Spirit and Flesh: On the Significance of the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper for Pneumatology

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SPIRIT AND FLESH: ON THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
REFORMED DOCTRINE OF THE LORD’S
SUPPER FOR PNEUMATOLOGY

by

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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT
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This dissertation explores the pneumatological significance of the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. Confessional Reformed teaching is distinguished from Lutheran and Roman Catholic accounts of eucharistic presence by claiming that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that believers are made to participate in the flesh and blood of Christ. The Spirit is not a mere proxy presence of Christ, but mediates to us in the eucharistic celebration the presence of the whole Christ. This position, I argue, reflects the pneumatological orientation of Reformed Christology and points to an understanding of the Holy Spirit as the reality constituting agency of God in the world. At one level this work is a commentary upon the implicit pneumatology of the Supper, at another level it is a systematic development of its potential in the areas of Christology, ecclesiology and spirituality. Although this is a constructive work my reflections are rooted in classical sources of the Reformed tradition, in particular the thought of John Calvin, John Williamson Nevin and the English Puritans. The center of my argument is that the whole of life in the Spirit, inside and outside the eucharistic context, is oriented around union with the glorified body of Christ. Scripture conceives of the eschatological consummation of human salvation as coming into possession of a body like that of Jesus—resurrected and glorified. Such a possibility highlights the eschatological work of
the Spirit as well as accenting the Spirit’s unique historical relationship to the bodily humanity of Jesus within the economy of salvation. This means that we cannot simply think about the Spirit “spiritually;” we must think about the Spirit “corporeally.” Human experiences of the Holy Spirit are therefore best understood to be embodied experiences, emerging theologically where the Spirit and the ascended humanity of Jesus touch and conjoin. John Calvin understood the grace of the Lord’s Supper to be the “visible Word,” by which Christ in the Spirit is accommodated to the human body. Against the deep suspicion within American Protestantism towards mediating agencies (i.e. church and sacraments) and the tendency to set the work of the Holy Spirit in opposition to corporeal and visible reality I argue for an embodied pneumatology that leads towards a revitalization of the spirituality of the visible church.
For

Christ Presbyterian Church

New Haven, CT

Where I discovered a Reformed Eucharistic Piety
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Preface

Reformed Protestants typically don’t have Lord’s Supper experiences. In my case it should be even less likely since I became a Christian through non-church attending Pentecostals and learned early in my Christian life that the most exciting works of the Spirit generally happen outside the visible church. Yet it was weekly participation in the Lord’s Supper that was the spiritual breakthrough of my adult life. It was at the Lord’s Supper that I experienced in the most palpable way justification by grace through faith alone. What I discovered in the bodily act of taking communion, to my surprise, was a deeper experience of this grace which had eluded me for years. As a young Christian I desired to find something in the celebration of the Supper. There were times when I withheld my participation because of feelings of guilt for sin. I often meditated on the theological meaning of the symbols of bread and wine. I was trained to think that the spiritual key to the Supper was in the sincere genuflection and moral probity that I brought to the table. It was largely up to me to make it into a meaningful spiritual experience. My breakthrough to grace happened when I realized that what was most significant about the Supper was not what I brought to the table, but what I received there. It did not matter if I had an experience, an “ah ha” moment, or felt my heart strangely warmed—what mattered was the promise that in partaking of bread and wine, alongside Christian brothers and sisters, Christ was present—personally, definitively and objectively. I knew my soul was being nourished by the body and blood of Christ whether I felt it or not. As long as I went to the table with faith I knew in a visceral way justification by grace alone.
What I found liberating was the sheer gift character and objectivity of Christ’s presence, regardless of my own interior apprehension of that presence. Ironically, it was not until I gave up having a spiritual experience at the table, that I started having a spiritual experience at the table. The communion table revolutionized my spiritual life by teaching me that the gift of grace was not always coordinate with my experience of that grace. Most evangelical Protestants don’t believe they receive grace unless it is something that moves their affections or becomes part of conscious thought. The problem with this orientation is that it lends itself to an excessively subjective and introspective spirituality—God’s grace must always terminate on some aspect of my consciousness. Even though we proclaim salvation through grace alone the Christian life is often lived through the hard work of pursuing experiences of the Spirit, whether that be through heightened affections or illuminating knowledge. The Lord’s Supper offered me an alternative orientation towards the work of the Holy Spirit. It reconfigured my thinking of the spiritual life around the regular practices of the church and the gathered life of the community of faith. I learned that I could always find Christ and the Spirit at the table of the Lord. The Supper drew me out of myself and reframed my spirituality in terms of the all-enveloping context of the mystical presence of Christ in the visible church.

I would call this a charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit. Not charismatic in the Pentecostal sense of wonder working power in mission, but charismatic in the sense of wonder working grace through the regular ministry of Word and sacrament in the visible church. (I don’t see why these two works of the Spirit need to be in competition). In the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper the role of the Holy Spirit is prominent. Although Christ is bodily ascended to heaven he is present in the Supper through the
power of the Holy Spirit. As a miraculous gift, exceeding all human comprehension, the
mystical presence of Christ is a charismatic work of the Spirit that the whole community
experiences together through regular worship. This dissertation explores the
pneumatological significance of the Reformed understanding of eucharistic presence.

It is hard to imagine this work being written in any other place than the
doctrinally serious and ecumenically vibrant theology department at Marquette
University. My past six years there have been one long, ecumenical conversation with
Roman Catholicism, Pentecostalism and Lutheranism. Cardinal Walter Casper once said
that the deeper we go into our own particular Christian traditions the nearer we draw to
Christ, and the nearer we draw to Christ the nearer we draw towards one another. This
dissertation stakes a lot on the confessional Reformed understanding of eucharistic
presence, but my hope is that there will be much in this work to edify and constructively
challenge Christians coming to the table with different understandings of what happens
during communion.

This work was enriched by many wise and challenging conversation partners
over the years. In particular I would like to thank Phillip Anderas, Bryan Bademan, Ken
Buck, Mark Chapman, Christopher Dorn, David Luy, Michael Matossian, Mickey
Mattox, Mark Totten, and of course my dissertation advisor Ralph Del Colle. I would
also like to thank the City Reformed Church plant group who prayed for me and cheered
me on as I worked to complete this enormous task so that together we might begin
another. Lastly, I would like to express my love and gratitude for my wife Katie Ganski.
Without her this work would never have come to be.
## Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ECRC</td>
<td><em>Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions</em> (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Church Publications, 1987)</td>
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Introduction

John Calvin’s appeal to the Holy Spirit in the context of the Lord’s Supper has been well remarked upon in sacramental theology, but hardly noticed in the area of pneumatology. For Calvin, through the power of the Holy Spirit we are made to participate in the body and blood of Christ in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) Calvin lays out the Spirit’s role in the sacrament:

> Our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain physical life. For the analogy of the sign applies only if souls find their nourishment in Christ—which cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us, and refreshes us by the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood. Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secrete [sic] power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space. Now that sacred partaking of his flesh and blood, by which Christ pours his life into us, as if it penetrated into our bones and marrow, he also testifies and seals in the Supper—not by presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises.1

Calvin holds a very high view of what happens in eucharistic communion: we partake of the very body and blood of Christ, although not by means of a local presence in the elements. What is remarkable is the manner in which Calvin asserts that it is the Holy Spirit who makes the body of Christ available to believers. The Spirit is not a substitute presence for an absent Christ, but the very conduit and channel of participation in his

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1 John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10 [my italics]. This work assumes Calvin’s mature doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. On the background and development of Calvin’s appeal to the Holy Spirit in his evolving eucharistic theology see the recent work of Sue Rozeboom, “The Provenance of John Calvin’s Emphasis on the Role of the Holy Spirit Regarding the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” (PhD. Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2010).
heavenly body. “To our having substantial communion with the flesh of Christ there is no necessity for any change of place, since, by the secret virtue of the Spirit, he infuses his life into us from heaven. Distance does not at all prevent Christ from dwelling in us, or us from being one with him, since the efficacy of the Spirit surmounts all natural obstacles.” In the eucharistic exchange it is not Christ but we who require relocation.

There are a number of striking features of this eucharist-oriented pneumatology. First is the way that the Holy Spirit, far from being conceived as the antithesis to the flesh of Christ, is the power of God that inserts us into the glorified corporeality of the Son. As we will see this is a marked contrast to the way Huldrych Zwingli’s understands the relationship between Spirit and flesh. The theological tradition has reflected a great deal on how the Spirit engages human minds, hearts and souls (all the immaterial and “spiritual” aspects of human nature), but less attention has been given to how the Spirit engages human bodies. In this respect Calvin’s eucharistic theology opens up suggestive avenues for thinking about the Spirit’s relationship to corporeality. This interaction of pneumatology and corporeality is rooted within a deeply christological reflection on the person of the Holy Spirit. Calvin’s eucharistic theology grows out of a well-developed account of the relationship within the economy of salvation between the person of Christ, the mediator, and the Holy Spirit.

One is also struck by the transcendence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of eucharistic communion. For Calvin the work of the Spirit in the Supper is a mystery as

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2 Calvin, True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood in the Holy Supper (TS), 518-519.
profound and secret as the manner of the communion with Christ himself. Against his opponents who demanded more scholastic explanation of the operation of the Spirit, Calvin emphasized that far from being a mere mechanism of fellowship, the role of the Holy Spirit so far “towers above all our senses” that it exceeds our ability to give a satisfactory account. The Holy Spirit engages human beings at a most personal and intimate level in the Supper, yet mysteriously transcends human agency and experience. Lastly it is important to observe the eschatological nature of Calvin’s Lord’s Supper theology. The Holy Spirit is not merely the bond of our participation in the person of Christ, but in a manner of speaking by eliciting faith within us the Holy Spirit lifts us up to Christ who is in heaven. This movement is best rendered as eschatological not cosmological. Here we encounter the *sursum corda* (“lift up your heart”) dimension of Calvin’s eucharistic thought. By faith “we are lifted up to heaven with our eyes and minds, to seek Christ there in the glory of his Kingdom . . . [from there] we shall be fed by his body, under the symbol of wine we shall separately drink his blood, to enjoy him at last in his wholeness.” Calvin’s insistence on reckoning with the bodily ascension of Christ gives his doctrine an eschatological dynamic, and insofar as the Holy Spirit is the agency of communication and reception he sets in place an eschatologically charged pneumatology.

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4 “[T]here is something so mysterious and incomprehensible in saying that he we have communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and we on our part are so rude and gross that we cannot understand the least things of God.” *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper (TS)*, 166.

5 Calvin saw the *sursum corda* as a recovery of the ancient church’s liturgical emphasis within the eucharist. “[T]he practice always observed by the early church, when about to celebrate the Supper, was solemnly to exhort the people to raise their hearts on high, to intimate, that if we would adore Christ aright, we must not stop at the visible sign.” *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper (TS)*, 188. See also *Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal (TS)*, 443-444. For more references and analysis of how Calvin’s indebtedness to early church tradition on this concept see Randall Zachman, “Revising the Reform: What Calvin Learned from Dialogue with Roman Catholics” in *John Calvin and Roman Catholicism: Critique and Engagement, Then and Now*, ed. Randall Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 173-178.

6 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.18.
What is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that makes possible Calvin’s claim that in the Supper there is a true participation in the flesh and blood of Christ? This is the guiding question of this dissertation. At one level this work is a pneumatological commentary upon the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, at another level it is a systematic development of its pneumatological potential.

The Holy Spirit and the Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions

In the major Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper bears the theological stamp of John Calvin rather than Huldrych Zwingli. Although it has been a fact often obscured in later Reformed history,

7 Cornelius Venema says, “It is hardly possible to overstate the influence of Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper on the magisterial Reformed tradition embodied in its confessions. . . there can be no doubt that Calvin’s, not Zwingli’s view of the Lord’s Supper prevailed.” “The Doctrine of the Lord Supper in the Reformed Confessions” Mid-American Journal of Theology, 12 (2001), 88, fn. 10. B.A. Gerrish notes all the Reformed confession follow Calvin in putting the emphasis “on communication rather than commemoration, but some reflect a certain shyness toward the idea of means of grace. Perhaps the hesitancy did owe something to Zwingli. Yet the real division in the Reformed confessions is not Zwingli versus Calvin, but (so to say) “Franciscan Calvinists” versus “Thomistic” Calvinists.” “Sign and Reality: The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions” in The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 128.

The difference between the “Franciscan” and “Thomistic” Calvin is the difference between a metaphysically weaker (Franciscan) or stronger (Thomistic) affirmation of eucharistic participation. In the very fine essay “Intermediate States,” Paul Helm discerns in Calvin’s eucharistic theology two forms of the “real presence” that, while not necessarily mutually exclusive, are to his thinking “conceptually speaking, quite distinct” (303). The metaphysically weaker is the notion that the Holy Spirit communicates to believers the whole reality of Christ’s love, mercy and grace of which his death is the supreme expression. “Partaking of the elements of the Supper focuses and expresses these virtues, heightens awareness of them, and feeds and strengthens faith in Christ” (303). On this view what is “presented” to the believer through the Holy Spirit is the “virtue,” “power” and “efficacy” of all that Christ achieved on the cross. The second form of the real presence, the one that Helm believes Calvin prefers (in agreement with the majority of Calvin scholarship), is the idea that the Spirit conveys not simply the virtues and graces of Christ but the whole Christ himself, although not the whole of Christ (i.e. not his body presence in the elements). So in the celebration of the Supper believers enjoy not only his benefits but the whole person of Christ, which means that in an ineffable manner the Spirit joins us to his heavenly flesh and blood. In Helm’s estimation the lyrical and almost ecstatic language that Calvin frequently employs to convey the nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper argues strongly in favor of Calvin’s preference for the latter view. Despite Calvin’s own leanings Helm’s sympathy is for the weaker view, since the stronger view in his estimation entails a “metaphysical thesis of some magnitude and obscurity” (297). The weaker view is to be preferred because
there were fundamental differences of serious consequence between the eucharistic theologies of Calvin and Zwingli. Even though Zwingli’s own sacramental theology evidences some movement late in his life towards viewing the sacraments as means of grace, the overall thrust of his thought—and his indisputable theological legacy—is to regard the sacraments as merely symbols that publically testify to a grace that has been already received personally. According to Zwingli there is nothing unique that happens in the sacramental celebration that does not happen elsewhere. This means the Supper is a commemoration of Christ sacrificial death, not a communication with his person. The Holy Spirit is prominent in Zwingli’s sacramental thought, but precisely for the reason of freeing our hearts from too much reliance on the sacraments themselves, for the Spirit does not need a vehicle, especially a material one, to communicate grace.

Alternatively, the Reformed confessions follow Calvin’s distinct emphasis on the Holy Spirit as the divine person who actualizes communion with Christ in the Supper. In his own Genevan Catechism (1542) Calvin reflects what we find in his other writings. The Spirit “makes us partakers of his [Christ’s] substance that thus we may have one life with him.” This occurs through the “secrete and miraculos agenz of the Spirit, to whom

it is less metaphysically complicated, for “on that view the Christ who is really present at the Supper is a wholly ‘spiritualized’ Christ, it is the virtues or powers of Christ that are ‘presented’” (304). What seems to be lacking in Helm’s assessment is a sense of what would have motivated Calvin to metaphysically exert himself on behalf of the stronger view of eucharistic participation and why Calvin had problems with affirming a “wholly spiritualized Christ.” In this dissertation I argue for the stronger metaphysical view and hope to demonstrate why it was critical not only for Calvin’s theology but also for later Reformed thought (Paul Helm, “Intermediate States” in Calvin at the Centre (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 273-307).

it is not difficult to unite things otherwise disjoined by a distant space.” Even though Christ dwells bodily in heaven, and therefore has no corporal or local presence in the elements, nevertheless as the *French Confession* (1559) declares it is through “the incomprehensible power of the Spirit he feeds and strengthens us with the substance of his blood.” Rather than drawing the body of Christ down into the elements, the Holy Spirit transports the believer up to Christ in heaven. The *Scots Confession* (1560) captures this upward movement:

> [T]he Holy Ghost, who by true faith carries us above all things that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and makes us to feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, which was once broken and shed for us, but now in heaven, and appearing for us in the presence of his Father. Notwithstanding the distance between his glorified body in heaven and mortal men on earth, yet we most assuredly believe that the bread that we break is the communion of Christ's body, and the cup which we bless is the communion of his blood.

On account of the Spirit the distance that separates the believer from the heavenly Christ is no obstacle to fellowship with his body and blood in the Supper. What becomes a well-known call within Reformed eucharistic liturgy to “lift up your hearts” (*sursum corda*) is not simply the occasion for an imaginative devotional exercise, but points to an objective operation of the Holy Spirit in communicating the body and blood of Christ.

As long as eucharistic presence is not interpreted in terms of local or corporeal categories, the classical Reformed doctrine affirms a strongly realistic notion of Christ’s presence to believers through the Supper. Following Calvin, “spiritual presence” for the Reformed does not mean that the Spirit is present instead of Christ; rather the body and blood are made present by the secret power of the Spirit who is the bond of union.

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10 *French Confession* art. 36 (CC). Also called the *Gallican Confession*.
11 *Scots Confession*, chap. 21 (TBC).
between believers and the life giving flesh of Christ. The *Belgic Confession* (1561) is quite clear on this point: “we do not go wrong when we say that *we drink the natural body and what is drunk is his own blood*—but the manner in which we eat it is not through the mouth, but by the Spirit, through faith.”¹² Likewise the *Scots Confession* affirms that believers

so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus that he remains in them and they in him; they are so made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone that as the eternal Godhead has given to the flesh of Christ Jesus, which by nature was corruptible and mortal, life and immortality, so the eating and drinking of the flesh and blood of Christ Jesus does for us.¹³

All of this takes place through the modality of the Holy Spirit. This *pneumatological* understanding of Christ’s presence is not a diminution of its efficacy and reality, as the *French Confession* clarifies, *spiritually* does not mean “we put imagination and fancy in the place of fact and truth, but because the greatness of this mystery exceeds the measure of our senses and the laws of nature.”¹⁴ The *Second Helvetic Confession* (1561) echoes this when it argues that the “spiritual food” we receive at the Supper is not “some imaginary food I know not what, but the very body of the Lord given to us.”¹⁵ In no sense is the believer’s union with Christ less intimate, less substantial, and less real because the mode is *spiritual* as opposed to *corporeal*. To the contrary the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) highlights how by virtue of the Spirit’s special relationship to the person of Christ, the intimacy we experience of Christ in the Supper is all the richer.

Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in Christ and in us, we are united more and more to Christ’s blessed body. And so, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. And

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⁰² *Belgic Confession* art. 35, *(ECRC)* [my italics].
⁰³ *Scots Confession* chap. 31 *(TBC)*.
⁰⁴ *French Confession* art. 36 *(CC)*.
⁰⁵ *Second Helvetic Confession* chap. 21 *(TBC)*.
we forever live on and are governed by one Spirit, as members of our body are by one soul.\textsuperscript{16}

Likewise the \textit{Westminster Shorter Catechism} (1649), which makes no explicit mention of the Spirit’s agency in its treatment of the Supper, assumes the idea when it teaches that believers are “made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.”\textsuperscript{17} All of the major Reformed confessions are united in affirming an objective participation of Christ in the Supper through the agency of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Tradition of the Holy Spirit}

The pneumatological resolution of the eucharistic question reflects a deep devotion to the person of the Holy Spirit within Reformed theology and piety. Well before Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity claimed to give special attention to the Holy Spirit as the defining characteristic and contribution of their traditions, B.B.

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Heidelberg Catechism}, Q &A 76 (ECRC).
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Westminster Shorter Catechism}, Q. 96 (TBC). Question and answer 91 of the Shorter Catechism makes clear that it is through the Holy Spirit that the sacraments are “effectual means of salvation.” It is best not to over-theologize the absence of explicit Spirit language in the Westminster Standards treatment on the Lord’s Supper. Disputes over the modality of Christ’s presence are distant from the social-cultural context of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century and one finds precedent for the Westminster language in the Anglican 39 Articles (1563) and the Irish Articles of Religion (1615).
\textsuperscript{18} B.A. Gerrish has argued that there are three different eucharistic positions that can be discerned in the Reformed confessional documents: symbolic memorialism, symbolic parallelism and symbolic instrumentalism. Zwingli’s position reflects the first option and as Gerrish notes it is represented only in minor confessions and never became standard confessional teaching. Symbolic parallelism reflects arguably the late-Zwingli and the development of his thought in that of his successor Heinrich Bullinger. This position maintains that there is an outward eating that is parallel to an inward feeding on the body of Christ. What distinguishes symbolic parallelism from symbolic instrumentalism is that in the former the outward use of the sacramental instruments do not convey or cause or give rise to the inward event. They merely indicate that it is going on. This dissertation argues for the position of Calvin and is clearly taught in the French, Belgic and Scots Confessions. See Gerrish “Sign and Reality: The Lord’s Supper in the Reformed Confessions” in \textit{The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage}, 118-130. Jan Rohls argues that symbolic instrumentalism is the dominant view of the sacraments in the Reformed confessions. \textit{Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen} trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 185.
Warfield (1851-1921) was making the same claim about Reformed Christianity. It was Warfield who famously called John Calvin the “theologian of the Holy Spirit.” This statement is frequently cited with approval by Calvin scholars but rarely appreciated with the fullness that Warfield intended it. In claiming Calvin a theologian of the Holy Spirit Warfield was asserting that the whole Reformed tradition, properly understood, was a Holy Spirit tradition.

Stated in its sharpest form this is as much as to say that the developed doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine. Wherever the principles of Reformed theology have gone it has gone, but it has come to its full rights only among Reformed churches... The doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is a gift of John Calvin to the church of Christ.

Warfield no doubt overstates his case, but he is not alone in recognizing that the Reformation was a (re)discovery of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life.

Susan Schreiner has labeled the Reformation period a “Great Age of the Spirit” characterized by a “yearning for an intensified, spiritualized religion.” It was among the English Puritans in particular, as Warfield rightly notes that the Reformed doctrine of the

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20 B.B. Warfield “Introductory Note” from Abraham Kuyper’s The Work of the Holy Spirit, trans. Henri De Vries (New York: Cosmo Classics, 1900), xxxiii. This is an important essay where Warfield lays out the history and distinctiveness of Reformed pneumatology up to the time of Kuyper’s own voluminous work.


Holy Spirit came into its fullest expression. The Puritans were quite self-conscious and outspoken about the neglect of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life and sought to remedy that deficiency.  

Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) sounds strikingly modern when he complains that there “is a general omission in the saints of God, in their not giving the Holy Ghost that glory due to his person, and for his great work of salvation in us, insomuch that we have in our hearts almost lost this third person.”  

At the beginning of *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (1647), arguably one of the great works on the Holy Spirit in any theological tradition, John Owen (1616-1683) claimed, “I know not any who ever went before me in this design of representing the whole economy of the Holy Spirit, with all his adjuncts, operations, and effects.”  

The Puritans across the board demonstrate a Spirit-consciousness rarely seen in the Christian tradition. And considering the comprehensiveness and depth of Owen’s work it is hard to dispute his claim to having penned the most comprehensive discussion of the Holy Spirit up until his time.

Unfortunately, the Puritan contribution to pneumatology has gone largely unnoticed.

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within the modern renaissance of pneumatology. This work is not meant to be a comprehensive history and account of Reformed pneumatology, but my hope is to bring attention to the deep pneumatological wells within the Reformed tradition.

Returning to the sacramental orientation of this work how is this Holy Spirit tradition connected to the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper? Beyond recognizing that the Holy Spirit is the agency that makes eucharistic communion possible, how are these doctrines related at a deeper level? Simply put the Holy Spirit is the reality constituting agency of God in the world. In the context of the Lord’s Supper the Spirit makes Christ sacramentally real to the believer. Calvin expresses a fundamental principle of Reformed pneumatology when he says that “until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed because we view him coldly without ourselves and so at a distance from us.” The Holy Spirit is the all-embracing reality and context of mediation by which Christ comes to us both as something experienced personally, as well as something exceeding and transcending our experience sacramentally. Christian experience is a fruit of the Spirit and according to John Owen the person of the Holy Spirit is the difference

There is a peculiar tendency in a great deal of contemporary pneumatology, especially within Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, to assume that the classical theological tradition, both Protestant and Catholic, gave inadequate attention to the person of the Spirit, or worse, had a subordinated pneumatology. Often times these works offer a generalized caricature of the historical tradition, which then clears the space for an original pneumatological proposal that is unencumbered by the baggage of the tradition. Certainly there are pneumatological inadequacies and even subordinations of the Spirit within the classical traditions that need correction, but this general hermeneutic of suspicion (and at times, I would contend, hubris) seems to prejudice against seeing the real pneumatological resources that have always existed within the tradition, like those such as the Puritans, or the Catholic mystical tradition. For a couple examples of this orientation see: Steve M. Studebaker, “Pentecostal Soteriology and Pneumatology, Journal of Pentecostal Studies 11.2 (2003): 248-270; Wolfgang Vondey, Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); and D. Lyle. Dabney, “Why Should the Last be First? The Priority of Pneumatology in Recent Theological Discussion” in Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current study of Pneumatology, eds. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001).

Describing the Holy Spirit in terms of the idiom of reality making is common among modern theologians. For a number of examples see Killian McDonnell discussion, The Other Hand of God: The Holy Spirit as the Universal Touch and Goal, (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2003), 91.

Calvin, Institutes, 3.1.3.
between knowledge of the truth and knowledge of the power of the truth.\footnote{John Owen, \textit{The Holy Spirit: his Gifts and Powers}, ed. and intro. Sinclair Ferguson (Christian Heritage Imprint, 2004), 27.} Puritan Richard Baxter (1615-1691) called the Holy Spirit “the most practical article of belief.” This because “to believe in the Holy Ghost, is to take him for Christ’s agent or advocate with our souls, and for our Guide, and Sanctifier, and Comforter.”\footnote{Richard Baxter, \textit{Christian Directory} from \textit{The Practical Works of Richard Baxter}, vol I. (London, 1838), chap. III., 69.} These observations draw into focus an important idea that has deeply influenced Reformed pneumatology: the distinction between redemption \emph{accomplished} and redemption \emph{applied}.\footnote{For a classic statement of this formulation see John Murray, \textit{Redemption Accomplished and Applied} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).} Typically, redemption accomplished refers to the work of Christ that occurred outside of us, while redemption applied refers to the person of the Holy Spirit who makes the work of Christ real within us. However, too sharp a distinction and division between the persons’ respective work should be avoided—the Spirit was essential to the \textit{accomplishment} of redemption, just as Christ still is active in the \textit{application} of redemption. This is also the teaching we encounter in the Reformed confessions. The Holy Spirit “brings us into all truth by his own working” and “makes me share in Christ and all his blessings.”\footnote{\textit{Scots Confession}, chap. 12 (\textit{TBC}); \textit{Heidelberg}, Q &A 53 (\textit{ECRC}). Also the \textit{Westminster Confession of Faith}: “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask of him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption” (Art. 9 \textit{TBC}).} The Holy Spirit “kindles in our hearts true faith that embraces Jesus Christ with all his merits, \textit{and makes him its own.”}\footnote{\textit{Belgic Confession}, art. 22 (\textit{ECRC}) (my italics).}

Owen offers this statement of the idea:

\begin{quote}
The Son condescendeth, consenteth, and engageth to do and accomplish in his own person the whole work which, in the authority, counsel, and wisdom of the Father was appointed for him, Phil.ii.5-8. And in these divine operations is the person of the Son revealed unto us . . . The Holy Ghost doth immediately work and effect whatever was to be done in reference unto the person of the Son or the sons of men, for the perfecting
\end{quote}
and accomplishment of the Father’s counsel and the Son’s work, in an especial application of both unto their especial effects and ends. Hereby is he made know unto us, and hereby our faith concerning him and in him is directed.\textsuperscript{34}

Here an important insight of Owen’s is how the Spirit has a role in applying and effecting redemption not only with respect to believers but also to the person of Christ. In chapters four and five we will explore more broadly the application work of the Holy Spirit in terms of the person of Christ and then the believer. Important to note here is how the language of \textit{application, actuality, efficacy} points to the reality constituting agency of the Spirit which runs as a common theme through Reformed Christology, sacramental reflection and the order of salvation (\textit{ordo salutis}).

However, many have objected to the concept of “application” as an inappropriate category to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit. Surely when it is interpreted too narrowly, it is problematic. Reformed theologian Hendrikus Berkhof claims that in this thinking the “Spirit is customarily treated in noetical, applicative, subjective terms. He is that power which directs our attention to Christ and opens our eyes to his work. The main result of his work is the awakening of faith in Christ. His work is merely instrumental.”\textsuperscript{35}

Killian McDonnell makes a related charge against Calvin’s eucharistic theology, claiming that it tends towards an impersonal and instrumental pneumatology on account of how the Spirit is seen to mainly address the problem of overcoming the cosmological distance between the believer and the ascended Christ.\textsuperscript{36} Instead of being the communicative agency of God that creates the conditions and possibility of real

\textsuperscript{34} John Owen, \textit{Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit}, 159. Owen’s use of the redemption accomplished and applied is deeply trinitarian and dynamic concept (see chapter 2, in particular, 152-159).


participation in the triune life, the application paradigm is thought to flatten out pneumatology: the work of the Spirit is reduced to that of divine dispenser of soteriological commodities (i.e. beneficia Christi), and his person subordinated and merely auxiliary to Christ.  

Indeed we would be remiss, if we did not recognize the inherent problems associated with the application paradigm as it has often transposed into modern theological contexts. Influenced by modern epistemology and science many theologians spoke of the Holy Spirit as the subjective side of revelation and redemption, and Jesus Christ and his work on the cross as the objective side. Not only has this distinction often

37 John Owen anticipated these kinds of criticisms: “That the will and pleasure of the Holy Spirit is in all the goodness, grace, love and power, that he either communicates unto us or worketh in us. He is not as a mere instrument or servant, disposing of the things wherein he hath no concern, or over which he hath no power; but in all things he worketh towards us according to his own will. We are, therefore, in what we receive from him, no less to acknowledge his love, kindness and sovereign grace, than we do those of the Father and the Son” (Discourse Concerning the Holy Ghost, 201).

38 Of course this objective-subjective distinction is a 19th century addition to the application paradigm. One will look in vain within the 16th century Reformers or the 17th century Puritans for anything that approximates this kind of epistemological distinction. Susan Schreiner offers a note of historical caution against trying to read the modern objective-subjective distinction back into Reformation era theology. She notes that the “idea of subjectivism requires a modern concept of the self. It is very questionable whether this concept of the self was a part of 16th century thought about the nature of the soul. When we spoke of the subjective certitude of salvation among the Reformers, the reference was to an individual experiential feeling that was divinely given, a certitude that did not belong to the realms of epistemology or interpretation--and clearly not to the "subjectivism" of modern use. Historical context cautions us against assuming that 16th century opponents immediately perceived Luther and the other Reformers as working from the privacy of the self. It also cautions us against anachronistically assigning the ideas of "objectively valid" and "merely subjective" to the 16th century. Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era. (New York : Oxford University Press, 2011), 258 [my italics]. For more clarification on the use of “objective” and “subjective” during the Reformation see Mickey Mattox, “From Faith to the Text and Back Again: Martin Luther on the Trinity in the Old Testament.” Pro Ecclesia Vol. 15.3 (2006), 287, fn. 19.

