer in his dogmatic study on holy scripture. In that work Berkouwer elaborates on this important area of theology from the outset as this is vital to the methodology he employs. He introduces the topic of holy scripture by speculating whether it is possible to synthesize all the aspects of scripture usually covered by dogmatics; a synthesis that could serve as a usable principle for presenting a holistic study. Consequently, his question ranges over the whole field of pertinent issues such as canon, certainty, authority, interpretation and criticism.

These questions are dealt with carefully, not in isolation, but, insofar as they light up the nature of scripture itself, which is that scripture IS the word of God. He finds his synthesis in the compelling doctrine of inspiration, or as he will have it, the God-breathed character of scripture.

Scripture as God's word meets us in virtue of its own authority and calls from us an attitude of faith. Faith here is the human response in the vital relationship between the impulse of the Holy Spirit in God-breathed scripture and man's freedom of exercise that faith. This same vital relationship in faith is what defines, for Berkouwer, scripture as God's word for us. Berkouwer wonders whether it is possible to discuss Holy Scripture apart from a personal relationship of belief in it.⁽¹⁾ He raises this question because of the very nature of faith, which rests on and trusts in the word of God. For him involvement in the word is not the same thing as subjectivism because the object of faith is God and not a

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture, p.9.

written word.⁽²⁾

As for this human faith-response, Berkouwer does not hesitate to describe it as child-like faith or submission. The person who has this faith does not walk around with his eyes closed, for he is required to search the scriptures. The person who has this faith must continuously live in the light of his encounter with the God whom he meets in the scriptures. If he meets the Holy Spirit in obedient encounter, the word will be, to paraphrase the psalmist, a light for his feet and a lamp for his path. (Psalm 119:105).

It is in this relationship that all the other questions of Biblical theology find their synthesis. This is underscored by the general Reformation confession, concerning the Spirit, which holds that it is the authority of God's word itself that alone leads to an acceptance in the depth of the heart.⁽³⁾ But in affirming this, Berkouwer also insists on its corollary and that is that God's word comes in human words and so the human witness can never be devalued in any respect.⁽⁴⁾ He adduces the experience of the Samaritans who first believe in the woman's testimony, but when they meet the Lord himself, they believe because of His word. The human witness is true and valid and even appealing but in the final analysis it carries its reliability only on the explicit authority of God Himself, who is the deep foundation of all prophetic and apostolic authority.⁽⁵⁾

The question of this authority in relation to interpretation of scripture is important. God's word does not impose an authority arbitrarily like

² Ibid., p.10.

³ Abraham Kuyper, The Work of the Holy Spirit, pp 172-173.

⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, op. cit., p.145.

⁵ Ibid., pp 143-146.

external human authority. Rather, its purposes are worked out in the way of the Holy Spirit, who leads man to obedience and draws him in his full existence to the gospel. This is rather more like a wooing than like some irresistible external force that reduces man to a passivity and robs him of his freedom and selfhood. One finds this portrayed in the parable of the sower where each of the hearing types can be seen reacting differently to the seed or word.

This word of God does not switch off human reactions, instead it confronts the hearer with a choice and the necessity of a decision. Here one is brought right back again to the perception of a direct relationship between faith and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in which the believer's acceptance occurs with joy and willingness. Berkouwer explains it like this:

The Spirit, as the spirit of Christ and of God-breathed scripture, does not blind man but opens his eyes and calls him to discipleship. Man in turn becomes a witness of what he has heard, seen and tasted of the word of life, "so that you may have fellowship with us" and "that our joy may be complete." (1 John 1:3-4). Faith in terms of a sacrifice of the intellect is a perversion of the Christian faith and obedience.⁽⁶⁾

Hence it is the Holy Spirit in God-breathed scripture who enlightens men's minds to see the wonder of what has been revealed to them. He instills in them the desire to become witnesses to what they have experienced. This removes any ideas of blind faith as fundamentally unchristian.

The interaction of roles between the Holy Spirit and the believing members of His church raises the question of biblical criticism and its effects upon human faith. Berkouwer's firm conviction in the witness of the Holy Spirit and his exposition of this witness is imaginative and persuasive. He advocates that for people who accept it, biblical criticism presents no

⁶ Ibid., p.351.

problem; the word Berkouwer uses is "fear".⁽⁷⁾ He encourages them to view issues like historicity, reliability, perspicuity and sufficiency from a correct perspective. This perspective takes as its starting point the scriptural fact that the Holy Spirit Himself calls on believers to test and to try out the message for themselves. They are called upon not only to hear and do God's will but, to "acknowledge" this will (Rom.12:2). Furthermore, they are asked to "approve" what is excellent (Phil.1:10), and they are called upon to "exercise" this knowledge with discernment (Phil.1:9) and to test the spirits (1 Cor.12:10; 1 John 4:6).⁽⁸⁾

These texts are basic to Berkouwer's call to freedom from fear in biblical research, but they are accompanied by a note of warning to the serious scriptural scholar. He alerts one to the fact that there must always be a sharp distinction between criticism of the word and criticism by the word. In applying the critical method to scripture which IS the word of God, one cannot place oneself above the word of God. God's word can only have one subjective correlate and that is faith.

The word, "criticism", can be used with different meanings. This is important for those who, while confessing Holy Scripture to be God's word addressed to us and not wanting to belittle its authority, still wish to deal with important ancillaries like the text itself, or its form and historical situation. Textural, historical and form criticism are necessary because they deal in this respect with the human form of God's word. Berkouwer is aware of, and resists, the temptation to think in terms of a competition between the divine and the human aspects of scripture; a dilemma which could easily lead either to an emphasis of the one aspect or a diminution of the other. This would clearly be at variance with the

⁷ Ibid., p.19.

⁸ Ibid., p.354.

God-breathed character of Holy Scripture. In the light of the God-breathed character of Holy Scripture, there is no sanction against subjecting this scripture to human analysis as long as it does not attack its divine origin.

Berkouwer affirms that the Holy Spirit will keep the Church from prejudice, dogmatic exegesis and the dictatorship of method, provided the Church gives testimony to God's word in scripture. The arresting fact that God's word itself challenges us to research will then also be honoured and understood in the Church. Berkouwer would go even further and add that the Church itself is led by the Spirit to exercise pastoral care (as opposed to protection - we are not called to protection; it is taken care of by the Spirit himself in proclaiming the message of scripture). For it is only by proclaiming this message that the Holy Spirit in turn makes His intention clear to us. (9)

In proclamation it is God who speaks his word. Corrections by scholars of various translations of the word, its composition and place in the universe of men, need not concern the reception of its message. The word finds its way through periods having their own social structures and cultural identities. The Holy Spirit is not hindered by the historical or cultural matrix but lets the word shine through these clearly. Holy Scripture has a central aim that totally supersedes any regional or historical limitation in human expression. Berkouwer sums up the whole endeavour in this way:

Thus the meaning of scriptural faith is to be understood not as a "form" of faith that can be isolated, but as the written word of the Paraclete, whose witness concerning Jesus Christ conquers all distrust. In that case we may think anew of the promise that pierces through to us in human words and of the biblical phrase "that you may believe" the promise is

⁹ Ibid., p.210.

a correlate to faith. Come, Creator Spirit! (10)

Thus we can see that the Holy Spirit through scripture encounters all men, everywhere in their human situation. Scripture, as the "written word of the Paraclete", operates in this power because it is God-breathed; this will be observed in the next section.

B. Holy Scripture is "God-breathed"

The discussion concerning Holy Scripture over the centuries is inseparably linked to the confession that scripture is inspired, or as Berkouwer would prefer to say, that it is God-breathed. This expression comes directly from the Pauline words, "pasa graphe theopneustos" (II Tim.3:16). The word "theopneustos" is usually translated into English by the word "inspired", owing its origin in turn to the Latin, "inspiro" (to breathe into). In English however, the word does not convey with sufficient clarity all the power and activity of God "breathing" His word. This activity of God makes scripture, in its humanity, totally different from all other writings. This means that scripture is not derived solely from the impulse of man, but by men moved by the Holy Spirit. (11)

It is in addressing himself to the status, the origin and the authority of the writings (graphé) that Berkouwer articulates clearly a role for the Holy Spirit; at the same time he safeguards man's unique freedom as a creature of God. Berkouwer repeatedly highlights the issue that scripture deals with a relationship that involves the Holy Spirit and real human words. He elaborates this in these words:

The fact that scripture and the prophets are from God (II Pet.1:21; Ezek.2-6) does not rule out the human witness in a divine monergism, but includes this witness in a unique manner. God's word has not come

¹⁰ Ibid., p.345.

¹¹ Ibid., p.140.

to us as a stupendous supernatural miracle that shies from every link with the human in order thus to be truly divine. Rather, when God speaks human voices ring in our ears. Many attempts have been made to describe this relationship. For instance this relationship has been expressed as the taking into service of men by the Holy Spirit. Repeatedly we are referred to the many examples of the taking into service of a prophet, a human child and words. Obviously the connection between God speaking and the human word is very close and real. One can describe this relationship without exaggeration as "identity". So it is said that the Spirit speaks by the prophets (II Sam. 23:2; Heb.1:1)⁽¹²⁾

This quotation has been given in full because it comes very close to being a definition of Berkouwer's thoughts on scripture; but what does he mean by "identity"? He uses the example of one who, as a consequence of a sending or mission, is empowered to proclaim in virtue of another's authority. He tells us that God makes His appeal through "ambassadors" as in the Pauline sense of being an ambassador for Christ. This "identity" is given special incisiveness by Jesus when he talks about His own voice being present in the voice of the apostles; "He who hears you, hears me and the one who rejects you, rejects me. (Luke 10:16)."⁽¹³⁾ It is necessary to reiterate, at this point, that the speaking of God through men is not a substitution of God's word for men. It remains man's own speech - yet it is man's speech with its limits, whether of personality, cultural milieu or standard of education. Despite this intrusion of human personality, the divine word is still heard in its perfection and scripture reaches us as the word of God. Proof of this is that Jesus treated it as the final arbiter in his expressions: "it is written" during the temptation in the wilderness, and again when he expounded the word to the two on the road to Emmaus.

Berkouwer also explained the operation of the Holy Spirit in the act of

¹² Ibid., p.145.

¹³ Ibid., p.147.

revelation. He rejects a mechanistic view of inspiration and replaces it by an organic idea of the God-breathed character of sacred scripture. He implies that, with the growth of human understanding, it becomes increasingly evident that a term like "theopneustos" conveys an activity of the Spirit that is very different from ecstatic inspiration. The human contribution in revelation can never, for Berkouwer, be explained simply by the kind of illustration that denotes helpless passivity in the inspired writers. Examples of that sort usually represent the Holy Spirit as a musician who played upon his musical instruments, the inspired writers. The latter lacked all vitality of their own and merely reproduced what the musician required of them. ⁽¹⁴⁾

In the course of this development of insight, the word "organ" came into frequent use. It meant that the sacred writers were, not passive instruments, but organs with their own free will. In this context, there was a co-operation between the Holy Spirit, as principal author of scripture, and the sacred writers as his instrumental authors. With time even this word needed to be more specifically defined. In a carefully defined context it was a good way of describing the double aspect of scripture because it could serve to clarify the relationship between Holy Spirit as author and man as the person taken freely into His service in one way or another. The weakness of the definition is that it is too wide. If used in this sense, it is possible to describe any person taken into God's service (for any reason whatsoever, e.g. Cyrus or Asshur) as organs of the Spirit. This can be for any reason at all, be they inspired writers or not. Berkouwer, however, after having admitted the possible flaws in the usage of the term "organ" will not relinquish it because it serves too valuable a purpose in demonstrating this great truth of faith. He declares that:

¹⁴ ibid., p.151.

... this word ("organic") is used so concretely and characteristically that it cannot be discredited as mere terminology. Though it is not at all new, it serves today to avoid a magical and supernatural view of scripture and calls attention to the manner in which the biblical authors were taken into service. It is noteworthy that the problem is often expressed in terms of a union of divine and human factors.⁽¹⁵⁾

The term though acceptable to Berkouwer, warrants further elaboration from him. He relentlessly rejects all the other traditional attempts at defining the Spirit's influence upon the human author as the core of an understanding of revelation. He finds a lack of sufficiency in the traditional Reformation standpoint that describes the Spirit as generating an impulse to write in the author. In the same way he discounts another Reformation viewpoint usually called "verbal inspiration", which saw the inspired author moved by a suggestion of matter and words, that is knowledge placed into the mind of the Holy Spirit.⁽¹⁶⁾ This seems to Berkouwer as if the word is still the product of a verbal-mechanical inspiration. Consequently, he criticizes Kuyper's position, in which Kuyper speaks of "a content pressed into me by the Spirit and given back in words forced out by the Spirit."⁽¹⁷⁾

Berkouwer will not have talk of persons inspired by the Holy Spirit as opposed to writings inspired by the Spirit. The reason then becomes clear as to why he rejects all the previous examples. It is because he declares that the Holy Spirit reveals the word of God in the text itself. This event occurs in the words as they confront us. Berkouwer clarifies this matter in the following quotation, in which he asserts:

The kinship of the God-breathed scripture with revelation in Christ (i.e. its content) does not mean that it is not related to the words. It explains rather that everything is at stake with these words;

¹⁵ Ibid., p.154-155.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.156.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.157.

that God-breathed character is a witness which at no time can or may be severed from what it testifies to by these words.⁽¹⁸⁾

From this it can be seen that for Berkouwer, believing scripture does not mean staring at a holy and mysterious book, but hearing the witness concerning Christ.

