

Spiritless Lutheranism, Fatherless Pentecostalism, and a Proposed Baptismal-Christological Corrective

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In 2004, the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, France, an independent house of studies that had been founded by the Lutheran World Federation forty years earlier to assist in its ecumenical work, pioneered conversations on an international level with trinitarian Pentecostals. Six years later saw the joint publication by the Institute and two Pentecostal research centers of what is likely the world's tiniest ecumenical document (the booklet measures 5.5" by 4.25"), *Lutherans and Pentecostals in Dialogue*. Conceived as a handbook to future dialogue, the document briefly describes the group's dialogue process, states its recommended goals, explores common ground and differences under the rubric of "how we encounter Christ" (in proclamation, sacraments/ordinances, and charisms), and concludes with three long articles detailing Lutheran history for Pentecostal readers, Pentecostal history for Lutheran readers, and Lutheran reactions to Pentecostal and charismatic movements.¹ While the handbook is brief and represents only the very beginning of a much-needed conversation, the overall feeling is positive, hopeful, and relieved that many of the misunderstandings have already been cleared away. It is thus a very young dialogue (by contrast, the Pentecostal-Roman Catholic dialogue started in 1972), still feeling its way forward. This essay is intended as a contribution toward this nascent process, well aware of its own limitations and deliberately painting with bolder strokes than is usual for scholarly work in the hopes of spurring interest and discussion.

A chief impression gained from this first official ecumenical encounter between Lutherans and Pentecostals is that they are already deeply entangled with each other, though most of the time they don't realize it. To begin with, Pentecostals award Luther an exalted place in church history. He is the beginning of the "latter rain" that brought the good news afresh to the world – succeeded, of course, by other great lights such as John Wesley and various twentieth-century Pentecostal leaders – but he's always the first. The honor paid to him is so great that it was the *Pentecostals* of Chile who successfully lobbied for making October 31, Reformation Day, into a public holiday. The doctrine of justification by faith is taken for granted as foundational to the Pentecostal message: contrary to many popular misperceptions, the granting of spiritual gifts emphasized in trinitarian Pentecostalism is not the *cause* or *proof* of salvation but rather a *consequence* of salvation. Another classic Lutheran concern is seen in Pentecostalism's commitment to the Scripture as the source and norm of Christian teaching, against which all words of knowledge and prophecy given to contemporary believers must be tested.

¹ *Lutherans and Pentecostals in Dialogue* (Strasbourg, Pasadena, and Zürich: Institute for Ecumenical Research, David du Plessis Center for Christian Spirituality, European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association, 2010). I participated in the last two of the six years of conversations that led to the publication of this handbook.

Altogether it is best to see Pentecostalism as an extension of the Protestant movement begun five hundred years ago, not as an entirely new thing with a set of commitments alien to its forebears'.²

The connection to and dependence of Pentecostalism on Lutheranism is clear. But does the connection go in the other direction? The answer of "yes" will probably surprise many Lutherans; it certainly surprised me. But the fact is that Lutheranism has been deeply marked over the past five centuries by movements that prefigured Pentecostalism. Pietism is the most important of these movements: while it did not usually include speaking in tongues or baptism in the Spirit, it did often stress healing, the full involvement of the laity in worship and teaching, mission, and intense personal experience of God through prayer. But there have also been more distinctly "charismatic movements." Two of the strongest were in Finland: the Awakened movement under the leadership of Paavo Ruotsalainen in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the Laestadian movement in the nineteenth century, both of which were characterized by speaking in tongues.³ While some of the Pietist and charismatic movements broke off to form free churches, many of them stayed within the Lutheran folk or state church and exercised influence there.

