Dialog - A Journal of Theology vol. 13, Winter 1974

THE COMING CHURCH OF THE SPIRIT

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We are still in the midst of a publication-explosion focusing on the future. A variety of scholars and self-styled prophets are telling us, sometimes with amazing detail, what life will be like three decades from now, two centuries from now, or whatever. One gains the impression that it is somehow easier to describe life in the year 2000, than it is to say something meaningful about our existence today. The present is so complicated, and so full of those "messy facts" which Saul Bellow's Herzog talks about. The future, in contrast, howevermuch we may stretch our minds and make computerized projections, is always subject to the parameters of our wishful thinking. For this reason, a certain sustained skepticism about the findings of futurology seems to be appropriate, whether those findings project catastrophe, utopia, or some state in between.

Even so, the process of reflection and dreaming about the future can be enlightening. It can stimulate us to make concrete projections of where we actualy think we are going and, in turn, give us occasion to seek to change our course if we don't like the prospect we see when we lift our eyes to the future. In this spirit, I want to jump on the futurist bandwagon and consider what seems to be in store for the Reformation tradition as it approaches the year 2000 and beyond.

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The future I see for the Church of the Reformation is at once sobering and exciting. Sobering, in view of what it will be, if it continues to be as it has been. Exciting, in view of what it might be, if it turns itself anew to the zealous, transforming vision of St. Paul that originally sent it on its way.

As a futurologist at this point, it should therefore be clear, I am not concerned with the various symptoms or the mundane successes of the Reformation churches today. I am much more concerned with the underlying problems and possibilities. However important the manifold details of Reformation existence may be today (membership statistics, financial reports, organizational restructuring, mental breakdown among the clergy, and so on), I want to probe more deeply: to unearth and reflect about the most fundamental currents of the Reformation tradition today, in order to consider where those currents might take us. I find those currents identified suggestively by Paul, as I have already intimated, specifically in the question he poses to members of the Galatian church at one point: "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal. 3:2)

We begin, then, with a glimpse of the Reformation tradition as it has been. I will sketch two caricatures, one of Lutheranism, the other

of Calvinism. As long as we keep in mind the fact that these are caricatures, I think that they will prove useful, and not essentially distortions. The Church of the Reformation, it appears to me, has got itself bogged down in what from a Pauline perspective is a secondary arena, the problem of faith and works. The Lutheran side of the tradition has generally stood up for the one; the Calvinist side of the tradition has generally stood up for the other. But, in one way or another, each has missed what I take to be the major thrust of Paul's thinking about the church, his concern with the Spirit.

Lutheranism As It Has Been

Lutherans have consistently emphasized what Paul calls "hearing with faith." They have elevated the preaching of the Word—whose content is justification by faith—to the center of their teaching and piety. Somehow the resonance of Paul's question in Galatians has escaped them. The whole point of what Paul is saying revolves around *the Spirit:* "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith?" Paul assumes that the central feature of the Church's life is the reality of having received the Spirit. The means for doing this (hearing and faith) are a secondary matter.

The result on the Lutheran side, frequently, has been a Church full of preaching and teaching, but without compelling communal and personal evidences of the presence of the Spirit. The nineteenth century German pastor's son, who proclaimed the death of God so vividly, Friedrich Nietzsche, once remarked that he would have become a Christian, but he had never met any real Christians! Nietzsche's expectation of seeing evidences of God's Spirit in the lives of church members was not unreasonable. In this sense, seeing *is* believing. The Church, if it is to be true to itself, will as a matter of course shine as a light for the whole world. The early Church surely gave evidences, many of them ecstatic, of a rich life in the Spirit. In contrast, to use the vernacular, the Lutheran emphasis on right preaching and teaching seems to have hamstrung the Spirit.

A graduate of the college recently told me of what I take to be a not altogether typical experience, in this respect. She explained to me, with deep feelings, how much the Lutheran Church had meant to her all her life, how it held her life together. Two years ago, however, she began to have certain fundamental doubts about the meaning of the resurrection of Christ. So she went to her pastor to talk with him. He soon concluded the conversation by telling her that if she couldn't believe in the resurrection, she should consider leaving the Lutheran Church, and perhaps join some association for humanists! Almost in tears as she recalled that conversation with her pastor, she said to me: "The Church was my life. He crushed the life right out of me." She left the Church—or rather, the Church left her.