The respect for the concrete words is related to the Holy Spirit who wants to bind men to Christ through His message; the message that is expressed precisely in the words of scripture. It is not a mechanical inspiration but an organic one. God works through man's natural faculties, that is why Paul is different from John, or John from the Synoptics, but nonetheless all their scripture is God-breathed.⁽¹⁹⁾

The Holy Spirit himself ensures that the message is without error. The Spirit is the guarantor of the message in which the thought is important and the very words are its vehicle. A consequence of this is that this word of God in human words implies a responsibility in the Church's preaching. The Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit is urged to preach Christ. This transition from the hearing to the preaching of scripture corresponds to the progression of human life and history; its relation is to the mystery of the Spirit's taking scripture into service. In Berkouwer's words it is, "... the mystery of the Spirit's taking scripture into service because of its unique content and intention, referring not to a mysterious occurrence but to the beautiful feet 'of those who preach good news' as it is written (Rom.10:15)."⁽²⁰⁾

The Spirit, as the guarantor of the message, also witnesses internally to man that scripture is indeed the word of God. He works in and through the

¹⁸ Ibid., p.162.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.166.

²⁰ Ibid., p.210.

world of men binding them by His "inner witness" to the core of Scripture, which is Jesus Christ.

C. "The Inner Witness"

Calvin's most enduring contribution to the understanding of the nature and authority of scripture was his doctrine of the internal witness or testimony of the Holy Spirit, usually referred to by its Latin designation, Testimonium Spiritus Sancti. According to this doctrine, neither the written word, nor the proclaimed word has any power of persuasion apart from the secret working and witness of the Spirit.⁽²¹⁾ Berkouwer believes that the importance of this doctrine for the Reformed church centres in two issues. The first issue demonstrates that belief in scripture is not merely a rational insight, or an intellectual acceptance of the trustworthiness of scripture, without a personal relationship to it. The second issue is that it provided an alternative authority to Rome's Testimonium Ecclesiae, wherein Rome emphasized the authority of the Church under the direction of the Holy Spirit.⁽²²⁾ Rome interpreted this ecclesial authority as constituting the Church as custodian and interpreter of sacred scripture in the task of aiding the faithful to certainty. Berkouwer concedes that this claim has to be answered and he therefore quotes with approval Article V of the Belgic Confession, which says that we accept without any doubt all that is written in the holy canonical books, "not so much because the church receives and approves them, but more especially because the Holy Ghost witnesses in our hearts that they are from God."⁽²³⁾

²¹ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1.7.4, 1.7.13. This great insight of Calvin is present in the Reformed Confession, see especially article 5 of the Belgic Confession, the Westminster Confession 1, 5, and the Gallican Confession article 4.

²² G.C. Berkouwer, op. cit., p.40.

²³ Ibid., p.40.

Berkouwer does however, carefully note the form of this confessional article that does not totally exclude the church's place in approving the scriptures. The church in the Reform tradition recognizes the imprint of the Holy Spirit in the scriptures, but in doing so, does not itself give scripture the stamp of approval. That prerogative belongs to God alone.

Problems connected with the unqualified acceptance of the doctrine of the "Inner Witness" first arose within the ranks of the Reformed churches when later theologians pointed out the anomaly inherent in this teaching. It seemed as if the confession taught, on the one hand, the objective witness of the Holy Spirit to scripture, and on the other hand, it also appeared to teach a further subjective witness of the Spirit in the heart. In the light of this "second" witness, it could be concluded that scriptural objectivity, trustworthiness and self-authentication were in need of an additional Testimonium internum to be complete. Berkouwer notes that, on the basis of this "doubling of witness", Strauss considered this confession to be "the achilles heel" of the Protestant system.⁽²⁴⁾ This criticism leads Berkouwer to treat of the whole status and nature of the Testimonium in detail.

Is this Testimonium a separate mystical witness of the Holy Spirit and therefore a hidden operation? Is this voice of the Holy Spirit then the real revelation in contrast to the voice of scripture which then becomes insufficient? We have here the danger of a formal authority, of an abstract voice of God apart from the content of the word. Thus stated, it could be argued that this doctrine had no other context than the subjective assurance that scripture is the voice of God. Berkouwer quotes Bavinck with approval in saying that the Testimonium gives no assurance regarding

²⁴ Ibid., p.63-64.

objective truth of salvation; it has a bearing instead on personal Sonship.⁽²⁵⁾ It is in this way that the Holy Spirit brings us into a believing subjection to Holy Scripture, uniting us to it in the same way as it unites us to Christ. This places the Testimonium fully in the dynamic context of the entire life of faith. Berkouwer agrees with Bavinck that the Testimonium is so intertwined with the life of faith, that our belief in scripture decreases and increases with our trust in Christ.⁽²⁶⁾

Berkouwer also holds that both Bavinck and Kuyper would be in agreement about the true nature of the Testimonium;⁽²⁷⁾ it does not supply direct certainty regarding "authenticity", "canonicity" or even "inspiration". The witness of the Holy Spirit is inseparably linked with faith and salvation in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit begins by binding us to the centre of scripture, namely Jesus Christ. That is why in its reflection on salvation and certainty the Church always focuses itself on the Holy Spirit. From the word of God it learned to understand that certainty of faith was not a self-evident human correlate of revelation gained by rational insight. The words from Matthew's gospel, that faith and knowledge do not come from flesh and blood (Matt.16:17) are particularly pertinent here. No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. It is God himself who has been revealed to us through the Holy Spirit, who searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Cor.2:10).⁽²⁸⁾

Berkouwer is adamant that the Holy Spirit does not coerce us irrationally, or force us by surprise, into acceptance of the word. The Spirit's work should rather be comprehended in the rich essential context of the New

²⁵ Ibid., p.43.

²⁶ Ibid., p.44.

²⁷ Ibid., p.45.

²⁸ Ibid., p.48.

Testament. Christ promised us that the Holy Spirit would "guide us into all truth (John 16:13)", as the Spirit of truth he "bears witness to Christ (John 15:26)." Furthermore, the Holy Spirit "convinces the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:18)." In other words, the Holy Spirit's work in leading us to faith and certainty in scripture is done through His function as witness or bearer of testimony to Christ the saviour. (29)

The testimony of the Spirit works in and through the world of men; it does not exclude man but wins his inner consent. The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are the children of God. All this shows a concentration on the believer's relationship to God in that child/father sense which the bible describes as sonship. The Testimonium cannot be split into separate testimonia, the one regarding sonship, the other concentrating on the truth of holy scripture. Everything that God reveals in His word is sure knowledge and gives a firm confidence, which the Holy Spirit works, in the heart of the gospel. The human response of faith in the Christian tradition is not knowledge in the sense of an intellectual assent to a revealed truth, rather it is a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When acceptance of holy scripture as the word of God is separated from a living faith in Christ, it is meaningless and confusing. The purpose of scripture is given by itself in these words from the gospel, "These words are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31)". Berkouwer uses strong language in affirming the testimony of the Holy Spirit, as it confronts us with God's message as the message of holy scripture, but he does not hold that this confession provides us with one simple answer to all the questions which are denoted as "problems regarding scripture." (30)

²⁹ Ibid., p.49.

³⁰ Ibid., p.65.

He is also seriously concerned with exploring the connection between the Testimonium and the mode of determining the concrete contents, or canon, of holy scripture.

D. The Holy Scripture and Canonicity

Berkouwer confronts the question of canonicity and its relatedness to the testimony of the Holy Spirit with less conclusiveness than the rest of his work on holy scripture evinces. He discerns the following connection:

We have noted that the Reformed confession on the testimony of the Spirit regarding holy scripture automatically leads to a consideration of this scripture as canon. This is especially true since this confession is not merely an escape into spiritualism but is inseparably joined to the confession of the self-authentication of scripture.⁽³¹⁾

From this quotation, Berkouwer further concludes that attention must be paid to the central place which the canonical normative aspect of scripture has historically been given in the church.⁽³²⁾ A further question that presents itself here for Berkouwer is, how does the believer, in the Reformed tradition, go from Article V of the Belgic Confession, which speaks of concrete canonical books, "to a believing study of God's word as a prophetic-apostolic witness?"⁽³³⁾ Berkouwer posits this question because he does not want the testimony of the Holy Spirit to be misunderstood. Such a misunderstanding would see the Testimonium as formalizing and mechanizing the scriptures through the external imposition of a canon upon the Church. The Testimonium could further be misrepresented by confessing it to be an autonomous witness to the canonicity of the several books. Berkouwer wrestles with the paradoxes of the Church's specific and deter-

³¹ Ibid., p.67.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., p.66.

mined manner in confessing holy scripture as canon, as well as confessing the self-authentication of scripture. This issue is evidently of great importance for a Christian communion which is word-centred, and for whom preaching not based on canonical scripture is considered to be illegitimate. This area of concern was especially highlighted with the advent of historical criticism. This period considerably diminished the role of the Holy Spirit in favour of seeing the canon as the consequence of a lengthy historical process. (34)

The question of canonicity affected the Old Testament as profoundly as the New. The Church's unswerving commitment to the Old Testament as the divine cradle and matrix of the New Testament, and her commitment to this writing as being revealed by the Spirit, poses even more questions. The fact is especially true in view of the uncertainty surrounding the so-called Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. The fact that historians now doubt whether such a council, of Jewish rabbis and scholars, ever existed at all, casts doubt on the concept of a single authoritative closing of the Old Testament canon. (35) It is sufficient to mention, at this point, that many theologians are wary of any concept of canonicity that accents juridical validity. The reason for this is that such juridical validity would make the Holy Spirit depend upon the structures of an institution.

The situation regarding the New Testament is of even more immediate importance. Berkouwer demonstrates a discernible process of growth from the apostolic times until the respective synods of Hippo (393 A.D.) and Carthage (397 A.D.) that determined the boundaries of the canon as we know them today. (36) He also notes that a case can be made for a recognizable canon

³⁴ Ibid., p.67.

³⁵ See Berkouwer's footnote 3 on page 69.

³⁶ Ibid., p.70.

in the life of the church even before the data. This is important if a conclusion has to be reached about the role of the Spirit in the closing of the canon; whether He works in the church councils or speaks out of the centre of the canon itself.

Berkouwer demonstrates that it is imperative to give a good theological account of the phenomenon of the closed canon. He shows how an initial attempt was made to connect the process with the specific guidance of the Holy Spirit, "a special providence." Abraham Kuyper, for example, took this position.⁽³⁷⁾ The reason that this analysis gained popularity was due to the fact that it focussed attention on the truth that it is God, and not human factors, that led to its closure. Berkouwer is of the opinion that the above, while describing Kuyper's position, can also be seen as the Roman Catholic position. He discerns the similarity to the Roman Catholic conception of canonicity in that both views stress the Spirit's guidance of the church in the closing of the canon. Berkouwer seriously questions this notion because he holds firmly that the church did not, critically, by means of its own shifting and weighting create the canon. The church, on the contrary, was itself subjected to the canon in all its priority.⁽³⁸⁾

Berkouwer would still hold that the church is highly visible in the closing of the canon, even if it does not have as obvious a role as in Rome's opinion. The church's authority must be seen as part of her essential nature because she is truly the Body of Christ, God's creating according to His unchangeable saving purpose. In the words of Berkouwer, "... the

37 Ibid., p.75.

38 It must be noted that this description of the canon as the creation of the church is not uniquely Roman Catholic. One finds almost identical wording with Harnack and Kummel, (see G.C. Berkouwer, op.cit., p.77).

church is thus ruling and norm giving, rather than a church looking for the norm and adapting itself to that norm."⁽³⁹⁾ Another interesting quotation given by Berkouwer in this context is from Appel's Kanon und Kirche, 1964, when he speaks about the self-authentication of the church, which he grew up under the leading of the Holy Spirit. He describes the church's self-authentication as, "... the only criterion of canonicity able to remove all uncertainty entailed by the historicity of the process of the canon."⁽⁴⁰⁾ In this view it is the Holy Spirit who is the ultimate factor in the closure of the canon.

Berkouwer has reservations about this interpretation. His objection is that it is too diffuse and does not answer the whole question; it does not give any basis for the contents and for the closing of the canon. He goes on to say that each of the proffered solutions is inadequate if viewed in isolation, (i.e. the providence of God, the testimony of the Spirit and the authority of the Church). Boldly stated, they all give evidence for one conclusion; there is no solitary isolated authority, outside the content and depth of the canon itself, for its formation and validation. However, when viewed in concert, these same proffered solutions, especially the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit are the correct way of approaching the question.