The more recent Lutheran dependence on Pentecostalism is a widespread reality. As with many other mainline churches, charismatic renewal found its way into Lutheran churches around the world starting in the 1950s, often through contact with members of classical Pentecostal churches. In the United States there was a dramatic charismatic renewal among Lutherans, which by 1980 included at least 10% and possibly as many as 20% of the nation's Lutherans.⁴ Interestingly, though, it was steadily ignored by the official church bodies, at times quietly suppressed, sometimes investigated with the help of psychologists,⁵ and in one case led to what can best be described as a "peace treaty" between the denominational offices and the charismatic community.⁶ Charismatic renewal integrated into German Lutheran churches with less difficulty, particularly under the guidance of Arnold Bittlinger. In

² See, for example, the chapter "Tongues of Fire: The Pentecostal Revolution in Protestantism," in Alister McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea* (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 415-38.

³ See A. Lahonen, "Awakened" and "Finland," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. ed., eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 343 and 103. There is not a great deal available about Ruotsalainen or Laestadius in non-Scandinavian languages, but for the basics on the latter see Jacob W. Heikkinen, "Lars Levi Laestadius," *Lutheran Quarterly* 8/4 (1956): 360-362.

⁴ Larry Christenson, "Lutheran Charismatics," *Lutheran Forum* 43/3 (2009): 60-65.

⁵ See the "Report on Glossolalia" by the American Lutheran Church in 1963, published in *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal*, vol. I, ed. Kilian McDonnell (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1980), 57-63.

⁶ The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, "The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement" (1977), available online at www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=683 (accessed June 15, 2012).

Finland it led to significant renewal in the Lutheran folk church and even improved relations with the Pentecostal churches.⁷ The East African Revival Movement and subsequent charismatic movements have had a tremendous impact on the practice and theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania as well.⁸ A particularly intriguing case is Ethiopia, where contact with Pentecostals led to an internal renewal of the Lutheran church, for which the Lutherans had been praying. In the mid-1970s, a deliberate study process led to the creation of guidelines for incorporating charismatic practice into Ethiopian Lutheran church life. These guidelines have been very successful, and except perhaps for Tanzania, Ethiopia's is the fastest-growing Lutheran church in the world.⁹

It is quite possible that these Pietist and charismatic movements have been addressing a keenly felt lacuna in Lutheranism over the centuries. All too often, the Spirit has been treated as a backup plan for getting the Word across, a theoretical guarantee that God saves human beings instead of human beings saving themselves – not a divine Person but more like a divine personification of a theoretical truth. The teaching of God's initiative in rescuing humanity from sin, death, and the devil has frequently devolved into depriving people of any meaningful involvement in their own religious lives. Could this really be what Luther had in mind?

I doubt it very much. Consider the opening sentence of the classic study on Luther's theology of the Holy Spirit, *Spiritus Creator*, by the Danish theologian Regin Prenter, which states: "The concept of the Holy Spirit completely dominates Luther's theology."¹⁰ I suspect this claim would evoke astonishment from your average Lutheran. The Spirit is always an underdefined entity for Lutherans, a fifth wheel, a faceless blank in which to collect all the leftover phrases of the creed. In my own case, I only began to make some headway toward the Spirit during my doctoral studies (after already countless years of theological education) when I suddenly realized that justification by faith belongs to the third article of the Creed, being a doctrine primarily about the Spirit and the Spirit's work – not a second-article doctrine about Christ. I put forward this newfound insight in a seminar with fellow Reformation Protestants, who all looked at me in bewilderment. I shut my mouth but began to suspect that every doctrine was being collapsed into the second

⁷ Harri Heino, "The Charismatic Movement in Finland and North America," *Pneuma* 10/1 (1988): 50–61.

⁸ Moritz Fischer, "'The Spirit Helps Us in Our Weakness': Charismatization of Worldwide Christianity and the Quest for an Appropriate Pneumatology with Focus on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 20 (2011): 95–121.

⁹ "The Work of the Holy Spirit," Lutheran Church – Mekane Yesus, Ethiopia, in *Presence, Power, Praise*, vol. II, 150–82.