On the somersault history of the terms “objective” and “subjective” in the western philosophical and scientific tradition see Lorraine Datson & Peter Galison, Objectivity (New York: Zone Books, 2007). Datson and Galison show that in medieval philosophy objective referred to things as they are present to consciousness, whereas subjective referred to things in themselves. The terms objective and subjective fell into disuse in the 17th and 18th centuries but where dusted off and breathed new life and new meaning by Immanuel Kant. "But the Kantian meanings were the grandparents, not the twins, of our familiar senses of those words. Kant's "objective validity" referred not to external objects that are the preconditions of experience, but the "forms of sensibility" that are the precondition of experience. And his habit of using "subjective" as a rough synonym for "merely empirical sensations" shares with later usage only the sneer
relegated interpretations of religious experience to the realm of mere subjectivity, and hence problematized the idea of experience altogether, but this way of speaking has tended to create fissures between pneumatology and Christology, sometimes resulting in the perception that the Holy Spirit had no genuine mission in the life of Christ. In addition there has been a marked tendency to interpret the work of the Spirit primarily in terms of human consciousness and a restricted sense of interiority, without a convincing appreciation of the Spirit’s relationship to all of created reality, in particular the corporeal dimensions of human existence. Two effects of this have been that Christology and pneumatology have not always been convincingly integrated at the level of Christian spirituality, and in the modern era the Reformed tradition has struggled to retain anything of the rich sacramental piety witnessed to in its early confessional period. Alasdair Heron is right in observing that when it comes to a doctrine of the Spirit there is an “uneasy oscillation between objectivism and subjectivism has marked a good deal of Protestant theology and piety.”39 It is precisely here that sustained reflection on the work of the Spirit in the context of the Lord’s Supper can assist us; not only does the sacrament express a balance between Christ’s offer of grace to us and our personal reception of that grace, but in the sacrament the interaction of Christ and the Spirit are exhibited in a fashion that establishes the integration of their work within Christian experience.

A Reformed theologian no less than Jonathan Edwards was critical of application language for talking about the Spirit. However, Edwards’ criticism and correction more nearly reflects what was originally assumed under the term as it was used by figures like

John Owen. He complains that “merely to apply to us or immediately to give or hand to us the blessing purchased after it was purchased (as subservient to the other two persons), is but a little thing to the purchasing of it.”\textsuperscript{40} For Edwards the Spirit is not merely the agent that applies what Christ’s offering purchased, but the “sum of all that Christ purchased for man was the Holy Ghost.”\textsuperscript{41} The Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son to the world, “that delight which the Father and the Son have in each other.”\textsuperscript{42} In the best sense the application work of the Holy Spirit has never been merely instrumental, noetic and subjective, but rather ontological, creative and communicative.\textsuperscript{43} The application paradigm is better interpreted not as a functionalism, but a personalism of the Spirit—the Spirit of God as the incorporative and communicative agency of God in the world. The Spirit enacts our fellowship with the Father and Son by becoming that fellowship in his very person. He is the bond of love between the Father and the Son. Where the work of the Spirit makes himself distinct from the Son or the Father, is the manner in which he makes effectual and contemporizes within the stream of human history the reality of redemption accomplished which itself entails the believer’s participation within the triune life of God.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Edwards, \textit{Writings on the Trinity, Grace and Faith}, 136. John Owen offers some helpful clarifications of the two senses of the Spirit’s grace which Edwards here at least seems to see as alternative understandings (\textit{Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit}, 200-201).
\textsuperscript{42} Edwards, \textit{Writings on the Trinity, Grace and Faith}, 136.
\textsuperscript{43} Hendrikus Berkhof, \textit{The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit}, 23. Adding to this the “Spirit is far more than an instrumental entity, the subjective reverse of Christ’s work. His coming to us is a great new event in the series of God’s saving acts. He creates a world of his own, a world of conversion, experience, sanctification; of tongues, prophecy, and miracles; of mission; of upbuilding and guiding the church, etc. he appoints ministers; he organizes; he illumines, inspires, and sustains; he intercedes for the saints and helps them in their weakness; he searches everything, even the depths of God; he guides into all truth; he grants a variety of gifts; he convinces the world; he declares things that are to come. (23).”
\textsuperscript{44} John Owen had a deeply trinitarian orientation see, \textit{Communion with the Triune God}, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossways Books, 2007). For a nice account of Owen’s trinitarian
A Eucharistic-Oriented Pneumatology

Commenting on Calvin’s turn towards the Spirit in discussions of eucharist and ascension, Douglas Farrow observes that he “displayed a keener sense of the interpersonal trinitarian dimension of human existence *coram deo.*”45 Eucharistic theology for Calvin is connected to a broader understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption. Against the Lutheran view of Christ’s ubiquitous humanity Calvin argued that, “greatly mistaken are those who conceive no presence of flesh in the Supper unless it lies in the bread. *For this they leave nothing to the secret working of the Spirit,* which unites Christ himself to us.”46 The Spirit was not simply a convenient mechanism to solve the problem of presence. As his critical engagement with the Lutherans demonstrates, Calvin’s eucharistic thought is driven in part by a desire to safeguard a fully biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which he thought the doctrine of ubiquity endangered. The eucharistic controversies were christological disputes and as we will see the Reformed pneumatological emphasis in the Supper corresponds to a prioritizing of the Holy Spirit in the area of Christology. In later polemics with the Lutherans, the Reformed continued to assume a significant connection between Christ’s Spirit-enacted presence in the Supper and the broader work of the Spirit in salvation history. The 19th century Presbyterian theologian George Smeaton charged that,

“Thus the Lutheran Church, to maintain her peculiar views of the Lord’s Supper, is compelled to lay emphasis on the alleged ubiquity of Christ’s humanity. *But by so doing they evacuate the Spirit’s work in that*

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46 Calvin, *Institutes,* 4.17.31.
The Lord’s own teaching is that He acts by the Spirit on His church, and that He is present not by the ubiquity of his human nature, but by his omnipresent Spirit, who is at once in Him and in us as a perpetual bond or link.”

Unfortunately the Reformed tradition has never positively developed a eucharist-oriented doctrine of the Spirit that extended beyond polemical salvos against the Lutherans. Even in Owen, who combined a very high estimation of the sacramental mystery of the Supper and an intense interest in pneumatology, one finds surprisingly little about the role of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament. In Reformed theology reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in the Supper has remained largely confined to treatments of the sacrament itself.

This dissertation assumes a deep doctrinal coherence between Reformed teaching on the Supper and the broader understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In the light of this orientation I interpret the traditional loci in Reformed pneumatology (Word-Spirit, Spirit-Christology and ordo salutis) from the vantage point of the Lord’s Supper. My treatment of the sacrament is limited to a pneumatological exposition of the Supper, which means that this is foremost a work in pneumatology and secondarily sacramentology. I make no claims about the Lord’s Supper being the systematic and proper ordering center of Reformed pneumatology; one can imagine different pathways for pursing some of the same themes that I explore here. And by no means does this work address all aspects that are important for a comprehensive pneumatology. Yet, the Lord’s Supper is of critical significance to theology and spirituality. As John Nevin observed the “mystery of Christianity is here concentrated into a single visible transaction, by which it

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49 Even more narrowly my consideration of the sacrament is limited to the issue of eucharistic presence, which means I do treat the issues of eucharistic sacrifice, liturgy or episcopacy.
is made as it were transparent to the senses, and caused to pass before us in immediate living representation."\(^{50}\) Even though this is a work in pneumatology I hope it will be a contribution to Reformed sacramental theology by showing the centrality of the Supper for an understanding of Christian piety. In Reformed theology there are many fine works devoted to an exposition of the doctrine of the Supper, but few that make it persuasive and relevant at the level of spiritual practice.\(^{51}\) In exploring the broader work of the Spirit through the Supper I hope this work contributes to a revitalized understanding of the *spirituality of the visible church*. By this I mean the manner in which Christ through the Spirit has established the church as the geographical entry point in this world for fellowship with the triune God, and thus uniquely anointed the visible-local church, and her means of grace, in order to accomplish the ends of human salvation. The loss of the Supper as a central act of Christian piety has contributed to a loss of the symbolic life of the Holy Spirit within the church. Having been driven out of the visible church, the danger is for pneumatology to become privatized and swallowed up within individual experience so that the biblical witness to the public character of the Holy Spirit is diminished.

Life in the Spirit is a gift that comes to us from the resurrected and ascended body of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:45). According to Athanasius, “the Word took bodily form so that we might receive the Holy Spirit: God became the bearer of a body so that men might be bearers of the Spirit.”\(^{52}\) Life in the body and life in the Spirit are two sides of a single,

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\(^{51}\) A significant exception being John Nevin’s *The Mystical Presence*.

indissoluble spiritual economy. This is often lost sight of in many Protestant discussions of the Holy Spirit, especially when like Zwingli they draw an overly sharp distinction between Spirit and flesh. The importance of the Lord’s Supper is how it draws into focus the pneumatological significance of corporeality in the Christian life and unites it within an ecclesial setting. At the most basic level the celebration of the Supper is a spiritual act that engages our personal bodies. Eating and drinking is something we do every day and the Supper as the “sacrament of nutrition” links the spiritual nourishment of our souls to a bodily act fundamental to human survival. At another level the Supper signifies the unity of personal bodies within the corporate body of the church. “Because there is one bread we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread” (I Cor. 10:17). What unites the many into the one is the personal and now glorified body of Jesus Christ. “The bread that we break is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (10:16). At multiple levels the Lord’s Supper is the point of integration between spirituality and corporeality, between life in the Spirit and life in the corporate body of Christ. We ought not to underestimate the importance of the Supper as symbolic of the Spirit’s work. "A symbol is the place where and the means by which we can apprehend realities which the concept fragments in its attempt to reproduce them exactly. It is also apt to indicate the transcendence of revealed spiritual realities."53 As an effectual symbol the Supper refers us to the way that the Spirit simultaneously redeems our personal bodies, incorporates us into a communal body and makes us participate in the heavenly body of Christ. Mary Douglas observes that

The condensation of symbols in the Eucharist is staggering in its range and depth. The white bread encompasses symbolically the cosmos, the whole

history of the church and more, since it goes from the bread offering of Melchisidech, to Calvary, and the Mass. It unites the body of each worshipper to the body of the faithful. In this compass it expresses themes of atonement, nourishment and renewal.\textsuperscript{54}

Rather than restrict or arrest the full range and depth of the Spirit’s work, the Lord’s Supper discloses it. \textit{The whole of life in the Spirit, inside and outside the eucharistic context, is oriented around our union with the glorified body of Christ.} This is the constructive center of my argument. The salvation and sanctification of our bodies, which represent our whole person, presupposes the Spirit’s unique relationship to the bodily humanity of Jesus within the economy of salvation. This means that we cannot simply think about the Spirit “spiritually;” we must think about the Spirit “corporeally.”

Everything that the Holy Spirit works in us has reference to the risen and ascended body of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{55}

\section*{Outline of the Dissertation}

This work draws upon two eucharistic disputes within theological history. The first is the well-known controversy among the Lutherans and Reformed during the 16\textsuperscript{th} century Reformation, and the second is a less well-known intramural dispute between 19\textsuperscript{th} century American Reformed theologians John Williamson Nevin and Charles Hodge. Chapter one deals with the Nevin-Hodge debate and their disagreement over the authentic Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. Although it seems counterintuitive to deal with this controversy before the earlier Reformation dispute it is the more recent debate that


\textsuperscript{55} This is a slight twist on Eugene Rogers original statement. See \textit{After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West} (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005), 56.
continues to frame pneumatology and eucharistic reflection in the American Reformed tradition. In many ways the terms of this sacramental debate set the theological agenda for the entire dissertation. At the center of the Nevin-Hodge disagreement is the question of whether believers spiritually participate in the glorified body of Christ, or rather, only with the efficacy of Christ’s sacrificial death. Nevin staked everything on the former reading, while Hodge rejects it as a foreign element in Reformed theology that is irreconcilable with a proper doctrine of the Spirit. I draw out the pneumatological heart of this dispute arguing in favor of Nevin’s position. In this chapter I give a comprehensive account of Nevin’s eucharist-oriented pneumatology in the context of Protestantism in the 19th century. At stake in these different eucharistic understandings are two different understandings of the Spirit’s work in the mediation of grace through sacramental and ecclesial means.

In chapter two I consider more directly the Holy Spirit’s relationship to corporeality. Here I propose an account of Reformed sacramentality as the Spirit’s accommodation to human bodiliness. I treat of the question of experiences of the Spirit and argue that a Supper-Spirit approach is a way to revitalize the classical Protestant tradition of Word-Spirit pneumatology. The Word-Spirit model is criticized for excluding the category of experience from pneumatology as well as exhibiting a tendency to subordinate the Spirit to the Word. I argue that attention to the sacraments as “visible words” opens up a more expansive register for thinking about experience as well as capturing the participatory and incorporative nature of the Spirit’s triune work.

In chapter three one will find the most direct and comprehensive account of the classical Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. This chapter offers a pneumatological
reading of the 16th century eucharistic debates from the perspective of John Calvin’s Lord’s Supper doctrine. I develop Calvin’s *sursum corda* pneumatology and argue that his eucharistic doctrine of the Spirit steers a course between Zwingli’s spiritualization of the flesh of Christ on the one hand, and the Lutheran marginalization of the Spirit on account of ubiquity on the other. This chapter also considers the central importance of Christ’s bodily ascension and how it lends a distinct eschatological dynamic to Reformed thought.

Chapter four is an exposition of Spirit-Christology in the Reformed tradition in the light of its distinctive Lord’s Supper teaching. The great Puritan monographs on the Holy Spirit, as well as the *Westminster Confession*, understood the Christian experience of the Spirit to be grounded in the special relationship between Christ and the Spirit within the *historia salutis* (history of salvation). The mission of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ is crucial to the development of Reformed Christology and is reflected in its piety. This chapter considers the pneumatological dimension of the major christological categories that developed in Reformed theology. I argue that the pneumatological orientation of the Lord’s Supper, and the Christology it assumed, was a theological pathway that opened up into a rich Holy Spirit piety among the Puritans.

In the last chapter I consider the significance of the body of Christ for the ongoing experience and application of redemption. In other words what does the christological and sacramental doctrine of *corpus Christi* have to do with the pneumatological doctrine of *ordo salutis*. I show that the point of integration runs along the lines of an eschatological understanding centered in Jesus bodily resurrection. Many confessionally oriented Reformed readers will worry that my emphasis on union with Christ comes at
the expense of a traditional understanding of the doctrine of justification. In this chapter I seek to resolve the putative dilemma within Reformed soteriology between a forensic account of justification and a strong emphasis on union with Christ by reflecting on how a balanced eschatological perspective holds these soteriological emphases together.
Chapter One

Mediations of the Spirit

“She is as lusty a Pentecostal as she was a Southern Presbyterian. She likes as much as ever cooking a hearty breakfast, packing the kids off to school, and making morning love on our Sears Best bed, as we used to. She loves the Holy Spirit, says little about Jesus. She is herself a little holy spirit hooked up to a lusty body. In her case spirit has nothing to do with body. Each goes its own way. Even when she was a Presbyterian and I was a Catholic, I remember that she was horrified by the Eucharist: Eating the body of Christ. That’s pagan and barbaric, she said. What she meant and what horrified her was the mixing up of body and spirit, Catholic trafficking in bread, wine, oil, salt, water, body, blood, spit - things. What does the Holy Spirit need with things? Body does body things. Spirit does spirit things.”

~Walker Percy, Thanatos Syndrome

“For most assuredly no Church can stand, that is found to be constitutionally unsacramental.”

~ John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence

The Fate of Calvin’s Eucharistic Doctrine in Reformed America

The Lord’s Supper sits at the intersection of a profound tension within Reformed theology between spirit and flesh. Southern Presbyterian R. L. Dabney (1820-1898) is explicit in his displeasure with what he thought was John Calvin’s mixing up of the categories of spirit and flesh in his eucharistic theology. Calvin’s view that a believer participates through the Spirit, not simply in the sacrificial efficacy of Christ’s death, but in his glorified corporeality as well was for Dabney a “real a violation of my intuitive reason” as great as that of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. “We reject

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1 Walker Percy, Thanatos Syndrome (New York: Picador, 1999), 353.
the view of Calvin concerning the real presence . . . because it is not only incomprehensible but impossible.™ Dabney’s alternative was to drop altogether any talk of participating in Christ’s human nature in the Supper. What is more appropriate, he says, is a “mental or spiritual presence” which “places the object before the cognizance of the appropriate mental faculty. In this sense only, the sacrament brings Christ before us; that it places Him in faith, before the cognizance of the sanctified understanding and heart.”™ The Scottish Presbyterian John Dick (1764-1833), whose Lectures in Theology were widely read in the United States, rejected Calvin’s position because it involved an “inexplicable communion” of the believer in the human nature of Christ. The Zwinglian position was to be preferred. According to Dick, Calvin

endeavours to remove the objection arising from the distance of place, by a reference to the almighty power of the Spirit, much in the same way as Papists and Lutherans solve the difficulty attending their respective systems. If Calvin had meant only that, in the Sacred Supper, believers have fellowship with Christ in his death, he would have asserted an important truth, attested by the experience of the people of God in every age; but why did he obscure it, and destroy its simplicity, by involving it in ambiguous language? If he had anything different in view; if he meant that there is some mysterious communication with his human nature, we must be permitted to say that the notion was as incomprehensible to himself as it is to his readers.™

Calvin’s appeal to the Holy Spirit was for Dick not a satisfactory explanation of how the believer could participate in the human nature of Christ which remained in heaven.

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™ Dabney, Systematic Theology, 811.
™ Dabney, Systematic Theology, 811.
Another influential Scottish Presbyterian, William Cunningham (1805-1861), also expressed a critical reception of Calvin’s view of the Supper. Cunningham betrays a low view of the sacraments, even by Reformed standards, when he complains that, “it can scarcely, we think, be denied that the general tendency, even among the Reformers, was to exaggerate or overstate the importance and efficacy of the sacraments.” However, what Cunningham found most problematic was Calvin’s approximation to a corporeal presence of Christ in the Supper.

We have no fault to find with the substance of Calvin’s statements in regard to the sacraments in general, or with respect to baptism; but we cannot deny that he made an effort to bring out something like a real influence exerted by Christ’s human nature upon the souls of believers, in connection with the dispensation of the Lord's Supper—an effort which, of course, was altogether unsuccessful, and resulted only in what was about as unintelligible as Luther's consubstantiation. This is, perhaps, the greatest blot in the history of Calvin's labours as a public instructor.

What these Reformed theologians were unable to grasp was how it was possible for Calvin to appeal to the agency of the Holy Spirit on behalf of a participation in the corporeality of Christ. Inconceivable was how the Spirit could make us participate in Christ’s human nature, since according to another American Presbyterian, William Shedd (1820-1894), the “act of truly partaking of the Lord's Supper is mental and spiritual, not physical and carnal.” Calvin’s eucharistic theology seemed to confuse the proper demarcation of Spirit and flesh. The problem with Calvin’s position according to Dick is

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8 William Cunningham, *The Collected Works*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh T&T Clark, 1862), 240.
that “it gives rise to carnal meditations.” In the proper observance of the Supper “our minds are employed in the spiritual contemplation of his atonement, and its effects.”

This perceived incompatibility between corporeality and spirituality in Reformed theology has deep roots in the Reformation owing in part to the thought of Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1521). For Zwingli “a channel or vehicle is not necessary to the Spirit, for He himself is the virtue and energy whereby all things are borne, and has no need of being borne.” Zwingli’s thought reflects the influence of Renaissance Humanism and its strong metaphysical distinction between spirit and flesh. According to Zwingli faith does not spring from sensible objects because “body and spirit are such essentially different things that whichever one you take it cannot be the other. If spirit is the one that has come into question, it follows by the law of contraries that body is not; if body is the one, the hearer is sure that spirit is not.”

Even though the confessional Reformed tradition rejected Zwingli’s sharp dualism and followed Calvin instead, Zwingli’s

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11 Dick, Lectures on Theology, 414.
13 Zwingli was especially influenced by the famous Christian humanist Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536), whose fifth rule in his widely read Enchiridion (1503) stated that the best piety consisted in a turning away from visible things to invisible reality. Erasmus instructs that one “no longer wish to crawl upon the ground with the beasts, but to rise above those wings that sprout in the minds of those who love. Advance from the body to the spirit, from the visible things to the invisible, from things sensible to things intelligible, from things compound to things simple . . . if you make a sincere effort to escape from the chains of blindness with which the love of sensible things has bound you, He will come to you, and you will no longer be chained to the things of earth.” The Essential Erasmus, trans. and ed. John P. Dolan (New York: Meridian Book, 1964), 71. For an excellent account of the pneumatology of the devotional traditions that shaped the Reformers see chapter five of Susan Schreiner’s, Are you Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
sacramental thought was warmly received by a number of American Reformed theologians, becoming their preferred framework for interpreting the sacraments.\footnote{R.L Dabney calls Zwingli “the most emancipated of all the Reformers from superstition and prejudice” and only at fault in underemphasizing the “sealing nature of the sacraments.” Systematic Theology, 809-810. William G.T. Shedd argues that the differences between Calvin and Zwingli have been exaggerated and in his own presentation of the Supper effectively assimilates Calvin to Zwinglianism. See Dogmatic Theology vol. 2, 569-570.}

There was, however, a vocal minority who championed a full embrace of Calvin’s Lord’s Supper doctrine.\footnote{For more on this conflicted history see E. Brooks Holifield, “Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in Nineteenth Century” in Journal of Presbyterian History 54 (1976): 238-57.} The most important of them was Mercersburg theologian John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886), who in 1846 published The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed or Calvinistic Doctrine of Holy Eucharist. In this work Nevin defended Calvin against his critics and put a theological stake in the ground claiming that not only was Calvin’s view theologically superior, but historically speaking it was the consensus position of the confessions and old Reformed divines. The Mystical Presence was a broadside against “modern Puritans” like John Dick, whom Nevin singles out for criticism; but it was also a theological attack upon the spirit and flesh dualism that he perceived was widespread within all the Protestant churches.\footnote{For Nevin’s “historical exhibition” of the state of a Lord’s Supper piety across the spectrum of Protestant traditions see chapter 2 of Mystical Presence, 99-110.} In abandoning the traditional Calvinistic doctrine, Nevin maintained that the church was defenseless against the excesses of revivalism and sectarianism. Lamenting the general attitude in the Reformed churches towards the traditional doctrine Nevin says it is “considered to be of no force whatever for the Church, in her present condition of gospel light and liberty. It is unintelligible and absurd; savors of transubstantiation; \textit{exalts the flesh at the expense of the spirit}.\footnote{Nevin, The Mystical Presence, 103 [my italics].}”
Nevin’s criticisms of the Reformed churches’ low view of the Supper did not go unchallenged. In 1848 Charles Hodge, the keeper of Reformed orthodoxy, published a lengthy and very critical review of _The Mystical Presence_. Hodge was quite candid about how _The Mystical Presence_ sat on his table for two years before he was able to summon the “stimulus of a special necessity to carry us through such a book.”¹⁹ Hodge’s summary judgment was severe: “We differ from him indeed, essentially, as to the whole subject, not only as to the historical question, but as to what is the true doctrine.”²⁰ Together with Nevin’s doubly lengthy response to Hodge’s review, the publication of _The Mystical Presence_ became the occasion for one of the most substantive debates on the nature of the sacraments within American Protestantism.²¹

Among other things, at stake in this heated exchange were two different understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to the sacramental mediation of grace. Nevin’s theology so emphasized the mystical and objective presence of Christ in the Supper that Hodge thought it smacked of a corporeal presence similar to Romanism and Lutheranism, which were thought to marginalize the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit in effecting communion with Christ.²² “What the scriptures refer to the Holy

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²⁰ Hodge, “Doctrine of Reformed Church,” 227.
²² We have already stated that Romanists, say it is to be referred to the sacraments themselves as containing the grace they convey; Lutherans to the supernatural power of the word, inseparably joined with the signs; the Reformed to the attending power of the Spirit which is in no manner inseparable from the
Spirit, this system refers to theanthropic nature of Christ, to a nature of life ‘in all respects human.’ This supersedes the Holy Spirit. Every reader, therefore, must be struck with the difficulty Dr. Nevin finds from this source. He does not seem to know what to do with the Spirit.”

Hodge believed that Nevin’s eucharistic thought displaced pneumatology with Christology. Of course this criticism is deeply ironic since it was Nevin who sought to recover the truly Calvinistic doctrine, and yet he is being charged with the same error that Calvin leveled against his Lutheran opponents. Nevin was quite clear throughout The Mystical Presence to distance his position from the Lutheran and Catholic one, as well as to uphold the traditional Reformed view that Christ’s presence is mediated through the Holy Spirit. However, on account of his enthusiastic retrieval of Calvin’s account of a spiritual participation in the glorified body, Hodge was unconvinced that Nevin had preserved a real role for the Holy Spirit in his theology. He ceded to Nevin his reading of Calvin, but along with the chorus of his Reformed contemporaries Hodge came out against Calvin’s eucharistic theology as “an uncongenial foreign element” that almost “immediately died out of the church.”

One is struck by the fact that both Hodge and Nevin emphatically affirmed a presence of Christ in the Supper that held only through the power of the Holy Spirit. However, they understand the nature of Christ’s presence and the consequent operation of the Holy Spirit under very different terms. As we will see, contrary to Hodges’ claim, Nevin’s eucharistic doctrine is very attentive to the Holy Spirit. In fact one of Nevin’s contributions to the development of the doctrine is the way he developed the signs or the service. Dr. Nevin’s doctrine seems to lie somewhere between the Romish and the Lutheran view” (Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 274).

Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 277 [my emphasis].

pneumatological potential of Calvin’s account precisely in conjunction with its emphasis on a participation in the humanity of Christ. Writing at the height of the Second Great Awakening, and the dominating influence of the “new measures” revivalism of Charles Finney, Nevin saw in the Protestant churches a spiritualist crisis, not unlike what the 16th century Reformers had struggled against: the Spirit was being severed from the Word, and the objectivity of grace in Christ was being swallowed up in the subjectivism of human experiences of the Spirit. Nevin was quite sensitive to the pneumatological mood of his own context and his retrieval of Calvin’s eucharistic doctrine sets forth an alternative pneumatology to that of revivalism, sectarianism, and modern Puritan theory, one that challenged the spiritual dualisms that he believed had overcome American Protestantism.

**Spirit and Mediation in American Religion**

Reformed theologians were not the only ones who struggled with the right configuration of spirit and flesh in the Lord’s Supper. In a different religious context Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) confronted the same issue. The tipping point for Emerson’s resignation from ministry in the Unitarian church was not being able to convince his congregation to abandon the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In a final sermon (1832) he laid out his theological and biblical arguments for why the church should leave behind the sacrament as it was traditionally practiced. The Scriptural text that framed his argument was Romans 13:7, “The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink,

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25 On the nature of spiritualism in the 16th century Reformation see chapter 3 footnote 33.
but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.” Speaking on behalf of what he believed was a distinctly American feeling Emerson said that, “We are not accustomed to express our thoughts or emotions in symbolical actions.”

Bread and wine are not aids to devotion, but painful impediments. To eat bread is one thing to follow and obey the precepts of Jesus something entirely different. According to Emerson, the importance ascribed to the form of the Lord’s Supper was entirely inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity. Here he interprets religious life in the Holy Spirit to be irreconcilable with insistence on set religious forms. “Forms are as essential as bodies; but to exalt particular forms, to adhere to one form after it is outgrown, is unreasonable, and it is alien to the spirit of Christ.”

The institutions and outward forms of Christianity ought to be “as flexible as the wants of men. That form out of which life and suitableness have departed should be as worthless in its eyes as the dead leaves that are falling around us.” Christianity according to Emerson is religion of the spirit and heart in contrast to the Jewish religion of forms which was all body and no life. He was drawn to Christian teaching on the Spirit in particular, since in them he saw a path towards a religious life emancipated from restrictive form, tradition and institution.

The Lord’s Supper in Emerson’s estimate was a secondary accretion rather that an essential and original element of Christianity. Reflecting a sentiment that was common among revivalists of the Second Great Awakening, and foreshadowing the later pragmatism of William James, Emerson argued that the measure of any external form or practice in religion must be a

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27 Emerson, *The Lord’s Supper*, 117.


29 For an early treatment of the Holy Spirit by Emerson while he was still a Unitarian minister see Sermon CX (1831) on James 1:17, which he delivered on five different occasions. Find in *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 3. ed. Ronald A. Bosco (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 118-125.
measure of its usefulness. Once a practice has lost its original usefulness it ought to be abandoned no matter what its original prestige was among the people.

Few Christians would endorse Emerson’s specific religious vision, or even his reasons for rejecting the Lord’s Supper, but to varying degrees his uneasiness towards religious intermediaries reflects a broader cultural mood within America Protestantism in the 19th century. Mediation according to Emerson was a backward glance to already given forms, which were impediments to human flourishing. “Our age is retrospective. It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” Mediation was a problem because it meant the absence of a “face to face” relationship with God; it was the exchange of direct experiences for ones that were second hand. Emerson’s thought is doctrinally distant from the once dominant Puritan orthodoxy of his New England environment, but as Perry Miller observes what holds between Emerson and that Puritan tradition is an “effort to confront, face to face, the image of a blinding divinity in the physical universe, and to look upon that universe without the intermediary of ritual, of ceremony, of the Mass and the confessional.” Emerson’s thought reflects a secularization of a deep strain of Puritan piety in America.

30Nathan Hatch describes this mood within popular religion as driven by a democratizing impulse that sought freedom and equality over-against the hierarchies and tradition of old world institutions and practices. It was characterized by a “passionate rejection of the past” and an assault on “mediating structures.” The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 14.
31From the essay Nature (1836) in The Selected Writing of Emerson, 3.
As John Nevin discovered, the American context, on the whole, was an inhospitable environment for sacramental reflection. This is in part due to how a great deal of Puritan reflection on the Holy Spirit developed precisely as its interest in the sacraments seemed to wane. It is difficult to generalize about a movement as diverse as Puritanism, but there were certain identifiable trends in their thinking. In the only comprehensive treatment of Puritan teachings on the Holy Spirit, Geoffrey Nuttall observes that “the Puritan movement was a movement towards immediacy, towards direct communion with God through His Holy Spirit, in independence of all outward and creaturely aids.”34 In contrast to the ceremony, ritual and formalism of the Church of England many Puritans sought a direct and personal encounter with God in the Spirit.35 This loss of interest in discerning the Spirit in the context of the sacraments corresponded

Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1983). Schweitzer has a particularly nice treatment of Emerson’s Lord’s Supper sermon that shows its importance as a turning point for his more developed transcendentalism and aesthetic theory (260-264). The problem with these dissertations, both drawing inspiration from Perry Miller, is that the comparison between Emerson and the Puritans is more a structural historical comparison of ideas than a historical demonstration of dependence. With that said Emerson was not the kind of thinker much concerned with footnotes or revealing historical debts. 33What M.H. Abrams observes of Romantic philosophy and literature is true of Emerson’s thought as well, namely that it represents a “displaced and reconstituted theology, or else a secularized form of devotional experience, that is because we still live in what is essentially, although in derivative rather than direct manifestations, a Biblical culture and readily mistake our hereditary ways of organizing experience for the conditions of reality and the universal forms of thought.” Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1971), 66.

34 Geoffrey F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), 92. Nuttall’s text is important, remarkable in its breadth, and argued carefully from the sources. However, it is better read as a snapshot of religious cultural trends of Puritan piety in a very broad sense. A problem with the work is its tendency to assimilate the whole trajectory of Puritan pneumatology to that of Quakerism, combined with a mistaken view that Puritan pneumatology is largely without precedent within the Reformed tradition, most especially John Calvin! (6) Nuttall is quite sensitive to the varieties of Puritan thought on the Spirit, but from this text one gains little sense of how Puritan pneumatology, represented in such figures as Richard Sibbes, John Owen and Thomas Goodwin, is a profound and orthodox development of antecedent Reformed reflections on the Holy Spirit. A new comprehensive interpretation of Puritan pneumatology is badly needed.