Here one has to be aware of two different sets of realities: the first is the central canon which the church "received" without any conflict; the second is that body of writing in which apostolic authority did not seem to address the church in so convincing and definitive a manner. It is in considering the status of these books, that the church confronts the problem of where to finalise the boundaries of the canon. Rome included

³⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, op.cit., p.79.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

these apocryphal books in the canon and the council of Trent confirmed this on the ground that they had already been included in the lists of Hippo and Carthage.⁽⁴¹⁾ The Reformation was more ambivalent; it distinguished between canonical and apocryphal books but after having done so, its distinction appears to be relativized. Article VI of the Belgic Confession goes on to state that these books may nonetheless be read instructively insofar as they agree with the canonical books.⁽⁴²⁾

Berkouwer is at his weakest in the area of canonicity insofar as he does not effectively answer a single question that he raises either with reference to the content or the boundaries of the canon. He finally leans heavily, as usual, on Bavinck and Kuyper. With Bavinck he says, ultimately, that the canonicity is rooted in the existence of the canonical books themselves. They have their authority jure suo, by the fact that they exist.⁽⁴³⁾ Kuyper is more explicit in highlighting the testimony of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer defers to him in the following quotation:

He (Kuyper) pointed to the fact that the testimony of the Spirit ties us to the core of scripture, and that the authority which then begins to address us out of the centre ends as "Scripture by placing sacred obligations upon us", until finally "in form and content both, the Scripture comes to stand before us as an authority from God."⁴⁴⁾

Berkouwer, elaborating on this reference to Kuyper, affirms that in such a manner the church arrived at its confession regarding the Bible. The church testifies that in scripture it hears God and that there it will continue to hear Him.

In his dogmatic study on the word of God, Berkouwer demonstrates incisively

⁴¹ Ibid., p.97.

⁴² Ibid., pp 97, 98.

⁴³ Ibid., p.90.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.99.

the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit authenticates scripture and divinises this human word whether by His "inspiration" or by His "testimony". It is He who binds men to God in Christ in this word. Berkouwer also explains the role of the Church as she arrives at her confession in recognizing and receiving the word of God. The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the believing community, the Church, clearly warrants his theological consideration.

CHAPTER 3 - "I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH"

A. The Holy Spirit and the Church

In Berkouwer's study on the Spirit and the word, it was explained how the Holy Spirit in "God-breathed" scripture enlightens men's minds to see the wonder of what has been revealed to them. We may now logically proceed, in this chapter, to consider the role of the Spirit as he enlivens the Church in recognizing and receiving the truth of God.

In the Creed, the Church confesses her faith in the Holy Spirit, and then immediately afterwards speaks about herself, "I believe in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints ...". For Berkouwer it is highly significant that the Church dares to speak about herself in this manner, notwithstanding the great distance between belief in God and the credo ecclesiam. The reason he believes this to be significant, is because it confronts the church with the reality of faith contained in this article of confession.⁽¹⁾ Such a reflection of introspection must lead the church to confront herself with her own claims. Is she really what she confesses herself to be: the people of God, the disciples of the Lord, the flock of the sole shepherd, the city set on the hill, the salt of the earth and the light of the world?⁽²⁾

Berkouwer's analysis of the church, in the light of these questions, is found under the traditional headings which are derived from the Nicene creed's four attributes. These attributes that define the church, in that credal formula, are unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity. From a pneumatological point of view this is one of the least successful and satisfying of his works. He seldom mentions the Holy Spirit despite the

¹ G.C. Berkouwer, The Church, p.10.

² Ibid., p.11.

promising link that is made between Spirit and church at the beginning of his book The Church. The role of the Spirit is certainly avowed and acknowledged but is never sufficiently elucidated. Examples of this can be found in his treatment of the attributes of the church's unity, or her communion, and the issue of her catholicity. He deals with the communion of the Church by situating it within the fellowship of Christ, which is lived out in the Holy Spirit. He writes:

However, communion can be better understood as implied in the reality of the church of Christ, thus speaking confessionally of what the New Testament says about Koinonia⁽³⁾ as fellowship in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In this brief quotation he removes the church's fellowship from the realm of purely human association and elevates it to an action of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when he discusses the catholicity of the church, he also deals with its pneumatological dimension in the following words:

In connection with the many human distinctions that affect catholicity, it is necessary to recall that the confession of catholicity is preceded by that of the Holy Spirit: Credo in Spiritum Sanctum. Uppsala took a meaningful approach when it dealt with the Holy spirit and the catholicity of the church. Here, too, strong emphasis is laid on gift and task. Catholicity is possible only⁽⁴⁾ by the Spirit and the perspectives opened by Him.

This particular quotation is very promising and rich in overtones about the Holy Spirit because it points out the inseparable relationship between the Spirit and the church. Unfortunately, Berkouwer does not expand on it or ever again refer to it.

The section of his ecclesiology that gives a satisfying treatment on the role of the Spirit is that which deals with the apostolicity of the church.

³ Ibid., p.92.

⁴ ibid., p.126.

He answers the question of how the empowerment of ministers, for the apostolic proclamation, must be understood. It must be seen in terms of a divine sending. This is due to the New Testament understanding of an apostle as one who is sent, and hence carries something of the authority of the sender. In the case of the apostles, this authority of empowerment is from above. There is a certain identification between the sender and the one sent since we are told that to hear to reject the disciples, sent by Christ, is to hear or reject Christ Himself.⁽⁵⁾ In endeavouring to describe this identification, Berkouwer rejects the word "substitution" because that word seems to suggest someone taking the place of another who can no longer fulfil this commission himself. From a theological point of view, the most suitable description is found in the word "representation" for implicit in it is the empowerment of the messenger by God through the Holy Spirit. The way Berkouwer describes it is as follows:

The word 'representation' allows the intention of the word 'identification' to emerge clearly: in human, empowered speaking, the full seriousness and reality of Christ's speaking is present. A warning is given against the misunderstanding that it is only a human voice. The depth of human, empowered speaking is indicated in sharp contrast: 'Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but ⁽⁶⁾ God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you' (1 Thes.4:8).

The voice of Christ Himself speaks through the human words of his ambassadors by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. There is a profound role for the Holy Spirit here as the one who is still operative in the church; the One who makes Christ's voice present in the living witness of the church. Berkouwer's insight is valid, even if underdeveloped.

Berkouwer realizes as well, that as a consequence of this divine empowerment within the apostolicity of the church an important issue remains to

⁵ Ibid., p.208.

⁶ Ibid., p.209.

be clarified. That issue is the relationship between charisma and office, between the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of ecclesiastical authority. If it is indeed the Holy Spirit who empowers the ministry and mission of the church, then one may ask how there can be any independence with respect to human empowerment. Similarly, in regard of human authority within the church, the question has further implications. Is not every human overseeing and administration in fact a perversion of the new fellowship of the church? Berkouwer recognizes that frequently tension and even antithesis is evident between the charismatic depth of the church and her administrative structures.⁽⁷⁾

Berkouwer believes his assertion, concerning this tension, can be demonstrated historically. The church in its inception was charismatic (led by the Spirit and with members in mutual subjection in the one body), but historical factors brought the church into a variety of different situations of life and thought - namely, those of institutionalization and of official structures of authority.⁽⁸⁾ This is understandable, since where no structures exist, a spiritual anarchy could follow with arbitrary and unchecked appeals to spiritual authority by any individual. Berkouwer tells us that even Paul, the great charismatic who saw the church as the domain of the Spirit, did not sanction individualism or disorder.⁽⁹⁾ Order in the church is established to create channels for receiving the Spirit's grace and should not be seen as the "antipole" of the Spirit. Berkouwer does, however, explain that the empowerment for the exercise of order in the church comes "from above" and cannot in any sense be compared to 'authoritarian' order. Where obedience to authority is called for, there

⁷ Ibid., pp 201 - 206.

⁸ Ibid., p.217.

⁹ Ibid.

is no thought of rigid blind obedience. The esteem and love for the bearers of empowerment are required because of their work.⁽¹⁰⁾ Berkouwer sees this development, of the structures of order, within the church as historically inevitable, and he does not believe that it results in a stifling of spiritual freedom in the church. He adduces Käsemann in support of this and outlines his position with evident approval. He continues:

The Pauline and Johannine aspects of the church, spirit, and charisma faded away. True, the intention was not to oppose office and structure to the Spirit, but rather to preserve His work from confusion and to escape spiritualistic intangibility. A principle of order was introduced to the structure of the church. First of all, it was beside, and later in place of, the charismatic structure. Just as everything in God's world order has a firm place, a position, a particular order, so it also is in the church: a charismatic life - life deriving from the Spirit - must be inserted into this order.⁽¹¹⁾

Order therefore is of extreme importance to the church as led by the Spirit. Berkouwer's approval of Käsemann derives from the position that neither of them wish to oppose charisma to office. The two impenetrate each other in order to give the church her true identity. "Charisma and office could not be placed in opposition to each other, but both had to be honoured in harmony with each other."⁽¹²⁾ Berkouwer is wary of seeing office in the church as something that arises when the original apostolic community deteriorates into a dull bureaucracy and can "no longer breathe on the mountainous heights of charismatic life."⁽¹³⁾ Nor does he want to see the idea that the life and activity of the Holy Spirit in the church is identified only with the extraordinary or the exceptional in the life of the

¹⁰ Ibid., p.222.

¹¹ Ibid., p.218

¹² Ibid., p.219.

¹³ Ibid., p.219.

church.⁽¹⁴⁾ On the contrary, the ecclesial activity of the Holy Spirit belongs to the ordinary or common life of the church and will not exist apart from its official structures. From this Berkouwer concludes that the charismatic life of the church has to be given its due in virtue of the double structure of the church namely charisma and office. Having said this, however, he further contends that these two structures can not be placed in opposition to each other; "they must both be honoured in harmony with each other".⁽¹⁵⁾

The exercise of empowerment of ecclesial office must itself stand under the test of submission (cf. Matt:1f; Rom.14:4). This obedience in the church is not blind, irrational obedience, but is the outflow of love and esteem amongst its members, and hence must be received with joy (Phil.2:29) for it comes from above. In such an interplay between the divine and the human, the church is enabled to exercise a life of mutual esteem, love and joy even in its structures. Berkouwer holds that all the usual queries connected with the tension between hierarchial authority and freedom in the Spirit are diminished when this is lived out.

The ancient confession that the Holy Spirit is the anima ecclesiae, the spirit of the church, is understood by Berkouwer in a special way. Primarily, he is careful to differentiate between the Roman Catholic teaching and traditional Reformed thought on this issue. He believes that the Roman Catholic interpretation, in practice, gives the church a pretension of being unthreatened in this world as if it were legitimized a priori by direct divine assistance from the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer does not totally disagree with such an interpretation but believes a qualification is

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

necessary. Admittedly, the Holy Spirit does, in the teaching of the Reformers, give a sure way of guarantee and a safe guide, but, the church's way through history is nonetheless full of tension. Berkouwer adds that even the appeal to the Holy Spirit in this situation of tension in the church's history was never presumptuous, "it was always placed under the test of obedience and faith in order to draw attention to the constancy of the church".⁽¹⁶⁾ What emerges from such an obedience is a firm affirmation of the church under the lordship of Christ, and also the perception that continuity is not placed in human hands.

Appeals to the Holy Spirit by those who have pastoral care in the church must be placed under the test of faith and obedience to the word. There must first be discrimination and testing within the church in order to guard against all arbitrariness. This is due to the fact that "the church still exists along the way of expectation - Veni Creator Spiritus."⁽¹⁷⁾ What this means for Berkouwer is that while the Holy Spirit is admittedly leading the church, this leading is experienced as voluntary captivity; the Spirit is not the prisoner of the church's institutions.

Berkouwer is aware of and refers to the New Testament texts about the faithfulness of God (Rom.3:2f) who does not forsake the work of His hands (Phil.1:16). He further proclaims the new age of the Spirit of truth who will guide the church into all truth (John 16:12), but he holds that these texts refers only to "promise" and not to continuity. Berkouwer also holds that the Reformers consistently refused to turn this "promise" into a starting point for a series of conclusions that would make the guarantee an objective factuality.⁽¹⁸⁾ Having alerted the student to this freedom

¹⁶ Ibid., p.270.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.269.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.209.

in the leadership of the Spirit, Berkouwer is sufficiently clear as to what the actual role of the Spirit is in leading the church into all truth. Further elucidation is needed from him on that particular question. He does however deal persuasively with the Holy Spirit in the sacramental life of the church. It will be observed that Berkouwer is persuaded that the sacraments are instruments used by the Holy Spirit as signs and seals, that go together with the word as the promise of God.

B. The Holy Spirit and the Sacraments of the Church

Berkouwer has maintained a very high view of scripture but he does not end at his point. He underscores the Spirit's operation in relation to the sacraments as well as to the word. He begins his study on the sacraments concretely by making reference to the Heidelberg Catechism's thesis that, "The Holy Spirit strengthens our belief by use of the sacraments."⁽¹⁹⁾ In the same introduction, Berkouwer also refers to them as the "sacraments of the church".⁽²⁰⁾ This affirmation places the sacramental reality in immediate relation to its institution by Christ, its efficacy in the Holy Spirit and its administration through the church. Berkouwer is also clear in his opinion of the implications of a correct theology of the sacraments. He considers that a true theology of the sacraments will not indulge in intellectual speculation without taking cognisance of the fact that they are given by God as occasions for the strengthening of belief and the certainty of salvation. He states:

The sacraments are too important to be obscured by speculation, for they are occasions for the strengthening of belief and the certainty of salvation. Dogmatic reflection should avoid pretentiousness and

¹⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, The Sacraments, p.10.