¹⁰ Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator*, trans. John M. Jensen [1946] (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), ix.

article.¹¹ Could it be that the work of Christ, once and for all, was not actually the whole story? That there was a third term or event, in which the work of Christ got to me?¹²

The point was further driven home to me by another graduate seminar episode. My Anglican professor concluded a discourse on the incarnation with the declaration, “The chief thing is not that God died but that God took on our human flesh. And that it why *Christmas*, not Good Friday, is the highest holy day of the church year, contrary to what some Reformed Protestants may think.” I the Lutheran immediately objected that it was neither Christmas (incarnation) nor Good Friday (death of God) that was the highest holy day, but Easter – for what good is incarnation or death if not followed by a resurrection? And to that another student from the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition went one step further and said, “I always thought it was Pentecost – because what good do God’s incarnation, death, *or* resurrection do if you never hear about them and so come to believe and be saved?” Obviously, the whole project of pitting church holidays against each other is rather silly, but the point struck home with me. What good *is* the resurrection if you never hear about it, and so come to justifying faith, and so come to rise again yourself, spiritually now and physically in the life to come? There is a root incoherence in a Lutheranism that talks about only Christ and never about the Holy Spirit.

But this was not *Luther’s* problem. Luther’s constant drumbeat was the real presence of God – whether in the person of Christ, in the Lord’s Supper, or in faith. And it is the Holy Spirit, as God, Who makes Christ present to us, not just a matter of past history or doctrinal theory. As Prenter’s aforementioned study of Luther’s understanding of the Spirit put it: “Justification means that God in the Spirit is present with us. He struggles in the midst of the reality of sin and death. This is the forgiveness of sin. Sanctification means that God in the Spirit also in the future remains near us, struggling in the midst of the final destruction of sin and death.”¹³ Though later Lutheranism got nervous about sanctification, trying to keep it as distinct as possible from justification and very modest in its achievements, for Luther there was no competition between the two. There was no competition because *both* were the work of the *really present* Holy Spirit, Who alone can convict us with the law and Who alone can raise us up again with the gospel. In fact, as Prenter argues, all of Luther’s insistence on the Spirit’s communication through the word

¹¹ Perhaps the pervasive influence of Karl Barth at my school had something to do with it. See, for instance, the notorious article by Robert W. Jenson, “You Wonder Where the Spirit Went,” *Pro Ecclesia* 2/3 (1993): 296–304.

¹² Luther did actually think this, though it took me a long time to notice. Among others, see his comments in: “The Large Catechism,” in *The Book of Concord*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 436, 440; “Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper,” in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.) [hereafter cited as LW], 37:366; “Theses concerning Faith and the Law,” Thesis 1, LW 34:109; and the 1535 Lectures on Galatians, LW 26:90, 130, 282.

¹³ Prenter, 229–30.

and sacraments is to block human efforts at climbing up toward God, so that all human activity is reduced to one thing: “the expectation of the Spirit. Yes, only the expectation of the Spirit! That means, the expectation of God himself personally.”¹⁴ Here begins the rediscovery of the long-lost “Pentecostal Luther.”

But in time Lutheranism tore apart what Luther had been able to hold together. Why this is the case is a long and complicated story.¹⁵ The constant threat of violence and compromise from the Roman side, and alarm at the extreme elements on the radical side, had a lot to do with it. The strictly forensic model of justification with its courtroom imagery of imputation seemed to hold off Catholic ideas of earning salvation by good works and Enthusiast ideas of mandatory religious experience, and over time the forensic model shoved all other models aside, including Luther’s own “joyful exchange” model, which depicts a far more dynamic, personal, passionate, and all-encompassing encounter with God.¹⁶ So it is discouraging, but not surprising, that when contemporary Pentecostal theologian Frank D. Macchia takes up the topic of justification in his recent book, he presents the imputed righteousness of the forensic model as *the* Protestant view of justification. He himself finds this model wanting – rightly so – but he has Lutherans to blame for this more than Luther himself.¹⁷ Whatever the reasons for its happening, the loss of the Spirit from the central Lutheran doctrine of justification turned into a loss of the Spirit just about everywhere else, with devastating consequences. Three errors that it has engendered are particularly worth mentioning.