35 Winthrop Hudson notes that among the Puritans because “most of the bitter conflicts between the rival religious factions were over externals of polity, worship, and usage, it was quite natural that increasing numbers should look with favor upon an attempt to secure unity by subordinating the controversial outward forms of religion to the supposedly uncontroversial witness of the Spirit within.” “Review Article: Mystical Religion in the Puritan Commonwealth,” The Journal of Religion, vol. 28, No. 1 (Jan., 1948), 53.
to an increased emphasis on discerning the work of the Spirit in the conversion of the sinner. E. Brooks Holifield notes that in New England Puritanism,

The ministers and laity were particularly occupied with the manner of the Spirit's work, in the conversion of the sinner. The essence of their piety was the longing for a personal experience of the Spirit. . . . Puritan assumptions and preoccupation therefore produced intense religious feeling but did not comport with a vigorous sacramental piety.\(^{36}\)

The background of this Puritan piety became fertile theological ground for the later development of revivalism in America, and as Mark Noll observes, revivalism’s emphasis on the new birth through the Holy Spirit had the effect of trivializing “the importance institutions once held to mediate regeneration.”\(^{37}\)

Even though there was a great deal of continuity and positive theological development between the piety of the Puritans and the early Reformers, which we will explore in later chapters, there were significant departures when it came to the emphases of sacramental doctrine and practice.\(^{38}\) Holifield observes a marked difference between

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\(^{37}\) Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 174. There was a real difference, however, between the anti-formalism of the Puritans and that of later American evangelicalism. Noll helpfully notes that “Although Puritans stood against Catholic and Anglican formalism, salvation for the Puritans was still mediated by institutions—family, church, even the covenanted society; in evangelicalism (at least in American forms), salvation was in principle unmediated expect by the written Word of God. Puritans protested against nominal ecclesiastical life, but they still treated institutions of church and society as given; American evangelicals created their own communities, at first ecclesiastical, then voluntary. Puritans accepted authority from designated leaders; American evangelicals, looked for authority from charismatic, self-selected leaders” (173).

\(^{38}\) On this theme see the illuminating dissertation by Jonathan Jong-Chun Won, “Communion with Christ: An exposition and comparison of the doctrine of union and communion with Christ between Calvin and the English Puritans.” (PhD. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989). Won argues that in Puritan piety the theme of communion with Christ becomes a hallmark, for Calvin the emphasis was on
the sacramental theology of the Reformers and that of the later Puritans in England and America.

[T]heirs was Calvinism with a difference, for Puritan definitions of sacramental benefits represented a departure in tone and emphasis from Calvin. Because they elaborated the dichotomy between flesh and spirit especially in terms of psychological interiority, the Puritans tended to rely on subjective explanations of sacramental efficacy. The sacrament was a seal with which God bound himself to stand to his word, but it worked by evoking a subjective sense of assurance in the mind of the communicant. The emphasis fell on psychological inwardness. The definition itself revealed a tendency to understand sacraments in terms of their impact on the understanding, to offer psychological interpretations of sacramental mysteries. Puritan ministers uniformly described the Lord's Supper as a dramatic exhortation evoking appropriate mental states.  

It was this shift, especially towards a subjective orientation, which Nevin labeled as “modern Puritan theory” and decried as a falling away from the “old Reformed doctrine.” Even though many Puritans never prescind from a view of Christ’s sacramental presence (pneumatologically conceived of course) the emphasis shifts from a theological account of God’s active relating to us in the sacrament to the individual’s own interior disposition in approaching the sacrament. What is obscured in this change is the clarity with which

union more than communion. The theological contexts in which these theological emphases occur also differ: Calvin developed the theme of union within a eucharistic context, while the Puritans developed the theme of communion most frequently in the context of devotional reflection on the Song of Songs—in this sense going beyond even Calvin in their proximity to Bernard of Clairvaux. Won argues that the Puritan emphasis on communion is not a departure from Calvin’s theology, but a shift in the emphasis of their piety. Where for Calvin the major interest of union and communion was soteriological, for the Puritans “the major concern was the application of union and communion to the life of the believer in order to bring comfort and encouragement to smothered and afflicted consciences of believers.” There is in this sense a characteristic interest in the use of doctrine that one does not find in Calvin. Moreover, by attending to the sacramental doctrine of the Puritans Won shows how in the shift from union to that of communion there was a migration of reflection from a sacramental context to one that was less and less sacramental.

39 Holifield, A Covenant Sealed, 53; For a more popular history of the Lord’s Supper in Reformed thought that confirms this interpretation see Keith A. Mathieson, Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publ. 2002).
40 The Westminster Larger Catechism, a Puritan document, bears this shift out; of the eight questions and answers that deal exclusively with the Lord’s Supper five (Q.171-175) address the proper interior comportment of the communicant. This subject matter is dramatically expanded compared to earlier Reformed confessions. Nevertheless the Westminster theology continues to uphold the Calvinistic
the sacrament holds out to the believer an objective grace. The tendency was for sacramental grace to be absorbed into the believer’s exercise of faith. Nevin believed that the only way the church could recapture sacramental objectivity was to recover Calvin’s emphasis on participating in Christ’s glorified humanity. Holifield’s work demonstrates the complex and variegated nature of Puritan reflection on the sacraments, and even identifies a countermovement among some that led towards sacramental renewal, but he admits it “has become commonplace, and it is largely correct, to say that the Puritan impulse led to a gradual disinterest in the sacraments.”

**B.B. Warfield and the Legacy of Puritan Pneumatology**

The varying attitudes of ambivalence, disinterest and suspicion towards the sacraments left their mark on the development of Reformed pneumatology in America. A preeminent example of this is Princeton theologian Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield (1851-1921), whose theology deepened the Puritan tendency to sharply distinguish the work of the Holy Spirit from external means of grace. On this account Warfield’s pneumatology offers us a clear alternative to that of John Nevin. Historically speaking it would make more sense to discuss Charles Hodge’s doctrine of the Spirit since he was Nevin’s contemporary and interlocutor, but Warfield is actually more important on account of how he codified the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for an American Reformed

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41 Nevin was...
audience, and consequently shaped a great deal of American evangelical thinking on the subject. Warfield was a student of Hodge and faithfully developed and carried on his theological legacy at Princeton Seminary. Because of the close personal and doctrinal continuity between these two figures it is possible to catch a glimpse in Warfield’s thought of some of the pneumatological repercussions of Hodge’s opposition to the Calvinistic doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

The cornerstone of Warfield’s interpretation of Reformed pneumatology is his claim that Calvin is a theologian of the Holy Spirit. According to Warfield, Calvin is a Spirit-theologian in the way he related “the whole experience of salvation specifically to the working of the Holy Spirit.”43 Central to his interpretation is how the Spirit plays the central role in linking the reality of grace in Christ with a transforming experience in the believer. The Holy Spirit is grace itself and depends ultimately on no external mediation, which is why the Spirit is able to grasp and transform the subject at the deepest level of his or her being. Because the work of the Spirit is God’s sovereign grace operating upon the soul immediately, Warfield situates the Reformed view between two erroneous theological tendencies he calls the “libertarian” and the “sacerdotal.” In Warfield’s thinking both of these positions marginalize the Holy Spirit in the Christian life by externalizing the work of grace.44 The libertarian tendency makes the autocracy of human will the decisive factor in salvation and the sacerdotal tendency causes a person to focus

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too much on the external media of grace; both fail to properly direct attention to the immediate and personal working of the Spirit upon the individual.

Warfield’s critique of sacerdotalism continues to reflect the deep suspicion within American Protestantism towards mediating agencies. The sacerdotal principle, according to Warfield, is operative wherever external instrumentalities are made indispensible and absolute in the way that salvation is brought to the soul. Roman Catholicism is the most obvious target, but Warfield identifies the Anglican and Lutheran traditions as “honeycombed with the inconsistencies” of sacerdotalism. True evangelical religion “sweeps away every intermediary between the soul and its God, and leaves the soul dependent for its salvation on God alone, operating upon it by his immediate grace.”

Warfield calls sacerdotalism an inconsistent form of supernaturalism, as opposed to the pure supernaturalism of Calvinistic evangelicalism. At work in sacerdotalism is a subtle deism that has God retiring behind his works such that the Spirit becomes impersonal “as if he were a natural force, operating, not where he pleases, but uniformly and regularly wherever his activities are released.” This is akin to keeping God the Holy Spirit on tap to do the bidding of church at the will of human beings. It is to make salvation depend on human intermediation and subjects the Holy Spirit to human control.

45 Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), the Dutch Calvinist and contemporary of Warfield is in lockstep with the latter in opposing the spiritual religion of Calvinism with that of sacerdotalism. According to Kuyper, Calvin was the only Reformer who fought the battle of sacerdotalism to the end with consistency. The essence of Calvinism is immediate fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit, independently of priest or church. “Sensual church services tend to service and flatter man religiously, and only the purely spiritual service of Calvinism aims at the pure worship of God.” Lectures on Calvinism (New York: Cosmos, 1931), 67.

48 Warfield, The Plan of Salvation, 82.
49 The predestinarian emphasis in Reformed theology during this period reached a fevered pitch that made it difficult to find much of a role for the visible church and sacraments in the economy of salvation. To admit intermediate causes and instrumentalities was seen to derogate from a full affirmation of God’s
and sacerdotal piety are “utterly different,” one fosters dependence on external instruments of grace while the other fosters conscious communion with God the Holy Spirit as a personal saving presence.

Despite occasional affirmations of a Reformed position on the means of grace, Warfield comes close to portraying the work of the Holy Spirit and an ecclesial and sacramental mediation of grace as a zero-sum game.

Wherever this sacramentarianism went, in however small a measure, it tended so far to distract men’s attention from the Spirit of God and to focus it on the media of his working . . . It is easy indeed to say that the Spirit stands behind the sacraments and is operative in the sacraments; as a matter of fact, the sacraments tend, in all such cases, to absorb the attention, and the theoretical explanations of their efficacy as vested in the Spirit’s energy tend to pass out of the vivid interest of men.  

Seen in the best light, Warfield’s critique of sacramentalism reflects a legitimate Reformed concern that the problem with mediating agencies is that they quickly become sovereignty. The older Reformed tradition was able to hold a balance between these two on account of an affirmation of secondary causality (see Westminster Confession Art. 6 on providence). No doubt, this widespread and zealous emphasis on predestination led Nevin away from the traditional Reformed expression of the doctrine. He believed that Hodge’s predestinarian views, in particular, excluded any legitimate room for a positive view of the sacraments or the visible church. Nevin’s biographer notes that on the doctrine of predestination he “came to feel that it could not in all respects be made to harmonize with Calvin’s doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, and he allowed his view of the decrees to be considerably modified.” (Theodore Appel, The Life and Work of John Nevin (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 566. For Nevin’s own comments on Hodge on this issue see Appel: 572-578. 

The thought of Abraham Kuyper is also prone to this overemphasis. “In religion, says Kuyper, “there must be no intermediation of any creature between God and the soul,–all religion is the immediate work of God Himself, in the inner heart. This is the doctrine of Election.” (Lectures on Calvinism, 58-59). Herman Bavinck is a very helpful corrective and restatement of the classical Reformed position, that holds together uncompromisingly the importance of the sacraments and visible church with that of God’s sovereign grace. See his Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit’s Work in Calling and Regeneration, which is largely directed against this imbalance in Kuyper’s theology.


Warfield, “Introductory note,” 217. Such a sentiment is confirmed by the paucity of reflection on matters ecclesiological and sacramental in Warfield’s expansive body of works. The recent work by Fred G. Zaspel confirms this (The Theology of B.B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary. (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway, 2010), 513).
interesting in their own right. However, the antithesis that he erects between sacerdotalism and evangelicalism is overstated to the point that it is nearly impossible to reconcile with those of Calvin and the confessional Reformed tradition. Warfield nowhere denies the external means of grace, but they are so severely diminished in his thought that his affirmation of them is something of a concession to the primary thrust of his soteriological thinking.

Warfield stumbles at the notion of mediated grace, in part, because of how he relates the work of the Holy Spirit and the religious experience of the individual. He develops his understanding of the Reformed means of grace largely in terms of a doctrine of religious knowledge rather than along the traditional lines of word, sacrament and prayer, which are expressed as concrete practices in the local church. In his essay “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God” Warfield calls the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti* in conjunction of Word and Spirit the “fundamental formula of the Calvinistic

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53 Peter Leithart makes similar criticisms of Warfield’s lack of sacramentality in “Framing Sacramental Theology: Trinity and Symbol” *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 (2000), 4. fn. 12. Warfield’s suspicion of the means of grace is amply illustrated in his treatment of Augustine’s theology of grace. “When Augustin [sic] comes to speak of the means of grace, i.e., the channels and circumstances of its conference to men, he approaches the meeting point of two very dissimilar streams of his theology,—his doctrine of grace and his doctrine of the Church,—and he is sadly deflected from the natural course of his theology by an alien influence.” What Warfield is objecting to in particular is Augustine’s admittedly troubling doctrine that all unbaptized infants are condemned. Indeed this is an extreme example of tying grace to the institution of the church, but one senses even without such a teaching that Warfield is altogether uncomfortable with Augustine’s theology of church and sacraments. In fact he reads Augustine’s theology of grace against his theology of the church. “Thus, although Augustin’s [sic] theology had a very strong churchly element within it, it was, on the side that is presented in the controversy against Pelagianism, distinctly anti-ecclesiastical. Its central thought was the absolute dependence of the individual on the grace of God in Jesus Christ.” From the introductory essay in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Saint Augustin: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, vol. V. ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), lxx-lxxi. [last italic mine].
Calvin’s formula here is Word and Spirit. Only in the conjunction of the two can an effective revelation be made to the sin-darkened mind. The Word supplies the objective factor; the Spirit the subjective factor; and only in the union of the objective and subjective factors is the result accomplished. The whole objective revelation of God lies in the Word. But the whole subjective capacitating for the reception of this revelation lies in the will of the Spirit. Either by itself is wholly ineffective to the result aimed at—the production of knowledge in the human mind.

The manner of associating the Word with objective revelation and the Spirit with its subjective apprehension was common among theologians in Warfield’s day. It is the function of the Word to set before the soul the right object of belief and the work of the Spirit to illumine and quicken within the soul a true faith in that object. Warfield calls this work of the Spirit “regeneration considered in its noetic effects.” By this he means to show that the Spirit’s work of illumination and regeneration are united as one reality in the life of the believer. The work of the Spirit is an operation upon the human heart as much as it is upon the mind. This means the internal testimony of the Spirit to the Word is thoroughly correlated to the inner religious life of the Christian. As Warfield notes for Calvin an embrace of Holy Scripture as the divine rule of faith and life “is just one of the effects of the gracious operation of the Spirit of God upon the heart, renewing it into

54 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 8. Warfield is rather flexible in what constitutes a “mean of grace.” In the essay “Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary” (*Princeton Theological Review* Vol. II. (Philadelphia: Macalla & Company, 1904.)) he implores a diligent use of the public means of grace which he identifies with the whole seminary experience itself. “The entire work of the Seminary deserves to be classed in the category of means of grace; and the whole routine of work done here may be made a very powerful means of grace if we will only prosecute it in a right spirit and with due regard to its religious value” (73).

55 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 83.


57 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 102-103.
spiritual life.” This renewal of the Spirit will not happen without Word of God, but without the Spirit the Word is ineffective to renew hearts.

In the light of his well-known theological attacks on mysticism, perfectionism and nascent Pentecostalism, a common perception of Warfield is that he sought to remove “any trace of subjectivity” and inwardness from theology. It was an utmost concern of Warfield to preserve the objectivity of theology over-against the many subjectivisms of the modern religious world, nevertheless, he never denied the importance of a true religious experience and the need to pursue a life of devotional piety. This is nicely illustrated in his treatment of mysticism. The problem with mysticism, asserts Warfield, was that it sought to find God wholly within the “circle of the individual’s experience.” Because this was the principal meaning of mysticism Warfield avoided a straightforward Christian appropriation of the term, but he was willing to speak of the “mystical aspect of Christianity and we may even speak of the doctrine rather the experience of the Holy Ghost as the real truth of mysticism.” Following a comment of R.C Moberly, Warfield asserts that if Christians had only understood and lived up to their belief in the Holy Spirit then all would be mystics. All Christians are mystics in the sense that “communion with God is the essence of Christianity.” Warfield stops short of adopting the word

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58 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 106.
mysticism, but insists that “no man is a Christian who has not the experience of the indwelling Christ.”

Mysticism, despite its errors, points to something important about the intimacy and depth at which the Holy Spirit penetrates human agency in the experience of salvation. The individual’s relationship to the Spirit is not simply that of a moral association of wills or an illuminating light upon the mind to discern truth from falsehood (libertarian error). The Holy Spirit invades and transforms the person at the deepest level of human consciousness. To be sure this experience is a double testimony between our own spirit and the Holy Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is “delivered through the forms of our consciousness, but it remains distinctively the testimony of God the Holy Spirit and is not to be confused with the testimony of consciousness.” The failure to make this distinction is precisely the problem at the heart of mysticism. Nevertheless the Christian experience is one where the witness of the Spirit and our consciousness of the Spirit “run conflually together into one.”

[The Holy Spirit is not delivered to us in a propositional revelation, nor by the creating in us of a blind conviction, but along the lines of our own consciousness. In its essence, the act of the Spirit in delivering His testimony, terminates on our nature, or faculties, quickening them so that we feel, judge, and act differently from what we otherwise should. In this sense, the testimony of the Spirit coalesces with our consciousness. We cannot separate it out as a factor in our conclusions, judgments, feelings, actions, consciously experienced as coming from without.]

According to Warfield we cannot easily distinguish the activity of the Holy Spirit from our recognition of God as reflected in our trust, love and obedience towards him. Despite Warfield’s earlier cautions this text approaches a highly subjectivist account of the Spirit.

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63 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 110.
64 Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, 110-111.
Warfield would have emphatically denied this accusation, but it has traction because it is not clear where in his theology he actually has room to distinguish between the presence of the Holy Spirit and the human experience of the Holy Spirit. Without a developed understanding of *embodied* means of grace (i.e. sacraments)—where the Spirit is promised to be present beyond the various apprehensions of human consciousness, whether affective or cognitive — Warfield’s particular synthesis of Word and Spirit is vulnerable to being pressed into an antithesis where the Word approaches being equated with “pure doctrine” and the Spirit becomes a cover for human subjectivism.  

One place that Warfield attempts to deal with this tension is in the essay “Authority, Intellect, and Heart.” In this work he tries to spell out the intimate relationship between theological doctrine (Word) and religious experience (Spirit). The three terms of the essay’s title are the three sides of the triangle of truth that must be held in balance if a person is to have a symmetrical religious life. Authority, intellect and heart ought to work harmoniously together, interlacing and interacting, so that no one term is exalted to the detriment of the others. Any lopsidedness produces error: too much emphasis on authority leads to traditionalism, too much intellect to rationalism, and too much heart, mysticism. Despite Warfield’s emphasis on the need for symmetry between the terms, there is a clear logical flow that starts with authority, flows through the intellect, and terminates finally upon the heart. In this understanding protecting the objectivity of theological truth means one must prioritize its intellectual apprehension.

Warfield argues that “all the dicta of authority are addressed to the intellect, which, also,

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is the sole instrument for ascertaining the implications of the feelings; so that all our
sources of knowledge reduce at last to this one source—the intellect. We know only what
our intellect grasps and formulates for us.”

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Warfield’s spirituality has a particularly
cognitivist bent. This is different from claiming that he had no room in his theology for
an affective piety. The problem is his strict association and limitation of the Word to an
intellectual apprehension. What is not entirely convincing about Warfield’s theology is
the extent to which his theology possesses the resources to offer a satisfying integration
of head and heart. Heart seems to be dramatically subordinated to head. Missing in his
account is an understanding of knowing and experiencing God that is not limited to the
spirituality of mind, but extends spirituality to the body. For it is the body, or
embodiment in Nevin’s language, that literally and figuratively holds together head and
heart. By prioritizing the intellect in the reception of faith, Warfield grounds religious
experience in the objectivity of revelation, but there is not much room here for thinking
about sacramental means of grace as anything other than visible didactic symbols

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68 Paul K. Helseth in Right Reason and the Princeton Mind convincingly defends the Princeton school
against a regnant historiographical narrative that has cast their theology as overly philosophical and
rationalistic which left little or no room for a robust piety. Despite the falsity of this caricature I do not
believe that Helseth’s work exonerates the Princeton theology from Nevin’s critique of lending towards
disembodiment and afflicted with spiritualist, low-church tendencies. Certainly Hodge and Warfield
sought an integrated spirituality, but their low view of the sacraments and dualistic anthropology creates a
situation where pietistic expressions seems to toggle back and forth between the poles of the head and the
heart.
69 Mark Noll raises a similar concern about the stability of Princeton piety in general. “The pertinent
question is not whether they had a place for religious experience and the work of the Holy Spirit . . . they
certainly did. The question is rather where this religious experience, where the work of the Holy Spirit, fit
into their theology. It is hard to escape the conclusion that on this score . . . no entirely satisfactory
integration occurred.” Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development, ed. David F.
Wells (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 23.
addresses to the mind. Here Warfield reflects a Puritan sensibility that Holifield nicely captures:

The Puritans thought that the enrichment of understanding was a major means of grace; they could not tolerate a sacramental theology that was, as they saw it, patently irrational. To acquiesce in Roman and Lutheran irrationality would be to diminish, if not destroy, a major benefit of communion. And even if that were tolerable, they considered it impious to identify the body of Christ with "bakers bread." For the Puritans Christianity was a spiritual religion; carnality was alien to it. 70

What is absent in Warfield’s theology is any positive account of how the Holy Spirit is related to material reality, most especially the human body, and why such a relationship might be important for an understanding of Christian existence. This is demonstrated by his inability to conceive of a non-competitive relationship between the presence of the Holy Spirit and an emphasis on the sacraments.

**John Nevin’s Sacramental Critique of American Pneumatology**

John Nevin refuses to see a high estimation of sacramental means as antagonistic to a strong pneumatology. As already mentioned Nevin is one of the few theologians to develop the pneumatological potential of Reformed eucharistic doctrine. This was made possible in part by his confrontation with revivalism and sectarianism. B.B. Warfield in his much cited treatment of Calvin’s theology virtually ignores book four of the *Institutes*, which is the longest section of the work, where Calvin sets forth his doctrine of church and sacraments. Warfield breaths nary a word about what Calvin has to say on these issues. 71 In contrast, fifty years prior, Nevin bet his entire theological project on a

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70 Holifield, *Covenant Sealed*, 60.
71 See Warfield’s *Calvin and Augustine*. 
retrieval of this aspect of Calvin’s theology, his eucharistic teaching in particular. *The Mystical Presence of Christ* is not a disinterested work on sacramental doctrine, but rather a trenchant theological critique of the religious culture of his time. In this work Nevin sought to counteract the tendency towards disembodiment in the Protestant churches by a recovery of the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. The common error of the sects and revivalists was “a conception that the externalization of the Christian life is something accidental only to the constitution” of that life.⁷² For Nevin this is injurious to the life of the church because it turns the external forms into mere “mechanical machinery” for the advance of religion outwardly conceived. According to Nevin the perfection of religious feeling is only complete when it becomes an embodied reality. However, not just any form is appropriate because the outward must draw its power from its true inward source. The true inward source is the person of Christ and Nevin’s theology of the Lord’s Supper sought to articulate the proper theological relationship between the inner and outer dimensions of Christian life. By divorcing the inward from the outward, American Protestantism had become increasingly shallow, individualist, rationalist and Pelagian. For the revivalist and sectarian what was most *real* in Christian existence was a conception of the spiritual in opposition to the corporeal. Nevin’s theology sought to reverse the direction of what was most real.

All thought, all feeling, every spiritual state, must take a body, (in the way of word, or outward form of some sort,) in order to come at all to any true perfection of itself . . . The more intensely *spiritual* any state may be, the more irresistibly urgent will ever be found its tendency to clothe itself, and make itself complete, in a suitable external form.⁷³

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⁷³ Nevin, *Mystical Presence*, 3
Certainly one encounters here the strong influence of German idealism and romanticism shaping Nevin’s thinking, but Nevin roots his principle of embodiment in the reality of Christ’s incarnation which the Lord’s Supper ritually enshrines within the Christian experience. As we will see this is not merely a christological reality but pneumatological as well.

It was Nevin’s critical engagement with the “sect system” and the “new measures” of revivalism that laid the groundwork for his ecclesial and sacramental theology. Recovering the Calvinistic and confessional Reformed doctrine of Christ’s mystical presence in the Lord’s Supper was the sum of Nevin’s response to a corrosive theological culture. His sacramentalism was not a conservative retrenchment in “old forms” over-against a fear of innovating religious practice, but reflective of a wholly alternative understanding of the Christian life. According to Nevin “modern Puritan theory”—his umbrella concept for this degenerate Protestantism—expressed an understanding of the religious life that was utterly foreign to the tradition of the Protestant Reformers. Nevin came to see that a recovery of the theology and practice of the Reformation meant a recovery of their doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. “Our view of the Lord’s Supper must ever condition and rule in the end our view of Christ’s person and the conception we form of the Church. It must influence at the same time, very

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74 Nevin was quite open and candid about the philosophical influences upon his theology. (Charles Hodge was not as forthcoming about his own philosophical debts.) Nevin makes this clear in the “preliminary essay” by Dr. C. Ullmann from Heidelberg that he includes at the beginning of The Mystical Presence. Hodge accused Nevin’s theology of accommodation to German philosophical influences, but what Nevin sought in these sources were new conceptual tools to reframe an American theological tradition that he believed had lost its way. For an excellent treatment of Nevin’s philosophical background and its relationship to his theology see William DiPuccio, “The Dynamic Realism of Mercersburg Theology: The Romantic Pursuit of the Ideal in the Actual.” (PhD. Dissertation, Marquette University, 1994). For a condensed and revised version that leaves out some of the details of philosophical background see DiPuccio’s The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Hermeneutics of John W. Nevin (Macon, GA: The Mercer University Press, 1998).
materially, our whole system of theology...” Nevin believed that a proper understanding of the eucharist was at the inmost heart and core of “the great life-problem of the age” which was the entire question of the church.

But what does this have to do with a doctrine of the Holy Spirit? At first glance the contribution of Nevin’s eucharistic doctrine would seem to embrace Christology and ecclesiology at the expense of pneumatology. It would seem to assert the priority of form at the expense of Spirit. Indeed this was Charles Hodges’ suspicion of Nevin’s work. But to accept this criticism of Nevin is to fail to see how he sought to fundamentally reconfigure the relationship between Spirit and flesh through a renewed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper. A central aspect of Nevin’s response to revivalism and sectarianism was his articulation of an alternative framework for interpreting the work of the Holy Spirit. While a great deal of American Protestantism sought to discern the work of the Holy Spirit almost entirely in terms of human experiences, Nevin sought to locate discernment of the Spirit within the sphere of the church and sacraments, which engages human subjectivity and experience, but still exists objectively beyond them.

Revivalism and sectarianism confronted Nevin with two interrelated pneumatological problems: one that opposed life in the Spirit to external forms, and the other that reduced the Spirit’s use of external forms to something entirely casual and accidental. The problem with sects, according to Nevin, is that they “despise forms, under the pretext of exalting the spirit.” “Full of religious pretension” they contrast experimental and personal religion to “dead formalism.” “Sects start usually in abstract

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75 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 3.
76 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 3.
77 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 140.
supernaturalism, with an affection of hyper-spiritual perfection.” However, in denying religion a theological principle of embodiment—a binding and stable understanding of the relationship of inward and outward—the sect impulse eventually passes into rationalism. The rationalism of the sect is to deny that the supernatural reality of faith has any concrete union with natural and external reality. Without a theological principle of embodiment so-called personal experiences of the Spirit are really forms of false interiority; in fact the thrust of sectarianism is to make religion an outward affair. The application of salvation is “magically affected by an outward impulsion from God’s Spirit, carrying the soul through a certain process of states and feelings. No sacramental grace. No true union with the life of Christ.” By divorcing the inward in religion from the outward the sect religion tends to be driven towards outward notions and abstractions. Even though they emphasize the eminence of their spirituality they lack the force of a true work of the divine life. “They hold not so much in the actual apprehension of divine realities by faith, as in the mere notion of them by imagination. They come not so much to an inward living union with the life of the soul, as they are accepted by it rather in an external, mechanical way.”

This is illustrated by the contrast Nevin draws between the significance of the Lord’s Supper in the old Reformed view and that which one meets in modern Puritan theory. The classical Reformed view recognized an objective force and presence of grace in the Supper, while in the modern Puritan view the Supper is merely an occasion for the pious excitement of feelings in the individual. The sacraments are merely outward rites

that have no force of grace except for the subjective exercise of the worshipper brings to
the table.

Ultimately, sooner or later, such merely subjective exaltation, such direct self-confusion of the human spirit with God's Spirit (without the mediation of the objective Word) is sure to run into sheer rationalism. *Beginning in the Spirit, the movement ends in the flesh.* First, the historical Christ of the gospel is lost in the ideal Christ of the soul, the inward light which it is held that every man must follow in order to be a true Christian; and then this inward inspiration itself again melts away at last into the common light of reason, and that view of the word in which no serious account is made of the mysteries of religion in any form.81

One could summarize Nevin’s critical pneumatological axiom this way: the less sacramental and embodied a theology is the more rationalistic and unspiritual it becomes over time; the less one thinks of the Spirit as mediated objectively in terms of Word and sacrament (i.e. christologically) the more anemic a pneumatology will become, not less. The problem with sect religion is that it bypasses the concreteness of the incarnation.82

Revivalism poses a slightly different pneumatological problem for Nevin. Applying a recently coined term from the contemporary business world we could describe this problem as the “casualization” of the Spirit’s labor. In other words, the Spirit no longer has a permanent contract (promise) to work securely in one place (e.g. Word and sacrament), but is instead hired out short-term in many different work-place settings. The problem is that one is never sure of when the Spirit’s work in that place will end and where his next job site will be. The revivalists defended the innovation of new forms in the ministry of the church by claiming them to be occasions of great new works of the Holy Spirit. For revivalist Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) there were no

theological grounds to regard one form as inherently special over any other. Since the special aim of all forms (i.e. “means of grace”) is the conversion of sinners, their value resides wholly in their present usefulness to this end.83 When forms become old and start becoming ineffective it is time to find new forms. Finney argued that the anxious bench in his day served precisely the same role that baptism did during the time of the apostles.84 Every age requires the innovation of new forms and to insist on one particular form and way of doing things is nothing less than Roman Catholic fanaticism. “The fact is, that God has established in no church, any particular form, or manner of worship, for promoting the interests of religion.”85 And it is when churches hold too strongly to the sacredness of certain forms that the spirit of revival is squelched. Finney claims that “it is impossible for God himself to bring about reformation but by new measures . . . When he [God] has found that a certain mode has lost its influence by having become a form, he brings up some new measure, which will BREAK IN upon their lazy habits, and WAKE UP a slumbering church.”86

Nevin took seriously the need for the church to experience authentic revival and avoid “dead formalism.” However, he drew a distinction between true revival and “new measures” revivalism. The church of every age has a right to expect “special effusions of the Spirit” but such effusions take place not through the innovation of new forms but by the “extraordinary use of the ordinary means of grace.”87 Nevin does not deny that the Spirit of God can make “any occasion subservient to the awakening and conversion of the

84 Finney, Lectures on the Revivals of Religion, 248.
85 Finney, Lectures on the Revivals of Religion, 255.
86 Finney, Lectures on the Revival of Religion, 249 [capitalization original].
soul,” but he warns that the salvation of one sinner is too much if “truth and righteousness are made to suffer for that purpose.” The church cannot divorce the external forms of religion from the true source of their inner life without suffering disastrous spiritual consequences.