²⁰ Ibid.

must not seek to overshadow the power of the Spirit who makes use of the sacraments. From the beginning to end, dogmatic theology is normatively determined by the Word of God, and it will serve the Church only if it refuses to give a separate 'gnosis' regarding the sacraments. Its only task is to point to Scripture itself, and thus to honor the divine institution of the sacraments. (21)

He phrases it in this way since he holds that dogmatic reflection on the sacraments should not separate itself from the Word and Spirit dimension. For Berkouwer, the point at issue is the necessity for clarification on the juxtaposition of "word" and "sacrament". He is quite clear that the distinction between their primary and secondary character in the order of salvation must be abandoned. (22) In traditional Reformed teaching, word and sacrament always stood in a special relationship and were never set one against the other. Berkouwer gives examples of this special relationship from the Heidelberg Catechism and the Hungarian Confession. These examples centre mainly on the fact that sacraments are spoken of as visible signs and seals of the promise that God has added to the word of the gospel. Question 67 of the Heidelberg Catechism teaches that what word and sacrament have in common is that they direct our belief to Christ's offering at the cross. But though they have so much in common they each also have a uniqueness. Article 65 defines it by saying that the preaching of the Word is used by the Holy Spirit to effect belief in our hearts. The Holy Spirit then strengthens this belief through the use of the sacraments. (23)

He does not, however, commit himself to any sort of proposition that would hold for absolute equality between word and sacrament, (24) but, rather,

21 Ibid., p.11.

22 Ibid., p.15.

23 Ibid., p.44.

24 Ibid.

seeks to find to what it is that they owe their unique role and commonness.

The answer is the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer declares:

When the confessions begin to specify what the word and the sacraments have in common, they mention that they both are instruments used by the Holy Spirit, that they both must be accepted in faith, and that they do not cease to be that to which God ordained them, even if man in unbelief rejects word and sacrament.⁽²⁵⁾

The Genevan Catechism refers to the sacraments as secondary organs, secunda organa, but Berkouwer does not regard this as an attempt to diminish them. The sacraments are not dispensible precisely because of their empowerment by the Holy Spirit. This is supported by a further reference to the Genevan Catechism which makes mention of "a disdain for Christ and the extinguishing of the Holy Spirit in him who disdains the secunda organa".⁽²⁶⁾

It is important to understand the role of the Holy Spirit here since only in this way will insight into the reality of the sacraments become clearer. Berkouwer demonstrates that the position of the Reformed churches on the sacraments is that they are not purely symbolical; if by symbolical it is meant that they are only empty signs, nuda signa, without real efficacy. He holds that the strongest evidence for the sacraments being more than nuda signa exists in the Reformed church's belief pertaining to the true role of the Holy Spirit in their administration. Berkouwer opposes this true role of the Spirit to the false view that is sometimes described as "spiritualism". He holds that the Reformed doctrine of the sacraments can certainly not be called symbolical, and this is especially evident in its polemic against spiritualism, which emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., p.45.

apart from "exterior", earthly corporeal means.⁽²⁷⁾ The Spirituals hold that the Holy Spirit operates outside and independently of visible church structures. This spiritualist point of view, therefore, is one which discovers an opposition between the independent working of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's operation in the visible sacramental sign. Berkouwer puts it more directly when he says that the spiritualists emphasize the work of the Holy Spirit "apart from exterior, earthly, corporeal means".⁽²⁸⁾

The Holy Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost did not change the form and practice of water baptism. Berkouwer is not one of those who would have expressed surprise that baptism by water was not ended after the gift of the Spirit. He holds this view since he regards the reason for such surprise as being grounded in spiritualism.⁽²⁹⁾ This spiritualist point of view as pointed out is one which holds for an opposition between the independent working of the Holy Spirit and His operation in the visible sacramental sign. Berkouwer says that the contrast between an "outward" and "inward"⁽³⁰⁾ sign is a false one because the historical progress of the acts of God could not be understood in such categories. This is shown by the fact that from the very beginning of the Christian church we encounter baptism by water.⁽³¹⁾ For Berkouwer then it can be clearly seen that the sacred sign of water is forever lifted above all arbitrariness. It is a meaningful sign of our accomplished salvation. His own description of the place of water baptism elucidates the situation more sharply. He affirms:

²⁷ Ibid., p.57.

²⁸ Ibid., p.57.

²⁹ Ibid., p.101.

³⁰ Ibid.,

³¹ Ibid.

Every form of spiritualism must bow before the fact that the community of the New Testament did not dispense with water baptism when the Spirit was poured out. Rather baptism immediately took its place as a divine legitimate given in the reality of the church. The work is heard in joyful discipleship and baptism is administered and accepted (Acts 2:37).

The New Testament gives no warrant for the contrast between sign and Spirit, for the sign stands in a serving relationship to the salvation in the Lord Baptism is a powerful sign of the Kingdom of God and of the Spirit, of purification through the blood of Christ, of regeneration and new life. ⁽³²⁾

This particular quotation from Berkouwer is fundamental because it demonstrates the gracious interplay of the Holy Spirit, both in the sacramental sign, and also in the believing community, the Church. He is the one who enlivens the Church by the Word. Berkouwer links these dynamics, Spirit, Word and Church as the only context within which the sacraments may be understood. He further maintains that the background of any problem regarding baptismal regeneration can be comprehended in the light of the truth that here we do not just come into contact with a religious ritual. We encounter, instead, a signifying and a sealing by the Holy Spirit. This signifying and sealing of the Spirit can only be satisfactorily discussed in connection with the locus de ecclesia, that is, within the context of the church of Jesus Christ. ⁽³³⁾

The reason why Berkouwer will not regard the sacraments as purely symbolical (if by symbolical is meant merely empty signs, nuda signa, without real efficacy) then is because they are the activity of the Holy Spirit. Here he is in line with Reformed thinking which speaks of the sacraments as signs and seals that go together with the word as the promise of God. The Heidelberg Catechism, to name only one example among the many cited by Berkouwer formulates it in this way, "The sacraments are ... appointed by

³² Ibid., p.104.

³³ Ibid.

God ... that He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel. (Q.66).⁽³⁴⁾

It is here that the pneumatological dimension of the sacraments is realized, for these signs and seals cannot in themselves perform the miracle of strengthening our faith. Berkouwer writes: "They cannot be detached from the power of God and from the working of the Spirit, who convinces us in the sacrament".⁽³⁵⁾ Berkouwer underlines his statement by referring himself to Calvin's quotation. Calvin declares:

The administration of the sacraments does not fulfil its function with regard to our salvation unless the Spirit as 'teacher' sends His power, the Spirit by 'whose power alone our hearts are penetrated and affections moved and our souls opened for the sacrament to enter in'. (IV.14.9).⁽³⁶⁾

Berkouwer expands upon the meaning of Calvin's quotation: Calvin further holds that if it were not for the working of the Spirit the sacraments would have no effect on us. Calvin further concludes that the working of the sacraments cannot be explained or demonstrated by natural evidence for only the operation of the Spirit can fill the sacraments with power.

With regard to the other sacrament, recognized as such in the Reformed church, namely the Lord's supper, it is again necessary to understand its pneumatological context. If this is done, then it is possible to deal with the question most frequently asked of the Reformed churches. This question, as phrased by Berkouwer, asks "can one still speak justifiably of the 'mystery' in the supper, namely, the real presence of Christ in the Lord's supper?"⁽³⁷⁾

³⁴ Ibid., p.134.

³⁵ Ibid., p.135.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., p.218.

The question is a legitimate one. One can with fair accuracy expound on the doctrine of the praesentia realis, or real presence in the other mainline Christian confessions. In Zwinglianism it is pure symbolism, in Lutheranism it is consubstantiation and in Catholicism it is transubstantiation, with all the qualifications implicit in those definitions. It is not easy to define quite as explicitly what we mean by the praesentia realis in the Reformed churches.

Berkouwer contextualizes the question in a pneumatological framework, and, in this light presents a profound exposition of "real presence". He affirms that the "real presence" of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's supper is a central issue to any theologising on this sacrament. This is in view of the fact that the Reformed churches declare that they too adhere to this teaching but differ from the Lutherans, for example, only in the manner of their understanding of Christ's presence.

Berkouwer explains this mode of Christ's presence by reference to the operation of the Holy Spirit. He quotes Bavinck: "It is a communion with Christ through the efficacy of the Holy Spirit"⁽³⁸⁾ and then extends this line of thought by citing question 79 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "His crucified body and shed blood are the true food and drink of our souls unto eternal life", and that we are, "really partakers of his true body and blood through the working of the Holy Spirit".⁽³⁹⁾

By identifying this sacrament firmly as an action of the Holy Spirit, he goes on to deal with the troublesome question of the mode or manner of Christ's presence. He holds that Christ, although not physically and locally present in the supper, is, nevertheless, truly and essentially

³⁸ Ibid., p.226.

³⁹ Ibid.

present in His person; that means in His risen body. The key concept is the word "person". Berkouwer sees the risen and exalted "person" as Jesus as present in this sacrament. In this manner Jesus is also in communion with the believer. The work of the Holy Spirit in this sacrament is to make the whole Jesus present. It is not a case of either meeting the Spirit or of meeting Jesus but of true communion with Jesus through the Spirit.⁽⁴⁰⁾ Berkouwer here finds himself in line with orthodox Reformed thinking. He says that the Reformers rejected any suggestions of speaking only in the presence of the Spirit, and not of Christ's presence, in the Lord's supper. They did emphasise that the presence of Christ was a reality for the Church in this sacrament through the Holy Spirit, "but they did not thereby intend to replace Christ with the Holy Spirit".⁽⁴¹⁾

Berkouwer believes this traditional Reformed position to be a good description of sacramental presence because he affirms that the Reformers never thought in terms of a "replacement" but rather in terms of the work of the whole trinity in redemption. Christ's promise to send another comforter does not mean replacement; it is something that must be understood rather as the next step in the progress of His work (John 14:16). He adds that just as the pneumatological never functions as a threat to Christology, in the confession of the church, so the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit is no threat to the confession of true presence.⁽⁴²⁾

The Holy Spirit brings the whole Christ in his "personal" presence, and so

⁴⁰ Ibid.,

⁴¹ Ibid., p.239.

⁴² Ibid., p.239.

admits the believing church to a full encounter with Him in this sacrament. Berkouwer observes: "To be sure it is a communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit, but this does not at all minimise the reality of our communion with Christ ..."(43)

Berkouwer holds firmly that this pneumatological understanding of "real presence", that is, the communion with the "personal" Lord in the sacrament brought about by the Holy Spirit, far surpasses any teaching that would limit this encounter to the elements of the bread and wine alone. Viewed from such a pneumatological perspective, he has a persuasive case.

Since the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, God's activity in this world, in the church community and in the individual is operative through the same Holy Spirit. The church lives in a state of tension; a tension between her expectation for the future and the promise of God for the future.

In the meantime, during this period between the ascension and the return of Christ in glory, the Christian community is addressed out of the future. Berkouwer says that this future "with the order and integrity of the coming Kingdom of God steps into man's existence in the form of hope".⁽⁴⁴⁾ Berkouwer deals with the life of the Christian community, the church, and its universal expectation in his book, The Return of Christ.

C. The Spirit and the Church in the "Time Between"

Before He ascended to His father, Christ promised to send the Comforter, who would declare all the things that are to come (John 16:13). It is on this basis of what divine revelation says about the gift of the Spirit,

⁴³ Ibid., p.241.

⁴⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, p.20.

that Berkouwer seeks to understand the condition of the church in her time of tension, expectation and hope. He also believes that it is during this period that the meaning and vocation of the church reveals its true form. He declares:

Within the 'time between', the calling and meaning of the Christian community lie. Precisely because the church has been called out of darkness and now may be known as the light of the world, a conspicuous relatively is manifest in it, just at the case was with chosen Israel, whose status as God's people, distinct from other nations gave no cause for self-elevation, but only for deep humility (Amos 3:2).⁽⁴⁵⁾

The period between the ascension and the Parousia, (Christ's coming in glory, when the Son of man will be revealed) is variously known as the age of the Spirit or the age of the church. Berkouwer addresses himself to this period, and in so doing, adds another insight into the operations of the Holy Spirit during this time of anticipation of the last things. The doctrine of the "last things", usually known as eschatology, teaches what scripture says about God's final definitive act towards His creation, the last days, the promise of the future and the hope occasioned by this promise.⁽⁴⁶⁾ In Berkouwer's theology we find again the interplay of Spirit, word and church declaring and witnessing to God in Christ and his Lordship. What emerges then, is a relationship between promise and expectation in the life of the believing community.

Berkouwer explains that once this correlation between promise and expectation is established, it will become evident that the structure of the expectation is wholly determined by the content of the promise. This needs further explanation. God, through his promise, does not permit His people to see the future as if they had a sort of special gnosis. What God's promise does do for them is to put them into a special relationship

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.137.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.9.

with the Holy Spirit. In other words, when Christ promised to send the Comforter (John 16:13) who will declare the things that are to come, He is in fact placing us into a new mode of relationship and communion with God. It is this communion that gives us the only correct perspective from which to live in the present and to hope for the future. Berkouwer articulates it as follows:

But this proclamation of the Comforter will not in any way remove the limitations of human experience or replace all secrets with an exhaustive revelation. The sure expectation of the fulfilment of the promises still leaves room for the message: ⁽⁴⁷⁾ 'It does not yet appear what shall be' (1 John 3:2).