There can be little doubt, I think, that the emphasis on the right preaching and teaching of the Word in Lutheranism has tended to produce an arid, insensitive, life-denying intellectualism or dogmatism, symbolized by that pastor's caustic response (did he even know how she was feeling?). The Lutheran side of the Reformation tradition has become, more or less, the tradition of pure doctrine. This propensity, in one of its more exaggerated forms, lies behind the current shambles within the Missouri Synod. Here "orthodoxy" (right doctrine) is being used as an authoritarian hammer to coerce the responsible, deeply dedicated teachers at that church's own seminary into accepting a long defunct theological worldview. As a result, the lifeblood of one of the leading theological schools in the nation is being sapped. So the Lutheran emphasis on pure doctrine, as that emphasis has become a force for itself, has proved costly indeed. It has deadened the Church. It has had the effect of stamping out the Church's inner life force, the Spirit. But did not Jesus himself say that the Spirit is to lead us into all truth? (Jn. 16:13)

Calvinism As It Has Been

If Lutherans have generally given priority to "hearing with faith," Calvinists have most frequently emphasized what Paul calls "the works of the law." Calvin himself taught that the Church is to be identified not only where the Word is properly preached and the sacraments ministered in accord with it, but also where there is the right kind of *discipline.* This emphasis on right living—it is "orthopraxy" more than orthodoxy that is here in view—then came to be a dominating feature in the Calvinist tradition, as anyone familiar with the history of Puritan New England knows. Somehow Paul's primary emphasis on the Spirit fell by the wayside in Calvinism, as in Lutheranism, but for a different reason. In Calvinism,

practically if not theologically, much if not everything came to hinge on doing the works of the law.

The result of the Lutheran habit of placing the primary emphasis on hearing with faith tended to be arid dogmatism. In a parallel way, the result of the Calvinist habit of placing the primary emphasis on the works of the law tended to be arid legalism. The latter can be seen in the lives of many American Protestants to this very day, insofar as they are still captives of the so-called "Protestant work-ethic." The social aspect of this ethic is a nation fixated on production and consumption, symbolized by the ideal of an ever growing Gross National Product. The personal aspect of the work-ethic is an inner feeling of guilt which many Americans carry around with them, and which constantly motivates them to do more and more work: if you don't get into the right graduate school in order to get the right kind of job; if you don't obtain the promotion you've been working for so long; or if you don't make your home a shining temple of cleanliness and familial perfection; you tend to feel that you're not worth much, sometimes indeed that your life has been a "total failure." So you try again ("if at first you don't succeed . . . ."). These are some of the telltale signs of the Protestant work-ethic. Your existence, your worth as a person, is justified by the good works you perform, that is, "productive" and "successful" works. You constantly strive, therefore, to be more and more successful.

The emptiness and the destructiveness of this work-ethic are apparent. Socially, our society's fixation on more and more production is a prime contributor to our own ecological crisis, and to the exhaustion of natural resources which belong to Third World countries; resources which rightfully should be used to benefit those needful nations, rather than to feed our American gluttony for gadgets and comfort. Individually, as socially, the work-ethic is also destructive. It frequently is a disillusioning experience for those who define their identity by the success of their work when they run squarely into one or more of life's personal crises: failing grades, financial woes, family troubles, death, illness, and so on. As the anguished face of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* showed brilliantly years ago, people who live exclusively or even mainly by the work-ethic are hollow people. They have no reliable inner substance. As they are buffeted from without by the incessant pressures and disappointments of a success-oriented society, they sooner or later begin to go to pieces. They find that they have nothing inside themselves, spiritually speaking, to hold themselves together. This is the legacy of the Protestant ethic, set in motion and sustained for so long by the Calvinist tradition.