The first error in a Lutheranism evacuated of the Spirit was the doctrine of scriptural inerrancy. Here we see no longer a Spirit Who blows where He wills. This is not a Spirit Who must inspire the reader of the Scriptures to grant faith and understanding, but a Spirit trapped under the letter, Whose work is finished. According to the inerrancy doctrine, the dictation of the Scripture, in a long-distant past, is the Spirit’s chief work. Then the text is no longer the canonical human witness to its encounter with the self-communicating Trinity, but scientific evidence

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁵ See Paul R. Hinlicky’s account of how this move in Melancthon was tied to the problem of the freedom or bondage of the will, in ch. 5 of *Paths Not Taken: Fates of Theology from Luther to Leibniz* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

¹⁶ “The Freedom of a Christian,” LW 31:351.

¹⁷ Frank D. Macchia, “Imputed Righteousness: The Protestant View of Justification,” in *Justified in the Spirit: Creation, Redemption, and the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Macchia does draw attention to Finnish Lutheran research that shows use of “union” language in Luther (which also appears in Calvin), but this doesn’t change his basic view of the Protestant preference for the forensic model. Perhaps on account of being Finnish himself, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen sees a great deal more promise in Luther’s doctrine of justification: “Ecumenically in general and with regard to Pentecostal-Lutheran relations in particular, it is extremely significant that it seems to be possible to express the classical Reformation doctrine of salvation and justification in pneumatological terms.” In “The Holy Spirit and Justification: The Ecumenical Significance of Luther’s Doctrine of Salvation,” *Pneuma* 24/1 (2002): 38.

for propounding doctrine and demanding intellectual assent – a far cry from the faith (*fiducia*) that clings to its Savior against doubt and darkness, in fact hardly distinguishable from the scholastic definition of faith (*notitia*) that Luther argued against in the first place. The alternative is not to say that the text of Holy Scripture is irrelevant or replaceable. But solely *as* text, apart from the living Spirit in the living reader, Holy Scripture avails nothing. The text is not God – the Spirit is God. Scriptural inerrancy puts divinity in the wrong place.

And this naturally leads into the next error of a Spiritless Lutheranism, of the rationalist variety. A Spirit that is not living and active is a datum, an item to be analyzed in a microscope or telescope, a factor fully within history rather than a force before and after, above and beneath history. An inerrant Scripture is such a deadening doctrine that it only logically gives rise to a historical-critical method calling into question pious certainties about authorship and received manuscripts. In many ways the de-divinizing of the biblical text was a blessing to Lutheranism and the other churches that eventually made use of it. The problem was the same empty doctrine of the Spirit that came attached to it. It has unsurprisingly evolved into an extreme, critical, even suspicious approach that refuses to believe what it cannot prove: so miracles are out, the resurrection is a myth, prayer is pain management, and healing is tapping into the body's natural resources. By the end there is nothing left to believe in because belief itself does not fit in a rationalist structure – and of course because there is no Spirit to grant belief.

And for those poor souls who are still attached to the Christian story without any good reason for it, without a living Spirit to animate faith or illumine the text, all that is left is the third error, namely moralism. I need hardly say that this is the most ironic possible outcome for Lutheranism five hundred years later. But I have regularly heard Lutheran sermons and exegesis of biblical miracles that share the same Spiritless conviction: there is no power of God active amidst humanity now. The miracle stories of the New Testament are not testimony to the power of the Spirit in the incarnate Son of God: no, they're inspirational, allegorical templates for doing good works. Christians can only spur themselves with stories of Jesus' healing or feeding in order to overcome their innate moral laziness and get on with the hard work of making the world a better place. Who could argue with such a noble aspiration? Except that it makes the church utterly indistinguishable from any other well-meaning humanitarian organization. But humanitarian organizations have a way of overestimating their own righteousness. In the church's case, without the critical discipline of theology, evil is sure to follow any attempt at improving the human race. And doubly so when the moralism is accompanied, as it usually is, by selective antinomianism: only those of God's laws deemed useful to the world-improvement project are promoted, while those apparently less relevant – usually pertaining to matters of so-called "personal" morality – are left to languish in the dustbin of unenlightened history. If there is no living Spirit, then there is no particular need to heed the whole counsel of the law. It is a pitiful outcome for a rich tradition.