The irony of revivalism is that in making the work of the Spirit accidental to external forms it exalts the outward at the expense of the inward. Similar to Simon Magnus in the book of Acts, revivalism supposes that the power of the Spirit can be bought and sold, commanded and controlled, simply by the effective wielding of new measures. Nevin calls revivalism a form of quackery. “Quackery consists in pretension to an inward virtue or power, which is not possessed in fact, on the ground of a mere show of the strength which such power or virtue is supposed to include.” Revivalism makes great claims to be working in the power of the Spirit, but its dependence on outward forms reveals it to operate in the power of the flesh. The shadow is mistaken for the reality, form replaces substance, and the outward stands in for the true presence of the inward.

Religion must have forms as well as inward living force . . . But these [forms] can have no value, no proper reality, except as they spring perpetually from the presence of that living force. The inward must be the bearer of the outward. Quackery however reverses the case. The outward is made to bear the inward. . . . Such forms may be exhibited in a ritual, or in a creed, or in a scheme of a religious experience mechanically apprehended; but in the end, the case is substantially the same. It is quackery in the garb of religion, without its inward life and power.

By reversing the proper relationship between the inward and the outward the vitality of the church is made to depend on the constant invention of new forms in order to keep it

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88 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 37.
89 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 49.
90 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 51-52.
alive and awake. In dispensing with a commitment to traditional means its practitioners affect to be completely free from the authority of form, but in fact they come to trust more blindly in the new forms. Nevin saw that the real forces of the new measures derived not from the workings of the Spirit, but the natural appeal and power of the new form upon a person.

A sure sign that there is a confused relationship between inward and outward is that the new measure methods of revivalism can be made to work regardless of the character of the person using them or the theological cause being advanced. Nevin points out that no system can involve real spiritual power if it can be made to work equally well for orthodox Christianity as it does for Universalists and Mormons. This would be to divide the reality of truth from that of the forms it inhabits. We cannot ignore the moral and theological constitution of forms, but must always test them by the source from which they spring. The pneumatological problem of revivalism is its casualizing the Spirit’s labor. The Spirit works not by contract (promise) with ordained means of grace but as a freelance agent—formerly in baptism, currently at the anxious bench, but in the future nobody is certain. The overall effect is to make the work of the Holy Spirit less secure since nowhere is the promise of the Spirit’s presence certain. According to Nevin, the incarnation of Christ makes the casualization of Spirit an impossibility, since the Spirit comes to dwell in creation distinctively as the Spirit of Christ.
Nevin’s Theory of Religious Change

*The Anxious Bench* (1846) is a work on the nature of religious change. New measures revivalism was not merely the addition of adiaphorous practices within the church’s life, but formed a new system "involving a certain theory of religious action, and characterized by a distinctive life."⁹¹ Nevin rejects the revivalist assumption that matters of practice are indifferent to matters of doctrine. “In religion, as in life universally theory and practice are always inseparably intertwined, in the ground of the soul.”⁹² New measures revivalism is not a system compatible with classical Protestantism since it teaches a different understanding of the Holy Spirit, a different construal of religious experience, and a theory of practice based in a wholly different anthropology.

Revivalism was a message of religious change sweeping the country and making extravagant claims about the outpouring of God’s Spirit. Bruce Stephens observes that in 19th century American Protestantism, "the work of the Spirit had to do with change, one of America's favorite themes. The Spirit was the very principle of change, the engine of transformation, the power of renewal of self and society. At stake in the work of the Spirit was a radical reordering of priorities resulting in a new birth equipping individuals for new patterns of behavior in society.”⁹³ Nevin’s critique perceived profound problems in the way revivalism correlated the doctrine of the Spirit with a theory of religious change. What does it mean to be truly transformed by the Holy Spirit? And what role does the means of grace play in this process of change? In these questions is a complex

interweaving of issues related to theological anthropology, pneumatology and sacramentology.

Considering the association of revivalism with heightened experiences of the Holy Spirit it would be tempting to see Nevin’s rejection of revivalism as entailing a rejection of religious experience. However, Nevin thought that revivalist claims to experience were in fact too shallow and did not penetrate deeply enough. Revivalism is unable to touch and move the foundations of the inward life because it has no compelling explanation for how salvation comes from a true inward union with Christ. The camp meeting conversions of the anxious bench are in utter want of spiritual depth. “No “experiences” are more superficial commonly, than those which belong to this whirlwind process . . . they involve little or nothing of what the old divines call heart work. They bring with them no self-knowledge. They fill the church with lean professors, who show subsequently but little concern to grow in grace.”94

The superficiality of revivalist experience corresponds in part to a diminished understanding of the depths of the human sinful condition. “A low, shallow, pelagianizing theory of religion” runs throughout revivalism which recognizes the fact of sin, but not its true extent.95 It lacks a radical and comprehensive understanding of salvation as a new spiritual creation on account of its high estimation of human ability to respond to the gospel call. Finney illustrates this perfectly when he claims that the influence of the Holy Spirit is not a condition for repentance from sin. “Obligation to perform duty never rests on the condition, that we shall first have the influence of the

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94 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 113.
95 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 114.
Spirit, but on the powers of moral agency. We, as moral agents, have the power to obey God, and are perfectly bound to obey, and the reason we do not is, that we are unwilling." The anxious bench, according to Nevin, is the embodiment in practice of this Pelagian anthropology. It makes the ground of salvation to rest entirely upon the energy of the individual who is ultimately responsible for the great changes in which regeneration is thought to consist. Religion under the revivalist scheme is ultimately a product of the human will, which is why it obtains in subjectivism, individualism and Pelagianism. Nevin contrasts this view with an understanding of salvation that demands a more comprehensive and deep experience of the Spirit.

The life of the soul must stand in something beyond itself. Religion involves will; but not as self-will, affecting to be its own ground and centre. Religion involves feeling; but it is not comprehended in this as principle. Religion is subjective also, fills and rules the individual in whom it appears but it is not created in any sense by its subject or from its subject. The life of the branch is in the trunk.

Christ is the trunk and we the branches; our salvation consists in an inward living union with Christ that must be as substantial as our union with the falleness of the first Adam which grips and enslaves us. This union with Christ is only extended to us through the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The revivalist understanding of experience is so radically individualist that it undermines the corporate nature of the church. The world is “a vast sand-heap, in which men are thrown together outwardly, to be formed for eternity as so many separate units,  

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96 Finney, Lectures on the Revival of Religion, 97. In this context Finney is trying to theologically respond to those who make the influence of the Holy Spirit a condition for repentance. The Spirit helps create an excitement towards repentance but is not the condition of it. Finney makes clear that it is not a question of inability on the part of the person, but rather unwillingness. Finney of course illustrates what Warfield called the “libertarian” error in pneumatology. Good Reformed theology would assert that it is inability and unwillingness.

97 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 116.
each perfect and complete by itself.”

According to Nevin a true theory of religion continually moves beyond the individual, it re-situates the particular life of a person within the context of something far deeper and more comprehensive than the individual will. “The particular subject lives not in the acts of his own will separately considered but in the power of the vast generic life that lies wholly beyond his will.”

A person will not have a sure conviction of the depths of their sin until they have a clear sense that their sinful condition is older and broader than themselves and that they have no power to renovate or control their situation. The ruin of the human race in Adam lies beyond the individual and so does the recovery of the human race in Christ. The true change in a person depends upon them being moved by a force deeper and more comprehensive than the individual will. This for Nevin is the ordained role of the church in the Spirit. The church is the medium of a more comprehensive life that can fill and animate a person from without. The possibility of a new spiritual constitution is brought to bear upon a person by the church through the “means of institutions and agencies which God has appointed, and clothed with power, expressly for this end.”

The depth and comprehensiveness of the sinful human condition requires a force and power that far outstrips the human individual.

By attending to the dynamics of religious change Nevin sought to articulate a deeper understanding of experiencing the Spirit. The revivalist understanding of change obtains in the Spirit being swallowed up in the subjective consciousness of the individual. This is not a more real or authentic experience of the Spirit over-against one that is

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99 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 125.

100 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 129.
mediated through the church since ultimately it has no way to distinguish the operation of
the Spirit from the machinations of human consciousness. For the revivalist a genuine
encounter with the Spirit coincides within the individual consciousness as a feeling or
thought. Generally this means that a genuine outpouring of the Spirit is associated more
with excitable and enthusiastic experiences of individuals, than it is in the regular
preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments. Within the revivalist
framework there is little room to imagine the gradual, regular and hidden work of the
Holy Spirit on the conscious and unconscious life of the believer. Nevin attempts to
locate pneumatology beyond the narrow categories of subjectivity, but by no means
should this be interpreted as a denial of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the
Christian. The personally indwelling of the Spirit in the individual is framed and upheld
by the special dwelling of the Spirit in the sphere of the church.

For Nevin we always live deeper than we think and feel in conscious experience.
The mind and spirit of a person is always open more interiorly to a spiritual world
shaping it in ways that conscious life cannot grasp.

The real complex forces, which enter as innumerable fibers into the
constitution of our outward conscious thought and speech, are all the time
at work for this end—though we know it not. And thus it is that the hidden
unknown of our daily mental life, whether as thought or speech, is always
immeasurably more than the open and known side of it which it turns to
our common waking consciousness.101

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Nevin’s claim here approximate those of Kenneth L. Schmitz’s who contrasts Thomas Aquinas’
understanding of experience which he describes in terms of “conceptualization” with modern notions of
subjectivity. “Now the interiority of modern subjectivity is vastly different in character and motive from the
ontological interiority that, as the metaphysics of Thomas insists, is resident in all being as the heritage of
every created being. For the causes and principles that constitute created being provide that being with an
ultimately inexhaustible depth and mysterious interiority that is partly its own but that also proceeds from
and leads back to its creative Source. Conceptualization properly carried out does not banish that mystery,
but it locates it differently than does experience. For even if the initial Cartesian dichotomy between
Nevin takes seriously the anthropological implications of Paul’s proclamation to the Athenians that in God “we live, move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

It is this understanding of the interiority of the world and human experience that is reflected in his definition of the mystical presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper. Real religious change involves a substantial change at the center of our being and nothing less than an encounter with the mystical presence of Christ makes this possible.

Life is not thinking, nor feeling, nor acting; but the organic unity of all these, inseparably joined together. In this sense, we say of our union with Christ, that it is new life. It is deeper than all thought, feeling or exercises of the human will. Not a quality only. Not a mere relation. A relation in fact, as that of the iron to the magnet; but one that carries into the centre of the subject a form of being which was not there before. Christ communicates his own life substantially to the soul on which he acts, causing it to grow into his very nature. This is the mystical union; the basis of our whole salvation; the only medium by which it is possible for us to have an interest in the grace of Christ under any other view.

Nevin wants to move reflection on the presence of the Spirit beyond the confines of human subjectivity. The reality of the Holy Spirit is inadequately grasped either as the subjective side of objective revelation or in terms of generator of excitable human experiences. Certainly the Holy Spirit acts upon our subjective natures both in terms of knowing and feeling, but the presence and operation of the Spirit goes much deeper than this. For Nevin all human action is always located in some particular place. There is no view from nowhere. Human agency is always located in history, in tradition, and enmeshed within a web of concrete practices. The system of revivalism always stands in subjectivity and objectivity is overcome, the various post-Cartesian strategies have absorbed reality into the horizon of subjectivity, giving us at best a shadowy and indeterminate transcendence. While experience translates the mystery into feelings of reverence and awe, conceptualization releases that same mystery to new depths; and its intelligible determinacy, properly understood, discloses more than experience can.” “St. Thomas and the Appeal to Experience” in The Catholic Theological Society of American Vol. 47 (1992) ed. Paul Crowley, 19 [my italics].

102 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 159.
the way of those “more silent and deeper forms of action” by which the Spirit changes people. Nevin’s frequent reference to the “sphere of the Spirit” is his way of reframing the space of experience.

The Sphere of the Spirit

Nevin rejects as “poor and flat” exegesis those who understand Jesus’ words “the Spirit quickens, but the flesh profits nothing” (John 6:63) to be a straightforward opposition between the Spirit and the corporeal reality. “Spirit and flesh here are opposed in a quite different and far deeper sense. The one represents the sphere of mere nature as embraced in the fallen life of Adam, soul, body, and all. The other designates the higher order of existence, of which Christ himself is the principle and which reaches out from him by the Spirit, as a new divine creation, over the whole range of our being.” This latter order of existence Nevin calls the sphere of the Spirit. The immateriality of the Holy Spirit does not entail an opposition to material reality, but to that order of existence called the flesh which has set itself up in opposition to all that is God. The Pauline distinction between flesh (sarx) and body (soma) is at work here. For Nevin the sphere of the Spirit is the power and basis of new spiritual creation. To live within the sphere of the Spirit is to be grasped in the totality of our being by an alternative economy, being subject to different powers and organized around different principles than those of nature and the flesh. The opposition between the sphere of the Spirit and the sphere of the flesh

103 Nevin, Anxious Bench, 118.
104 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 228.
105 The concept of “sphere” was widely used in a variety of philosophical and theological contexts in 19th century Germany by such figures as Hegel, Schleiermacher, and in the Dutch context, Kuyper (one thinks of Kuyper’s notion of “sphere sovereignty”).
is not drawn along the lines of materiality and immateriality, but along the lines of natural and supernatural, miraculous and the mundane. As subjects of the new creation believers are “already in the Spirit not in the flesh—that is, as participants in the pneumatic order of existence, of which Jesus Christ is the principle and the Holy Ghost the medium, and not under the power simply of our nature as derived with a fallen character from the first Adam.”¹⁰⁶ The contrast between the Spirit and the flesh, according to Nevin, has to do with the fact that the work of the Holy Spirit in the world is a higher, miraculous and more mysterious action than anything in natural life. The sphere of the Spirit transcends the sphere of nature not by leaving it behind but by working within its midst according to a wholly alternative economy. For Nevin, the category of “sphere” is a way for him to get at the integrated aspect of the Spirit’s work. The sphere of the Spirit is the context of God’s new creation work. As a sphere of God’s power and influence in creation it is miraculous, it has as its principle of operation the person of Christ, and as a spatial reality it takes up the location of the church and sacraments.

The recent work of David Kelsey is extremely helpful in making explicit many of the underlying assumptions of Nevin’s spatially oriented pneumatology. According to Kelsey the biblical witness to the work of the Spirit is best described in terms of a mode of presence that is circumambient. The circumambience of the Spirit is as all-encompassing as air and as dynamic as the atmosphere.¹⁰⁷ Like the oxygen rich air that human beings need to survive, the circumambient presence of the Holy Spirit is an

¹⁰⁶ Nevin, Mystical Presence, 214.
¹⁰⁷ Eighty years prior, Reformed theologian Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) described the Pauline conception of the Spirit in very similar terms. In accounting for the new advent of the Spirit at the resurrection and Pentecost, Vos notes that “the main peculiarity consists in the enveloping, circumambient, one might say atmospheric character of the Spirit’s working, a feature first emerging with Paul, and that so strongly as to give the impression as though the personal character of the Spirit’s mode of existence were obscured by it.” The Pauline Eschatology (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 59.
aspect of a creatures’ most embracing and most necessary context. It is the condition of human life, independent of human creatures’ thoughts and fantasies. The Spirit’s circumambience is public and not confined to the privacy of creatures’ interiorities.”

Kelsey notes that images of interiority used to describe the Spirit’s work have been dominate in the liturgical language of the church. Surely, scriptural metaphors that characterize the Spirit relating to people in interior ways are plenty and important to keep in place, but Kelsey argues more properly that there is a “bipolar pattern” in the way that the Spirit relates to us. The Spirit is not simply within us. “The Spirit is regularly characterized both as persons’ environing context always already there and enveloping them, and as intimately interior to them.”

The problem that Nevin perceived in revivalist pneumatology was a rejection of the Spirit’s environing presence as a presupposition of all human experiences of the Spirit. Kelsey captures the heart of Nevin’s objection when he argues that the “New Testament accounts of the Spirit ground its intimate relations to human persons’ interiorities in its always already being there as those persons’ environing context, and not the reverse.”

To subvert or reverse the relationship between the environing context and the individual interiority of the Spirit is what Nevin called the error of quackery. It produces a shallow understanding of experience and swallows up the work of the Spirit in human subjectivity.

Nevin’s understanding of the sphere of the Spirit fundamentally reframes the conceptual language used to talk of experiencing the Spirit. By using spatial and sacramental categories to speak of the agency of the Spirit Nevin is able to overcome two

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modern dualisms that afflicted pneumatology of his day—the epistemological dualism of objective and subjective reality, and the anthropological dualism of body and the soul.\textsuperscript{111} As the power and presence of new creation the agency of the Holy Spirit exceeds the category of interior experiences. The sphere of the Spirit is Nevin’s way of speaking about the agency of the Holy Spirit that moves beyond the context of human subjectivity and interior experiences, yet still embraces them. The Spirit comprehends forces and powers at work in the world that exceeds the power of individual persons. Deep, inward and everlasting change requires that a person enter body and soul into the sphere of the Spirit.\textsuperscript{112} The true human experience of the Holy Spirit is best described as “transjective.”\textsuperscript{113} In this experience the Spirit spans the distance between the objective grace given in Christ and its subjective realization within the person. Far from being merely the subjective side of salvation, the Holy Spirit mediates between the objective and subjective through generating faith.

\textsuperscript{111} Hodge was quite critical of Nevin’s lack of anthropological dualism (“Doctrine of Reformed Church,” 264). He argues that the scriptural understanding of human nature is best described as “realistic dualism.” This doctrine asserts “two distinct res, entities, or substances; the one extended and tangible, and divisible, the object of the senses; the other unextended, and indivisible, the thinking feeling, and willing subject of man. This doctrine stands opposed to materialism and idealism, which although antagonistic systems in other respects, agree in denying any dualism of substance” (Systematic Theology Vol. II (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishing, 2008), 46). For many reasons Hodge thought that the blurring of the body-soul distinction had disastrous theological consequences, but most especially in the area of Christology. Hodge tied a proper distinction of the two natures of Christ very closely to the body-soul analogy; this in part explains Hodge’s accusation of Eutychianism against Nevin, because the latter failed to uphold an anthropological dualism (“Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 264-266). As with a great deal of other Chalcedonian Christologies, Nevin did not feel bound to mark the distinction of Christ’s natures in terms of the body-soul analogy. For a trenchant critique of the body-soul analogy used to distinguish the two natures of Christ see Thomas Weinandy, O.F.M., Cap., Does God Suffer? (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 172-206.

\textsuperscript{112} Nevin, Anxious Bench, 50.

\textsuperscript{113} “Transjective” is a term used by Lyle Dabney. He notes that “The Spirit of God is thus not to be identified with individualized human spirit aspiring to the Divine, but neither is it the subjectivity of an individualized God making an object of the human. Rather, in contrast to ‘subjective’ or ‘objective,’ the Spirit of God is better conceived as ‘transjective,’ that is to say, that by which we as individuals are transcended, engaged, oriented beyond ourselves, and related to God and neighbor from the beginning.” See D. Lyle Dabney, “The Nature of the Spirit: Creation as the Premonition of God” in The Work of the Spirit, ed. Michael Welker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 82.
According to Nevin the Spirit comprehends the whole person, body, soul and spirit, reaching out over “the whole range of our being.” The new life in people is spiritual rather than being natural or physical, but this does not mean that Spirit operates only in the soul as opposed to the body. “There is no absolute opposition here between the idea of body and the idea of Spirit. . . . The Spirit of Christ, in his own person fills the whole man, soul, and body.”\textsuperscript{114} The transforming work of the Holy Spirit comprehends the whole human person. The Bible knows nothing of the Platonic antagonism between the body and the soul. Body and soul, as respectively the outward and inward and two different spheres of existence is a foreign idea.\textsuperscript{115} “Soul and body, in their ground, are but one life; identical in their origin; bound together by mutual interpenetration subsequently at every point; holding forever in the presence and power of the same organic law [i.e. the Spirit or the flesh]”\textsuperscript{116} If body and soul in human persons are inseparable in the experience of grace it makes no sense that the Spirit would be more properly related to the so-called immaterial aspect of the person, such as the mind and spirit. “Here is no exclusion of the body from the sphere of the Spirit, as being in itself of a totally opposite nature, and on this account incapable of sharing in the same life; but the last triumph of the Spirit is made to consist precisely, in the full transfiguration of the body itself into its image.”\textsuperscript{117} It would appear that Nevin recognizes the clear conceptual advantage of the sphere of the Spirit when discussing how the Spirit relates to common human life. His circumambient understanding of the Spirit, as a persons’ environing context and an

\textsuperscript{114} Nevin, \textit{Mystical Presence}, 166.  
\textsuperscript{116} Nevin, \textit{Mystical Presence}, 161.  
\textsuperscript{117} Nevin, \textit{Mystical Presence}, 213.
intimately interior presence to them, overcomes the contrastive anthropological
metaphors of “inside” and “outside,” “inward” and “outward,” “within” and “without,”
and “body” and “soul.” Nevin wanted to overcome the dualisms of Protestant spirituality
as well as the interiorizing of the Spirit within human subjectivity, which had the effect of
individualizing and privatizing the experience of the Spirit. Again Kelsey echoes
Nevin’s thought:

It is difficult to see how the Spirit within subjects constituted by their autonomous self-determinations could also be within a community, except that “within community” is shorthand for “aggregate of individuals each with the Spirit within her or him.” It is difficult to see what the Spirit changes in persons except interior states of consciousness expressible only in a subjective rhetoric that may always more or less objectivize and distort those states of consciousness. 118

Kelsey goes on to observe that such an interior account of the Spirit—individual, private and subjective—fails to rise to the level of being able to grasps the public character of the Spirit’s work in the Pauline concept of new creation. 119

B.A. Gerrish observes that the conviction that in the Lord’s Supper there is a real presence of Christ’s body and blood “to be had nowhere else,” explains why Nevin made it the place from which he “took his immovable stand.” 120 The Supper is an embodied and transjective meeting place where a person is able to experience the objective presence of God’s grace in the fullest sense. At the communion table the interior and exterior, the subjective and objective, corporeality and spirituality merge within one sacramental activity. “The outward is not merely the occasion by which the inward, in the

118 Kelsey, Eccentric Existence, 446.
120 B.A. Gerrish, “The Flesh of the Son of Man: John W. Nevin on the Church and Eucharist,” 65.
case, is made present to the soul as a separate existence; but the inward and outward, by
the energy of the Holy Spirit, are thus made to flow together in the way of a common life;
and come thus to exert a peculiar, and altogether extraordinary power.”

The Holy Spirit embraces the world most concretely in the space of the visible church and the
gathered community and is redemptively extended to the world through its preaching and
sacramental celebration. By no means is the Spirit restricted to and by the space and
practices of the church, but the communicative presence of God is promised to be especially powerful and effective through these ordained means. Moreover, centering reflection on Spirit-experience in the Lord’s Supper organizes and identifies the shape of
the Spirit’s work not only in the believer but the broader world.

Articulating the meaning of God’s saving presence is a central preoccupation of
Nevin’s theology. There is a clear relationship between his evaluation of the revivalist
claims to the Spirit’s presence and Nevin’s claims concerning the mystical presence of
Christ in the Lord’s Supper. For Nevin revivalism was a naturalization of the work of the Holy Spirit. “All might seem to begin in the Spirit, and yet all is perpetually ending in the
flesh.”

Similarly modern Puritan theory makes great claims to the Spirit but in fact tends towards rationalism. In contrast to these Nevin makes Christ’s eucharistic presence the center out of which he thinks about the miraculous and mysterious presence of the Spirit in the world. Understanding the deeper implications of Nevin’s pneumatology requires us to consider the relationship between the Spirit and the person of Christ, for it is at this place that that sects, revivalists and modern Puritan theory go wrong.

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Nevin’s Spirit-Christology

Yves Congar’s well-known axiom about pneumatology applies equally to John Nevin: “the vigour of lived pneumatology is to be found in Christology. There is only one body which the Spirit builds up and quickens and that is the body of Christ.” For Nevin the health of pneumatology lies in Christology because the Spirit’s renewal of all things happens by virtue of the special relationship established between it and the body of Christ. Nevin sought to address the pneumatological sickness of subjectivism and casualization by returning to the unique relationship between Christ and the Spirit in the economy of redemption. He discerned in modern Puritan theory a tendency to make the regenerating work of the Spirit something that was abstracted from and independent of the actual person of Christ. The reality of new creation holds “absolutely and entirely” in the powerful presence of the Spirit, but the indwelling of Christ and the Holy Spirit in believers is one and the same thing. “The Spirit then constitutes the form of Christ's presence and activity in the Church, and the medium by which he communicates himself to his people.”

Fundamental to Nevin’s soteriology is the idea that we must be connected to Christ who is the source of our salvation. “Christ is in the believer and the believer in Christ; not by a moral relationship simply, and not by a legal connection only; but by a bond of common life.” Justification as the forensic imputation of Christ’s righteousness Nevin upholds, but he argues that the Bible knows nothing of an outward

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imputation that does not in fact belong to a person. Salvation depends on a real union with Christ that is effected through the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not merely the pledge of Christ’s presence but the very form by which this takes place. The Holy Spirit is the bond of a living connection between Christ who is in heaven and his church upon earth. Christ and the church possess the same life not directly in the flesh of Christ but circuitously through the Spirit.

However, Nevin observes a significant difference of meaning when modern Puritans affirm that Christ personally indwells believers through the Holy Spirit. “Christ they say, dwells in his people by his Spirit: but in the way only of representation, not in the way of strict personal inbeing on his own part.” This is to make the presence of the Holy Spirit a substitute presence for the actual presence of Christ. Such a theological move according to Nevin cannot account for the biblical witness to the living bond between Christ and believers because it is a sundering of the Spirit of Christ from Christ himself.” The dogmatic root of the problem is an ambiguity in the understanding as to whether the Spirit of Christ corresponds to the divine nature of Christ as pre-incarnate Logos or to the whole Christ, which comprises the divine nature hypostatically joined to humanity. Nevin argues that the representational view of modern Puritanism entails that the “whole Christ must be held to be personally absent, and present only by proxy or

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126 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 179. The relationship between union with Christ and imputation will be explored more fully in chapter 5, but here it is important to recognize that Nevin desired to reorient what he thought was an overly abstracted doctrine of forensic justification within the context of an understanding of union with Christ. “Do we then discard the doctrine of imputation, as maintained by the orthodox theology in opposition to the vain talk of the Pelagians? By no means. We seek only to establish the doctrine; for without it, most assuredly the whole structure of Christianity must give way” (179).

127 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 182.

128 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 182.
substitution, in the separate agency of the Holy Ghost.”

If the Spirit corresponds only to Christ’s divine nature union with Christ is an abstract relation that holds only outwardly and in a mechanical fashion. If Christ indwells only by representation of the Spirit then the process of being conformed to Christ takes on a very different meaning since it does not derive from the living substance of Christ himself, but bears only an outward relation.

The differences in the positions are illustrated in fundamentally different notions of what it means for the Holy Spirit to create new life in the believer. Does the Spirit create new life \textit{de novo} or out of the person of Christ? Conformity to Christ under the representational view involves no actual participation of the believer in the person of Christ. A person is related to Christ not as the vine to the branches but “only as a mechanical transcript or copy to the original object it is employed to represent.”

This is to make Christ stand in the world alone and solitary, making possible and offering forgiveness of sins before God, but then leaving individuals to be formed by the Spirit, along with their own endeavors, into his image as an outward model.

New creation under the revivalist and modern Puritan view involves the “creative \textit{fiat} of God’s Spirit; but in the end it is a new creation that belongs in an immediate and exclusive way, to each single believer for himself.” Nevin asks, what is the content of the new life that the Spirit creates? From where does it come? The problem with this view is the creation of new life resembles a repetition of the mystery of the incarnation in

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Nevin, \textit{Mystical Presence}, 183. Such a view of the Spirit as corresponding to the divine nature rather than the human is evident in Zwingli as I will show in chapter three.
\item Nevin, “The New Creation in Christ,” 2.
\item Nevin, “The New Creation in Christ,” 2.
\end{enumerate}
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every individual believer. Nevin asks, “Is life created from nothing by the Holy Ghost, acting in the name of Christ, without any regard to his mediatorial nature, in any real sense the true and proper life of Christ himself as our mediator! Is this the mystical union?”

No, says Nevin. Regeneration by the Spirit is not a de novo creation from nothing, but a creation out of the actual substance of Christ’s life.

Christ does dwell in us by his Spirit; but only as his Spirit constitutes the very form and power of his own presence as the incarnate and everlasting Word. The Spirit (which is thus truly the Spirit Of Christ,) does form us by a new divine creation into his glorious image; but the life thus wrought in our souls by his agency, is not a production out of nothing, but the very life of Jesus himself, organically continued in this way over into our persons.

In the experience of regeneration the believer does not enjoy an original relation to the Holy Spirit. We participate in the Holy Spirit only by virtue of the unique relationship established in the humanity of Jesus Christ that was taken up wholly within the sphere of the Spirit.

Fundamental to Nevin’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit is that the Logos in assuming human nature makes the human reception of the Spirit possible. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God was active in the world under a certain form, but it was an “afflatus or influence merely” not promised and assured to believers. “It is by the incarnation properly, that the way has been opened for the true descent of the Spirit into the sphere of the human existence as such.” The Word made flesh is the medium and channel by which the effusion and outpouring the Holy Spirit takes place. The presence of the Holy Spirit was definitively present and at work in the humanity of Jesus. The glorified

132 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 184.
133 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 185.
134 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 185.
135 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 209.
humanity of Jesus Christ represents the final triumph of the Spirit over the law of sin and death in fallen human nature. Jesus was made perfect in the Spirit and his glorification in the ascension opened the way for a new out-flowing of Spirit to the world that carried the same divine life with which he was filled. Human nature receives the gift of the Spirit by virtue of the special relationship established between the Word and the Spirit when the Word took on human flesh. This means that we have no right to separate Christ from his Spirit in such a way as to suppose the presence of one without the presence of the other. Nevin believes that the modern Puritan understanding of the Spirit falters on trinitarian grounds because the rhetoric of its piety tends to treat the persons of the trinity as “one without the other” as if they are “abstract subsistences.” Surely the persons of the “adorable trinity” are distinct, but they subsist in communion with one another that is “the most perfect mutual inbeing and intercommunication.”136 This means that the Spirit of Christ is not simply a surrogate or representative of Christ but Christ himself under a certain mode of subsistence. The very possibility of the human experience being taken up into the sphere of the Spirit is only possible because the entire person of Christ was first taken up entirely by the Spirit.

The Spirit was never brought near to men before, as now through the incarnate Word. It dwelt in him without measure. Humanity itself was filled completely with its presence, and appears at last translucent with the glory of heaven itself by its means.137

For Nevin the believer’s experience of the Spirit flows out of that unique relationship that occurred between the humanity of Jesus and the Spirit. The work of the Spirit in our lives is not a de novo work or an original relation but a pneumatic work that flows to us as the

136 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 212.
137 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 165.
very presence and power of Christ himself at work in us. Nevin’s Christ centered
pneumatology is a response to the casualization of the Spirit’s labor in the Protestantism
of his day. A full recovery of the Reformed doctrine of the mystical presence of Christ in
the Lord’s Supper was his attempt to ground pneumatology in a more trinitarian and
christological space. What Nevin perceived in the Lord’s Supper was a clear relationship
between the mystical presence of Christ and the shape of the work of the Holy Spirit in
the life of the believer.