This quotation demonstrates that eschatological expectation is not just ordinary human longing for understanding an unseen future; in the Holy Spirit it becomes rather a response to a promise. This response to God's promise is a living hope aroused in us by God the Father (1 Pet.1:3). Such a Christian hope differs totally from ordinary human longing as it attains its certainty from the assured future, promised by the one who is faithful (Heb.10:23). ⁽⁴⁸⁾

Berkouwer makes persuasive use of Pauline thought to outline the Christian's expectation. Like Paul, he places it in pneumatological context. Paul says to the Christians who are living in expectation in this wicked age, "do not get drunk on wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph.5:18). The expectation, in other words, requires presence of mind, constant concern and a sharp spiritual eye to be able to discern the present and the future. ⁽⁴⁹⁾

Berkouwer goes on to say that it is this watchfulness, that comes from

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.12.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.19.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.21.

being filled with the Holy Spirit, that will give us a sober and enlightened expectation of the future.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Such a spiritual enlightening contrasts sharply with living in the darkness, where all vision is blurred and indistinct. It is true that in the last days the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out and men will see visions and dream dreams (Act 2:17; Joel 2:32), but these dreams and visions will not be ecstatic hallucinations and wishful thinking. They are rather the product of the Holy Spirit who raises the quality of our lives to an even greater participation in the divine life of Jesus Himself, and gave us the assurance that all future is safely in God's care.⁽⁵¹⁾

But, quite evidently, the picture is not quite as simple as that. The actual situation is that the church is caught, in the meanwhile, in a tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the coming into being of the Kingdom.⁽⁵²⁾ What this means for Berkouwer is that there is a spiritual paradox in which the church finds herself. Firstly she is in the historical situation where she continually fixes her attention on what is already accomplished through Christ's inauguration of the kingdom. Secondly she has also to continually fix her gaze to the future, the end of time, and God's absolute triumph.

Berkouwer understands the church to be in a constant state of activity as she proceeds towards her goal. Fortunately she is a community graced by the life and presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6:19), who has brought renewal (Titus 3:5), freedom (2 Cor.3:17) and sonship (Rom.8:4) even though the fulfilment is not as yet a finality. Furthermore, he maintains

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., p.21.

52 Ibid., pp 110 - 115.

that the church in the power of the Spirit, has now joined battle with the powers of evil. The outcome of this struggle is not in question, "yet, it is a conflict which requires persistence and steadfastness".

Berkouwer describes it in the following words:

"But this fulfilment is not a conclusion in itself; it is a perspective on the future, a house with open windows. When the Spirit was poured out upon the congregation, His power was revealed in the form of the church in the last days: through persistence, prayer, and the breaking of bread in communion. As a result of what had been accomplished, the battle with the powers of evil was joined, a race in which the believers look to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter (archegós kai teleiôtes) of our faith, laying aside sin which clings so closely (euperistatos)" (Heb.12:1f). The outcome of this race is surely not in question. Yet it is a conflict that requires persistence and steadfastness. (53)

During the "time between", this relationship between the "already" and the "not yet" of the kingdom, actually constitutes the existing tension of the church. Berkouwer believes that there is nothing morose, pessimistic or defeatist in recognising these limitations on the church. On the contrary, he holds, "there is a strong inclination and motivation to be active in the light of what has been already received in prayer and steadfastness, hope and love, and watchfulness and expectation". (54)

With regard to the future, it will be observed that Berkouwer again views it from a pneumatological perspective. He holds that the "not yet" dimension may most fruitfully be approached on the basis of what scripture teaches about the gift of the Spirit as first fruits (Rom.8:23). The gift of the Spirit he variously describes as "a possession", "a rich blessed and unquestionable reality," and also as an "initial endowment". (55)

53 Ibid., p.113.

54 Ibid., p.114.

55 Ibid.

The Spirit, accepted as an initial gift from God to the church, can also be viewed from the perspective of "expectation" in the expectation-promise relationship. Furthermore, in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, we find the Holy Spirit also acknowledged as the "guarantee" (2 Cor.1:22; 5:5), a word that for Berkouwer clearly conveys the eschatological nature of the Spirit's role in the church. For him, there can be no scepticism about the reality of this gift of the Holy Spirit. The awareness of its reality is already the guarantee of full future possession of salvation. Berkouwer refers to the quotation from Ephesians which proclaims, "The Holy spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance (Eph.1:14)". The Spirit is the way that God has prepared our transition from the mortal to the immortal; He is God's pledge to us that the future is assured.

If approached from this perspective it will be seen that the contrast, between the "already" and the "not yet", is not an irreconcilable antithesis. Berkouwer sums up this theological exposition by saying:

Through what has been given, the believer obtains a perspective on a new fullness, namely the reality of an inheritance. The designation "first fruits" indicates the beginning character of the gift of the Spirit, the designation "pledge" indicates the veracity of the promise and validity of the expectation. Both designations firmly establish the correlation between the present and the future. ⁽⁵⁶⁾

The judicious use of the scriptural terms "first fruits" and "pledge", both terms with a decidedly pneumatological reference, succeed in clarifying the church's anticipation of the future. The interaction between present and future shows a community graced by the presence of the Holy Spirit, a presence that is not a conclusion in itself but even in the present time gives a perspective and participation in future glory. This gives rise to a healthy vitality and a unique striving for what is ahead,

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.114.

an activity performed in the light of what has been received in the gift of sonship.

The Spirit, however, has another role in this present and future dialectic of the church's history. He is the Spirit who brings us into the sonship of God. In the Epistle to the Romans Paul writes, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Rom.8:14). In the same chapter we are told that the Spirit is the one who brings us to cry "Abba! Father!" (Rom.8:15). Through this sonship, the Spirit brings us into a new relationship vis-à-vis the future. As a consequence of this relationship with the Father, the Spirit changes the future for the believer, into "an inheritance" for him and so also to "ultimate glory".⁽⁵⁷⁾

Berkouwer's writings demonstrate that he has the making of a pneumatology for the age of the church. His writings on this topic could be summarised in the following quotation: "The meaning and joy of the time of salvation will be made manifest even after the ascension, through the power of the Spirit".⁽⁵⁸⁾ Embryonically it is there to be found in his ecclesiology, his sacramentology and his eschatology, but it is in need of development. This is in line with Reformed thinking generally, which strongly avows the Holy Spirit in every sphere of its confession, but has not followed Calvin's lead in the overriding importance that he gave this area of theology. Berkouwer particularly recognises the domain of the Spirit in sanctification and it is here, together with his theology of Holy Scripture, that he is at his best in pneumatology. We will now see exactly how Berkouwer views the doctrine of the Spirit in relation to the individual believer in his teaching on Sanctification. He recognized an inadequacy in both the Barthian and Roman exposition of this doctrine and

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.115.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.150.

consequently endeavoured to give direction where Reformed theology ought to go for the future if it were to be consistently true to Holy Scripture.

CHAPTER 4 - "THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE"

The Holy Spirit and Sanctification

A. Justification and Sanctification

In the previous chapter it was seen how it is of the very essence of the Spirit's work to create and enliven the church as the people of God. In this chapter the Spirit's operation in the life of the individual is examined since in the Spirit's work the individual is too important to ever be submerged into the community. Berkhof's observation regarding the individual believer is appropriate here. He remarks that in God's work the emphasis on the community can never lead to collectivism since God is the one who in his pity leaves the ninety-nine to go after the one who is lost.⁽¹⁾ With regard to the individual, Berkouwer sees the work of the Spirit as pertaining to the very essence of life itself. The Spirit is not only the giver of life, He is also the one who renews life. Furthermore, He gives direction and worth to life. In support of this contention, Berkouwer declares:

Any reflection on sanctification will have to concentrate on the nature of the new beginning. This renewal of human life in gratitude and love has always been considered the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit alone could perform the miracle of making man walk on the road of sanctity without a sense of his own worth.⁽²⁾

It is the profound pneumatological context revealed in the quotation that gives Berkouwer's study on sanctification its special character and enables him to deal so plausibly with all its aspects. Berkouwer understands the whole doctrine of regeneration as the expression of God's sovereign and gracious act of forgiveness. In recognising this, he firmly

¹ Hendrikus Berkhof, The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, p.66.

² G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification, p.78.

excludes all notions of human merit. He writes:

"It is self-evident that any view of regeneration, faith and sanctification, must be weighed and tested by the criterion of whether it does justice to the forgiveness of sins as the only ground and source of sanctification. This is the truth preached by the Belgic Confession (article 24) when it says that it is faith which regenerates man and causes him to live a new life. This, too, is the reason why the Canons oppose the overestimation of faith which would make it a condition for, and the achievement of, the reception of salvation. Faith simply and finally excludes human merit and understands that we are drawn by the power of the Holy Spirit to a living fellowship with our Lord."⁽³⁾

The justification/sanctification doctrine, due to its inseparable character, has frequently caused a lack of clarity in theological treatises. Consequently, there has all too often been a confusion in the understanding of the uniqueness of each of these moments of salvation and a resultant unsatisfactory treatment of their relationship. Berkouwer is aware of the history of this controversy and mentions how frequently either the doctrine of justification can assimilate sanctification, or alternatively, the doctrine of sanctification can assimilate justification, depending on the stance of the writer.⁽⁴⁾ Berkouwer's own approach to the tension between the unity and the uniqueness of these two moments in personal salvation finds its synthesis and solution in his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. For Berkouwer, the Spirit is the life-giver; He is God breathing the breath of life into man. This is His work in regeneration as well as in creation. Berkouwer adduces Melancthon who holds that the Holy Spirit creates a new life in the heart of the believer in order that faith may revivify it.⁽⁵⁾ Melancthon also contended that without the regeneration that such faith produced, it would be impossible

³ Ibid., p.96.

⁴ Ibid., p.9.

⁵ Ibid., p.37.

for a believer to fear, love and praise God, and without the Holy Spirit the law cannot be fulfilled.⁽⁶⁾

This careful pneumatological groundwork is of the utmost importance, since an unscriptural and theologically insensitive emphasis in the treatment of the justification/sanctification doctrine can result in dangerous heresy if either extreme is overemphasized. This can be seen in history. Those theological traditions that have over emphasized man's freedom, after God's declarative act of justification, frequently end up by teaching man's self-sanctification. In contradistinction to this, those theological traditions that seek to over-protect the divine initiative, at the cost of man's free response, are in danger of ending up in antinomianism. Berkouwer avoids both extremes, and in so doing, stays within the Reformed tradition. He does so by the use of a consistent scripturally based pneumatology.

B. Justification as the Genesis of the Salvation Process

The fundamental confession of the reformation was "Justification by Faith". For the Reformed church, the gospel of grace is totally misunderstood when justification of free grace, by faith alone, occupies other than central place. The emphasis on this confession has, however, led to the criticism from the Church of Rome, that the Reformation interpretation of justification is inimical to holy living. These critics believed that the doctrine of justification so taught removed the need for, and incentive to, good works. Consequently the sanctified life was also devalued. In order to answer this accusation, the Reformed church needed to teach an effective doctrine of sanctification.

⁶ Ibid.

The proffered solutions, although in agreement on the centrality of justification, were by no means unanimous in their presentation of the Reformed position on sanctification.⁽⁷⁾ The reason for this is not difficult to comprehend; it has to do with the nature of justification itself.

Justification and sanctification are of their very essence inseparable, so much so that it is hardly surprising that a separate doctrine of sanctification could be seen as a superfluity. Berkouwer writes:

"Indeed, nearly all the problems of sanctification are bound up with the question of this "transition" from justification to sanctification. One of the complaints which assail us constantly is that sanctification is being cut loose, or abstracted, from justification."⁽⁸⁾

Berkouwer regards this complaint seriously for, if it is true, then the church is in danger of slipping into a position of moralism with its attendant dangers of "pride and nagging uncertainties".⁽⁹⁾ In view of the centrality of the doctrine of justification, Berkouwer does not sidestep the importance of the issues raised. He wonders whether a person who has pondered the significance of the sola fide doctrine, justification by faith alone, is not confronted with the question as to whether such a glorious concept does not make any further discussion superfluous. He phrases this question as follows:

Does not to every addition (to justification) weaken the radical nature of grace, emasculate our creed which declares: 'But what does it profit you now that you believe all this? That I am righteous in

⁷ See G.C. Berkouwer, Faith and Sanctification, Chapters 4 and 5 for a comparative analysis of just how real the differences were between Kuyper, Köhlbrugge, Barth and others on this important issue.

⁸ Ibid., p.20.

⁹ Ibid.

Christ before God, and an heir to eternal life?' Antinomianism may be a dangerous heresy, but is it not true that it had its origin in the gospel and intended at least to be a reminder of what lies behind us, the truly finished work of Christ,⁽¹⁰⁾ the all-sufficient atonement which defies addition?

In the light of this quotation, one might well wonder, with Berkouwer, what this customary distinction between justification and sanctification involves? Furthermore one might ask whether this distinction is not perhaps an unconscious devaluation of the sola fide doctrine. Notwithstanding this speculation, Berkouwer is adamant that the distinction is real and rooted in the scriptures especially in the pneumatology of Paul's epistles.⁽¹¹⁾ In expounding his doctrine of sanctification, he is found coming into direct dialogue with Karl Barth. It will, therefore, be necessary to expand initially on Barth's teaching on this topic before demonstrating how carefully Berkouwer builds up his own presentation. This will be seen in the next section. Berkouwer acknowledges the tremendous contribution of Barth's dialectical theory to this debate. He writes:

As with the problems of justification, so with those of sanctification, the stage is set and the discussion, to a degree, determined by dialectical theology. When this new theology began to speak again, and with great emphasis, about the justification of the ungodly as God's sovereign verdict of acquittal, a verdict by no means precipitated by the moral condition of the acquitted, it was natural to ask what place would be assigned by this theology to sanctification. A widely voiced fear was that sanctification would be absorbed by the act of justification and that, on this view, the distinction between the two was hardly warranted.⁽¹²⁾

This quotation demonstrates how seriously Berkouwer regards the influence

¹⁰ Ibid., p.17.