Those, then, are my caricatures of Lutheranism and Calvinism as they have been; caricatures, I believe, that are helpful and essentially accurate, howevermuch they may distort the complexities of our Reformation past. I do not wish to deny for a moment that both Lutheranism and Calvinism have had their many moments of life-giving, Spirit-filled, existence. But I do want to suggest that their characteristic primary emphases, right doctrine and right living—orthodoxy and orthopraxy—have been costly, as each of those emphases took on momentum of its own: the resultant dogmatism and legalism have tended to stamp out the life of the Spirit. Both Lutheranism and Calvinism have sought purity, in other words, but both have ended up too often with a kind of arid, extra dry existence, having lost touch with the originating, deeper currents of the Pauline vision. Spirit-filled vision

The Coming Church of the Spirit

Who really wants to be a member of an arid, extra-dry, right believing or right behaving church, where he or she is given no real taste of the vitality and freedom promised by the church's own gospel? Who wants to invest his or her future in a community which seems to have nothing ahead of it but a quick, or perhaps gradual, approach toward *rigor mortis*?

No wonder the Reformation churches are experiencing so many membership and financial problems today! People are voting with their feet and their pocketbooks. In various ways, they want out. And, it can't *all* be due to external factors such as the rise of secularism, science, and technology. Nor will their thirst for God be fulfilled by organizational restructuring or new educational programs. Under present circumstances, such administrative techniques, at best, merely postpone the day of the church's eventual disintegration.

But show me a Christian community that lives by the Spirit, a community that transcends the life-sapping dogmatisms and legalisms of our Reformation past, and I will show you a church with a future! At this point, I think, the mainline Reformation tradition can grate-

fully learn from the proponents of the sometimes very much maligned "charismatic movement" (propably this movement *is* the contemporary heir of the traditionally scorned sixteenth century "enthusiasts"). Many of the people who have identified themselves with the charismatic movement have rediscovered—or they have stumbled upon—the integrating, enlivening reality of the Spirit. This renewal of interest in what for Paul is the creative matrix of the church's life can only be viewed as a major event in contemporary church history. It is fraught with important implications, I believe, for the future of the church—notwithstanding the several eccentricities and shortcomings in theology and ethics inherent in some forms of the charismatic movement.

If the Church of the Reformation is to have a viable future, I predict, and not end up as just one more religious monument surviving from our Western past, it will have to take a new hold on Paul's understanding of the church as the community of the Spirit of God. Talk about faith and works, for Paul, is definitely meaningful *only* in that Spirit-filled context. The Church of the Reformation, accordingly, must find the courage to let go of its tried and tested but tired emphases on right doctrine and right living, and throw open the window—to use Pope John's captivating image—to the winds of change, to the promptings of the very breath of God, the Spirit. This will not mean, surely, that concern for right doctrine and right behavior, for the hearing with faith and the works of the law, will be thrown out the window! Rather, those traditional dogmatic and legal motifs will be transformed by the influx of a deeper, enlivening energy, the Spirit of God.

This will definitely mean a willingness on the part of the Reformation churches to live with uncertainties. Where the Spirit is, there is freedom. Where the Spirit is, there is spontaneity and ecstasy. "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit." (Jn. 3:8) In a word, in the coming church of the Spirit the time of the quest for religious security will be gone. The time for seeking a permanent, unshakeable place to stand in the church, whether through theology, ethics, liturgy, or clerical authority, will lapse. The willingness to take risks in the Spirit, theologically, ethically, liturgically, and organizationally, will become the hallmark of the Reformation churches. Recent theologians have called this stance "openness to the future." Early Christians embodied it in their posture for prayer: standing, almost on the tips of their toes, leaning forward, hands outstretched, full of the Spirit, anticipating the coming Kingdom of God.

The Spirit of Truth

When a certain woman goes to see her pastor, for example, agonizing because she is having trouble making sense out of the resurrection of Christ, which she knows is such an essential reality for her life in the church, the pastor will no longer have the slightest inclination to read her out of the church, to send her away with the admonition that she should join some association for humanists. As a matter of course, the pastor will say something like this: "Be patient, wait on the Spirit. A mature faith is never automatic. Don't expect that everything will be in order in your mind and in your heart before you can be and live as a Christian. In the meantime join with us in our celebrations on Sunday morning, as much as you can. Let yourself be caught up by the enthusiasm of our worship, maybe no more than for a moment now and then. Remember, too, what the Psalmist says, 'Whither shall I flee from thy Spirit?' Recall, as well, the promise of Jesus himself, that the Spirit of God will lead the church in all truth. But above all, stay with us, if you want to. Can we count on seeing you?"