Nevin’s Pneumatological Response to Charles Hodge

How did Nevin respond to Charles Hodge’s accusation that he “does not seem to
know what to do with the Spirit”? In order to get at Nevin’s response we must consider
how the two differed on the topic of union with Christ and consequently the meaning of
eucharistic presence. Hodge agreed with Nevin’s assertion that the Lord’s Supper
exhibits and confirms a union between believers and Christ that is more than moral or
merely imaginary; indeed union with Christ is mysterious and real, not consisting simply
in receiving the benefits of Christ, but the person of Christ himself. Hodge even goes so
far as to say that “it is agreed that this union relates to the bodies as well as souls of
believers.”138 Nevertheless the fundamental disagreement over the nature of Christ’s
presence had to do with whether in the Supper believers participate in the glorified body
of Christ. According to Hodge we are not partakers of Christ’s human nature, his flesh or
blood. Hodge seems to make a distinction between the general bodily union believers

have with Christ by virtue of salvation from a more particular eucharistic participation in
Christ’s human nature. He notes two positions in the Reformed tradition for
understanding Jesus’ words on the meaning of feeding on his flesh and blood. The first is
to understand it to refer to the sacrificial virtue of his death; the other understands a
supernatural and mysterious efficacy as flowing outward to believers from the glorified
body of Christ. Hodge regards this latter position, which Nevin claimed as true Reformed
teaching, to be in fact a foreign element within the tradition that was a left over from the
early Reformed attempts to appease the Lutherans. Hodge struggles to understand how
Nevin is able to affirm his position without putting himself in danger of affirming a local
or corporeal presence of Christ in the elements. Against this position he reasserts the
“spiritual” character of Christ’s presence in the Supper over-against Nevin’s allegedly
corporeal orientation. Hodge will affirm, in a highly qualified sense, that there is a
mysterious presence of Christ’s body in the Supper, but it is not local, but spiritual, “not
for the senses, but for the mind and faith.”

In Nevin’s estimation Hodge has correctly identified the heart of the dispute,
namely, what it means to affirm that the body and blood are present in the Supper. Hodge
claims that there are different ways to conceive of how a thing can be present to human
perception. “Presence” is a relative word that to be understood must be in reference to the
object said to be present and the subject to which it is present. “For presence is nothing
but the application of an object to the faculty suited to the perception of it.” Hodge
distinguishes two modes of presence, one that is sensible and the other spiritual. The
former is present when it is perceived by the senses (corporeal in orientation) and the

139 Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 246.
140 Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 244.
latter when it is “presented to intelligence so as to be apprehended and enjoyed.” Note again the Puritan theme that links what is “spiritual” to the intellectual aspect of human nature. The body and blood of Christ are present by their efficacy and virtue even though they are at a great distance locally. Accordingly the presence of Christ in the Supper is to the mind by faith, not apprehended by the senses. In no sense can the presence of Christ’s body and blood be something understood as sensible because that would require a corporeal and local presence. What Hodge seems to be lacking is a theological category for understanding how the presence of the Spirit can communicate through the terms of sensible reality (i.e. the body of Christ). Spiritual for Hodge is largely coordinated in his theology with the immaterial dimensions of human nature—soul, spirit and mind. He denies that believers have communion with the glorified body of Christ because he cannot conceive how this does not necessitate a “gross” corporeal and local presence. Hodge’s stumbling at this point is rooted in an anthropology that has little sense of how the corporeal aspects of human nature are integrated with the so called spiritual aspects of our natures, and thus little imagination for how the human body can be engaged in the world spiritually.

Hodge charges Nevin’s eucharistic doctrine with failing to uphold the spiritual nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper. Nevin however, is thoroughly clear in The Mystical Presence, and his response to Hodge’s review restates this: in no way does he teach that Christ is present materially, locally or corporeally. Where they differ has to do with the interpretation of term “spiritual.” According to Nevin to deny an outward presence in space that is material and local does not mean that one can only assert a

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141 Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 244.
presence merely in and to the human mind. Nevin objects to the two alternatives that Hodge offers between spiritual or sensible. The Reformed doctrine knows no such bald alternative that opposes simple intellectual presence to a gross sensible one.\textsuperscript{142} Nevin accuses Hodge of holding an understanding of union with Christ “that holds only under a purely mental form between him and our souls, through the intervention of the Holy Ghost, exclusively altogether of his human life as such. Our relation to his body is at best remote and indirect.”\textsuperscript{143} According to Nevin what is spiritual and accomplished by faith does not exclude all action from the body of Christ.

Nevin sees in Hodge the same casualization of the Spirit’s work as he observed in revivalism. Hodge allows for an objective force of the Lord’s Supper where it is used rightly, but it is simply the influence of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing distinct about the Spirit’s appropriation of the sacrament as opposed to any other outward object.

The Spirit may work on men’s minds, exciting pious thoughts or feelings of devotion, by the presence of a majestic cataract, or a whirlwind, or a smiling beautiful landscape; and why not then with equal ease through the graphic and affecting representation of the blessed eucharist? In one case however, as in the other the relation between the earthly object and the grace thus made to go along with it, is wholly external. The sacrament like the landscape, is in no sense an actual embodiment of the presence of this last, but an occasion merely, in its own nature accidental though here of divine appointment, by which it is brought to reveal itself under an independent and wholly different form.\textsuperscript{144}

Nevin disagrees fundamentally with the charge that he has marginalized the work of the Holy Spirit in his understanding of Christ’s mystical presence. The Reformed doctrine

\textsuperscript{142} Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord’s Supper,” Mercersburg Review 2 (1850), 437. This is Nevin’s lengthy response (127 pages) to Hodge’s critical review of the Mystical Presence. It is reprinted and enlarged from “Review and Criticism of Hodge on the Mystical Presence.” The Weekly Messenger of the German Reformed Church, 24 May - 9 August 1848.

\textsuperscript{143} Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 444.

\textsuperscript{144} Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 450.
always asserted a real presence not simply as an object of thought but in the way of a real communication of Christ. As a presence it is not conditioned by relations of space, it is not material but transcending the ordinary sphere of nature and material causality, it is dynamic like a root and branches. Nevin objects to Hodge’s positing of the Holy Spirit’s intervention as entailing an exclusion of the presence of Christ’s human nature and the proper life of the Savior himself. This is a false understanding of the relationship between the glorified Christ and the Spirit.

The intervention of the Spirit, in the old Reformed doctrine, stands opposed only to the idea of all action that falls within the sphere of mere nature, and was never designed to be set in this way over against the reality of Christ's presence. On the contrary, the mystery of the transaction is taken to lie especially in this, that in a mode transcending the experience of sense, by the mirifical power of the Holy Ghost, the life giving virtue of his flesh and blood is made to be dynamically at hand, in a real and true way, for the use of his people.¹⁴⁵

Nevin asserts that the classical Reformed view, along with all the ancient church, affirm a real conjunction between the outward form of the sacraments and the inward reality of their grace. Although there is no physical or magical element to the sacramental transaction there was affirmed an inward bond that held by the power of the Spirit between the visible and invisible sides of the sacrament. In the sacrament a mystical force, above sense and natural reason engaged and nourished the faith of the believer.

Nevin believes that Hodge’s inability to affirm that the Holy Spirit communicates to believers the whole Christ, divinity and humanity, reveals a not so subtle spiritual dualism in his theology. The mystery of the Supper transcends all the conditions of natural experience and the sphere of sense. The flesh and blood of Christ is present

“superlocally” by the Spirit, not in the elements of bread and wine as such but the whole transaction in a dynamic sense.

Nevin rejects Hodge’s manner of setting material existence in opposition to the spiritual life. He argues that in Calvin’s thought there is a clear sense of the “central unity of our life as embracing corporeity and spirituality at last in the form of a single fact; and it is only the stubborn dualism which too generally characterizes our modern thinking that makes it so hard for many to get at his sense.”146 At the Lord’s Supper believers commune no less with the flesh and blood of Christ as they do with the Holy Spirit. The vivifying work of the Spirit is centrally related to making us partakers of Christ’s life-giving flesh. For Nevin the glorified body of Christ overcomes the dualism of Spirit and flesh.

In the glorification, the dualism between animating spirit and matter needing animation is brought to an end; the glorified body is through and through the manifestation of spirit, life, clear of space altogether through and through life; it has power to take volume at its own pleasure, (John 20:19; Luke 24: 16); but still in such a way that it shall rule the matter so assumed, and not be ruled by it as an outward limitation. 147

Nevin introduces the idea of glorified corporeity in contrast to a philosophy of nature that tends towards pure abstraction. In a world of sin and death there is discord between nature and spirit, but this reality has come to an end in the glorified body of Christ, which awaits us in heaven. The full redemption of the person in the eschaton will not involve a leaving aside of the body, but the full triumph of the Spirit over the law of sin and death in the body. “It needs to be openly and loudly proclaimed” argues Nevin, “that they are the true spiritualists who are not able to rise to the Calvinistic conception of glorified

corporeity, who take virtue or power for something unreal, and who remain bound thus to
the dualism that hangs between purely spiritual and a mechanically material
communication of the risen Christ.”¹⁴⁸

Assessing Nevin’s Contribution

If Wirkungsgeschichte were the final arbiter of theological disputes, Charles
Hodge would be the victor in his debate with Nevin. But the assessment of historians and
theologians is quite different from the view that actually prevailed in the majority of
American Reformed churches. Orthodox Presbyterian minister and theologian Robert
Letham observes:

When, in in the 1840’s, John Nevin of Mercersburg expounded the classic
Reformed teaching on the Lord’s Supper, he was trenchantly opposed by
some of the appointed guardians of that very theology, such as Charles
Hodge. The verdict of history has been that Nevin was right and that
Hodge had failed to grasp his own theological tradition.¹⁴⁹

Based on recent historical work on the debate itself, as well as treatments of the classical
Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper, it is clear that Nevin had the superior historical
understanding of the old Reformed teaching.¹⁵⁰ In fact Nevin’s counterattack on Hodge’s
review, according to James Hastings Nichols, stands as a historical monograph on the
Lord’s Supper “without a rival in English until the twentieth century.” Gerrish argues that

Company, 2001) As quoted in Keith Mathison, Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s
Supper, 175.
¹⁵⁰ For an evaluation of the debate see James H. Nichols’ Romanticism in American Theology: Nevin and
Schaff at Mercersburg, 105-106; B.A. Gerrish, “The Flesh of the Son of Man: John W. Nevin on the
Church and Eucharist” 60-67; Peter J. Wallace, “History and Sacrament: John Williamson Nevin and
Charles Hodge on the Lord’s Supper,” 199; Martha L. Moore-Keish, Do This in Remembrance of Me: A
one.
even the 20th century treatments hardly rival Nevin’s work. However, as Peter Wallace rightly notes, the correctness of Nevin’s historical interpretation is quite a different matter from his own “improvements” to the doctrine itself.

One of the difficulties in evaluating the Nevin-Hodge debate is that it was more about differences in theological emphasis than differences in theological doctrine—although surely the latter existed, in part on account of the former. The differences in theological emphasis between both men grew out of profoundly different philosophical orientations towards history, culture and nature. Nevin’s idealism and romanticism was a foreign philosophical body in 19th century America, while Hodge’s Scottish Common Sense Realism was the reigning philosophical framework. Nevin’s way of framing theology was deeply counter-intuitive to the thinking of most Americans, which meant that his philosophical language drew attention to itself in way that Hodge’s own philosophical commitments did not. This, in part, explains why the Mercersburg theology never stood a chance for survival.

Like no theologian since Calvin, Nevin discerned in the Reformed doctrine of the Supper a pneumatological potential that he exploited to great effect. However, from the perspective of Reformed confessionalism there were many aspects of Nevin’s theology that were problematic—some of which Hodge rightly identified. For instance, in Nevin’s presentation there is a depreciation and even subordination of the preached Word to that

152 Peter Wallace, “History and Sacrament: John Williamson Nevin and Charles Hodge on the Lord’s Supper,” 199. Wallace’s essay offers a perceptive and balanced account of the deeper philosophical issues related to history, nature and culture that divided Nevin and Hodge. Also see William DiPuccio, The Interior Sense of Scripture: The Sacred Sense of Scripture.
of the sacraments, an ecclesiology that approximates a 19th century Roman Catholic notion of the church as an ongoing incarnation of Christ in the world, and an excessive reliance on the language of German idealism and romanticism.

From the perspective of this work, most problematic is how Nevin subtly reconfigures the traditional christological reference point in Reformed eucharistic thought from Christ’s ascension to his incarnation. One of the reasons that categories of continuity tend to vastly outstrip and overshadow those of discontinuity in Nevin’s soteriology is on account of this christological shift. While the truth of Christ’s incarnation was an important assumption in Calvin’s treatment of the Supper, his actual exposition of the sacrament is dominated more by references to the reality of Christ’s ascension, not his incarnation. Nevin’s theology on the other hand more approximates traditional Roman Catholic and Lutheran approach by being oriented around a theology of the incarnation. “Low views of the sacrament,” according to Nevin, “betray invariably a low view of the mystery of the incarnation itself.” Everywhere in The Mystical Presence, Nevin discusses the sacrament in terms of the incarnation, but the word ascension and its cognates occur only five times and the theme receives virtually no

154 E. Brooks Holifield makes a perceptive observation about the differing orientations of Hodge and Nevin. “Nevin demonstrated willingness to accept categories of continuity that at times approximated the Roman Catholic tradition: continuity between creation and redemption, between the divine and human natures of Christ, between the first Adam and the second, and between the visible church and its efficacious means of grace and the ideal communion of true saints. Charles Hodge on the other hand, carried almost to its logical terminus another pattern present with the Reformed tradition: the impulse to accent discontinuity, in various ways, as the prevailing theological category.” (“Mercersburg, Princeton, and the South: The Sacramental Controversy in Nineteenth Century,” 239-240).

155 What makes interpreting Nevin’s eucharistic thought so difficult is the shift in his thinking towards an incarnational analogy, while at the same time his vigorous maintenance of the Reformed teaching on spiritual presence which entailed a rejection of Catholic and Lutheran teachings on Christ’s corporeal and local presence.

156 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 233.
exposition. Parenthetically, we might note, with a view towards Reformed-Roman Catholic and Reformed-Lutheran ecumenical dialogue, that Nevin shows one way an incarnational orientation does not preclude a strongly pneumatological interpretation of the Lord’s Supper.

On account of the predominating incarnational orientation of Nevin’s eucharistic thought it lacks the eschatological dynamism that is richly attested in Calvin’s presentation of the doctrine. As we will see in later chapters these different christological departure points produce very different conceptions of salvation history (historia salutis) and deeply effect the general orientation of Christian piety. Reformed Christology produced a piety with a strong emphasis on the Spirit-driven character of the entire historia salutis. For Nevin the “incarnation constitutes the only medium by which, the only form under which, this divine life of the world can ever find its way over into our persons.” The incarnation is the proper completion of human nature since Christ is the ideal man, the summit of human life and the path along which all of his history is drawn. “History, like nature is one vast prophecy of the incarnation, from beginning to end . . . What is history, but the process by which this idea is carried forward according to the immanent law of its own nature, in the way of a regular development towards its appointed end?” Nevin’s thought here reflects an idealist reception of the concept of incarnation. With such a strong emphasis it is easy to understand Hodge’s fear that all

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157 The exception to this is in his response to Hodge’s review. See Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 503-505. Where Nevin does seem to advance the eucharistic discussion christologically speaking is in his reference to Christ’s resurrection. Nevin has a great deal to say about the relationship between Christ’s resurrection and the eucharist—surely an underdeveloped theme in the tradition—which helps explain the pneumatological vibrancy of his eucharistic thought. In chapter five I will develop more fully the theological implications of resurrection for eucharistic theology.

158 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 160.

159 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 189.
that Christ accomplished in his death and resurrection had been radically subordinated to
Christ’s incarnation. The incarnational logic of Nevin’s thought also leads him to assert
that there is “nothing abrupt in Christianity” nor does it form any “violent rupture, either
with nature or history. It fulfills, and in doing so interprets, the inmost sense of both.”

This of course is difficult to reconcile with a biblical, in particular Pauline, picture of
eschatology and pneumatology. Geerhardus Vos points out the problems of this
progressive-evolutionary scheme that was widespread in the later 19th century.

Evolution means constant transformation, in the present case constant
spiritual growth, but without any crisis or catastrophe. Eschatology, on the
other hand, means a break in the process of development, suspension of
the continuity, a sovereign termination of the historical process by the
intervention of God. The practical spirit of the age demands concentration
of the religious energy upon the needs and issues of the present moment
and of the tangible world, whilst eschatology invites an expenditure of
spiritual power on transcendent realities both unseen and remote.

Biblical eschatology demands an account of discontinuity within a theological system.

On one level grace itself is disruptive. Not only does Nevin have little room for the
apocalyptic character of biblical eschatology, but also of the divine “interruptedness,” as
Pavel Florensky calls it, of the Holy Spirit in our world.

While there is a great deal to commend about Nevin’s doctrine of the Spirit, on
this front it tends to de-eschatologize pneumatology, making the Holy Spirit into an
immanent principle of history and nature working out the law of incarnation. Nevin
maintained that “it is incarnation properly, that the way has been opened for a true

160 Nevin, Mystical Presence, 167 and 193.
161 Geerhardus Vos, “Our Lord’s Doctrine of the Resurrection” (1901) in Redemptive History and Biblical
317
162 Killian McDonnell, “A Response to D. Lyle Dabney,” in Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the
Current Study of Pneumatology, eds. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee: Marquette
University Press, 2001), 263.
descent of the Spirit in the sphere of human existence as such.”¹⁶³ There is certainly a sense in which this is a true statement, but as we will explore in chapter five, the apostle Paul alternatively locates the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on humanity to be a reality rooted in the resurrection and ascension of Christ. While incarnation plays an important role in a doctrine of the Spirit, and moreover should not be neglected in eucharistic thought, fixating on this one moment in particular arrests the historical movement and pneumatological significance of the historia salutis (i.e. Christ’s life, death, resurrection and ascension). There is a sense in which Nevin’s eucharistic thought, as Hodge claimed, retreats into Roman Catholic and Lutheran modes of thinking insofar as everything is subordinated to the incarnation. This was an uncommon approach within the Reformed tradition. Unfortunately, this incarnational approach combined with the predominating influence of idealism (Hegel, in particular) gives Nevin’s pneumatology an orientation that is teleological but not quite eschatological.¹⁶⁴ On this account, Calvin’s presentation of the Lord’s Supper, with its emphasis on ascension, better captures the eschatological tension and dialectic of continuity and discontinuity that frames Christian existence. But before we can proceed to a treatment of Calvin’s eucharistic theology we must explore the possibility of a sacramentality that re-prioritizes the Spirit’s operation in the sacraments from one centered on the mind to one oriented around the body.

¹⁶³ Nevin, Mystical Presence, 209.
¹⁶⁴ For an example of this idealist pneumatology see Mystical Presence, 216.
Chapter Two

Accommodations of the Spirit

“Consider his human nature, as it was rendered beautiful and lovely by the work of the Spirit of God upon it”

~ John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit

“I want to speak to the despisers of the body. I would not have them learn and teach differently, but, merely say farewell to their own bodies—and thus become silent . . . There is more reason in your body than in your best wisdom.”

~Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Revitalizing the Word-Spirit Model of Pneumatology

John Nevin discerned in the Calvinistic doctrine of the Lord’s Supper a pneumatological embrace of corporeality. For Nevin, the Spirit does not merely address the so-called “spiritual” aspects of human nature (i.e., mind and soul), but the body as well. Building on Nevin’s insight, the challenge of this chapter is to give a Reformed account of sacramentality that recovers the emphasis on corporeality. The last chapter largely assumed the importance of the body for piety, in this chapter I make a case for why the body, and a pneumatology that addresses the body, is critical for an account of Christian life and experience.

1 John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit (Works vol. 3), 187.
The lines of demarcation that Nevin identified within Protestantism nearly one hundred and fifty years ago remain largely unchanged in America today. Within some confessional Reformed circles there has been a discernable shift in Nevin’s direction, but unfortunately Joseph McLelland’s observation still remains largely true that “to the shame of the Reformed side, history seems to have proved the Lutheran caricature to be more substantial than it was originally, because it is the “Zwinglian” sort of spirituality that has become normal for much of the Reformed world.”\(^3\) Reformed piety today finds itself between two impulses within the spiritual culture of contemporary Protestantism that on the surface appears to be antithetical. The first is a desire for more embodiment in the Christian life and the second a desire for greater charismatic experience. Echoing Nevin, Philip J. Lee asserts that if the principal foe of John Calvin during the Reformation was Roman idolatry that was a “false materializing of the spiritual,” the “arch foe” of the church today is a “Protestant Gnosticism” that falsely spiritualizes the material.\(^4\) Douglas Farrow observes that in the church many people are “starved for the sheer humanity of the Son of God.”\(^5\) Indeed, there is a discernable yearning among many evangelicals for a spirituality that is embodied more fully within an ecclesial-sacramental

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\(^4\) Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 270. Writing from the perspective of a Presbyterian minister, Lee’s text is a trenchant criticism of the culture of North American Protestantism. This is an eye-opening and challenging text, however, it suffers from being overly fearful of the presence of Gnosticism within the Protestant tradition and mistakenly, in my opinion, charges even Luther and Calvin with the error.

life that corresponds to a deeper rootedness within the historic Christian tradition.\(^6\) In response to cultural experiences that are shallow, fleeting and fragmented, a cosmos that has been desacralized by scientism and instrumental reason, bodies that have been Gnosticized through a corrosive consumerism and sexual permissiveness, many Christians desire a recovery of the sacredness and transcendence of corporeality. This helps explains the growing interest in John Nevin among some American Protestants.\(^7\)

Moving seemingly in the opposite direction is the continued expansion of Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity around the world. The remarkable growth of this tradition, especially in the past quarter century, has dramatically reshaped the understanding and expectations regarding religious experience for Christians across the spectrum. People hunger for and search after concrete and transforming experiences of the Spirit.\(^8\) What distinguishes this movement from revivalism, to which it is related, is less of a concern for the dramatic conversion of sinners, as it is for having experiences of Spirit-empowerment in the Christian life. Similar to revivalism this impulse often aspires to retrieve spiritual experience from deadening, routinized and conventional forms of institutionalized religion. Where this charismatic desire finds itself in tension with the yearning for embodiment happens when Spirit-experience (best evidenced in the miraculous) is conceived as a sign of authentic spirituality that cannot be gained merely


by participation in the ordinary means of grace and the community of the visible-local church. Jürgen Moltmann has given theological credibility to this sentiment. He argues that “the continual assertion that God’s Spirit is bound to the church, its word and sacraments, its authority, its institutions and ministries, impoverishes congregations. It empties churches, while the Spirit emigrates to the spontaneous groups and personal experiences.” \(^9\) Moltmann does not dismiss the presence of the Holy Spirit within the institutional church, but he has in his sights, in particular, a criticism of the Word-Spirit model of Reformation era pneumatology. In his estimation this is a ghettoized pneumatology that subordinates the Spirit to the Word, and displaces Spirit-experiences from the center of the Christian life. \(^10\)

Addressing human experience is fundamental to the doctrine of the Spirit; to admit this is not to cede pneumatology to the subjective or an anthropocentric perspective. One recent work argues that, “approaching the topic of the Spirit and pneumatology from the perspective of experience is the only way to do justice to the “object” of our study.” \(^11\) The problem of pneumatological study is that its “object” lacks altogether in objectivity. The sheer complexity of pneumatology is in the fact that we cannot separate the reality of the Spirit as an “object” from the very processes used to comprehend and express the nature of his person and work. The more we scrutinize and search for the Spirit, the more the Spirit seems to withdraw into mystery and hide from

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plain sight. More accurately it is the Spirit who searches us, scrutinizes and judges us, even articulates the deepest desires of our own hearts back to God (1 Cor. 2:10; John 16:8; Rom. 8:26). In a manner of speaking the very personhood of the Spirit consists in pointing away from himself to the person of the Son (John 14:25). This means that reflection on Christian experience, notes Yves Congar, becomes necessary because our knowledge of the Spirit is “affected by a certain lack of conceptual mediation.”

There is no revelation of the Person of the Holy Spirit as there is of the Person of the Son, in Jesus and, through that Person, of the Person of the Father. In this context, it has been suggested that the Holy Spirit empties himself, in a kind of kenosis, of his own personality in order to be in relationship, on the one hand, with ‘God’ and Christ and, on the other, with men, who are called to realize the image of God and his Son’ . . . The Holy Spirit is revealed to us and known to us not in himself, or at least not directly in himself, but through what he brings about in us.

The importance of grappling with human experiences of the Spirit is on account of the fact that the person of the Spirit is revealed as he actualizes in us the reality of Jesus and causes us to become participants in Jesus’ Abba relationship with the Father. With these considerations in mind any theology that is to be deemed pneumatologically robust must have a space to address Spirit-experience.

The presumption of many is that a Word-Spirit pneumatology must be set aside precisely because it has little space to address the human experience of the Spirit. Gary Badcock claims that the magisterial Reformers’ struggle against the enthusiasm of Anabaptists and Spiritualists led to an exclusion of religious experience and new birth as relevant to the church. “Because of the Reformation controversies . . . all possible subjective or experiential criteria for the true presence of God and the true people of God

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seem to be deliberately excluded.\textsuperscript{14} The tests of God’s presence therefore were public and objective, which meant that the Spirit was bound to the Word, leading to an intellectualist account of the Spirit relegated primarily to a doctrine of revelation.

Moltmann proposes an alternative understanding of Word and Spirit, one of mutual relationship, wherein the Word itself is bound to the Spirit, but the Spirit is not bound to the Word.

The efficacies of the Spirit reach beyond the Word. Nor do the experiences of the Spirit find expression in words alone. They are as multifarious and protean as sensory reality itself. The Spirit has its non-verbal expressions too. The indwelling Spirit in our hearts goes deeper than the conscious level in us. It rouses all our senses, permeates the unconscious too, and quickens the body, giving it new life (I Cor 6:19). A new strange energy for living proceeds from the Spirit. To bind the experience of the Spirit solely to the Word is one-sided and represses these dimensions.\textsuperscript{15}

Is this understanding impossible within traditional Word-Spirit pneumatologies? To the contrary, this winsome description of Spirit-experience is one we have already met in Nevin, and as we will see is well attested in John Calvin.

This work is based on the assumption that pneumatology understood through the category of Word and Spirit has an ongoing currency and vitality for theology today. The actual Word-Spirit pneumatology that we meet in a figure like Calvin more nearly reflects the dynamism that Moltmann’s putative alternative suggests—of course, without the claim that the Spirit is unbound from the Word. What has gone unaccounted in criticisms of the Word and Spirit model is the multi-dimensionality of the mutual relationship between Christ and the Spirit within salvation history upon which the

\textsuperscript{14} Gary D. Badcock, \textit{The Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 95. Badcock primarily has in mind Lutheranism although he does not pursue the distinctions between Reformation traditions.

\textsuperscript{15} Moltmann, \textit{Spirit of Life}, 3.
understanding is based. Moreover, central for the Reformers was that the Word extended well beyond merely written and preached words, but also included the sacraments as “visible words.” It is precisely around these “visible words” that a register becomes available for an expanded treatment of experiencing the Spirit within the Word-Spirit model. According to Calvin the sacraments (as visible words) are an accommodation of God’s grace to the human body. The critical question of this chapter is whether a desire for embodiment can be reconciled with a desire for the charismatic. Must a thick understanding of church and sacrament quench the charismatic within a tradition? What both impulses have in common is the desire for a revitalized understanding of Christian experience in the context of a postmodern world. The promise of a pneumatically oriented sacramentality is its ability to unite these dueling impulses, which means that it is possible to give an account of Christian experience that is charismatic and embodied at the same time.

**Calvin’s Concept of Sacramentality**

Charles Hodge rightly criticized John Nevin for drawing a distinction between the grace of the word and the grace of the sacrament. “According to the Reformed church, Christ is present in the sacraments in no other sense than he is present in the word.”\(^{16}\) Calvin is clear that the sacraments have the same office as the Word of God, which is to “offer and set forth Christ to us, and in him the treasures of heavenly grace.”\(^{17}\) Word and

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\(^{17}\) John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.17; see also *A Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper* in *Treatises on the Sacraments* (*TS*), 166.
sacrament are not two distinct graces but different aspects of the single reality of our communion with Christ. David Steinmetz nicely summarizes the broadly held Reformation view of the sacraments as visible words:

The eucharist is a *verbum visibile*, a visible word of God. There is really for Protestants only one means of grace, the word. But this word takes many forms, in Scripture, in preaching, and in the eucharist. The eucharist does not offer the church something which it does not have when it trusts the word of God in Scripture and proclamation, but it offers a mode or form of participation in that word. The eucharist is another form of the personal encounters with God in his word. What is mediated to the Christian is not a substance or power, but simply Christ himself.18

It would appear that Nevin’s later eucharistic thought shows a greater sense of the Supper as a visible Word.19 Despite Hodge’s correctness on this point, B.A. Gerrish observes that Nevin’s error lay not so much in an overestimation of the value of the Supper in Calvin as much as an underestimation of the significance that he attributed to the preached Word. “It is the Word of God that is for Calvin the actual means by which Christ gives himself to his people, and there is no good reason to suppose that he intends anything less than the whole Christ.”20 Nevertheless, if there is no grace given in the eucharist that is different from that received in the preached Word does this make the sacrament something unessential or superfluous? Some have argued that the sacraments understood as a “visible Word” has led to their diminishment and neglect within Reformed worship and piety.21 Surely based upon the neglect of the sacraments in the history of the

Reformed churches there is some merit to this criticism, however, a deepened appreciation and recovery of Calvin’s concept of sacramentality can assist us in returning the sacraments to the center of Protestant spirituality.

For Calvin what is special about the Lord’s Supper in distinction from the preached Word is not the character of the grace that it offers, but the degree to which it accommodates to our human nature. Sacramentality in Calvin is not a general principal that the natural world is imbued with transcendence, or an epiphany of the sacred; sacramentality begins with the anthropological observation that being human, having a body, means that we are users of signs and need corporeal expressions to experience the full reality of spiritual truth. The sacraments present a form of the Word of God that addresses an aspect of human nature that the preached Word does not. A Reformed concept of the sacraments addresses the corporeal side of human nature, which the Catholic theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet nicely captures in a subtitle— “the Word of God at the Mercy of the Body.” According to Calvin although we are spiritual beings

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22 Here I disagree with from Dennis E. Tamburello’s attempt to identify something approximating a modern (Catholic) concept of sacramentality in Calvin’s theology (“Calvin and Sacramentality: a Catholic Perspective.” John Calvin and Roman Catholicism: Critique and Engagement, Then and Now, ed. Randall C. Zachman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008): 193-215). Certainly Calvin has a high regard for how creation bears witness to the glory of God, but he would be loath to accept a sacramentality that in any sense could be understood without explicit reference to what Jesus accomplished in his death and resurrection. The problem with many accounts of sacramentality is that they have no discernable relationship to what Christ actually did in the flesh—the fact of the incarnation itself is not enough from a Reformed perspective since that is not all that was necessary to save us. Many Evangelicals who have been influenced by Post-Vatican II discussions of sacramentality sometimes fall into similar ways of speaking and describe things like community or friends or beautiful sunsets as sacraments. Within Reformed categories sacramentality cannot be interpreted as a general principle of God’s presence within material things, since there is no clear reference to the person of Christ and his work. What distinguishes the sacraments from other presences of God in creation is how they, as dominically instituted, are generated out of the very life of Jesus himself as his own experiences and always point unservingly to the great events of his dying and rising. Sacraments are pneumatological presences of Christ in the world, which are best understood as refractions of the Spirit from the glorified body of Christ to our own bodies.

with souls we have bodies, which means that God uses visible means to impart spiritual things. Sacraments then are God’s accommodation to our corporeal nature.