¹¹ Ibid., pp 18-22.

¹² Ibid., p.13.

of Barth's teaching. He is certainly in agreement with Barth on the fundamental assumption that the sola fide of the Reformation is the only proper response to the biblical message of sovereign grace. He further seriously affirms that its correct understanding can never be a threat to sanctification.

C. Karl Barth's View of Sanctification

Since Karl Barth's view on sanctification has been questioned by Berkouwer, it becomes necessary to assess his ideas. Karl Barth's teaching on sanctification is understood only within the context of Christology and it finds its fullest exposition in his Church Dogmatics.⁽¹³⁾ Barth's doctrine of sanctification carries the great theme of the exaltation of man - of the man Jesus Christ. Barth states it like this:

The exaltation of man, which in defiance of his reluctance has been achieved in the death and declared in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is as such the creation of his new form of existence as the faithful covenant partner of God. It rests wholly and utterly on his justification before God, and like it is achieved only in the one Jesus Christ, but effectively and authoritatively for all in Him.⁽¹⁴⁾

This quotation from Barth demonstrates the declarative nature of sanctification and the power of this same declaration which is effective despite man's defiance and reluctance. It also emphasizes the unique role of Jesus Christ and links sanctification completely to the justification wrought by Him. This is Barth at his most authentic. Man's very limited role in this declaration of sanctification has already been fulfilled in the act of faith, elicited from him, in justification.

¹³ See especially, Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.IV, Part 2, pp 499-613, where he deals with sanctification, and Vol. III, Part 4, which is his doctrine of creation.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.IV, Part 2, p.503.

Man's works win him no merit before God. He is righteous before God only by His pardon which is grasped by faith alone, and through the grace of God active in Jesus Christ. Barth explains it in these words:

No works, however good (even the best), have the power to justify before God the man who does them; to reinstate him in the right to exist before Him which he has forfeited, and continually forfeits, as a sinner, to make him a child of God, to earn for him the promise of eternal life. Works which we may try to do with this intention and claim are as such works of unbroken pride, and are not therefore good works but bad. Man can be righteous before God, the child of God and the heir to eternal life, only by the pardon which he can grasp in faith alone and not in any work, and which is that of the grace of the God active and revealed in Jesus Christ - a grace which consists in the unmerited forgiveness of sins.⁽¹⁵⁾

As Barth does not propound or accept any notion of gratia infusa, it is clear that, in his theology, man in himself has no standing before God. Barth takes seriously the Reformed doctrine of man's total depravity; he holds that this doctrine is not invalidated by the justification of the sinner. Justification does not eliminate sin; sin can only be forgiven. Man will consistently, in essence, be in a state of hostility to God as he is always man and can never evolve into another kind of man.⁽¹⁶⁾

Barth does, however, maintain that justification and sanctification are two genuinely different moments in the one act of the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus Christ. He phrases it thus: "It is one thing that God turns in free grace to sinful man, and quite another that in the same free grace He converts man to Himself."⁽¹⁷⁾

Having thus recognized the fact of the uniqueness of each of these

¹⁵ Ibid., p.587.

¹⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, op.cit., p.76.

¹⁷ Karl Barth, op.cit., p.503.

moments, Barth goes on to affirm their unity. The gracious act of God in His reconciliation of the world to Himself in Jesus Christ is a unitary act. This divine act accomplishes both the justification and the sanctification of man but it accomplishes them together; the one is done wholly and immediately with the other."⁽¹⁸⁾ This means that a further consequence of this unitary, sovereign declaration of God is that there is not an order of sequence in the two moments of salvation, a prius and posterius. They both take place simultaneously and together.⁽¹⁹⁾

But what of those whom God has thus sanctified, the saints? Are they people who have been "exalted to fellowship and co-operation with God", are they "royal men", in the sense that they merit a share in the "kingly office" of Jesus?⁽²⁰⁾ Barth would totally disavow such a description. The saint, for him, is different from the sinner in the sense that he has been given "new direction".⁽²¹⁾ There is no internal or existential sanctifying of that person. The sanctified person is the same person except of course for the fact of his forgiveness. Barth describes the saints in these words,

(The saints) in virtue of His direction recognize Him as theirs and themselves as His. He confronts them within the world as God confronts the whole world. They are not merely creatures. They are slothful, stupid, inhuman, dissipated and careworn sinners. And as His direction is given to them, they begin to see and confess that this is the case. They are still sinners - these saints, these recipients of the direction of the exalted man, of the son of man who is also the son of God. They are still below. The direction given and received is one thing; ~~they~~⁽²²⁾ themselves in comparison with it are quite another.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.502.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.507.

²⁰ Ibid., p.523.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., p.524.

From this quotation it can be seen that Barth does indeed differentiate between saints and unredeemed man, but he sees this differentiation not as a result of any intrinsic worth in the saints themselves. Whatever virtue they possess is solely as a result of God's gracious act in placing them under a new direction. Barth describes a saint as a "disturbed sinner."⁽²³⁾ He holds that they are disturbed by the fact that God has made clear to them the divine "NO". Barth writes:

As such they are disturbed sinners; sinners who are disturbed by the fact that He has made clear to them the divine NO to their own sinful will and action and that of all man. Because it is His NO, it is effective. It thus involves for them an irresistible and invincible disturbance. But again, because it is his NO it is not an empty or abstract. It is concretely filled out with the Yes of his instruction.⁽²⁴⁾

Consequently it is not merely a correction but also instruction. Those who are called by God are not simply called OUT, they are also called IN. They are also called out from this world, and they are called into fellowship with God: their sanctification consists in this, that they look up to Him who calls them and who alone is holy.⁽²⁵⁾

Man's sanctification results from his association with the exalted man, Jesus Christ, who through his salvific death has achieved our sanctification. However, Barth states in another place that it is already through the decree of creation that God had in mind man's election in Christ and therefore his sanctification as well.⁽²⁶⁾ So for Barth there exists also a logical relationship between creation and sanctification. He maintains that "the one command of God given to man - as the command of his creator

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., p.527.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.III, Part 4, p.3.

- is already the sanctification of the creaturely action and abstention of man."⁽²⁷⁾ By this he means the same decree that made creation possible is also the decree by which man is graciously elected in Jesus Christ. It is in relation to the election of Jesus Christ that God created the universe in Christ. Thus God already had man's election in view. This election in Christ is consequently man's sanctification.

Barth's doctrine of sanctification finds its clearest exposition in his teaching on creation and justification. This teaching maintains throughout a high Christological flavour, as indeed does all Barth's theology. In the opinion of many it does so at the cost of redeemed man's unique freedom as God's special creation. Barth's theology, with its dynamic inner cohesion, gained rapidly in influence and it is inevitable that Berkouwer would take serious cognisance of it. Berkouwer had to enter into direct dialogue with dialectical theology and at the same time keep a balance between this theology on the one hand and Christian humanism on the other.

D. Berkouwer's View of Sanctification

Since Barth makes both justification and sanctification objective in Jesus Christ, it becomes necessary to understand Berkouwer as a corrective. It seems to Berkouwer that Barth denigrates the role of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer's doctrine of sanctification found in his Faith and Sanctification is a very comprehensive work on the Holy Spirit. He deals with sanctification within a broader framework than Barth, in that he is concerned to see the whole Trinity as operative in the salvific process. This includes particularly the Holy Spirit in the subjective life of the believer; an idea that is not as immediately evident in Barth. Berkouwer confronts the usual difficulties raised by the justification/sanctifica-

²⁷ Ibid., p.41.

tion juxtaposition and is able to expand upon this without trapping himself into emphasizing one divine moment at the cost of the other. He is well aware that sanctification has different meanings to different Christian believers, and so at the outset of his exposition on the genesis of sanctification, he declares:

There has been and always will be a considerable debate as to whether sanctification actually effects a change in the believer, or whether divine forgiveness merely enables him to view his old unaltered life from a fresh angle.⁽²⁸⁾

Berkouwer does not immediately attempt to give a simplistic yes or no type answer to the question raised in this quotation. He maintains that it is essential to keep the debate, that ranges around sanctification, to the traditional formula, simul justus et peccator. It is crucial to highlight its critical and paradoxical meaning.⁽²⁹⁾ Furthermore, it is fundamental to the discussion to accept the peccator premise of this formula. As the starting point, where is a general consensus that the justified sinner remains to his dying day a sinner.⁽³⁰⁾

It can be seen then, that in view of this general agreement regarding man's basic sinfulness, debate on the meaning of sanctification will concern itself more with the concepts simul and justus. Berkouwer recognizes the validity of Van Niftrik's assertion when he says of Luther's formula (with reference to new life), that present-day theology has lost the Reformation insight into the nature of sanctification and the new life.⁽³¹⁾ Berkouwer declares that while all recognize residual sinfulness after justification, the debate has shifted to the relation between the

²⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, op.cit., p.71.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.71.

³¹ Ibid., p.73.

predicates "righteous" and "sinner" and their peculiar connection in simultaneity.⁽³²⁾ He is also not happy with the suggestion that the impact of the simul has been diminished in modern Calvinism.⁽³³⁾ This suggestion appears to present Kuyper and Bavinck as the culprits responsible for this diminishing of the simul, while Kholbrugge and Barth are hailed as once more revealing its true meaning. He addresses this issue incisively in his own doctrine of sanctification which takes its impetus and meaning in an effective pneumatology. He comments:

Any reflection on sanctification will have to concentrate on the nature of a new beginning. This renewal of human life in gratitude and love has always been considered the work of the Holy Spirit.⁽³⁴⁾

This quotation highlights two concepts, namely, the new life and the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer, like Barth, is unconvinced by his own interpretation of the Catholic teaching on infused or internal grace as an extra supernatural substance. Notwithstanding this reservation, he believes that an unreasonable fear of this doctrine has impelled people to dub as Catholic what has nothing to do with Catholicism. Here he is thinking especially of the debate concerning regeneration. Berkouwer contends that both the theology of Kuyper and the Canons of Dort were unfairly incriminated in this theological debate as a result of the type of terminology contained in their expositions. In both cases one finds a use of expressions like "infused new qualities", "new habit of will" and "a change in the innermost core of our being."⁽³⁵⁾ It would be difficult to maintain that the Canons of Dort ever view the believer as the product of his own achievement, yet they do suggest at a change in human existence. Berkouwer believes that the reason for this is due to the fact that the Canons

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p.78.

35 For a list of terms describing regeneration in Kuyper and the Canons, see pp 78-80 of Faith and Sanctification.

correctly acknowledge the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. He says (of the Canons) that, "in full view here is the connection between the operation of the Holy Spirit and sanctification. Good works are spoken of as the fruits of a good tree."⁽³⁶⁾ He offers a similar defence of Kuyper's particular use of imagery by again making reference to the Holy Spirit. He puts it strongly:

But let the critics rather search for the writers' intent than peck away at his words. Some theological honesty would help us to understand what Kuyper means when he speaks of 'seed' and 'infusion'. Does not the bible itself, when it talks about the word and the gift of the Holy Spirit, use such expressions? We are thinking of the 'outpouring' of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, of Paul's teaching that 'hope putteth not to shame, because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit' (Rom.5:5), and John's teaching that 'whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because his seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God' (1 John 3:9).⁽³⁷⁾

Berkouwer endeavoured to demonstrate in this quote, that a scriptural use of imagery does not indicate a physical grace. Theological terms must be serviceable to the truth they describe but one must also look for the intention of the writer who uses them. It can be seen here that Berkouwer considers it of the utmost importance that a correct understanding of the Holy Spirit be proclaimed in this doctrine. He teaches that the operation of the Holy Spirit is an "inscrutable mystery",⁽³⁸⁾ and that acknowledgement of this pneumatological dimension is seminal to the explanation of this doctrine. He cites numerous scriptural references in support of his argument and so demonstrates that many scriptural admonitions are based on the "indwelling" of the Spirit in the heart of the believer, (an example of this is 1 Cor.3:16). He also reminds us, in Paul's words, that the body is the "temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor.6:19)" and that

³⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, op.cit., p.79.

³⁷ Ibid., p.81.

³⁸ Ibid.

James contrasts the indwelling Spirit with the inclination to envy (James 4:5). He further draws attention to scriptural texts which speak of God's making His abode with us (John 14:23), of the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (II Cor. 1:22), and Christ's indwelling in our hearts through faith (Eph.3:17).⁽³⁹⁾

Berkouwer's pneumatology is developed out of a tightly worked scriptural understanding and elucidates the meaning of sanctification very effectively. But if this pneumatological view seems superficially to correspond to a certain understanding of the Catholic doctrine of grace, Berkouwer is quick to point out that this resemblance has no substance in fact. The reason is that, in true Reformed teaching, any discussion that deals with God's work in man does not turn to man considered by himself. Berkouwer stresses that the work of the Holy Spirit in man must be tied to the orientation of man's faith in divine grace, since this orientation is effected by the Holy Spirit and not by man's independent will. He elaborates this point by saying, "the doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is designed precisely to prevent us from viewing man as an independent dynamistic unit."⁽⁴⁰⁾ He thus argues persuasively that this doctrine far from upholding man as self-sufficient rather demonstrates his perpetual, inherent lack of self-sufficiency. In fact this doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification is actually an attempt to express the truth of Christ's teaching; "no man can come to me, except the Father that sent me to draw him (John 6:44)."⁽⁴¹⁾ It is therefore possible to speak about the Spirit's operations and yet not lose sight of man in his sinful self-containment. Berkouwer holds that "communion with

³⁹ Ibid., p.81.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.83.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.83.