Within the coming Church of the Spirit, in a similar vein, theology will be created and taught in the seminaries and in the parishes on a much more pluralistic, much more imaginative basis. This element—individual creativity—has always been present in the church's theology, but it usually has been something of an embarassment. This will no longer be the case. There will no longer be one, authoritative Reformation theology (if there ever was), as some abstract ideal. It will no longer make sense, if it ever did, to speak about *the* Lutheran position about anything. For, there will be many theological styles and options, as there will be many official roles in the life of the church:

> To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another ability to distin-

guish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (I Cor. 12:7-11)

The coming Church of the Spirit will be a symphony of truth in the Spirit—with one truth, manifested, written, and sung by many instruments. The single, authoritative voice of truth of our Reformation past, will be recalled as a theological impoverishment.

This emphasis on the variegated presence of the Spirit of Truth, replacing the primary concern with doctrinal purity, will of course have liturgical as well as pastoral and theological ramifications. One of these liturgical ramifications will surely be adoption of the practice of admitting all children of the community of faith to the fellowship of the Lord's Supper. For, no longer will right reception of the Sacrament of the Altar hinge on right thinking, even implicitly; it will hinge on openness to the Spirit. As a matter of fact, is not the child the one Jesus sets before us as the model for entering into the Kingdom of God? Shall not, indeed, a little child lead us into the Age of the Spirit?

The Spirit of Love

If inspiration by the Spirit of Truth is to take the place of the Lutheran tradition's primary allegiance to the pure Word in the coming Church of the Spirit, what is to replace the Calvinistic tradition's dominating interest in pure morality? Clearly, it will be: inspiration by the Spirit of Love. The church will come to be known by what the Epistle to the Colossians calls "love in the Spirit." (Col. 1:8) This emphasis will transvalue the traditional Calvinistic tendency of arid legalism.

Concretely, the church's life of love in the Spirit will have both internal and external dimensions. On the inner side, as the Church of the Spirit gathers its members together, a rich community life will come to the fore, alive with mutuality, acts of brotherhood and sisterhood, and characterized by vitality rather than solemnity, celebration rather than penitence, spontaneity and friendship rather than law and order. The coming Church of the Spirit will be an ecstatic church, in its own inner life, as the early church was, whether the orchestration be by Bach, the Beetles, or anyone else. Those who will identify themselves with the Reformation churches in the future will naturally "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all [their] hearts." (Eph. 5:18) The long-drawn, staid, motionless worship of much of our Reformation past will then be entirely a thing of the past.

At the same time, our sometimes compulsive Reformation concern to fill the empty spaces of the worship hour with words (or, failing that, with substitutes for words such as organ music) will give way to a new freedom for silence. The coming Church of the Spirit, I predict, will be tutored anew by the Quakers, as well as by the contemporary charismatic movement. This church will be free for, it will even regularly seek out, moments of silence—in order to wait on the still small voice of the Spirit.

Outside its communal life, extramurally, the church's life of love in the Spirit will mean both a new freedom from work and a new freedom for peacemaking. The essentially aggressive work-ethic and its socially destructive by-product, war-making, will be undercut, at least within the membership of the church. If a visitor were to observe members of the coming Church of the Spirit, he would not see people girding their loins for toil and struggle in their daily lives, he would rather see people "forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:2f.)

Some friends were meeting for a business discussion, not too long ago. It was a very serious affair. It so happened that one of the children of the household kept the cage for her pet gerbil in the very room in which these men were meeting. As the men talked, the little gerbil busily ran on the treadmill in his cage. Finally, the noise from the treadmill got so loud that the men decided to move the gerbil and his cage out of the room.