But as our faith is slight and feeble unless it be propped on all sides and sustained by every means, it trembles, wavers, tooters, and at last gives way. Here our merciful Lord, according to his infinite kindness, so tempers himself to our capacity that, since we are creatures who always creep on the ground, cleave to the flesh, and, do not think about or even conceive of anything spiritual, he condescends to lead us to himself even by these earthly elements, and to set before us in the flesh a mirror of spiritual blessings.24 For Calvin the sacraments are accommodations of God to the human situation in the most concrete sense—the body. Here, however, we must note a criticism of Calvin’s tendency to sometimes speak of our theological need for the sacraments and the visible church not in terms of “the positive experience of salvation, but rather in [the language of] a soteriological deficit.”25 Indeed Calvin often highlights the weakness, frailty and incapacity of human flesh in ascending to spiritual realities; but accenting the fallen and finite character of human nature does not mean Calvin’s concept of sacramentality functions only on the basis of a “soteriological deficit.” The corporeal experience of salvation is positively grounded in the incarnation of God in human flesh, which in a certain sense is the ultimate basis of all subsequent accommodations of God’s grace to

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24 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.3. For one of the few accounts of accommodation that discusses the sacraments see Ford Lewis Battles, “God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity” Interpretation 31 (January 1977): 19-38.
25 Miroslav Volf, After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 172. Understanding the pastoral and pedagogical character of Calvin’s theological rhetoric is critical for a proper interpretation of his frequent use of language that to modern ears smacks of soteriological deficit, and even a depreciation of corporeal existence. See the important essay on accommodation in Calvin by Ford Lewis Battles, “God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity.”
us. For Calvin the whole structure of revelation has the nature of accommodation, and the sacraments are merely the most sensible and personal form of God’s gracious address to us. Accommodation is not merely a divine pedagogical device to address the mental “torpor” and “dullness” of the human, rather it is “an account of some of the conditions under which God chooses to say and must say certain things about himself in order to reach certain ends. It is an integral feature of his gracious self-revelation.” As visible words Calvin argues that in order for the sacraments to be effective in producing faith they must be accompanied with the preached Word, which itself must present to us the Word incarnate.

The sacraments are distinguished from the preached Word in how they “sign” and “seal” the promises of God in us. The preached Word addresses our ignorance and the dullness of our minds and hearts, while the sacraments authenticate the promises to our weakness and fragile flesh. The sacraments are not superfluous or dispensable because they bring the “clearest promises” of God over and above the preached Word—they “represent them for us as painted in a picture from life.” They do not offer us a grace that is not available in the Word, but they do offer us access to grace at a more intimate level. This is the sealing work of the sacrament, which works assurance in our hearts of

26 “Hence, it was necessary for the Son of God to become Immanuel, that is, God with us and in such a way that his divinity and our human nature by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would not be enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us.” (Calvin, Institutes 2.12.1). Calvin never explicitly links accommodation and his treatment of the incarnation, but many scholars have commented on the implicit connections. Paul Helm says “Accommodation is a divine activity, and since the ends that God seeks to secure by the use of language are ultimately soteric in character, we must see the idea of God’s accommodation of himself in his language about himself as integral to his grace, an accommodation that has its end-point in the accommodation of God the Son in the incarnation.” John Calvin’s Ideas (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 197.
27 Calvin shares this understanding of God’s accommodation with Martin Luther. See David C. Steinmetz, Luther in Context. (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1986), 25; Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 22; and Thomas Davis, This is My Body, 58.
28 Helm, John Calvin’s Ideas, 196.
29 Calvin, Institutes, 4. 14.5.
God’s promises. Calvin calls the sacraments “the pillars of our faith” and compares their importance to the columns that uphold a building. They are mirrors upon which to contemplate the lavish riches of God’s grace. In fact Calvin goes on to make a very surprising claim: the sacraments bear witness to God’s “good will and love towards us more expressly than by word.” If the sacraments more expressly communicate God’s grace than the preached and written Word they are far from being superfluous and secondary.

The question is in what sense are the sacraments a better expression than the preached Word? According to Calvin the sensible depiction of the Word in the sacraments penetrates human nature more deeply than the auditory or written Word alone. The preached Word approaches a person through hearing, is discursive and analytic, primarily addresses the heart through the intellect and is not capable of presenting more than one aspect of divine truth at a time. The sacrament, on the other hand, communicates by touch, taste and sight, reaches the whole person in their bodiliness and is capable of presenting in one moment the concrete whole of the person and work of Christ. Richard Paquier calls this the “synthetic” work of the sacraments

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30 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.6 [my italics].
31 This idea is not unique to Calvin. Francis Turretin says that “Although the communion we hold with Christ by the preaching of the word and by baptism is the same as to species with that which we hold with him by the Eucharist (to wit, by the Spirit and by faith), it does not cease to be more ample and more sure as to the degree in the latter. For the more the symbols by which that mystery is represented to us and the more the sense by which it is perceived, so much more strongly is it impressed upon the mind. The word proposes these benefits in general, but the Supper applies them to individuals in particular. Baptism under the idea of washing and regeneration exhibits them; but the Supper under the idea of meat and drink, which far more efficaciously seal our union with Christ.” See Institutes of Elenctic Theology vol. 3, trans. George M. Giger. ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 519 [my italics]. One finds the same idea in Theodore Beza’s Confession de la foy chrestienne (1559). See discussion and references in Christopher Elwood, The Body Broken: The Calvinists Doctrine of the Eucharist and the Symbolization of Power in Sixteenth-Century France (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 100-101.
since they unite word, vision and sign. Benjamin Milner makes an astute observation concerning the sliding scale of accommodation in Calvin.

Calvin seems to think, then, of a descending scale of accommodation—the word of God in the Scriptures, then preaching, then the symbols—with increasingly greater efficacy at each step, but with an inverse ratio of normative value. So the biblical word is decisive for doctrine, and doctrine for symbols; but owning to the degree of accommodation, the symbols penetrate more deeply than doctrine, and doctrine more deeply than the Scriptures. Strictly speaking, the sign is not so much the revelation of God as it is the confirmation, pledge, or seal of that revelation in the word. Faith accordingly depends on the word, not upon the sign, but the sign strengthens faith as nothing else can.

The sacraments for Calvin are not merely visible didactic means to teach what the more spiritual person can apprehend by the word alone. The sacraments lead us directly into Calvin’s understanding of the experience of grace through the sealing and ratifying work of the Spirit. The function of the sacraments is not primarily a teaching one, but one that sustains, confirms, nourishes and deepens our establishment and faith in the promises of God. Strictly speaking these are not cognitive or psychological activities but corporeal ones. Thomas J. Davis, notes that according to Calvin, “one most fully knows and understands the salvific event of Christ through the body and its senses rather than through the intellectual capacity of the soul alone, apart from the body.”

The sacraments then, are a making real of God’s promises to human corporeality, in the elect they effect what they represent.

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32 Richard Paquier, *Dynamics of Worship* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966) 31. In addition to synthesis, Paquier argues that the sacrament is distinct from the Word in how it mystically unites believers to Christ and creates community through incorporating (baptism) and nourishing (Supper) these believers into covenant fellowship in the body of Christ. See also his treatment in his essay in the volume *Ways of Worship*, 248.


34 Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body*, 87. On the soteriological significance of the body in Calvin’s theology see chapter 4 of this book.

The sacraments are an accommodation of Holy Spirit to the human body. They are not merely rhetoric for the sensual, but God’s divine energy, power and Spirit channeled through physical things.\textsuperscript{36} Calvin is absolutely clear that in themselves sacraments have no power except that the Spirit accompanies them. For them to be effective the Spirit must illumine the mind and open the heart, for it is the Spirit alone who can penetrate the heart and move the affections so that the truth of the sacraments can enter. “If the Spirit be lacking, the sacraments can accomplish nothing more in our minds than the splendor of the sun shining upon blind eyes, or a voice sounding in deaf ears.”\textsuperscript{37} This requirement no more denigrates the sacramental means of grace or casualizes the Spirit’s relationship to them than is the biblical understanding of creation’s utter dependence on the Creator Spirit a devaluation of creation itself (Ps 104:27-30). The church looks to the sacraments as the promised place of charismatic power and experience in the Christian life, but never in the manner of an automatic formalism. The Holy Spirit must fall upon these signs and seals in order for them to accomplish the purposes to which they were ordained by God. Even though the sacraments are not effective by their own intrinsic power, Calvin clearly affirms that “God himself is present in his institution by the very present power of his Spirit” and it is in the Spirit that God “gives a place for the sacraments among us, and makes them bear fruit.”\textsuperscript{38} God executes what he promises and makes real what is represented in the sacraments.

The ministry of the Spirit in the sacraments moves more fully in the category of religious experience than we are accustomed to think of when considering the preached

\textsuperscript{36} Ford Battles Lewis, “God was accommodating himself to human capacity,” 36.
\textsuperscript{38} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.14.17.
and written Word.\textsuperscript{39} What we receive in the Lord’s Supper is an affective knowledge of our fellowship with Christ that is accommodated to our bodies. Union with Christ is corporeal according to Calvin. “We should note that the spiritual union which we have with Christ is not a matter of the soul alone, but of the body also, so that we are flesh of his flesh etc. (Eph.5:30). The hope of resurrection would be faint, if our union with him were not complete and total like that.”\textsuperscript{40} Through the Supper the believer is body and soul united in a mystical and reciprocal bond with the person of Christ. There the mystery of our secret union is figured and shown forth with visible signs adapted to our “small capacity.” In the Supper the Spirit “confirms for us the fact that the Lord’s body was once for all sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it and by feeding \textit{feel in ourselves} the working of that unique sacrifice.”\textsuperscript{41} The \textit{feeling} of Christ’s atoning work \textit{in us} is clearly linked to a bodily experience. The Supper offers us an \textit{affective} and experiential knowledge of all that Christ did for us. In Calvin’s eucharistic theology the language of experience is prominent. The mystical presence of Christ must be in the Supper otherwise it would be impossible for us to believe that in “this sacrament we have such full witness of all these things that we must certainly consider them as if Christ were here present himself set before our eyes and touched by our hands.”\textsuperscript{42} The Supper causes us to “feel the power of that bread” and “in living experience we grasp the efficacy of his death.”\textsuperscript{43} The Supper bears witness to a reality so mysterious and great that it is beyond the mind to grasp or the tongue to articulate. The human thought is overwhelmed and conquered by

\textsuperscript{39} However, the preached Word rightly understood has a sacramental character that means it holds Christ out to us in such a fashion that bridges and binds in us the intellectual and the affective.

\textsuperscript{40} John Calvin, \textit{Comm. I Cor. 6:15} (CNTC).

\textsuperscript{41} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.17.1 [my italics].

\textsuperscript{42} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.17.1.

\textsuperscript{43} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.17.4.
its greatness such that nothing remains than to break forth in wonder at the mystery.

Pressed to explain how this mystical union takes place in the sacramental act Calvin claims “I rather experience than understand it.”

Encountering the presence of Christ through the Spirit in the Supper is not reducible to a specific anthropological operation, whether that is a knowing or a feeling. To say that it is a great mystery that transcends our comprehension means that experiencing it does not always translate into our consciousness in the form of thought or affection. The Supper offers us a transcendent and wholistic experience of Christ that for Calvin is best grasped through our bodies.

Such is the presence of the body that the nature of the sacrament requires a presence which we say manifests itself here with a power and effectiveness so great that it not only brings an undoubted assurance of eternal life to our minds, but also assures us of the immortality of our flesh. Indeed, it is now quickened by his immortal flesh, and in a sense partakes of his immortality.

It is not enough to be assured in our minds of the promises of God we must experience it in our flesh—for in the flesh the whole person is comprehended by God’s salvation. For Calvin what we receive of Christ through the Spirit is not something that is something that embraces the whole human body—the site of all experience. And he is clear that in the Supper there is a real communication of Christ and the Spirit. “Christ is the matter or (if you prefer) the substance of all the sacraments; for in him they all have their firmness . . . [they] have effectiveness among us in proportion as we are helped by their ministry sometimes to foster, confirm, and increase the true knowledge of Christ in ourselves; at other times to possess him more fully and enjoy his riches.”

Both sacraments address uniquely the Christian experience of salvation, which is to be made participants in the

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44 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.32.
45 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.32.
46 Calvin, Institutes, 4.16.16.
dying and rising of Jesus Christ. In addition God’s accommodation to us in the Supper recognizes that we can only experience Christ in the Spirit. The sacramental presence of Christ in the Supper presumes that “until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed because we view him coldly without ourselves and so at a distance from us.”\textsuperscript{47} The accommodation of the Spirit to our corporeal humanity in the Supper is a unique ministry of the Spirit.

**Habits of the Spirit**

Any theory of change, especially spiritual change, requires a concept of mediation. Divine presence embraces human beings immediately (Acts 17:25), but the human knowledge and experience of divine presence is always mediated on account of having a body. To have a body is to participate in history, to speak a language, to possess an ethnicity, a gender, to be located geographically and formed by distinct social-political realities. Ernst Käsemann argues that the Pauline understanding of the body (soma) is a relational concept. For the apostle “corporeality is the nature of man in his need to participate in creatureliness and in his capacity for communication in the widest sense, that is to say, in his relationship to a world with which he is confronted.”\textsuperscript{48} The body is the means by which we relate to the environment and the environment relates to us; and the body is the medium of interaction and cooperation with other humans, which is why Paul frames the corporate nature of the church in terms of the body of Christ. This is

\textsuperscript{47} Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.3.
especially evident when we consider that eucharistic participation is communication not only between ourselves and the body of Christ, but ourselves and the whole body of believers. (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Mediation is the condition of corporeality. As mediating instruments, sacraments bind the church together around a set of common practices that serve as a link between theology and culture. This has been a broadly held assumption within the Christian tradition throughout history. Reminiscent of Nevin’s thought, Chauvet captures how the sacraments link our experience of the spiritual and the corporeal.

[That] Christian identity cannot be separated from the sacraments means that faith cannot be lived in any other way, including what is most spiritual in it, than in the mediation of the body, the body of a society, or a desire, of a tradition, of a history, of an institution, and so on. What is most spiritual always takes place in the most corporeal.49

Calvin starts his treatment of the sacraments with the Augustinian definition of a sacrament as the “visible form of an invisible grace.”50 In another place he insists “on the intervention of a symbol which may enable us to make a transition to the spiritual reality.”51 Bodily creatures require bodily means for the experience of grace—“because we are flesh, they are shown us under things of flesh.”52 Rowan Williams reflects on a similar point made by Thomas Aquinas. According to Thomas, claims Williams, a “sign is a means of coming to the knowledge of someone or something other than ourselves; the work of God for our salvation is ‘spiritual’—i.e. it is not itself an item, an object that can be isolated in our world, it is supremely alien to the everyday world, yet not in any way an identifiable reality in competition with it; so it can only be shown or signified

49 Chauvet, The Sacraments, xii.
50 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.1.
51 Calvin, Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal (TS), 428.
52 Calvin, Institutes, 4.14.6.
materially.” Calvin understood that the material cultus of the visible church—its worship, preaching, sacramental practice, discipline, fellowship and prayer life—is the mother that conceives us in her womb, gives birth and nourishes us at her breast until the end of life. This is why it is spiritually “disastrous” to leave the visible church. Arnold van Ruler observes that the “church, the corpus Christi and the Christianized culture, the corpus Christianum, are forms of the Holy Spirit and mediate the eternal salvation in Jesus Christ.” Without our participation in the distinct culture of the church, grace is nominal and without effect. To use a favorite Calvinian phrase this kind of grace is something that merely “flits about in the top of the brain.” With a lovely turn of phrase the Puritan Richard Sibbes describes the sacraments as the means by which the Holy Spirit “will slide into our souls.” Sibbes insists that the fullness of the Spirit depends on our diligent attendance to the practices surrounding the church’s means of grace, “reading, and hearing, and holy communion of saints” he says, “are the golden conduits of the Spirit of Christ. No man is ever spiritual but they are readers, and hearers, and conferrers of good things, and attenders upon the means of salvation, because God will work by his own tools and instruments.”

Grace penetrates the heart through the body. For everyone “the body is the place where the most internal and external meet or the external place in which the internal

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54 Calvin, Institutes, 4.1.4.
56 Calvin, Institutes, 3.2.36. See also Institutes, 1.13.2; 1.5.9.
place finds its structure.” Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said that the “human body is the best picture of the human soul.” The body is the intelligible space by which we occupy the world, it structures our perceptions and is the place where desire is formed. To speak of “body-image” is less about self-esteem, as it is about the body as a map that charts our paths through the world that bodily experience has inscribed. To have a body is to be a user of signs—habits of speech, tattoos, hair-styles, clothing, jewelry, where we live, what we drive—all of these are forms that we live through, ways that we imagine the world, give expression to ourselves, and the things we attach ourselves to. As embodied actors in history and culture we navigate meaning in the world through signs. To suppose that we can live without signs or beyond them is to suppose that language is merely a tool used to designate things in the world, rather than that by which we are constituted and express ourselves. Language is the womb of human subjectivity, it is the cultural air that fills our lungs and penetrates us even through the pores of our skin. To think that we stand outside it is to suppose that we can live without oxygen; it is to suppose human nature stands outside mediation, outside the body and outside of history. This is a picture of the human being as “some kind of lame angel.”

As an embodied historical actor Jesus was a revolutionary sign maker. This is the sense in which we ought to interpret Jesus as the fundamental sacrament of God in the world. Williams has argued that what makes “sacraments unique is not something inherent in doing them or some specialness in the action of them, but in the uniqueness of

60 On a history of the understanding of language that as “designative and “expressivist” see Charles Taylor, “Language and Human Nature” in Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). In this work and other Taylor argues for the expressivist view of language.
61 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 4.
Jesus’ dying and rising.”\(^{62}\) The acts of Jesus in death and resurrection become signs of “a form of human life yet to be realized and standing at odds with the political and cultic status quo.”\(^{63}\) Jesus in his flesh is a sign of human existence utterly formed by God, but as a sign it points beyond the fallen world materially, beyond human imitation soteriologically, and beyond the present age eschatologically. “Signs are signs of what they are not; they are transformations of the world by re-ordering it, not destroying it, so that the tension of otherness remains itself part of the fluid and dynamic nature of sign-making.”\(^{64}\) To highlight Jesus’ peculiar sign-making is not to gainsay his true sacramental presence; it is to understand the nature of that presence in terms of his historical actions of dying and rising rather than a metaphysically abstracted concept of sacramentality. Surely God has promised a special communion with his presence in the celebration of the sacraments, but it is the presence of a Paschal mystery that still awaits consummation in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:10).

This anthropological orientation towards sacramentality has the advantage of highlighting how the Holy Spirit redemptively engages people as embodied agents within the world rather than as rarified minds that transcend it, or etherealized souls that escape it. Under this understanding the meaning of the Spirit’s intimacy to human beings shifts from a sense of psychological interiority to the specification of God’s presence to a person’s own context and historically conditioned nature. Chauvet claims that the “Spirit appears as the agent of God’s embodiment: it gives body to the word.”\(^{65}\) With respect to the body of Jesus this is certainly true since he was conceived by the Holy Spirit at birth

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\(^{62}\) Williams, *On Christian Theology* 197.  
\(^{63}\) Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 203.  
\(^{64}\) Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 207.  
\(^{65}\) Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 166.
and raised from the dead through that same Spirit. Eugene Rogers makes a similar observation: “To think about the Spirit, you have to think materially, because, in Christian terms, the Spirit has befriended matter . . . for Christ’s sake on account of the incarnation.”66 This is also the reasoning behind Nevin’s argument that the incarnation changed the sense in which the Spirit was indwelling humanity. The Scriptures throughout bear witness to the diversity of the Spirit’s work and its special relationship to materiality: the Spirit hovered over the surface of the deep at the beginning of creation (Genesis 1:2), was the animating breath that brought Adam forth from the dust (Gen. 2:7), sustains moment by moment all animal life (Ps. 104:29-30), put flesh on a valley of dry bones (Ez. 37), overshadowed the womb of Mary in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35), was present in power at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Rom. 1:4, 8:10), is poured out on all flesh at Pentecost (Acts 2), and now indwells the body of believers as a temple (I Cor. 6:19). Rogers does not exaggerate when he says that Scripture “would rather have an advocate in the womb or the grave than in the mind and heart.”67 The biblical witness speaks more of the Spirit relating to humans physically than psychologically; not operating according to a modern theory of interiority, but leading and following Jesus into womb, the wilderness, the garden, the grave, and heaven.

“Such therefore is the Spirit’s function: to write the very difference of God in the body of humanity.”68 This was precisely the work of the Spirit on the body of Christ. John Owen observes that at Jesus’ miraculous conception the Holy Spirit made his body a “meet habitation for his holy soul, every way ready and complying with all actings of

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66 Eugene Rogers Jr., After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 58.
67 Rogers, After the Spirit, 8.
68 Chauvet, The Sacraments, 166.
The Spirit preserved the human nature of Jesus as pure from all defilement of sin from the stock of common humanity. “The exquisite harmony of his natural temperature made love, meekness, gentleness, patience, benignity, and goodness, natural and cognate unto him.” In the womb of Mary the Holy Spirit formed for Jesus a sanctified body. The regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit in our bodies is grounded in the body of Christ. The sacraments represent a kind of refraction of the Spirit’s power and work from its primordial presence from the body of Christ. As instruments of the Spirit the sacraments reconfigure the symbolic order of the universe around the reality of Jesus’ dying and rising and liturgically construct the human body in worship. This all presumes a shift in categories for talking about the Spirit’s bodily indwelling and manner of transformation. The Spirit indwells us and changes us not only through illumination of the mind and the elevating of affections, but also through a re-habituation of the body into the order of new creation, and the sacraments are precisely those actions that sign and seal this eschatological new life within us (Rom. 6). For the Spirit to inhabit is “to habituate, to dwell dispositionally or by training in limbs and muscles physically readied, for love’s sake, to act . . . to render love bodily.” This liturgical understanding of the Spirit’s transforming work is one that leads us and changes us through being interwoven into the practices of the church that the Spirit has uniquely anointed with the promised presence of Christ.

70 John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, 167. In his reflection on the Lord’s Supper Owen calls attention to the human nature of Christ as an immediate object of attention in the sacrament. “Faith, when it would lead itself unto the sacrifice of Christ, which is here represented, doth in an especial manner consider the human nature of Christ; that God prepared him a body for that end [Heb.10:5] This we are to have peculiar regard unto when we come to the administration or participation of this ordinance.” Sacramental Discourses (Works vol. 9), 524.
71 Rogers, After the Spirit, 54.
James K. Smith has recently brought attention to the pedagogical importance of liturgy, both sacred and secular, for an understanding of Christian formation. Smith argues that Christian education is more about the formation of desire than information of the mind. He argues for an understanding of education based upon an Augustinian anthropology he calls *homo liturgicus*. Humans are embodied actors not merely thinking beings; they are liturgical animals because they are desiring-creatures. Liturgy shapes human desire precisely by training the heart through the body. Through regular concrete practices liturgy teaches us and shapes our identity in all sorts of precognitive ways. This non-cognitive way of learning has a way of becoming conscious awareness at unexpected times of great spiritual and moral need. Habits or rituals are like a second nature, as if it were biological, that can become intimately interwoven into the fabric of our natures.

“Our habits thus constitute the *fulcrum* of our desire: they are the hinge that “turns” our heart, our love, such that it is predisposed to be aimed in certain directions.” Through the material practices of the sacraments the Spirit of God instills in our hearts non-cognitive desires, dispositions and skills precisely because our hearts are so closely tethered to our bodies. “The senses are the portals to the heart, and thus the body is a channel to our core dispositions.” In this sense we can speak of the Spirit (re)forming human desire through the Supper.

Recognizing that embodied agency is formed in mostly unconscious ways by the multiple mediations of language, culture and history helps us understand how the Spirit of God through the culture of the visible church acts upon us beyond everyday

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72 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 56.
73 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 59.
consciousness. The work of the Spirit in our lives does not always correspond to conscious thoughts or feeling, and perhaps most often, the agency of the Spirit shapes us when we are not aware. Calvin understood this to be true of baptized children. “Infants are baptized into a future repentance and faith, and even though these have not been formed in them, the seed of both lies hidden within them by the secrete working of the Holy Spirit.” By being children of the covenant and surrounded by the faith of their parents and the church, the Spirit waters the seed of faith and repentance that was implanted at baptism. Thomas Apple, who culled insights from Nevin’s sacramental theology, wrote about how the “Christian life is deeper than conscious experience.” Apple argues that in the Christian life “there are springs of life that are nourished down in the inner depths of the spirit, of which we have no conscious knowledge except in the effect or results of experience.” Apple appeals to the mystical presence of the Lord’s Supper as an example of this deeper life of the Christian. We believe that through bread and wine that the Lord nourishes his people spiritually with his own flesh and blood. How this nourishment occurs is a mystery.

We know the fact, but not the manner of the Spirit’s working in the sacrament this is concealed from our knowledge. The believer does not have a conscious experience of the nourishment conveyed to his spirit, that is, at the moment of receiving the bread and wine he does not have a sense of feeling of the grace conferred upon him. We should not expect a religious excitement, but we should also not doubt that if we have partaken with faith that we have truly encountered the Spirit.

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74 Calvin *Institutes*, 4.16.20.
76 Apple, “Christian Life is Deeper that Conscious Experience,” 48.
The Holy Spirit and Sacramental Experience

The most pressing need for Protestant spirituality today is to recover the theological link between form and content, theology and practice, head and heart, the embodied and the charismatic. Such a recovery lay in a renewed sense of the sacramental life and a participation in the spiritual culture of the visible church. Building on the work of John Nevin this chapter has sought to articulate a conception of Spirit-experience that embraces the fact of corporeality as essential to an account of human nature. As the next two chapters will demonstrate recovering this link requires much more than a wholistic anthropology and expanded sense of sacramentality, it requires a clearer theological sense of where these are ultimately rooted: the dynamic interrelationship of Christ and the Spirit within the economy of redemption. However, it remains for us in this chapter to consider more carefully the concept of experience as it relates to the Holy Spirit and the sacraments.

The philosopher Michael Oakeshott cautions that experience, “of all the words in the philosophical vocabulary is the most difficult to manage; and it must be the ambition of every writer reckless enough to use the word to escape the ambiguities it contains.”77 Indeed no word in contemporary life is thrown around so much and understood so little as that of experience, and this is to say nothing of its increased complexity when it enters the religious context. Jean Mouroux observes that there “are few more deeply human problems than the problem of religious experience.”78 This chapter has sought to specify Christian experience in particular as embodied and charismatic. This has drawn us into a

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reflection on how the Holy Spirit relates redemptively to humans as corporeal beings. Up to this point my reflection on the nature of experience has been largely indirect, but in an effort to “escape the ambiguities” of the concept it is important to set the claims of this chapter within the context of modern discussions of experience, especially those that relate to the problem of mediation.

Before going there we ought to recall the theological purpose for reflecting on experience in the first place, namely, to grasp something of the nature of the Holy Spirit’s person and work in relation to human nature. Pneumatology draws us ineluctably into the field of human experience, not as a coterminous realm, but with the understanding that the person of the Spirit is the field in which human experience occurs (Acts 17:25), the reality constituting agency of God within creation, our entry point into an actual fellowship with the triune God; or as Calvin describes the Spirit’s appropriated work, “assigned the power and efficacy of action.” While it is necessary to speak “objectively” of the Holy Spirit so as to distinguish his agency from that of human experience, at the same time we recognize that the Spirit is inseparable from the very processes necessary to discern and define him, for we must be “in” and “using” the Spirit in order to understand the Spirit. The doctrine of the Spirit is so difficult and elusive because as a doctrine it is one we are more intimately involved with than any other. “The Holy Spirit is God returning in love to his own outgoing in love manifested in Christ, and therefore it is a doctrine of God in ourselves, God in human experience; not God as

79 Calvin, Institutes, 1.13.18.
human experience, but God in human experience, in the experience of the church.” In the following I outline a constructive account of Spirit-experience along three trajectories: 1) experience as a mode of perceiving divine reality; 2) experience as an integration of the whole human person; 3) and experience as structured according to a network of complex spiritual relationships.

Perhaps no writer has shaped American thinking on the nature of religious experience as much as William James. In fact it is impossible to gauge interpretations of religious experience in the American context, especially as they relate to the reception of the forms of institutional religion, without an appreciation of James’ shaping influence. After more than a hundred years William James’ Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) continues to be a cultural bellwether on the topic of religion in the modern world. His positive view of religion draws inspiration from the tradition of American transcendentalism and the person Ralph Waldo Emerson. In a centenary address on the thought of Emerson, James notes that what is most characteristic of the Emersonian project is the sacredness of living “first hand.” This has clear implications for understanding how the individual is related to religious traditions. “It follows that there is something in each and all of us, even the lowliest, that ought not to consent to borrowing traditions and living second hand . . . The present man is aboriginal reality, the Institution

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is derivative, and the past man is irrelevant and obliterate for present issues.”

James’ own theory of religion develops these Emersonian themes further.

At the beginning of *Varieties* James identifies a “great partition” in the study of religion between the “personal” and the “institutional.” As a “Study in Human Nature,” which the subtitle of the text bills itself, James is concerned with that side of religion which deals with “the inner dispositions of man himself.” An unquestioned assumption of James is that sociality, ritual and institution are extraneous to what is essentially religious in human nature. In Emersonian fashion James marks the difference between personal and institutional religion as the difference between living “first-hand” and living “second-hand.” His interest is in the kind of religion that prompts personal acts not ritual ones, the kind where “the individual transacts the business by himself alone, and the ecclesiastical organization, with its priests and sacraments and other go-betweens, sinks to an altogether secondary place. The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between man and his maker.” For James religion is an experience of immediacy that permits no intermediaries. Religion, he says is the “feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine.” James’ pronounced religious individualism has

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85 James, *Varieties*, 8-9.
86 James, *Varieties*, 34.
87 James, *Varieties*, 36.
been roundly criticized by friends and foes alike, but it represents a powerful cultural logic in popular expressions of religion today.\textsuperscript{88}

The antipathy towards institutional religion stems in part from James’ belief that religious traditions are derivative, based upon the first-hand experiences of “religious geniuses” by their sympathizers and disciples. When “a religion has become orthodoxy, its days of inwardness is over: the spring is dry; the faithful live at second hand exclusively and stone the prophets in turn.” Not only is religious tradition once and twice removed from primary experience, but when religion becomes an institutional reality it begins to stifle “the spontaneous religious spirit, and to stop all later bubbling of the fountain from which in purer days it drew its own supply of inspiration.”\textsuperscript{89} This is why James is only interested in “original experiences which were the pattern setters to all this mass of suggested feeling and imitated conduct.”\textsuperscript{90} First-hand religious experience is the primary text for the study of religion and organized religion with its theological formulas are “secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue.”\textsuperscript{91}

Crucial to James’ account is how he locates religious experience in human feeling and sensation, which accounts for his embrace of mysticism. Religious people profess to know truth in a special manner that is most appropriately identified as mystical. Personal religious experiences are rooted in mystical states of consciousness which are ultimately ineffable. These religious experiences defy expression such that no adequate report or

\textsuperscript{88} See Charles Taylor’s commentary that situates James’s religious individualism within the sweep of Latin Christendom as well as his reasons for why it is such a powerful framework for modern perspectives on religion. \textit{Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited} 9-16. See also his comments on the “new individualism” of our age (79-107).

\textsuperscript{89} James, \textit{Varieties}, 369.

\textsuperscript{90} James, \textit{Varieties}, 8.