Christ through the Holy Spirit and the sanctification that flows from their very nature, excludes the vainglorious concentration on man."⁽⁴²⁾ He adds further that, "only an unassuming faith can rightly speak about the gratia interna and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit."⁽⁴³⁾ Berkouwer does not understand grace here as a substance, or assign to it a mystical understanding of inwardness that functions at the expense of the proclaimed word of God. He acknowledges himself to be in line with traditional Reformed teaching which rejects the Catholic concept of grace as donum superadditum, a new dimension in the world. He therefore feels confident in defending the language used by Kuyper and also used in the confessions of Dort. He would thus oppose the withdrawal of their concept of regeneration. He defends them in this way because of the role of the Holy Spirit that is so explicit in their exposition. He therefore contends:

Regeneration and the Holy Spirit, as taught in the Confessions and by Kuyper, do not in the least warrant a withdrawal from the world of today. This thought enabled Kuyper to take a broad view of human life, to speak of the influence of the gospel in it, and to teach the duties of believers towards it - even to the extent that he was saddled with the odium of having surrendered the sober mysteries of the Holy Spirit to the coarseness of public salvation! Not inwardness versus a full human life is the issue presented by the gratia infusa, but rather the renewal - through the sanctification of the believer - of all human life. The doctrine of internal grace is a continual warning against the hubris of activism, against sanctification without forgiveness, ⁽⁴⁴⁾ against a 'Christian' life without the Holy Spirit.

Berkouwer, in this quotation, rejects all notions of inwardness or "mysticism". He insists rather on a Spirit-directed life that takes a

⁴² Ibid., p.84.

⁴³ Ibid., p.85.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.86.

broad view against the pride of activism and against anything else that would do less than justice to the "ineffable operation of the Spirit that leads us to the mystery of God's work."⁽⁴⁵⁾ He is in complete agreement with Bavinck who holds that the regenerate man is no whit different in substance from what he was before his regeneration. Berkouwer concludes: "Grace must always, - as here - be considered an act of the Holy Spirit and never abstracted from Him."⁽⁴⁶⁾ Therefore when the Canons of Dort and theologians like Bavinck and Kuyper use imagery such as "new qualities" and gratia interna, it is done in order to express the truth that the new life is not a human achievement. It is in fact the result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is also of interest in this regard, according to Berkouwer, to keep in mind that Kuyper did not only write of the work of the Holy Spirit in connection with sanctification. He also mentions the Holy Spirit in terms of justification and insists that "the Holy Spirit communicates to us the benefits of Christ."⁽⁴⁷⁾

Berkouwer is sympathetic to Kuyper's position since the latter clearly argues that the important thing is to relate the Holy Spirit's work to the redemptive suffering and death of Christ. Such a Trinitarian view of sanctification can be seen as the hallmark of Berkouwer's theology. He would, therefore, reject as a fake dilemma, the controversy between a theology of justification and a theology of sanctification. Such a theology is unacceptable "because it makes an either-or proposition of God's verdict of acquittal and the Spirit's act of renewal."⁽⁴⁸⁾ The fact of sanctification does not allow for such an either-or controversy.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.87.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.91.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.92.

The reason for this is that the heart of sanctification is the life which feeds on justification. Berkouwer teaches an internal grace "always allows the work of the Spirit to be founded through faith upon the forgiveness of sins and any view of sanctification whatever must spring from this forgiveness."⁽⁴⁹⁾

It is quite evident then, that for Berkouwer, sanctification is the being called apart to worship God and it is achieved through the redemptive work of Christ. Like Barth, he rejects the notion of sanctification as a process of moral perfection in the life of the believer. It is, rather, a new relationship in love with God in Christ that is enlivened by the Holy Spirit. In a rare burst of poetry, Berkouwer describes the relationship of faith like this: "If faith will but lift up its blossoms to catch the sunlight of God's grace, the fruit will be a life imbued with holiness."⁽⁵⁰⁾ For Berkouwer, sanctification without faith degenerates into a humanism without God.

Berkouwer's significant contribution is that he attempts to correct Barth's one-sided emphasis. Barth is a good Protestant in his doctrine of justification but has he not gone too far in his doctrine of sanctification in maintaining that sanctification, like justification, is a declarative act effective only in Jesus Christ? What then is the role of MAN in the Christian faith if his sanctification is also an objective act? Barth leaves no room for subjective sanctification and hence is not able to demonstrate the effects of sanctification on man.⁽⁵¹⁾ Berkouwer reasons the issue differently as a consequence of his insight in the work

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.93.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.193.

⁵¹ Barth does however deal with the outworking of objective sanctification in a man's life in his work on Ethics. See also Church Dogmatics, Vol.IV, Part 2, Ch.68, "The Holy Spirit and Christian Love".

of the Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit calls us into adoption with Christ, sanctification reveals itself in this adoption and in the growing awareness of sonship; a renewal that conforms itself after the image of God.⁽⁵²⁾

This does not mean that Berkouwer regards this growing awareness of sonship as a getting "better and better". It is rather seen as coming "more and more" into an understanding of God, as something happening in the life of the believer. This endeavour in the believer to understand is not a process, it is a progress. It is here, in his description of the progress of sanctification, that Berkouwer parts company most creatively with Barth's theology.⁽⁵³⁾

E. The Holy Spirit and the Progress of Sanctification

Berkouwer considers it to be beyond dispute that the bible itself treats of the "progress of sanctification", or progress in sanctification, in the individual believer.⁽⁵⁴⁾ He is therefore also concerned with this reality of the believer's life; a life that is in motion from day to day as it progresses on the way to salvation.⁽⁵⁵⁾ In committing himself to this theological stance and to the type of language that accompanies it (language that of necessity uses words like "growing" and "increasing") it becomes necessary for him to develop a persuasive defence of his position in Reformed circles. The reason for the controversy that raged around this issue was the fear that any talk about progressive sanctification was incompatible with faith-connected sanctification. Most of the fierce debate revolved around the teaching of Köhlbrugge and Barth. Berkouwer makes the connection between them when he writes:

⁵² Ibid., p.110.

⁵³ Refer to footnote 13.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.101.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

However great the difference between the theology of Barth and Köhlbrugge, there is a common motif which explains the sympathy with which Barth regards Köhlbrugge. Barth's opposition to the subjective theology of the nineteenth century brought him in the vicinity of Köhlbrugge who, against the tenor of the times, witnessed powerfully to justification. Barth protested also against the devout, self-assured Christian Both Barth and Köhlbrugge spurned justification as a gateway to sanctification as well as a sanctification which made the justification of the ungodly unnecessary.⁽⁵⁶⁾

Berkouwer here demonstrates the strong commitment that both of these theologians had to the evangelical message of radical justification. In the case of Köhlbrugge this commitment was so pronounced that one of the charges levelled against him was that of antinomianism.⁽⁵⁷⁾ It should be noted, however, that this was a charge that Köhlbrugge repudiated in the strongest possible way.⁽⁵⁸⁾ But it is true to say that both these theologians and their supporters firmly resisted all notions of sanctification that used language like "striving" or "being renewed more and more" as being indicative of work-righteousness. Berkouwer had to elucidate his doctrine of sanctification in the face of this type of criticism.

He explains that the two alternative ways of describing sanctification as suggested by Haitjema (that is, either sanctification as being holy through the spirit of faith, or sanctification as a process of becoming holy through the indwelling operation of the Holy Spirit) created a false dilemma. Neither scripture nor the confessions of faith would countenance such an alternative.⁽⁵⁹⁾ He suggests that it would be a more useful exercise to explain what is meant by progress. Such an understanding of progress is not in conflict with "being" but inseparable from it. He

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.105.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.103.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.106.

asks, therefore, "Is there no progress in which the believer rather than sweating out his good works and cultivating his own regeneracy, relies more and more on the grace of God?"⁽⁶⁰⁾

For Berkouwer, progressive sanctification is entirely compatible with faith-connected sanctification since anyone who manages to maintain the full status of the sola fide can speak about progressive sanctification without confusing this with legalism. This striving and building up in progressive sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit in the believer in line with scriptural teaching:

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Jude 20, 21)".⁽⁶¹⁾

This is an apt quotation from scripture in that it collates together all the true elements of sanctification: "building up", "faith", "Holy Spirit" and "mercy". Berkouwer's words in his clarification of the meaning of progressive sanctification are useful here. He writes:

To the man who understands that a progressive sanctification must keep the windows of faith opened to the grace of God, the surprising multiformity of the word of God will be intelligible. For one moment we are directed to follow after holiness and in another to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. This multiformity preserves us both from passivity and from nomism. Any 'striving' in this connection receives its content from the fact of grace. Not activity as such is disqualified by scripture but only the activity which cannot be considered as a growing in grace or as the perfection of holiness in the fear of God."⁽⁶²⁾

Berkouwer's reasoning in this quotation is valid. He shows that progress, as a scriptural concept, is opposed to passivity and to nomism. Believers should be eager for the spiritual milk of God's word, especially after

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p.108.

62 Ibid., p.107.

they have encountered His grace.

For Berkouwer, then, there is always a relationship between justification and sanctification in that the grace of God also admonishes the progressing believer. Grace is the dominant motif in all admonition and is decisive for the progress of sanctification. Genuine progress can never be cut off from its foundation in faith. Berkouwer considers that this progress has been accurately described in Lords day 44. Here it is presented as having four elements. These elements are, firstly, an increasing knowledge of one's sinful nature. Secondly, there is an increasing earnestness in seeking for the forgiveness of sins. Thirdly, there is the eschatological perspective in which the goal of perfection is sought. Fourthly, there is the pneumatological underpinning which is always seminal to sanctification. It consists in prayer to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit and a constant endeavour to be renewed more and more in the image of God. (63)

Berkouwer, in his extrapolation of these four elements, enlarges on the pneumatological significance of the doctrine. He feels that these elements are a vivid reminder of the scriptures that tell of the earnest of the Spirit given in our hearts (1 Cor.1:22) and also of the Holy Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance (Eph.1:14). Even the assumption that lies behind the eschatological perspective is the reality of communion through the Holy Spirit. He quotes from Paul who emphasizes the facts of unfulfilment and anticipation when he writes that we have the first fruits from the Spirit and now await with eager longing for the redemption of our body (Rom.8:23). (64)

63 Ibid., p.109.

64 Ibid., p.110.

It is in these scriptural texts that Berkouwer finds the key to a valid understanding of sanctification. Sanctification shows itself, for him, to be both our adoption as sons of God in the Spirit, and simultaneously in our growing awareness of this sonship.

Berkouwer notes that Barth also wrote about the sonship of believers, but Barth saw adoption and regeneration unreservedly as eschatological entities.⁽⁶⁵⁾ In this view, Barth taught the divine presence of God in the believer but stressed its realization proper, in the believer, as an eschatological reality. Berkouwer comments on this teaching in the following way: "The synthesis by which he (Barth) managed to exclude the presence of the Holy Spirit as conditioner of human life was that the reality of the eschatological presence exists in the promise."⁽⁶⁶⁾ Berkouwer's obvious disappointment with Barth's view, expressed in this statement, stems from the evident omission of the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier. He feels that Barth is so adamant on his eschatological position because of unfounded fears about the misinterpretation of sanctification. Barth is fighting an imaginary opponent, who, he believes, is reaching out impatiently for future realities in trying "to push beyond the present word of promise". Berkouwer writes:

But the choice of alternatives here is hardly scriptural. The enemy Barth is opposing here is a caricature. It is hard to see why the actual presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, a reality we can know only through faith, must necessarily imply a reduction to human levels. The distinction between the Holy Spirit and our spirit will never, not in all eternity, be annulled. Nor is it annulled in the present. Barth imagines his opponent to be someone who in reaching out impatiently for future realities tries to push beyond the word of promise.⁽⁶⁷⁾

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.110.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.111.