What the men did not notice was that they were being sent a message by the Spirit! It was in code, of course. But this is what it said: "Men, once you have the power and the vitality of the Spirit, you can step off the treadmill of your success-hungry work." Or, in a somewhat freer translation, the Spirit was urging them: "Say goodbye, O compulsively busy-ones, say goodbye to your Protestant ethic! Who-you-are does not depend on your success in your work! You don't really have to make money and amass status points so fast, drive so fast, play golf so fast, make love so fast! The Spirit will re-create you and enliven you. Wait on the Spirit!"

That coded message from the Spirit had a second paragraph which the men also passed by in their hurry to get on, undisturbed, with

their busy-ness. "Men," the message went on to say, "you don't have to stay within the cage of the established order when you get off your treadmill! You are free now, in the Spirit, to go anywhere, do anything, in order to be a peacemaker. You are free to spend time with your children and to stay home at regular intervals so your wife can pursue her vocation outside the home. You are free to stop your business's policy of consuming so many of the planet's resources for your own selfish purposes. You are free to open up your entire business, without pomp and circumstance, to blacks; not just the clerical and menial jobs. You are free to pressure your representatives in Congress to put the brakes on the American war-machine. You are free to speak out in public, and among your friends, in behalf of full and unconditional amnesty for those who have refused to fight in an immoral, evil war in Southeast Asia. You are free to be a peacemaker, anytime, anyplace, beginning with your own heart. Just be open to the Spirit of Love!"

That is a full transcript of the message to those men from the Spirit, transmitted in code by the gerbil on his treadmill. Now that it has been decoded here, the message should no longer considered to be an official secret.

Free from compulsive adherence to the work ethic, free for a life of peacemaking—that's the kind of life in love the coming Church of the Spirit will embody. That's the kind of external life that will complement the church's inner life of vitality, spontaneity, and celebration in the Spirit, who is the ever-present source of the church's love, as well as its truth.

The Democratization of Sainthood

When the Church of the Reformation does become the Church of the Spirit, I predict finally, it will make an amazing discovery. It will experience as a reality that lovely fact which for Paul was as obvious as the sun is bright. The church will discover that sainthood has been democratized! It will discover that the responsibilities and the joys of church life are no longer—if they ever were—the prerogative of those who seek to teach the truth officially (backed up by seminary degrees no doubt) or those who seek to live morally upright lives officially, so recognized by society at large (think of the pressures that have been laid on many pastors, and "pastor's kids" as well, to be moral superstars).

The church will discover, as the Book of Acts says, that the Spirit indeed has been poured out on *all* flesh. Every rank and file member of the Christian community will be enabled to be a full-fledged child of the Spirit: female and male, black and white, Third World and Western, old and young, poor and rich, laity and clergy, social activist and liturgical reformer, mystic and militant. Each, in his or her own way, will be given a decisive role to play in the life of the church, not just the "paid professionals" (the latter may well be on their way out, if not totally gone, by the year 2000). No one role or style will be considered to be more essential than any other (cf. I Cor. 12:14-26).

Similarly, there will be a rich diversity of spiritual experience in the life of the coming Church of the Spirit. It would be a misunderstanding of the variegated power and the particularized presence of the Spirit to expect that every member of the church will experience the Spirit in the same manner, or with the same kind of intensity. In the life of a church which is born of the Spirit, there can be *no single method* of communion in the Spirit, since the Spirit, like the wind, blows where it wills. One of the shortcomings of the charismatic movement today seems to lie precisely here, in the assumption that one style and one intense degree of experiencing the Spirit is normative for everyone, particularly that experience which comes to expression in so-called Second Baptism and, sometimes, speaking in tongues. In contrast, and in truth, the Spirit of God knows *many methods* by which to communicate and commune with those human beings who are open to the Spirit. The new Church of the Spirit, accordingly, will overflow with a rich diversity of pieties and lifestyles, paralleling its creative diversity in theology and ethics. Every member of the church will be equal in the Spirit surely, but at the same time every member of the church will be very much an individual, too, as far as his or her piety and lifestyle are concerned.

That, I am bold enough to predict, is the Future of the Reformation, if this venerable tradition of ours is to have any viable future at all. The Church of the Reformation will become the Church of the Spirit, before our very eyes.