\textsuperscript{91} James, \textit{Varieties}, 470.
description of it can be given in words, or symbolic depiction. “It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others. In this peculiarity mystical states are more like states of feeling than states of intellect. No one can make clear to another who has never had a certain feeling, in what the quality or worth of it consists.”92 James admits that those who experience mystical states characterize them as states of knowledge, nevertheless “incommunicableness of the transport is the keynote.”93 Given this reality it explains why James has such a low view of religious tradition and institution; they depend upon the communicable, what is public and repeatable in multiple contexts. Mystical truth on the other hand “exists for the individual who has the transport, but for no one else . . . it resembles the knowledge given to us in sensation more than that given by conceptual thought.”94 Religious experience is not irrational but “thought” according to James, as opposed to feeling and sensation, tends towards remoteness and abstractness.

Given our interest in identifying a Protestant sacramental conception of experience this presentation has focused on how James conceives of religious experience as something opposed to ecclesiastical religion. There is a great deal more to his treatment of religious experience. Although James made no claims to theorize as a Christian his legacy has profoundly shaped the contemporary horizon within which Christian and non-Christian alike reflect on the meaning of religious experience. The brilliance of the Varieties is due in part to how it synthesized and gave expression to a distinctively American tradition of religious reflection for non-religious people. Standing

92 James, Varieties, 414 [my italics].
93 James, Varieties, 442.
94 James, Varieties, 442.
in the tradition of Emerson, the Jamesian project is a secular articulation of American religion. This religious sensibility, which is now shared widely within the modern West, is marked by suspicion towards institutional religion, a pronounced individualism and a tendency to locate experience beyond the cognitive dimensions of human nature.

Deeply problematic in James’ account is how he relegates religious experience within a conception of human interiority that is largely cut off from outward experiences of sociality and culture. According to James when religion becomes externalized through ritual or concept it ceases to be inward and interior to a person (i.e. a first-hand). However, this way of conceptualizing the relationship of subjectivity and the world has been thoroughly challenged by recent philosophy. George Schner observes that recent philosophers have dismantled “the metaphor of the subject as “inside” and the world as “outside,” leave the modern preoccupation with the subject, and rejoin the premodern philosophical study of the forms of mediation, of language, symbols, and culture in general, as the proper topic for the investigation of just what experience is and is not.”

Recognizing this critique is important for overcoming the spiritual cultures that have dichotomized the charismatic and the embodied, the experiential and the institutional. The claim that I have been arguing from the beginning of this chapter is that it is precisely in the sacraments that we have mediated to us an experience of Christ that is charismatic and embodied. Sacramentality is an accommodation of the Holy Spirit to the corporeality of human nature. Recapturing such an understanding of experience requires us to move beyond modern readings that render experience, observes Philip Rossi, “as a

95 George Schner S.J., “The Appeal to Experience” Theological Studies 53 (1992), 42-43. For a thorough critique of James’ account of religious experience, especially as it relates to his concept of institutions and theological conceptualization see Nicholas Lash, Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 51-64.
function of self-enclosing human subjectivity of consciousness. Such taking of experience “as” subjectivity, constricting it to self-conscious dimensions of human reality, marks it off as distinct from the full reality of human interiority.”96 The popular talk that sees “having an experience” of the Spirit as threatened by the institutional presence of the church depends upon a modern notion of subjectivity that fails to do “justice to the inner intelligibility of human interiority as it is constituted in relation to all that is.”97 By speaking of Spirit-experience in terms of the sacraments we seek to recover an expanded conception of human interiority; one that relocates subjectivity from the tiny and lonely islands of self-consciousness to a social and ritual space of the ecclesia where the person encounters the Spirit in all his mediated immediacy and transcendent mystery. Recalling our discussion of the Spirit’s circumambience from the last chapter, the Spirit is intimately interior to us because he is our environing context, the always already there reality that sustains and supports us. Again this is not to deny the traditional understanding of the Spirit’s personal indwelling within the believer, it is a challenge to a restricted understanding of subjectivity and interiority that tends to frame personal indwelling over-against the way the Spirit ministers to us through the spaces of the ecclesia. The important point here is that the movement of the Spirit’s work proceeds to us from outside to inside.

Jean Mouroux helpfully distinguishes two senses in which the concept of experience has been used in theology.98 The first sense deals with experience as the search for truth and the second with experience as a grasp of reality. In the light of broad

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97 Philip Rossi, “The Authority of Experience,” 270.
98 See George Schner, “The Appeal to Experience” for very helpful taxonomy for the use of experience in recent theology.
intellectual challenges to a natural theology which once sought to demonstrate God’s existence through nature and a concept of supernatural revelation through Holy Scripture and tradition, in the modern era the category of experience came to play an essential role for the proof and verification of God’s existence. Rather than an objective revelation through the Bible or the natural order, human experience itself has become the basis upon which a person can be moved from unbelief to a faith in divine reality. This is precisely the kind of argument that James makes in the *Varieties*. The classical theological tradition never denied that God was revealed in human experience, but unlike a great deal of modern theology the tradition never made an appeal to human experience the primary basis for justified belief in God. Within modernity the category of experience is drawn into the realm of epistemology and interpretation in a manner that was not the case for earlier theology.

The second sense of experience deals not with the search for truth but denotes a grasp of spiritual reality. This has been the primary sense in which the theological tradition has deployed the language of experience within the context of the theology. An experience of the Spirit is a consciousness in us of the effects of our union with Christ, effects which cannot but make themselves known to those who are truly under the process of his cure and healing. John Owen gives a classic Puritan expression to this:

> Experience is the food of all grace which it grows and thrives upon . . .
> Every taste that faith obtains of divine love and grace adds to its measure and stature . . . he who knoweth not how faith is encouraged and strengthened by especial experiences of the reality and power and spiritual efficacy on the soul of the things believed, never partook them . . . That it is the Holy Ghost who giveth us all our spiritual experiences needs no other consideration to evince but only this, that in them consists all our consolation. His work and office it is to administer consolation, as the only Comforter of the church. Now he administereth comfort in no other way
but by giving unto the minds and souls of believers a spiritual, sensible experience of the reality and power of the things we do believe.\(^9\)

Owen’s description of experience is a development of the distinction within the theological tradition between theoretical and experimental knowledge of God. Thomas Aquinas calls this experimental knowledge a “sweet knowledge” which calls to mind Jonathan Edwards’ well-known discussion of saving faith as a “new sense” of divine things.\(^1\) There is a difference, Edwards tells us, “between having an opinion, that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness.”\(^2\) Such a conception of experience is not unique to Puritan or Roman Catholic theologians. Calvin affirmed the distinction between theoretical and experimental knowledge and spoke often of the necessity of the Christian experience of grace. According to Calvin knowledge of God’s existence “consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation.”\(^3\) He even appeals to experience in the context of his argument for the divinity of the Holy Spirit:

For what Scripture attributes to him and we ourselves learn by the sure experience of godliness is far removed from the creatures. For it is the Spirit who, everywhere diffused, sustains all things, causes them to grow, and quickens them in heaven and in earth. Because he is circumscribed by no limits, he is excepted from the category of creatures; but transfusing

\(^1\) Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae, 1, 48, 5 ad. 2; II-II, 97, ad.2
\(^2\) Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light” in *Selected Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Harold P. Simonson, 2nd ed. (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 2004), 55. The possibility of this “new sense” is pneumatological. “There is a difference, that the Spirit of God, in acting in the soul of a godly man, exerts and communicates himself there in his own proper nature. Holiness is the proper nature of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit operates in the mind of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties,” 52.
into all things his energy, and breathing into them essence, life, and movement, he is indeed plainly divine.\textsuperscript{103}

For Calvin experience of the Spirit is grasping oneself in relation to a God who is absolutely other from us, yet still enters into the most intimate fellowship conceivable with humans. For it is through the Spirit that “we come into communion with God, so that we in a way feel his life-giving power toward us.”\textsuperscript{104} Along the same lines Yves Congar in his work \textit{I Believe in the Holy Spirit} summarizes experience as “the perception of the reality of God as he comes to us is active in us and operates through us, drawing into communion and friendship, as one being exists for the other.”\textsuperscript{105} When we speak of an experience of the Spirit this is the primary sense in which it is intended. Christian experience is something \textit{received} from God the Holy Spirit and it involves a consciousness and deepening perception of a spiritual reality that is given and structured.

As a perception of divine reality Spirit-experience is \textit{integrative} of the whole person. We have observed in modern treatments a tendency to locate religious experience within the domain of feeling and affection in a way that dissociates the corporeal, intellectual and social aspects of human nature. Christian experience rightly conceived is the most unifying and integrative activity in which a person can partake. Mouroux observes that when these dissociations take place it results in mutilation. “The “religion of heart” is separated from the social aspect of religion, or because this inner religion is given an intellectualist, or voluntarist, or sentimental or aesthetic form. But this mutilation of religion leads to a corresponding mutilation of experience, which in its turn

\textsuperscript{103} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 1.13.14.
\textsuperscript{104} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 1.13.14 [my italics].
\textsuperscript{105} Yves Congar, \textit{I Believe in the Holy Spirit}, xvii.
becomes a matter of mere intellect, or will, or sentiment.”¹⁰⁶ I have been arguing for a recovery of corporeality as critical to Christian spirituality. The corporeal is here proposed not as alternative to a spirituality which engages the mind and the heart, but represents the integration of the all aspects of human nature as one. Surely the Holy Spirit consoles our spirit, quickens the heart, illumines the mind, and nourishes the soul, but never by circumventing the body. We only have access to the Spirit—the Spirit only has access to us—through the body. In fact, Paul identifies the final redemption and glorification of human nature with an event most corporeal and pneumatological—the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23). The integrative nature of Christian experience follows from the nature of its object, God himself. “Hear O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:4). God is one, and he desires a unified love from his creatures that involves every aspect of their creaturehood. While it is the experience of sin to dissociate, it is the experience of grace to unify. Mouroux offers a wonderful reflection on what this integration looks like:

Consequently, experience in faith means that the human person is involved in his most hidden inwardness, his profoundest aspiration, his ontological and spiritual totality. The experience therefore brings all his powers into action—his intellect, because experience is founded upon faith; his affectivity and freedom, because it rises entirely from love; his will and action, because it has to be built up, beginning with inward acts and proceeding to visible actions in which the whole person is involved; his body, because it purifies and takes up into itself the reactions of the sense, and the body too has to expend itself and offer itself in homage as a pleasing sacrifice to God; and his communion with others, because it springs from a being who is part of a community, made to love others and to build up the whole body.¹⁰⁷

Insofar as we are speaking of a sacramental experience of the Spirit we are describing how the whole body grasps the reality of God. A Lord’s Supper experience is the body’s perception of God. By reframing Spirit-experience in terms of an embodied practice we open up a register for thinking about the topic of experience that transcends the dualisms of spirit and flesh, inward and outward, subjectivity and objectivity.

Finally, we must discuss how Spirit-experience is structured. This brings us back to the fundamental claim of this dissertation: in the Lord’s Supper we have an experience of the Holy Spirit that reflects our insertion and participation within the humanity of Christ. Spirit-experience develops out of a network of extremely complex spiritual relationships. As a grasp of spiritual reality given by God, experience is structured and therefore reflects something extrinsic to the experiencing subject even though it is intensely interior and personal to the person. This is a very different way of talking about experience from the American pragmatist tradition of Emerson and James. Richard Rorty has approvingly observed that this pragmatist tradition embraces a “de-divinization” of the world by which he means an absence of any transcendent ideals, values or forms to guide and ground human action. According to Jonathan Levin, this de-divinizing of the world follows the Emersonian pattern by which habitual and therefore degraded forms of spiritual and imaginative experience are rejected in order to open the space for more authentic experience of spiritual and imaginative ideals. In a sense the pragmatist is never more "spirited" than when insisting on the wholly secular dimension of the pragmatist project.108

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This conception of experience is unwilling to embrace conceptualizations or forms that transcend and thus that might guide, limit or ground experience. The sources and norms of religious experience are wholly immanent within human nature, not extracted from without; even though James conceives of religious experience as pointing beyond human agency his mysticism forbids naming it. This is quite distinct from our sense of structured experience. Mouroux observes that the “Christian experience is not its own norm. It is a structured experience, and the essential lines of its structure are its permanent norms. It is an experience in Christ, and it is from this that it derives its value and fruitfulness.”

Nevertheless despite the specific structure and normative pattern of Christian experience it “is infinitely diverse in its personal realizations.”

Asserting the structured nature of spiritual experience is not to impose upon it procrustean restrictions, but merely to recognize that there are no experiences, religious or otherwise, that are able to be constituted from within the purely interior space of human subjectivity. “Human experience is woven from and into structures which are deeply social and cultural, so that genuine reflection is not analysis of the mental process but of cultural meaning and content,” or, in our case, theological meaning and content. James’ embrace of religious experience as something ineffable and as largely incommunicable reflects a widely held romantic sensibility that language and verbal expression are largely incapable of comprehending lived experience. Here the later work of Wilhelm Dilthey and his concept of expression (Ausdruck) is a helpful alternative.

According to Dilthey expression is capable of disclosing more about the hidden depths

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110 Mouroux, Christian Experience, 365.
and meaning of “lived experience” (*Lebenserfahrung*) than conscious introspection. Expressions are direct manifestations of a person’s inner mental life, but they penetrate more deeply than a person is consciously aware. In the “most important and deepest experiences of life” says Dilthey, “we constitute in ourselves but always with this reference to without.” To be aware that we are even “experiencing” something entails its own interpretive moment that is not secondary or derivative to some more original moment; experience is “already a kind of proto-interpretation, for we do not exist de novo of our own immediate subjectivity, but rather “live through” life in a vast network of accumulated meanings.” The very possibility of having an experience as something that a person is conscious of and can reflect upon depends upon that experience taking the form of an objectification through expression. Here the influence of G.W. F. Hegel on Dilthey is clear.

Human beings understand themselves not through introspection but through history. “Whatever, characteristics of its own the mind puts into expressions today, are, tomorrow, if they persist, history.” All experiences are constituted within the atmosphere Dilthey calls the objective mind. Objective mind is just another way to talk about the cumulative content and effects of history and culture as they always surround, confront and shape us.

Every single expression represents a common feature in the realm of this objective mind. Every word, every sentence, every gesture or polite formula, every work of art and every political deed is intelligible because the people who expressed themselves through them and those who understood them have something in common; the individual experiences,

thinks, and acts in a common sphere and only there does he understand. Everything that is understood carries, as it were, the hallmark of familiarity derived from such common features. We live in this atmosphere, it surrounds us constantly. We are immersed in it. We are at home everywhere in this historical and understood world; we understand the sense and meaning of it all; we ourselves are woven into this common sphere.\textsuperscript{115}

As something external to us expression discloses what is not directly available through direct immediate consciousness. James’ analysis of experience moves from the inner recesses of subjectivity to the (invariably denigrated) outward expression of it; for Dilthey the movement is in the opposite direction: from the outer expression to inner recesses of experience. In no sense is experience understood through expression a loss of interiority, or mean that life must be lived “second hand.”

In lived experience alone our own self is not graspable, neither in the form of its development, nor in the depths of all that it encompasses. For like an island, the small province of conscious life arises out of the impenetrable depths. The expression, however, arises from out of these depths. It is creative. And thus life itself is available to us through understanding, as a reconstruction of the productive process.\textsuperscript{116}

Expression is not a mere facsimile of our inner mental or emotional life, but the creative achievement of living experience in dialectical relationship to its cultural environment; expression discloses the fullness and depth of this relationship.

Spirit-experience is preeminently available and comprehensible through the expression of the sacraments and the culture and practices of the visible church. As expressions the sacraments symbolically disclose Jesus redeeming experience of dying and rising, and most remarkably through the Holy Spirit they hold out the possibility of an actual participation in that reality in a most personal and interior way. Christian

\textsuperscript{115} Dilthey, \textit{W. Dilthey Selected Writings}, 191.
\textsuperscript{116} Quoting Dilthey, Ermart, \textit{Wilhelm Dilthey}, 280.
experience is woven from and into the structures of Jesus’ dying and rising which the sacramental life reveals and communicates to us, and is at the same time deeply social, cultural and spiritual. What distinguishes Christian experience from the generic Jamesian account is that the former is really an expression of Jesus’ own Spirit-experience; its structure, pattern and norm is his dying and rising and only through this expression is it possible for us to plumb the experiential depths of the Holy Spirit’s work in us. As Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). The sacraments are an objectification of this spiritual life, and the Holy Spirit in a special way becomes available to us through these God ordained expressions.

The objective character of sacramental expression is critical since, as we have noted, many pneumatologies struggle to adequately distinguish human experience from the person and presence of the Spirit. Human experience cannot be the measure of pneumatology without the error of enthusiasm. Alasdair Heron reminds us that the “Spirit cannot be dissolved and swallowed up without remainder in our experience: rather it opens us up and sets our lives in the broad horizon of God's purposes in Jesus Christ.”

In identifying Spirit-experience with a sacramental expression we have the means of keeping the experiential dimensions of pneumatology central without confusing Holy Spirit and human spirit. In the sacraments the Holy Spirit retains his freedom to be anonymous and transcendent to human conscious without becoming remote, insecure or alien to it. In the sacraments not only is there the promise of an objective presence of Christ himself, but also an objective presence of the Holy Spirit.

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But does this proposal escape Moltmann’s critique of ghettoizing the Holy Spirit? In speaking of the symbolic life of the Spirit sacramentally, does this not restrict the Spirit within the walls of the visible church and the moment of sacramental celebration? Calvin rejects this claim. There are a couple points worth remembering when thinking about the charge that the sacraments restrict or arrest the freedom of the Holy Spirit. First, Calvin is clear that God is not bound by outward means, although he has bound the church and believers to the use of these means. In no sense is the freedom of the Spirit violated by the fact that God has appointed these means. Second, the spiritual advantage received from the sacraments is not restricted to the time of external taking. Calvin argues that “though the visible figure immediately passes away, the grace which it testifies still remains, and does not vanish in a moment with the spectacle exhibited to the eye.” Both in baptism and the Supper the grace of the Spirit precedes and follows the believer beyond the boundaries of the visible ecclesia. "How many daily approach the holy table who by negligence and lukewarmness are deprived of present benefit, and yet, when afterwards aroused, begin to receive it? Who dare say that none partake of Christ but those who receive him in the very act of the Supper? . . . They do good just as a seed when thrown into the ground, though it may not take root and germinate at the very moment, is not without its use.” Just as the Holy Spirit was breathed upon the first disciples from the personal body of Jesus, now through the corporate body of his church, in Word and sacrament, Jesus continues to breathe his regenerating Spirit upon the world. Spirit spills over to us from the sacrificial cup of Jesus, overflowing in redeeming power.

118 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.1.5.
120 Calvin, *Last Admonition against Joachim Westphal (TS)*, 342.
to all of creation. The sacraments are unique in how they reveal the symbolic life of the Spirit and identify his work as inextricably bound up with the redeeming body of Jesus.
Chapter Three

Spirit and Eucharistic Flesh

“Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secrete power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.”

~John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion* 4.17.10

**Q 49. How does Christ’s ascension to heaven benefit us?**

“We have our own flesh in heaven—a guarantee that Christ our head will take us his members to himself in heaven.”

~Heidelberg Catechism
Convergences of the Spirit

It is typical to interpret the eucharistic controversies of the 16th century in terms of differing christological commitments; less frequently are they seen to demarcate alternative understandings of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This chapter presents a pneumatological reading of the debates that highlights the role that the Spirit-oriented concept of *sursum corda* played in the eucharistic theology of John Calvin. The overarching question that animates this chapter is the understanding of the Holy Spirit that makes Calvin’s realistic understanding of eucharistic participation possible. Calvin

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1 Any systematic theologian looking for contemporary inspiration in Calvin’s eucharistic theology must proceed with caution and reckon seriously with the fact that he or she is trying to work upon historically shifting and polemically conflicted ground. *Pace* the insightful works of Killian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967) and John W. Nevin, *The Mystical Presence of Christ: A Vindication of the Reformed Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist* (New York: Lippencott, 1846), Calvin’s eucharistic thought, even from the point of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes* cannot be approached statically as a finished and a fully formed theological product. The past fifteen years of historical scholarship has demonstrated that Calvin’s eucharistic thought developed gradually, and some would say incoherently, in heated debate between the Swiss Reformed in Zurich and the German Lutherans. At different times and places (geography matters here) Calvin’s thought exhibits Lutheran, Melancthonian, Bullingerian and Bucerian impulses and leanings. This has led one scholar, not entirely unjustly, to the startling claim that the “existence of the eucharist theology of Calvin is just such a fiction” (Wim Janse, “Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology” Three Dogma-Historical Observations” in Calvinus sacraum literaum interpres, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2008): 37–69). Nevertheless there is enough continuity of development in Calvin’s eucharistic thought to speak of a mature and stable pneumatological doctrine of *sursum corda*. My historical understanding leans heavily on the important work of Thomas J. Davis’ *The Clearest Promises of God: the Development of Calvin’s Eucharistic Teaching* (New York: AMS Press, 1995). Davis’ genetic-historical approach identifies Calvin’s mature eucharistic position with the 1559 *Institutes* as supplemented with the 1561 treatise against Tileman Heshusius, *The True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ* to which was appended at the time of publication *The Best Method of Obtaining Concord, Provided the Truth be Sought without Contention*. Insofar as the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, following Wilhelm Niesel, represents Calvin’s last response to Joachim Westphal, the three polemical tracts (*Defense of the Sane and Orthodox Doctrine of the Sacrament* (1555), *The Second Defense of the Pious and Orthodox Faith* (1556), and *The Last Admonition of John Calvin to Joachim Westphal* (1557)) against Westphal are also important for identifying Calvin’s mature position. See Wilhelm Niesel’s *Calvins Lehre von Abendmahl im Lichte seiner letzen Antwort an Westphal* 2nd ed. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1935).

2 Joseph N. Tylenda notes that “Calvin is one with the other Christian communities in teaching a presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.” To say that Calvin’s understanding of presence is realistic as I have is a more contemporary way of saying that Christ’s presence is not imaginary, illusory, or fallacious, but in fact true. To the chagrin of his Lutheran interlocutors Calvin avoided the language of “real” (*realis, realiter*) on account of its close associations with their corporeal interpretations of presence. His preferred manner of commenting on the authenticity of Christ’s presence was to call it “true” (*vera*) presence. For this reason it is misleading—even though it may be ecumenically advantageous—to call without qualification Calvin’s understanding, and the Reformed understanding for that matter, a doctrine of “real presence”—this despite the fact that Calvin and much of the tradition held firmly that in the Supper
never tires of reminding his Lutheran critics that the Holy Spirit is not simply a substitute presence for an absent Christ, but in fact causes us to be united to the flesh of Christ in body, soul and spirit. Calvin insisted throughout his career on a spiritual mode of this presence, but he refused to speculate upon it in scholastic terms.

Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it. . . [Christ] declares his flesh the food of my soul, his blood its drink. I offer my soul to him to be fed with such food. In his Sacred Supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that he himself truly presents them, and that I receive them.

Calvin believes that there is a mysterious experience of Christ through the Spirit in the Supper that defies the intellectual approach of Zwingli and will not satisfy the demands for scholastic explanation by the Lutherans. Indeed, I argue Calvin’s doctrine of the Supper highlights a special relationship between the Holy Spirit and the human flesh of Christ into which, to echo John Nevin’s sacramental language, the Christian is experientially inserted. The human flesh which Jesus “assumed is vivifying by becoming the material of spiritual life to us . . . as Eve was formed out of a rib of Adam, so the origin and beginning of life to us flowed from the side of Christ.”

Spiritual here is not simply an adjective for religious; spiritual refers to the activity of the Holy Spirit.


David Willis observes a certain healthy refusal on Calvin’s part to be drawn into scholastic discussions on how Christ’s presence is related to the signs and symbols. “Calvin’s Use of Substantia” in Calvinus Ecclesiae Genevensis custos: die Referate des Congrès International des Recherches Calviniennes ... vom 6. bis 9. September 1982 in Genf, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), 294.

John Calvin, The True Partaking, 507. All references and quotations from Calvin’s eucharistic treatises come from Treatises on the Sacraments (TS) and will not be noted hereafter.
According to Calvin the flesh of Christ is the “material” (*materia*) with which the Holy Spirit operates in our lives, such that one could describe the substance of the Christian existence as being nourished upon the flesh and blood of Christ.

For Calvin the Lord’s Supper is a sacramental convergence zone for the shape of the Holy Spirit’s work.\(^7\) Not only is the Holy Spirit the agent of *communication* of Christ’s body and blood to us, the Holy Spirit is the agent of *reception* that capacitates us for the enjoyment of the grace of communion.\(^8\) In the Supper two important aspects of Calvin’s broader pneumatology meet in one place as symbolically depicted and sacramentally effectual. The first is the Spirit’s work of *uniting* the believer to Christ. Calvin begins his treatment of the reception of grace in book III of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559) by highlighting this uniting work: “the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us with him.”\(^9\) In the same section Calvin describes another aspect of the Holy Spirit’s work, which he calls his “principle work,” namely that of *creating faith* in the hearts of believers.\(^10\) Both sides of these works come together in his description of the effectual grace of the Lord’s Supper in book IV of the *Institutes*. According to Calvin union with Christ is a special fruit of the Supper in which God illustrates through a visible image the incomprehensible nature of our secret union and causes us to feel its power within us. The gift character of the Supper is the confirmation and nourishment of our faith which springs from a special accommodated knowledge of


\(^9\) Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.

\(^10\) Calvin *Institutes*, 3.1.4.
our union with Christ. So, the principal works of the Holy Spirit, creating faith and effecting union with Christ, are clearly symmetrical to what Calvin identifies as the central effectual grace of the Lord’s Supper. These structural similarities are not merely parallels or a didactic image of the Spirit’s work; not only does the Supper symbolically illustrate the operation of the Spirit: it is precisely in the sacramental context of the Supper that we are promised and assured that this special operation of the Spirit is indeed taking place and being deepened in the life of believers. The Supper is an instrument of God’s grace.

However, what is most notable about Calvin’s reflection on the Holy Spirit and the Lord Supper is the way he turned to the Spirit to address the vexing question of eucharistic presence. Even though there were many precedents in the history of theology which made eucharistic appeal to the Holy Spirit, no theologian previous to Calvin so thoroughly applied pneumatological thinking to the problem of Christ’s eucharistic presence. A fundamental presupposition of Calvin’s eucharistic theology is that the

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11 For more on the gift character of Calvin’s eucharistic thought see John Williamson Nevin, The Mystical Presence of Christ, 63-71; B.A. Gerrish, Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) chapters 5 and 6; and Thomas Davis The Clearest Promises of God, chapter 6. Davis is particularly helpful in responding to common criticisms of Calvin’s understanding of eucharistic gift. He notes three interrelated strands of to his thought: a special knowledge of union, substantial partaking through the Spirit of the flesh and blood of Christ and accommodated instrumentality. “Eucharist serves as an instrument by which the Christian not only is joined to Christ but also knows the goodness of God in a way most fully accommodated to the weakness of the faithful” (214).

12 Although never representative of any Christian tradition a possible exceptions to this claim is the thought of Isidore of Seville (560-636) and Ratamnus of Corbie (868 d.). See Killian McDonnell, John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist, chapter 2 and 8 for a helpful but limited reflection on the history of the role of the Holy Spirit with respect to the mode of Christ’s presence in the eucharist. The most notable appeal to the Holy Spirit in the context of the eucharist is called epiclesis, or the invocation of the Holy Spirit upon the sacrament. Epiclesis of the Spirit is broadly attested in the patristic period and has remained throughout history an important aspect of Orthodox eucharistic theology. For more on the Holy Spirit and the eucharist in the early church see Geoffrey Wainwright, Eucharist and Eschatology (Akron, Ohio: Epworth Press, 1971), 119-130; Gregory Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 259-267; and E.G Cuthbert F. Atchley, On the Epiclesis of the Eucharistic Liturgy and the Consecration of the Font, (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 3-17. For a summary of contemporary Orthodox reflection on
ascended body of Christ, in a manner of speaking, is localized in heaven. For this reason Calvin rejected the traditional views of bodily and local presence of Christ in the Supper, but affirmed nevertheless that there was a true sacramental participation of the believer in the flesh and blood of Christ through the activity of the Holy Spirit. This has been called Calvin’s *sursum corda* solution to the problem of presence.  

13 *Sursum corda*—translated in Reformed liturgy as the call to “lift up your hearts”—is an idea worked out in Calvin’s theology by the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* and continued to shape his eucharistic theology to the end of his career.  

14 A nice statement of *sursum corda* is found in the 1546 Commentary on I Corinthians which demonstrates it was not merely a figurative description of eucharistic communion, but Calvin’s understanding of a real operation of the Holy Spirit that takes place during the Supper.

15 But the sharing in the Lord’s body, which, I maintain, is offered to us in the Supper, demands neither local presence, nor the descent of Christ, nor an infinite extension of his body, nor anything of the sort; for in view of the fact that the Supper is a heavenly act, there is nothing absurd about saying that Christ remains in heaven and is yet received by us. For the way in which he imparts himself to us is by the secrete power of the Holy Spirit, a power which is able not only to bring together, but also to join together, things which are separated by distance, and by a great distance at that. But to be capable of this impartation, we must rise up to heaven.  

Eucharistic communion according to Calvin is not an earthly action whereby Christ is drawn down into material elements, but a “heavenly act” whereby we are lifted up to him

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14 *Sursum corda* is a cornerstone of Calvin’s eucharistic theology. See *Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper* (1541), 188; *Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal* (1557), 443; *Institutes* 4.17.18, 36; *The True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ* (1561), 516; and *The Best Method of Obtaining Concord* (1562), 579.

16 Sue Rozeboom has argued that *sursum corda* refers more to the way that the believer is lifted up to Christ in the exercise of their faith, not by the Holy Spirit. She recognizes that the Spirit is integrally related in this activity but wants to restrict too much the interpretation of *sursum corda* to the realm of the believer’s exercise of faith. (“The Provenance of John Calvin’s Emphasis on the Role of the Holy Spirit Regarding the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper,” 32). She offers substantial evidence for the importance of faith in her interpretation, but does not seem to appreciate how Calvin understood the *sursum corda* to also describe the activity of the Spirit. Calvin says “we are separated from him by a certain species of absence, inasmuch as we are now distant from his heavenly dwelling. Christ then is absent from us in respect of his body, but dwelling in us by his Spirit he raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigour of his flesh, just as the rays of the sun invigorate us by his vital warmth” (*Exposition of the Heads of Agreement*, 240) [my emphasis]. Without a strong account of how the Holy Spirit is objectively at work in a mysterious fashion raising us up to Christ (of course in the exercise of our faith) the Lutheran critique, that the Reformed eucharistic exchange falls entirely on the side of the subjective exercise of faith, has significant traction (See *Formula of Concord*. VII.5. in BC).

17 Paul Rorem, “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper Part I.”, 158.


19 Filling a much neglected gap in Calvin scholarship is Sue Rozeboom’s excellent dissertation “The Provenance of John Calvin’s Emphasis on the Role of the Holy Spirit Regarding the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper” (2010). Where her emphasis differs from mine is that she is interested in the historical origins of Calvin’s emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the Supper and directs her inquiry in the direction of his trinitarian theology, while I pursue my more systematically interested reading of Calvin on this topic more in the light of his Christology. Even though brief one of the best treatments on the Holy Spirit and the Supper in Calvin is I. John Hesselink, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin’s Doctrine of the Sacraments”
seen as the “pneumatological solution,” and accordingly treated somewhat one-sidedly as relevant only for how Calvin understood eucharistic presence, but not relevant for a broader understanding of an operation of the Holy Spirit. In this chapter I hope to reverse the direction of reflection. I believe that Calvin’s eucharistic theology provides an insightful grammar for articulating a Reformed understanding of religious experience that unfolds where the Spirit puts believers in touch with the flesh of Christ. This is an understanding of experience that is framed christologically and ecclesiologically. This pneumatological grammar comes into clearest focus when we interpret Calvin’s involvement in the eucharistic controversies as driven, in part, by a desire to secure a fully biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This chapter maps the work of the Holy Spirit within the terrain of the Lord’s Supper as we find it in Calvin’s thought. What one discovers when Calvin’s eucharistic pneumatology is pulled into focus is a mutually reinforcing relationship between an emphasis on the unabridged humanity of Jesus and a robust account of the Holy Spirit’s operation in the economy of redemption.