In this quotation, Berkouwer seriously questions Barth about the role of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the individual. He does this because he believes that it is important to acknowledge that the gift of the Spirit dwells with us today, in the present, and not only in the future. It is this gift of the Spirit that makes us long for the coming of the Lord in the "now". Of Barth's view, he says, "The false option which Barth entertains misled him into viewing the adoption solely in terms of the future."⁽⁶⁸⁾

It is of course possible and correct to also regard adoption as an eschatological reality as Paul does in Romans 8:32. However what is important for sanctification is to be aware of what our adoption in the Spirit means as an ongoing and present reality. It must be grasped that the Spirit is the one who as the spirit of adoption leads us to cry in the present, "Abba, Father", and who bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed the children of God (Rom.8:15, 16). Berkouwer holds that this scripture is fundamental to sanctification. He affirms that the answer to Barth's thesis that "all must remain implicit in the word" is to be found explicitly in this dictum of Paul.⁽⁶⁹⁾ He believes that after Paul is understood there can be no further talk of contradiction between promise and fulfilment. Furthermore this operation of the Holy Spirit protects the relationship between the sovereign gracious God and the regenerate man. Barth's other fear was that man might somehow be seen as a subjective, free correlate to God's objective declaration. Berkouwer takes note of Barth's phrasing, "my being appropriated by Christ needs no correlative on my part, it cannot even have it." He also notes Barth's view of faith, which is not "the act of human belief, but the act of

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

original divine belief."⁽⁷⁰⁾

Berkouwer finds this type of thinking to be seriously lacking in an appreciation of the Holy Spirit's presence and role. He holds that the free and sovereign grace of God does not abolish human subjectivity for correlativity between the grace of God and the human subjectivity lies in the mystery of the gift of the Spirit.⁽⁷¹⁾ The reality of sonship is not the same thing as the righteousness of works since the secret of sonship lies in the acknowledgement of grace. All progress in sanctification moves within the boundaries of being sons of the Father. Progress in sanctification does not mean working out one's own salvation under one's own impulse and effort. On the contrary "it means working out one's own salvation with a rising sense of dependence on God's grace."⁽⁷²⁾ Berkouwer sees this as the work of the Holy Spirit. He writes:

To be able to walk on this road is the work and miracle of the Holy Spirit. Everything depends on whether this 'we' magnifies the grace of God or whether the grace of God is understood as a pedestal to elaborate the 'we'.⁽⁷³⁾

Here Berkouwer incisively designates the problem of relationship in sanctification between the "we", and God. He sees the divine balance in this walk, this relationship, as the work of the Holy spirit.

Berkouwer in his "dialogue" with Barth demonstrates that all views of justification that arrive at some extreme view of regeneration will deprive us of the "wonderful mystery" of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is wonderful for it turns man from a study of his own condition to the life of faith. In this life he feeds on God's grace alone and seeks to

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.122.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p.112.

⁷³ Ibid., p.121.

live in terms of the salvation he has received. Berkouwer's treatment of sanctification is sufficiently imaginative in its pneumatological perspective to warrant further study, and his pneumatological intimations, generally, err only in that they lack adequate elaboration. A Catholic critique of his insights can only add to the measure of his theology.

CHAPTER 5 - AFTERWORD

Berkouwer's Pneumatology - A Catholic Appraisal

A. Berkouwer, from a Catholic Viewpoint

In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that there is more than just an intimation of pneumatology in the dogmatics of G.C. Berkouwer. This is due to his ability to create a climate of theology that can hold in tension a wide range of learned opinion. His dogmatics in no way conflicts with the Reformation sola fide teaching, yet it holds out a recognizable vision for the Catholic student as well.

Berkouwer's contribution to an improved pneumatological understanding is realized against the background of traditional Reformed theology, a theology which is noted more for its developed Christology than for its pneumatology. Such traditional Reformed thinking tends to stress the Holy Spirit's work in individual sanctification almost to the detriment of His universal salvific activity. In such a view, the understanding of the Holy Spirit's role can be limited since He would only be seen as the one who applies the objective work of Christ (done upon the cross) to the heart of the believer. Here the believer's eyes are turned away from the Holy Spirit himself and rest solely on Jesus. It is, however, affirmed that the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, but it is very difficult to identify a distinctive role for Him apart from individual sanctification. He is thus in no way an initiator, but is rather, a humble quiet servant in the triune Godhead. This view is not without its merits as it does still highlight a very real truth of revelation. It further recognizes the Spirit's unique place in special revelation, and thus the importance of the Word of God. The apposite dictum, "by the Spirit, through the bible, in the heart" might well, with qualifications, sum up such a tradition.

Evidently Berkouwer also belongs to this theological tradition, but his handling of pneumatology provides an opening for creative extrapolation in several areas. For a Catholic commentator on his work, concepts that excite particular attention include his explanation of the praesentia realis as an ontological presence of the person of Christ in the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Furthermore, his conclusions about the thorny question of gratia infusa as an indwelling of the Spirit (who brings the believer to bear fruit), and the insights into progressive sanctification, well merit serious consideration in Catholic circles. Berkouwer's obvious familiarity with his own church tradition interacts well in his constant reference to other theological systems, not least of all the Roman Catholic one. He is evidently well versed in the Catholic teaching on grace and the Holy Spirit and deals objectively with issues when he raises them.

Roman Catholic theology of the Holy Spirit has developed in insight over nearly two millenia. On occasions it has exhibited serious sectional differences as various schools arose, but there is, nonetheless, an inner consistency and a broad agreement in its understanding of pneumatology. The Holy Spirit's efficacious and gracious action is proclaimed in comprehensive terms and recognized as operative both within and outside of the church. A synopsis of this inclusive theology can be partially, though adequately, grasped in Karl Rahner's description:

He is the Spirit of grace: God within us as our anointing and sealing, our earnest of heaven, our guest, comforter and advocate, the interior call, freedom and sonship, life and peace, holiness and unity, we call the Spirit. He who causes the fruits to mature in us - love, joy, patience, chastity - is the Spirit, the stern adversary of the flesh, of sin, of legalism, the secret power of transformation within us that presses forward to the resurrection of the glorified body and transfiguration of the world, the unity of the body of Christ. Pentecost reveals that the Spirit is not only offered to man, but that man's acceptance of the Spirit is itself the Spirit's gift; that this communication of the Spirit is no longer a

sporadic breathing, as it was for the prophets, but has happened definitively and irrevocably. The primordial sacrament of Christ's grace in the Spirit, who is not only promised but given, is the Church. In her he lives, both in prudent laws and in awakening to new life, in office and charism. He is the Spirit of the individual, who may possess him and be guided by Him in a Christianity that is still nameless and does not understand the Church but that can be perceived whenever men refuse by the (1) grace of God to conform to legalistic mediocrity.

Rahner succeeds in including a wide range of concepts in this definition. He refers to grace, indwelling, charisms, sonship, sanctification, inspiration, sacramental life, and even to the Spirit's activities in the Universe, the Church and the individual. His definition, although couched in sweeping and broad terms, does in fact accurately reflect the pneumatology of the Roman Catholic church. (2)

The strength of Berkouwer's theology is that it reflects fairly a wide range of teachings, and is also acquainted with Catholic teaching on the various doctrines. Paradoxically, this strong point is also a weakness in Berkouwer's methodology. Due to his vast erudition and determination not to caricature other positions, it is frequently difficult to identify his own theological stance. Careful study of Berkouwer's writings, however, invariably pays dividends. From a Catholic perspective, this dissertation has already acknowledged his positive contribution to pneumatology. There remains the task of referring to perceived weaknesses as well.

¹ Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Theological Dictionary, p.211.

² For a full exposition on the Holy Spirit as reflected in the doctrinal documents of the Catholic Church, see J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, The Christian Faith, especially the chapters on Grace, God, Church and Sacraments.

B. Some Critical Aspects

Berkouwer did not at any time set out to propound a specific pneumatology, but in view of the fact that his theology is so markedly trinitarian, he ended by saying a great deal about the Holy Spirit. One of the serious criticisms that can be levelled against his dogmatic studies is the fact that it does not include a specific treatise on the Holy Spirit. His objective and balanced brand of theology supplies a partial corrective to the subjectivistic types of Spirit-orientated religion so evident at present. This lack of a well-defined pneumatology is in fact serious at this time when the Christian world is grappling on both its flanks, left and right, with two polarized movements. On the one hand, a very militant socio-political brand of theology known variously as the theology of revolution or liberation theology is becoming very articulate. On the other hand, a worldwide proliferation of pneumatic denominations and sects representing a wide spectrum of Pentecostal churches is making tremendous impact. There is enough good orthodox teaching in Berkouwer's view of the Kingdom of God to develop a bulwark against the former.⁽³⁾ There is sufficient pneumatology to confront the very subjective approach of the latter, but he does not give it the serious treatment that it warrants. From a Catholic perspective, the two major areas requiring further development within a pneumatological framework are to be found in his ecclesiology and in his treatment of scripture.

The church receives surprisingly little mention in his eschatology (The Return of Christ) although what there is of it well deserves more attention. He deals very scantily with the fact that Pentecost not only inaugurates "the time between" but is also the birthday of the church;⁽⁴⁾ this

³ G.C. Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, pp 33 - 50.

⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, Ibid., p.70.

is left as an undeveloped theme. He had ample opportunity to develop the Spirit/Church theme in his book, The Church, but again this receives almost cavalier treatment despite the fact that he is aware of the tensions inherent in this dynamic. He makes adequate reference to the extremes between a structured Institutional church and a Spiritual church, but leaves the issue unexplored notwithstanding its relevance for contemporary Christianity.⁽⁵⁾ From a Catholic point of view with its strongly held position that the Holy Spirit is the soul of the church as well as its ultimate source of empowerment it would have been important to encounter a comprehensive Reformed statement on this issue. This would have been especially pertinent in view of the enthusiastic challenge facing all mainline Christian denominations at present.

As regards the otherwise excellent study on special revelation found in his Holy Scripture, there are only two notable lacunae: The question of human instrumentality and that of canonicity. The weakest part of the whole book is Berkouwer's attempt to answer the perennial question about human instrumentality, that is, the question that would attempt to describe man's relation to the Holy Spirit in God-breathed scripture. Berkouwer does make mention of the Organic theory of Inspiration but his explanation of its mode of operation is inadequately explained. (Inadequate only in the sense that, while so many problem areas are highlighted, no clear definition of this mode of operation is ever given). He does nonetheless clarify the consequences of such a concept, namely that God is totally the author of Holy Scripture and that the inspired authors are also totally the authors, without any loss of freedom. He is evidently very aware of the danger of monergism (an unbiblical concept which, while attempting to pay tribute to God's role, nonetheless completely misunderstood God's way

⁵ G.C. Berkouwer, The Church, pp 220-222.

with man). Berkouwer settles on the word, "aansluiting" which the translator of his book renders into English as "continuity".⁽⁶⁾ The word is, in this writer's opinion very imprecisely translated, and it would have been preferable to have used the word "conjunction", or even a word like "conjoined" (with many qualifications) to express the interrelationship of God's activity with that of the authors of scripture.

At the forefront of any discussion of instrumentality, one must always be quite clear that the human authors were authors in the full sense of the word, not with a weakened, but with a heightened awareness through the impulse of the Holy Spirit. Berkouwer affirms this consistency throughout his explanation on human authorship.⁽⁷⁾

Many pitfalls obviously present themselves and one has to wander through a theological minefield of contradictions: Berkouwer says that the road through an understanding of the organic theory of inspiration is "not without dangers and pitfalls".⁽⁸⁾ Does such a continuity not perhaps limit the Divine Word? In what way can one escape synergism, that combination of human and divine effort? Does not the problem of dualism absorb the Old (human) into the New (Divine) or vice versa?

In admitting the "time bound" nature of scripture, one might opt for a solution under the heading of "Accommodation", an idea that would suggest that the Holy Spirit, or even Christ, deliberately checked himself for the sake of the weakness of the hearers when dealing with lofty doctrines, and used ideas that could be accommodated by human language with all its implicit limitations. From this point on, Berkouwer gets badly deflected and moves away from the whole manner of the human/divine continuity which

⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture, p.170.

⁷ Ibid., p.172.

⁸ Ibid., p.155.

was the original issue, and grapples with the problems consequent upon the "time-bound" nature of scripture. He seems to face in the right direction even though he never comes to a resolution. The remainder of the book can be summed up in his growing elaboration on the purpose and goal of scripture. All questions are now dealt within the light of this goal or scopus of scripture, but the more pertinent question of the Holy Spirit's initiative and sustaining grace are lost sight of.

Fortunately, corrections of various conceptions of the word, its composition and place in the universe, need not concern the reception of its message, because the word finds its way through a variety of periods each with their own social structures and cultural identities. The word of God is not hindered by the historical or cultural matrix but shines through quite clearly. Holy Scripture has a central aim and that is witness to Christ. This aim totally supersedes any regional or historical limitations in its human expression.

The question of the determination and closing the canon of scripture has been dealt with in Chapter Two of this dissertation. It remains only to express regret that the activity of the Holy Spirit did not receive the attention that it obviously requires, and Berkouwer does not succeed in answering the many questions posed there. He does not, in the view of this writer, explain how the Holy spirit effects the canon's completion; he takes it for granted. Berkouwer comes closest to making a significant pneumatological contribution to this question when he refers to Kuyper's statement about the testimony of the Holy Spirit tying one to the authentic core of scripture,⁽⁹⁾ but again he fails to enlarge upon such an important point. For the Catholic commentator who believes that the role of the

⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, Holy Scripture, p.99.

Holy Spirit is normative and specific in this regard,⁽¹⁰⁾ there seems insufficient clarity and satisfaction in Berkouwer's handling of this doctrine.

In retrospect, it can be seen that Berkouwer's theological study is a vigorous and convincing contribution to Christian thought. His awareness of the Holy Spirit as operative in the entire work of the triune God is valuable. It provides the elements for an orthodox corrective to the subjectivistic excess prevalent in certain areas of Christianity today. What is important for this dissertation, is the clarity that has been shed upon Reformed teaching by Berkouwer, and the possible avenues of dialogue that could be intelligently pursued by the churches of Rome and the Reformation, especially in the once disputed areas of soteriology and ecclesiology. Berkouwer needs to be known far more widely outside of his own tradition.

¹⁰ Karl Rahner, (Editor), Encyclopedia of Theology, p.173.

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