All of these errors – inerrantist, rationalist, and moralist – are miles away from Luther’s own lively doctrine of the living Holy Spirit always at work in the church *now*. In Luther himself, Lutherans have the resources to address their mistaken Spiritlessness, which is all the more evident in comparison with the bold expectation of the Spirit among Pentecostals. But would Pentecostals invite Lutherans to take a step even further than Luther did? The very idea usually raises the fear of Enthusiasm; but it is fitting, here as always, to discern the spirits before crying heresy.

Let us approach the topic by way of a test case concerning global Christian mission. Luther and his fellow reformers, including the Reformed and Anabaptist, basically believed that the era of mission was over, having been restricted to the apostolic period. The Great Commission was taken to be Jesus’s specific instructions to the people gathered around him on the mountain, not a permanent charge for all Christian believers forever after. Certain Lutheran scholastics went so far as to claim that mission was a Catholic heresy! It wasn’t until the eighteenth century that the matter came to be reconsidered among Lutherans and other Protestants.¹⁸ Theological and exegetical ideas were re-evaluated, and the previous consensus against it was overturned in favor of a renewed effort at world mission. Nowadays it is taken for granted that the mission of the church is not over, even if there are some appropriate concerns about how it is carried out. But the theological principle stands: mission did not end with the apostles but continues now and until the end. The reformers were mistaken when they thought otherwise.

Much like with mission, Luther and the other reformers took it for granted that the spiritual gifts of the apostolic age had ended along with the age itself. This was a venerable opinion, held at least from the time of Augustine. John Chrysostom fretted over the gradual disappearance of spiritual gifts,¹⁹ but in time their absence was taken for granted. The Pentecostal conviction is that, like mission, spiritual gifts did not cease with the close of the apostolic age. They remain permanently available to believers – and chiefly *for* the sake of mission. The question to Lutherans, then, is whether they might be prepared to revise their ideas about spiritual gifts, just as they did about mission. This is not separate from the whole question of the missing Holy Spirit in our theology but closely connected to it, for if the Spirit is real and alive and active, then “there are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” What will decide it for Lutherans is seeing whether the Spirit that produces the charismatic phenomena is indeed the *Holy* Spirit, which means the Spirit sent by Jesus Christ. Lutherans will know that the Holy Spirit has more to offer the baptized if the “more” leads them not away from Christ but deeper into Christ – and out into the world that knows neither Christ nor Spirit.

¹⁸ See the section on “Early Protestant Disinterest in Mission” in McGrath, 175–78.

¹⁹ Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries*, 2nd rev. ed. (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994), 376.

Though I can speak with some assurance about the problem of Spiritlessness in Lutheranism, it is with considerably more fear and trembling that I undertake the topic of Fatherlessness in Pentecostalism. I will trust to the mercy of my Pentecostal interlocutors to be gentle with me if they conclude that I have missed the mark entirely.

What has struck me almost since my first encounter with Pentecostalism is the absence of the Father.²⁰ There is, of course, persistent emphasis on the Spirit. And this Spirit is not divorced from Jesus Christ, forgotten aspects of whose ministry – especially healing and baptizing in the Spirit – have been brought to the fore. There is much to commend here and much for other Christians, not least of all Lutherans, to learn.

But where is the Father? Apart from the rhetoric of prayer, the Father appears to be as much the absent party in Pentecostalism as the Spirit is absent in Lutheranism. There is, of course, talk of God. But trinitarian doctrine makes the referent of the word “God” multivalent. There is biblical reason to equate “God,” plain and simple, with the Father. In Eastern Orthodox theology, this habit has been managed by speaking of the Father as the “fountainhead” of the Trinity. In the West and especially since the Enlightenment, “God” has come to take on deist or unitarian overtones, such that the divinity of the Son and Spirit remain somewhat in question, and any distinctive quality of God as the *Father* of His particular Son has almost entirely vanished. But Christians run into trouble very quickly if they say “God,” and think they know who and what “God” is, without clear reference to all three persons of the Trinity.

The absence of specific reflection on or engagement with God the Father and Creator has, I propose, given rise to the errors that have dogged Pentecostalism almost since its inception. The first of these is the Oneness movement, which as a result of its restorationist concern to baptize in the way recorded in the book of Acts – in the name of Jesus – rejects the triadic formula of Mt 28:19 and accordingly the doctrine of the Trinity.²¹ Early Oneness Pentecostals concluded that the name of

²⁰ Others have noticed this too, most famously the Anglican charismatic Thomas A. Smail: “If I were to diagnose and prescribe for [the charismatic renewal’s] present ills in a single sentence, I would say that it needs to know the Father.” *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Paternoster, 1996), 13.

²¹ Amos Yong takes some pains to point out Oneness Pentecostalism’s differences from other anti-trinitarian movements (chief of all that it resoundingly affirms the full divinity of Jesus Christ) while acknowledging its attraction to other historic heresies such as Nestorianism. See his generally sympathetic treatment in ch. 5 of *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). Yong notably identifies the chief critical issue in the division of economic from immanent Trinity in Oneness theology: “if God in Godself does not correspond to God as revealed, then revelation is deceptive and untruthful. What is at stake and needs to be exposed in the Oneness interpretive scheme, according to former Oneness Pentecostal Gregory Boyd, is the ‘authenticity of God’s self-revelation,’” 211. It may be of interest for Pentecostals taking up this challenge to consult the work of Christine Helmer, *The Trinity and Martin Luther: A Study on the Relationship between Genre, Language and the Trinity in Luther’s Works (1523–1546)*

Jesus was the equivalent of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” so that Jesus simply *is* the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or rather that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are various roles in the divine plan of redemption, centered on the one God Who is Jesus.²² The Father, then, is a cipher for the foreordained plan of salvation²³ and “reminds us of God’s transcendence,”²⁴ but has no personal existence; indeed, the very notion of “persons” in God is deeply troubling to Oneness theology. In this reading, Jesus (in his role as the Son) is very accessible God in his ministry, death, and resurrection, and so is the Spirit, Who is simply Jesus spiritually present, felt, and experienced. But the Father is the one hidden, least known, invisible and intangible, thus dissolving into general notions about divinity. Though trinitarian Pentecostal David Reed, following other scholars, suggests that “while [Oneness Pentecostals] have a oneness view of God, they have a trinitarian experience of God,”²⁵ the overwhelming impression is that the experience is binitarian at most – not the usual binitarianism of the West that neglects the Spirit, but a uniquely Pentecostal version that neglects the Father. Maybe the emphasis on spiritual experience led toward the loss of the Father; or maybe it was a discomfort *precisely* with the experience of the invisible Father that led to neglect of Him. More about that shortly.

Another result of Fatherlessness is an error that infects trinitarian Pentecostalism as much as the Oneness variety, and that is the prosperity gospel, which locates the favor of God and the benefit of being Christian in material wealth. In all fairness, prosperity gospel often takes root in places where basic human living conditions are appalling, and it is hard to imagine a faithful preaching of the gospel that does not include the alleviation of the crushing burdens of suffering, disease, and poverty. The obvious danger of the prosperity gospel is the blessing of rampant consumerism and personal success, which so often come at the expense of others. But the greater danger, theologically and spiritually, is identifying material blessing with the Holy Spirit rather than with the Father. Then material prosperity, or even basic health, is a reward for faith. This quickly flips faith on its head, turning faith into a tool for achieving this-worldly goods, even valid goods like health, home, food, and clothing. But prosperity is not a gift of the Spirit. It is a gift of the Father (sometimes a curse of the Father, but that is another story) and one that is distributed without attention to a person’s state of faith and righteousness. Prosperity concerns creation and its stewardship. It is meant to be universal, not restricted to a privileged few, whether those few are hereditary royalty, oil tycoons,

(Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1999), which explores at some length Luther’s arguments about the necessity and, more importantly, the *good news* that God’s trinitarian self-revelation is of God’s own eternal trinitarian being.

²² See the account offered by Oneness theologians in section IV.B on “Christology and the Godhead” in “Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report, 2002–2007,” *Pneuma* 30 (2008): 214–16.

²³ *Ibid.*, IV.B.36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.B.42.

²⁵ David A. Reed, “Oneness Pentecostalism: Problems and Possibilities for Pentecostal Theology,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997): 85, 91.

or Christian believers. Here one is confronted with the mystery of the Father, the numinous and invisible person of God, Whose will and decisions do not reflect the preferences of the pious. Christians create a strange and dangerous competition between themselves and everyone else when they associate human flourishing with a special gift of the Holy Spirit attached to faith, rather than with a universally intended gift of the Father to His beloved creatures, regardless of their state of reconciliation to Him.

And this finally brings us to a third error, one not unique to Pentecostalism but common in all movements that stress personal sanctity. This is the sin that only afflicts those who have made “progress” in their moral and spiritual lives – people for whom the really gross sins (in both senses of the word) are no longer appealing, not necessarily because they are so displeasing to God but because they are so displeasing to the individual’s new righteous identity. The distinction is subtle; the devil learns to be trickier the more people “advance” in righteousness. For the more believers advance in righteousness, the easier it is for them to attribute their righteousness to the advance itself! As if their righteousness would eventually become their own possession, separate from God, so that His mercy was no longer necessary.

But here again arises the mystery of the Father’s ways, as St. Paul tells us in Rom 11:32, “God has consigned all to disobedience, that He may have mercy on all.” That includes the believers and the righteous. Quite fittingly, Paul immediately follows this statement with the exclamation: “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways!” (ESV). This is the truth of God the Father: Who is neither the one suffering in the flesh with us nor the Comforter bestowing faith and spiritual gifts upon us, but the one Who consigns us to disobedience so that His mercy may be great. The Father is the one Who, to use Luther’s words, “hidden in His majesty neither deplores nor takes away death, but works life, death, and all in all”²⁶ – disrupting all our human patterns of piety and striving for security. This means confronting the God Who offers no guarantees except His own presence.

Any brand of Christianity that cannot reckon with God the Father will end up taming the gospel into a project of human self-improvement. And it will necessarily become judgmental, because it won’t be able to account for an answer of “no” to prayers for healing or spiritual gifts in any way but to lay the blame at the feet of the inadequate believer – for what reason could the Spirit have for withholding what He promises to give?²⁷ It is the sovereign Father’s inscrutable wisdom that forbids human inferences about others’ spiritual progress. This Father is not always an endearing figure: He is sometimes the “Abba” of trusting prayer (Mk 14:36) but

²⁶ Martin Luther, “The Bondage of the Will,” LW 33:140.

²⁷ Indeed, I found this to be by far the most troubling part (much more than anything about the baptism in the Spirit!) of pioneer Episcopal charismatic Dennis J. Bennett’s book *Nine O’Clock in the Morning*, namely his assertion that his first wife Elberta died on account of some spiritual failure, since she was not cured of her disease despite their prayers for her healing.

sometimes also the one Who forsakes according to His own purposes (Mk 15:34). Luther advised believers to flee to Christ, the God incarnate, for comfort and certainty, but not in order to eliminate the reality of the “naked God,” almighty God, Father and Creator. The comfort offered by Christ is necessary *only* because of this hidden and uncontrollable God, Who sends even His only-begotten Son to the cross.

If Lutherans have lost the Spirit and Pentecostals have forgotten the Father, how can they assist each other in a much-needed trinitarian retrieval? An intriguing fact of church history suggests a pattern for knitting their fractured theologies together again around a shared christocentric core.

Some years ago two Catholic scholars associated with charismatic renewal, Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, investigated the interrelationship of baptism in the Spirit, spiritual gifts, and sacramental initiation in the early church. They discovered that as long as the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was the central paradigm for the baptism of Christians, the expectation of spiritual gifts in the life of the Christian continued. It was the descent of the Spirit with a commission for ministry that distinguished Christ’s and thus Christians’ baptism from John’s. But in time, the image of Jesus’ baptism and the concomittant bestowal of the Spirit with His gifts faded from view. The Montanist heresy made spiritual gifts suspect. The Adoptionist heresy made any emphasis on Jesus’ baptism suspect, too. The Pauline letters offered another way of interpreting baptism: as sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁸ This was surely a true and good expansion of baptism’s meaning; Mark 10, for example, suggests that Jesus’ passion was a baptism of suffering. But gradually all the emphasis shifted over to the death and resurrection motif, and the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was forgotten liturgically and theologically. And here’s the interesting part: the historical evidence suggests that when the baptism of Jesus was forgotten, so was the expectation of the power of the Spirit and the Spirit’s gifts in the lives of baptized Christians. It’s not that the Spirit wasn’t there, or even that the gifts weren’t there. But nobody even seemed to remember to ask for them.

The past century has witnessed, through the Pentecostal and then charismatic movements, a vital remembering of something long-forgotten. The gifts of the Spirit are there for the asking, distributed according to the Father’s wisdom. They are part of the endowment given with baptism itself, for the sake of the church’s mission. Such gifts of the Holy Spirit ought to drive our attention back to Christ, because he is our pioneer through his baptism when he was personally endowed with the Spirit for his mission. And it is no accident that the baptism of Jesus is the trinitarian moment *par excellence*. Here the incarnate Lord submerges his physical body in the river water and rises up out of it again, foreshadowing his death and resurrection,

²⁸ See McDonnell and Montague, 350–55. They mention that the growing practice of infant baptism may have contributed to the forgetfulness as well, since there is a time lag between baptism and the appreciable manifestation of spiritual gifts. On the other hand, they note that the Syrian church had both infant baptism *and* the longest-lasting emphasis on the baptism of Jesus in Christian baptism; the baptism of Jesus was even included in their creed. See pages 360–66.

only to have the Spirit descend upon him, foreshadowing the outpouring of Pentecost. The crowning moment of the story follows these actions of the Son and the Spirit, when the unseen Father's voice declares from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." The Father's good pleasure is the apex of the action; indeed, its goal.

In reclaiming the full theological import of the baptism of Jesus in their own practice and theology, Lutherans and Pentecostals would be challenged to hold together the things that they have allowed to fall apart. There can be no Christian baptism apart from the descent of the Spirit, empowering the mission with His gifts. And there can be no Christian baptism apart from the Father's good pleasure in sending His only-begotten Son on a mission that would take him to the cross – the baptism into death – and through death to resurrection.²⁹

Lutherans and Pentecostals have much to learn from one another in this strange ecclesial experiment called ecumenism and much to learn from our mutually forgotten history. The errors that spring out of the traditions we love are instructive, and it is foolish to ignore them, for they point out the weak spots in the best of our thinking and practice. Perhaps in ecumenical perspective we can even be learn to be grateful for our weaknesses, since they deprive us of the sin of pride and force us to seek answers from others. So let us look both backward and toward one another in confident hope of a reconciled future, children of the same Father, sisters and brothers of the same Lord Jesus, empowered and enlivened by the same Holy Spirit.

²⁹ Koo Dong Yun, "Water Baptism and Spirit Baptism: Pentecostals and Lutherans in Dialogue," *Dialog* 43/4 (2004): 344 -351, notes that Lutherans tend to follow the Pauline account of baptism while Pentecostals follow the Lukan account (chiefly from Acts) – suggesting that both parties have a valid point, and both have an incomplete one. Since Lutherans and Pentecostals alike maintain that Christian theology must be at root biblical, neither party profits from a restricted understanding of baptism according to one biblical account but not the others.