The Critical Pneumatology of Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology

The eucharistic debates of the 16th century have been illuminatingly read in the light of the Reformers different christological orientations; as far as I am aware they have yet to be interpreted in terms of different pneumatological understandings. Yet one way to distinguish John Calvin’s doctrine of eucharistic presence from the Lutheran and Zwinglian positions is according to a different understanding of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Supper. In fact what is distinct about Calvin’s pneumatological approach to the Supper comes to light in his ecumenical effort to break the impasse of the Marburg Colloquy (1529) and reconcile the warring parties of Luther and Zwingli on the nature of Christ’s eucharistic presence. In A Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper (1541) Calvin pointed towards a pneumatological solution to the problem of presence that he believed satisfied the theological concerns of both parties.20 He concludes the treatise stating his pneumatological rapprochement: “We all then confess with one mouth that on receiving the sacrament in faith . . . we are truly made partakers of the proper substance of the body and blood of Jesus Christ . . . [nonetheless it is] made effectual by the secrete and miraculous power of God, and that the Spirit of God is the bond of participation, this being the reason why it is called spiritual.”21 Perhaps Calvin was naïve to believe that a

20See Joseph Tylenda, “The Ecumenical Intentions of Calvin’s Early Eucharistic Theology.” In Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in Honor of Ford Lewis Battles, eds. by B. A. Gerrish and Robert Benedetto (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1981), 27–47. In subsequent debate with Westphal, Calvin at one point related to Westphal Luther’s respectful esteem for Calvin’s own work as it was communicated to him through Philip Melanchthon (Second Defense in TS 308). B.A. Gerrish offers some illuminating and suggestive fleshing out of these historical details of Luther’s impression of Calvin and of the Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper. Gerrish says that “Luther is reported to have announced, as he read this gentle account of the controversy, that had Zwingli and Oecolampadius spoken like Calvin, there would have been no need for a long dispute.” See “Luther and the Reformed Eucharist: What Luther Said, or Might Have Said, About Calvin,” in Seminary Ridge Review, 10.2 Spring (2008), 10.

21Calvin, Short Treatise, 198. Here I disagree with I. John Hesselink’s claim that at the time of the Short Treatise Calvin’s pneumatological solution for how believer’s participate in the flesh and blood of the ascended Christ is largely absent (“The Role of the Holy Spirit in Calvin’s Doctrine of the Sacraments,”
spiritual mode was adequate to satisfy the Lutheran demand for a real presence, but he persisted to the end of his life believing that by “this partaking of the body, which we have declared, we feed faith just as sumptuously and elegantly as those who draw Christ himself away from heaven.”

His belief that a spiritual presence could accomplish the same work as corporeal presence suggests an intriguing difference between Zwingli and Calvin on the work of the Spirit in the Supper. If this were not the case Calvin could hardly have anticipated his position as eliciting approval from Lutherans who regarded Zwingli’s appeal to the Spirit as nothing more than spiritualism. As we will see Calvin held a very different understanding of the operation of the Spirit than Zwingli, but after participation in the Consensus of Zurich Calvin was unable to convince the Lutherans otherwise, and his pneumatological doctrine of sursum corda would be a major stumbling block to the Lutherans.

Calvin’s involvement in the production of the Consensus of Zurich, drafted in 1549 and published in 1551, was a decisive turning point in his relationship with the Lutherans. The Consensus sought to harmonize all the Swiss churches on their views of the Supper, but its overall effect was to become “the innocent occasion of the second

79. One of the reasons that Calvin may not have given a more direct and full account of pneumatology in the Short Treatise was on account of his desire not to alienate the Lutherans who associated too much Spirit talk with Zwingli and the spiritualism of Andreas Karlstadt. Thomas Davis has shown that the key pneumatological aspects of Calvin’s eucharistic doctrine are mostly in place before he wrote the 1541 Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper (Clearest Promises of God, chapter 4).

22 Calvin, Institutes 4.17.32. As he argued in his final eucharistic tract, The Best Method for Obtaining Concord (1562), Calvin maintained all along that his dispute with the Lutherans did not have to do with whether there is a reception of Christ in the Supper, but only the mode by which that reception is made possible (577). See also Second Defense of the Sacraments (282).

23 See Calvin’s excoriation of Westphal for being unable to distinguish his spiritual understanding from Zwingli’s position (Second Defense, 276). Calvin’s other Lutheran critic Tileman Heshusen also tried to discredit Calvin as a Zwinglian. David Steinmetz cautions that “historians should not be misled by Heshusen’s attempt to view his debate with Calvin through the narrow lens of Marburg or to identify Calvin’s position with the already discredited Zwingli. Geneva in 1560 is not Marburg of 1529, as Heshusen perfectly well knows, and Calvin is not a disingenuous Zwingli.” “Calvin and His Lutheran Critics” Lutheran Quarterly 4.2 Summer (1990), 191. For a similar interpretation see Richard A. Muller, “Calvin on Sacramental Presence, in the Shadow of Marburg and Zurich,” 147-167.
sacramental war” between the Lutherans and the Reformed, with Calvin at the center.  

Although the Consensus met approval from Philip Melancthon it was violently attacked by the Gnesio-Lutheran Joachim Westphal of Hamburg in 1552. Under personal attack and pressure to maintain good theological relations with the Zurich churches, Calvin became less and less conciliatory towards the Lutherans. Whereas in the Short Treatise Calvin only made veiled criticisms of Luther’s concept of ubiquity, in Calvin’s later writings he assails the doctrine as it was developed and defended by Westphal and Tileman Heshusius.

A cornerstone of Calvin’s criticism of ubiquity was that it left no room for the work of the Holy Spirit. “But greatly mistaken are those who conceive no presence of flesh in the Supper unless it lies in the bread. For this they leave nothing to the secret

26 Perhaps the most complicated issue for understanding Calvin’s doctrine of the Supper is how it should be interpreted in the light of the 1549 Zurich Consensus (Consensus Tigurinus). For historical background one should consult Paul Rorem’s excellent articles on the exchange between Calvin and Heinrich Bullinger, the two principal drafters of the agreement. Rorem makes clear the kind of concessions that Calvin had to make in order to achieve agreement, and the subsequent interpretive maneuvering he had to employ before the Lutherans in defending his signature of the document (Paul Rorem, “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper Part I. The Impasse” Lutheran Quarterly 2, no.2 (1988): 155-84; “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper, Part II. The Agreement.” Lutheran Quarterly 2, no.3 (1988): 357-89). I think that Thomas Davis is overly optimistic about the consistency of Calvin’s developing position when he argues this only meant a political concession on Calvin’s part and not a real theological turn towards Zurich (The Clearest Promises of God, chapter 2). Wim Janse, to the contrary shows that there were new elements, however muted in certain contexts, that entered Calvin’s eucharistic thought after the Zurich Consensus and that could not be fully reconciled with Calvin’s earlier more Lutheran friendly phase, nor even rendered fully understandable in the light of his mature eucharistic theology. Janse, a Reformed theologian himself, in this way partially vindicates the Lutheran Joachim Westphal’s charge that Calvin was betraying his own earlier eucharistic thought. This does not mean that Calvin’s thought ever become Zwinglian or even Bullingerian, but does appear to retreat from certain Lutheran emphases. See Janse’s, “Joachim Westphal’s Sacramentology” Lutheran Quarterly, Vol. 22 (2008): 137-160; and “Calvin’s Eucharistic Theology” Three Dogma-Historical Observations” in Calvinus sacraum literaum interpres, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008): 37-69.
27 In his polemical responses, Calvin did his best to disassociate the thought of his Lutheran detractors from Martin Luther “a man I revere, and whose honour I am desirous to consult” (Mutual Consent of the Churches of Zurich and Geneva as to the Sacraments, 224). However, Calvin was critical of the nearly messianic significance and authority that his Lutheran opponents attributed to Luther the man. Calvin asks, “What oracle revealed to them that the treasures of divine power were so exhausted or impaired by the formation of one individual that none like him can come forth from his boundless and incomprehensible fullness?” (Last Admonition, 477).
working of the Spirit, which unites Christ himself to us.” Calvin’s worry is that Christ’s bodily ubiquity makes the Spirit’s work in the Christian life superfluous and marginal. He goes on to say that “a serious wrong is done to the Holy Spirit unless we believe that it is through his incomprehensible power that we come to partake of Christ’s flesh and blood.” For this reason the mode of Christ’s presence in the Supper must be understood as being spiritual, not corporeal. Calvin consistently criticized the doctrine of ubiquity for its pneumatological deficiency. Because of the centrality of the Lord’s Supper for a general account of piety, Calvin continued to press the broader significance of his criticism. “If there is any eating which is not spiritual, it will follow that in the ordinance of the Supper there is no operation of the Spirit. Thus it will naturally be called the flesh of Christ, just as if it were a fading and corruptible food, and the chief earnest of eternal salvation will be unaccompanied by the Spirit.” The possibility of impious feeding (manducatio impiorium) was one of the corollaries of this Lutheran view that led to another pneumatological problem: if the body of Christ is ubiquitously present without the Spirit then unbelievers can partake of Christ without the simultaneous work of the Spirit. This according to Calvin is to “dissolve Christ from the Spirit” and those “who separate Christ from his Spirit make Him like a dead image or corpse.” Calvin believed that ubiquity and the Lutheran commitment to a manducatio impiorium reflected a

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28 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.31.
29 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.32.
30 The True Partaking of the Flesh and Blood of Christ, 520. For similar comments see also Second Defense, 310 and The Last Admonition, 411.
31 Calvin, Mutual Consent, 234; Comm. Romans 8:9 (CCNT); see also Second Defense, 303-305. See Paul Rorem, “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper. Part 1. The Impasse,” 16. For further exposition of the pneumatological dimensions of this issue see Mark Garcia. Life in Christ: Union with Christ and Twofold Grace in Calvin’s Theology. (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008), 170-184. Calvin, so Garcia relates, “objects to the manducatio impiorium on the specific grounds that there is no union with the Spirit-anointed Christ that is less than vivifying or life giving. Union with Christ who is Life by the Spirit cannot but enliven: [now quoting Calvin] “Let [Westphal] now say whether the bread of the Supper vivifies the wicked. If it does not bestow life, I will immediately infer that they do not have the body of Christ”, 177.
problematic Christology that separated Christ from his Spirit and undervalued the biblically prescribed model of union with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Yet Calvin was no less sympathetic with the opposite extreme of spiritualism, which makes believers “partakers of the Spirit only, omitting mention of flesh and blood.” Although this criticism is likely directed to radical reformers like Andreas Karlstadt, when it came to the sacraments Zwingli’s thought evidenced clear tendencies toward spiritualism. Over-against medieval sacramentology Zwingli sought to isolate the grace given by the Spirit from the material reality of the sacraments. In An Account of the Faith (1530) he denies that the Spirit needs “a channel or vehicle” such as the sacraments since the Spirit himself is “the virtue and energy whereby all things are borne, and has no need of being borne.” This should be contrasted with Calvin’s claim that “the sacraments are not empty figures, but true pledges of spiritual grace, and living organs of the Holy Spirit.” Zwingli believed that the sovereignty of the Spirit was injured by the insistence that the Spirit was bound to the means of grace.

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33 Among the 16th century Reformers “spiritualist” was a negative label that described a theology that stressed the operation of the Holy Spirit at the expense of the Word. Luther accused Zwingli of being a spiritualist and a schwärmer (enthusiast) because of his emphasis on the Spirit. However this is not quite fair since unlike the actual 16th century spiritualists, Zwingli held firmly to the inseparability of Word and Spirit. See Zwingli’s treatment of the issue in On the Clarity and Certainty or Power of the Word of God (1522). However, W.P. Stephens points out there are clear spiritualist leanings in his theology in that Zwingli gives such a high priority to the Spirit that it is more natural for him to speak of “the Spirit and the Word, rather than the Word and the Spirit.” Zwingli: An Introduction to his Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 61.


35 Calvin, Second Defense, 307. Also from Calvin’s 1546 commentary on Ephesians: “But there is no absurdity in saying that God uses the sign as an instrument. Not that the power of God is shut up in the sign, but he distributes it to us by this means on account of the weakness of capacity. Some are offended at this, thinking that it takes from the Holy Spirit what is peculiar to Him, and which is everywhere ascribed to Him in Scripture. But they are mistaken; for God so acts by the sign, that its whole efficacy depends
The Spirit of grace is conveyed not by this immersion, not by this drinking, not by that anointing. For if it were thus, it would be known how, where, whence, and whither the Spirit is borne. If the presence and efficacy of grace are bound to the sacraments, they work whithersoever they are carried; and where they are not used, everything become feeble.\textsuperscript{36} According to Zwingli the divine Spirit precedes all of the sacraments so that they may be received with faith by believers. Luther and Calvin also believed this, but Zwingli was the only one who drew the conclusion that if the Spirit gives a grace prior to receiving the sacrament then the sacrament in itself becomes finally unnecessary for communicating grace. In effect the sacraments are superfluous to the immediate operation of the Spirit.

This understanding of the Spirit’s independent relationship to the sacraments shifts the understanding of Christ’s presence in the Supper away from a grace bestowing reality, as Luther and Calvin understood it, to a human act of contemplating faith. On the surface, Calvin’s objection to this strictly symbolic understanding of the Lord’s Supper is not pneumatological; but the differences have everything to do with a doctrine of the Spirit since it implicates their notion of faith. In the \textit{Institutes} Calvin distinguishes his understanding from Zwingli’s by appeal to different notions of faith in receiving the Supper. For Zwingli to eat and drink of Christ is nothing other than to believe in Christ. This means that the Supper is merely a symbolic enactment of what the Christian does when he or she proclaims belief in Christ outside the Supper. The problem with this view is that it reduces eating and drinking to “mere knowledge.” Calvin contrasts his own position in this way: “I say that we eat Christ’s flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that this eating is the result and effect of faith. Or if you want it said more

\footnotesize{upon His Spirit. Nothing more is attributed to the sign than to be an inferior instrument, useless in itself, except so far as it derives its power from elsewhere” \cite[Comm. Ephesians 5:26 (CCNT).][]{Zwingli}}

clearly, for them eating is faith; for me it seems rather to follow from faith.”

According to Calvin partaking in the Lord’s Supper is not simply to confess one’s faith in Christ, but to actually receive Christ himself—the Supper does something. “Jesus Christ is never communicated to us in such a way as to satiate our souls, but wills to constantly be our nourishment.”

Our faith is never perfect, we do not possess Christ fully in this life and it is precisely this reality that makes the Lord’s Supper possess ongoing relevance for the Christian life.

The danger of Zwingli’s view of the Supper is that it threatens to reduce the Christian life to a cognitive experience—“mere imagining” in the words of Calvin. “In a word, faith is not a distant view, but a warm embrace, of Christ, by which he dwells in us, and we are filled with the Divine Spirit.” This “warm embrace” of Christ becomes most palpable and experientially real in the context of the Supper. Calvin does not deny that Christ dwells in believers through faith apart from the Supper, but he thinks that because Zwingli makes the act of faith and the celebration of the Supper equivalent, Zwingli is unable to distinguish between human act of believing in Christ and from the divine gift of Christ dwelling in us.

Fellowship with Christ and believing in Christ are not the same thing, fellowship is an effect of faith and Zwingli has denied the special experience of this fellowship in the Supper. Moreover in collapsing these two realities into one there is no place in the Christian life where a person is able to clearly identify and distinguish their own subjective believing in Christ from an objective gracious experience of him.

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37 Calvin, Institutes 4.17.5
38 Calvin, Short Treatise, 182.
39 Calvin, Comm. on Ephesians 3:16 (CCNT).
40 Calvin, Institutes 4.17.5. It should be noted that Charles Hodge struggled to “see the force of this distinction” that Calvin insists upon over-against Zwingli. “Doctrine of the Reformed Church on the Lord’s Supper,” Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review 20 (1848), 247.
Here Calvin reflects Luther’s critique that in emptying the sacrament of the true presence of Christ Zwingli has robbed the Supper of grace and turned it into yet another work for believers to perform. Zwingli’s understanding of the Supper cannot accomplish what Calvin and Luther’s does, namely differentiate the objective offer of grace from the subjective experience of it.

What does all this mean as a pneumatological criticism of Zwingli? It means that Zwingli’s doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit is not sufficiently objective. It tends towards a spiritualism that is under strain to distinguish between an experience of the Spirit and the christocentric operation of the Spirit. According to Calvin the Spirit does not work without an object and that object is the flesh and blood of Christ as represented in the sacrament. The objectivity of the Spirit’s work in the Christian life is reflected in the objective gift character of the Supper. Alasdair Heron notes the pneumatological achievement of Calvin’s view of the Supper by pointing out the problems inherent in his opponents.

Not an extension of the humanity of Christ but the uniting and unifying activity and energy of the Spirit of God is what counts. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to take Luther’s path: he has fallen into the short-circuit of false objectivism, as Zwingli into an equally false subjectivism. *Neither gives the objective presence and reality, power and working of the Holy Spirit its due place.* Consequently Luther substitutes the presence of Christ’s physical body for union with him by the Spirit; Zwingli dissolves the Spirit into the spirituality of faith; and Calvin judges that neither does justice to the heart of the matter.  

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41 David Willis describes Calvin’s understanding of the work of the Spirit in the Supper as underscoring the objectivity of the Spirit. “Calvin’s Use of Substantia,” 294-295.


Calvin’s via media on the Lord’s Supper reflects a similar via media in a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately what is distinct about Calvin’s Lord Supper pneumatology only comes into focus when it is seen in contrast to the positions he was trying to overcome. The rest of this chapter pursues, as much as it is possible, a positive statement of Calvin’s eucharistic pneumatology by trying to answer this question: what is the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the ascended flesh of Christ? Calvin’s Lord Supper pneumatology points to significant differences with his opponents over the meaning and the ongoing significance of the flesh of Christ for the Christian life. In brief Zwingli fails to recognize the significance of Christ’s eucharistic flesh, while the Lutherans fail to take seriously enough the importance of Christ’s ascended flesh. The real contribution of Calvin’s theology is the way that his doctrine of the Spirit was able to hold both realities together.

Contra Zwingli: On the Importance of Eucharistic Flesh

“The emphasis on the Spirit in Zwingli corresponds in part to the stress on Christ’s divinity rather than his humanity.”44 Here lies the christological root of what distinguishes Zwingli’s appeal to Holy Spirit in the Supper from that of Calvin. According to Calvin the Holy Spirit does not merely communicate to us Christ’s divine nature, but the whole person: “I do not restrict this union to the divine essence, but affirm that it belongs to the flesh and blood, inasmuch as it was not simply said, My Spirit, but, My flesh is meat indeed; nor was it simply said, My Divinity, but, My blood is drink

44 W.P. Stephens, Zwingli: An Introduction to his Thought, 61.
This basic distinction, among others, explains why Zwingli’s pneumatological orientation towards the Supper never develops, as did Calvin’s, a *sursum corda* solution to the problem of Christ’s presence. And this distinction explains why those trajectories within the Reformed tradition that favor Zwingli over Calvin tend to depreciate the corporeal aspects of salvation.

Unlike Luther and Calvin, Zwingli did not attribute ongoing significance to the flesh of Christ in the Christian life. Flesh is significant as the once for all sacrifice that satisfies the righteousness of God, not “as pressed with the teeth or eaten.” This explains the centrality of remembrance in the Zwinglian celebration of the Supper. The only sense in which a person is nourished by the flesh of Christ is in terms of the consolation they receive in believing upon its sacrificial worth as having suffered for them. To think otherwise in Zwingli’s estimation is to hold two ways of salvation, “the one by eating and drinking the flesh of Christ and the other by believing on him.” Of course this reflects a strongly instrumentalist view of Christ’s humanity. According to Zwingli, “flesh is not itself a satisfaction or payment, but it stands for the payment of death. The death and passion which Christ bore in the flesh are the means of our redemption.” The soteriological significance of Christ’s flesh is quite specific and circumscribed. It stands for “the suffering which he bore in his body as the phrase “which is given for you” specifically shows us. The body of Christ is redemptive in so far as it was given for death.”

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45 Calvin, *True Partaking*, 507.
47 Zwingli, *On the Lord’s Supper*, 204.
48 Zwingli, *On the Lord’s Supper*, 204.
This has led to the common observation that the difference between the
eucharistic theologies of Luther and Zwingli is that Luther emphasized the humanity of
Christ while Zwingli the divinity.\(^{49}\) Indeed for Zwingli Christ’s divinity is the decisive
factor for our salvation. “He redeemed us by his death, by reason of the fact that he who
died was God; and redemption belongs to the deity; but the suffering of death must be
born by the humanity alone.”\(^{50}\) Since the godhead is impassible it was necessary that
Christ assume human nature to suffer on our behalf.\(^{51}\) The humanity of Christ is
indispensable for Zwingli because an atoning sacrifice could only take place through a
human nature that was like us in every way, except sin.\(^{52}\) However, this more narrow
sacrificial interpretation of flesh stands in marked contrast to that of Luther and Calvin
who emphasize more strongly that God assumed humanity in order that he might be close
to us and not distant.\(^{53}\) Zwingli’s strongly instrumentalist understanding of Christ’s
humanity kept him from elevating it to the same devotional status as Christ’s divine
nature. In the Lord’s Supper, a rite so central to Christian piety, Zwingli wanted the
devout to be clear that we trust Christ because he is God not because he is man.\(^{54}\)

\(^{49}\) “As the stress in Zwingli’s theology as a whole is on God rather than on man, so the stress in his
Christology is on Christ as God rather than on Christ as man.” Gottfried Locher, Zwingli’s Thought: New

\(^{50}\) As quoted in Locher, Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives, 175. fn. 114.

\(^{51}\) Zwingli, Exposition of the Faith, in Zwingli and Bullinger, 252.

\(^{52}\) Zwingli, Exposition of the Faith, 250.

\(^{53}\) Of course one can find statements in Zwingli that reflect this theological sentiment, but unlike Luther and
Calvin it is not a theological point of departure and that clearly shows in the differences between their
eucharistic doctrines. Calvin opens his reflection on the necessity of the incarnation saying, “it was
necessary for the Son of God to become for us Immanuel, that is God with us, and in such a way that his
divinity and our human nature might by mutual connection grow together. Otherwise the nearness would
not have been near enough, nor the affinity sufficiently firm, for us to hope that God might dwell with us”
(Institutes 2.12.1). In his commentary on the gospel of John, Calvin says, “God the Father, in whom life
dwells, is far removed from us, and Christ, placed between us, is the second Cause of life, that what would
otherwise be concealed in God may reach us from Him” Comm. John 6:57 (CCNT). For Calvin’s
reflections on the incarnation within a eucharistic context see Institutes 4.17.8 and Last Admonition 472.

\(^{54}\) Stephens, The Theology of Zwingli, 111.
Gottfried Locher goes so far as to say that “With regard to the human nature of Jesus, there is a definite subordinationism.” This is evident in the way that Zwingli states the nature of Christ’s post-ascension presence within the world. Jesus’ promise to his disciples that he would be present with them to the end of the world, Zwingli says, “can refer only to his divine nature, for it is according to that nature that he is everywhere present to believers with his special gifts.” In no sense for Zwingli can this presence include Christ’s human nature, since that nature has ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God. This means that insofar as Christ’s presence to his church is the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit has primary reference to his divine nature.

The unusual stress on the distinction of the two natures is characteristic of Zwingli’s thinking. “If without distinction we were to apply to his human nature everything that refers to the divine, and conversely, if without distinction we were to apply to the divine nature everything of the human, we should overthrow all Scripture and indeed the whole of our faith.” According to Zwingli “the proper character of each nature must be left intact, and we ought to refer to it only those things that are proper to it.” These comments, of course, are directed against Luther’s view of the communication of attributes which informs his understanding of real presence. However, Zwingli’s emphasis on this distinction in Geoffrey Bromiley estimation, “aggravated the debate by the crass way in which he thought he could attribute certain words and works of Christ to his divine nature (e.g. miracles) and others to the human (e.g. thirst) even

55 Locher, Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives, 175.
56 Zwingli, On the Lord’s Supper, 213. Zwingli goes on: “That which is said concerning the Ascension must be referred specifically to human nature. . . And that which is proper to his divine nature must be referred specifically to that nature, as for example, his omnipresence, his abiding fellowship, with us, his presence in all our hearts, and that all things consist in him, etc.” (214).
57 Zwingli, On the Lord’s Supper, 213.
58 Zwingli, On the Lord’s Supper, 213.
while rightly ascribing all of them to one person.” In this respect Calvin provides an important christological corrective to Zwingli, but one, notes Bromiley, that was too late to change the course of the debate.

For Calvin the whole Christ is always the focal point of the Christian life, never the divine or the human nature in abstraction or isolation. Calvin notes that those passages of Scripture that comprehend both natures at once most clearly set forth the true substance of Christ. Ordinarily he will not speak of the presence of Christ, either in terms of his divine nature or human nature, but prefers instead to speak of the presence of the mediator, which expresses divinity and humanity united inseparably in one person. This means that for Calvin in the Lord’s Supper we have fellowship with the presence of the whole mediator, never simply with divine nature alone.

This all adds up to a significant difference between Zwingli and Calvin on the operation of the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper. Zwingli’s method of sharply distinguishing the natures underwrites (perhaps reflects) a fundamental antithesis in his

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59 Geoffrey Bromiley, “The Reformers on the Humanity of Christ” in Perspectives on Christology: Essays in Honor of Paul K. Jewett, eds. Richard Muller and Marguerite Shuster. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1991), 98. Stephens defends Zwingli’s Christology from the charge of actual Nestorianism (Theology of Zwingli, 127). Indeed Zwingli does argue for the unity of the person of Christ, nevertheless, Locher is right when he says that Zwingli’s christological starting point in his debate with Luther lent to his thought a Nestorian’ colouring” to his manner of distinguishing the two natures (Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives, 174).

60 “Those things that apply to the office of Mediator are not spoken simply of the divine or of the human” Calvin, Institutes 2.14.3.

61 Calvin, Institutes 2.14.3.

62 For Calvin’s views on relating the distinction of natures to the unity of the person see Institutes 2.14.3-5.

63 In the context of the Supper “flesh and blood” is short hand for the presence of the whole mediator. “But as nothing is plainer than that Christ there joins himself to us as our Mediator and Head, the whole dispute is at an end the moment it is agreed that Christ, in the person of Mediator, or, if they prefer it, the whole person of the Mediator, is truly and essentially in the midst of us, although the flesh of Christ, or which is the same thing, Christ is, in respect of his flesh, in heaven . . . the flesh of Christ remains in heaven though he dwells in us in his capacity of Mediator” (Last Admonition, 466).
sacramental thinking between the Spirit and material reality. Whereas in Calvin the sacramental flesh of Christ and the Holy Spirit are intimately related and joined together, in Zwingli Spirit and flesh are fundamentally opposed. Zwingli’s dualism between Spirit and flesh comes out most clearly in his Marburg dispute with Luther. At the heart of his critique of Luther’s view was an appeal to John 6:63, which he called his “bronze wall.”

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail.” According to Zwingli the meaning of Jesus’ words contradicts the idea of corporeal presence since the Spirit is opposed to the flesh. At Marburg Zwingli argued that “the soul is spirit; the soul does not eat flesh, but spirit eats spirit.” This idea is echoed in other places as well. “It is the Spirit which gives life. I speak of the life of the spirit, the life of the soul. There can be no doubt that only the Spirit can give life to the soul. For how could the physical flesh either nourish or give life to the soul?”

According to Zwingli the activity of the Holy Spirit is invisible, immediate and incorporeal.

This reflects Zwingli’s conviction that the only proper object of faith is God himself, not creaturely things. Only God, who is infinite, eternal and uncreated, is capable of providing the inflexible and never-wavering foundation of faith. And this “faith is from the unseen God, it points to the unseen God and is a thing absolutely independent of all sense. For whatever is body, whatever is object of sense, can in no way be a matter of

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64 R. J. Goeser observes that the dualism that affects Zwingli’s sacramentology is also determining his Christology. “The human nature of Christ is not a part of the atonement or salvation because it is bodily and physical and the Spirit cannot be confused with what is physical. Thus the separation of the two natures in Christ, with respect to the divine nature, is determined by Zwingli’s peculiar separation of the Creator-Spirit from the creaturely-physical. (“Word and Sacrament: A Study of Luther’s Views as Developed in the Controversy with Zwingli and Karlstadt” (PhD. Dissertation. Yale University 1960), 72. As quoted in Stephens, The Theology of Zwingli, 111, fn. 26).
66 Martin Luther, (Works v. 38), 21.
67 Zwingli, On the Lord’s Supper, 206.
faith.”

To place one’s trust in the sacraments is to trust in created things rather than the uncreated God. And according to Zwingli’s logic “If we were to trust in the sacraments, the sacraments would have to be God.” To ascribe trust to the sacraments destroys the chief principle of faith, namely, that “God is the uncreated Creator of all things, and that he alone has the power over all things and freely bestows all things.” This theological truth about God cannot be reconciled to a notion of the sacraments as instrumental aids for faith. This is not to make the sacraments of no value whatsoever; they ought to be reverenced as holy things by virtue of the theological reality they signify, nevertheless, Zwingli says, “I attribute no power to any elements of this world, that is, to things of sense.”

Zwingli’s antithesis of Spirit and material reality also reflects an anthropological opposition between the body and the soul, and inward to outward. “For body and Spirit are such essentially different things that whichever one you take it cannot be the other.” When a person draws near to God it will not be through the senses, but the mind, which for Zwingli is a spiritual entity. Sacraments function spiritually not by acting on the corporeal senses of the person and so increasing faith, but by presenting something to the

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68 Zwingli, Commentary on True and False Religion, 227.
69 Zwingli, Exposition of the Faith, 247. H. Wayne Pipkin observes how Zwingli’s understanding of God determines his spirituality, “It is his understanding of the spiritual nature of Divine reality that shapes his understanding. It is the theocentric emphasis that governs his thinking rather than an institutional, political or even a Christocentric emphasis. When he speaks of the Spirit, he more often than not speaks of the Spirit of God rather than the Holy Spirit . . . True spirituality is that directed toward the spiritual reality which is God. False spirituality is guilty of misdirected aim and it is directed toward creatures rather than the Creator” (“In Search of True Religion: The Spirituality of Zwingli as seen in Key Writings of 1523/24” in Prophet, Pastor, Protestant: The Work of Huldrych Zwingli After Five Hundred Years, ed. Dikran Hadidian (Alison Park, Penn: Pickwick Publications, 1984), 129).
70 See B.A. Gerrish on a possible way that Zwingli’s view of the sacraments might be construed as instrumental “Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther’s Controversy with the Swiss” in Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 73.
71 Zwingli, Commentary on True and False Religion, 211.
72 Zwingli, Commentary on True and False Religion, 214.
mind for contemplation, and “the mind works most freely and quickly when it is not
distracted by the senses.”  With such a dualistic anthropology it makes sense why
Zwingli would believe that the Holy Spirit bypasses a physical mediation through a
sacrament and instead acts immediately upon the higher nature of the person. David
Steinmetz notes that on the basis of Zwingli’s anthropology “the Lord’s Supper cannot be
a means of grace, but belongs rather to the response of the church to the grace given
immediately by the Spirit.”  For how could, asks Zwingli, “water, fire, oil, milk, salt,
and such crude things make their way to the mind?” What is inward in a person (heart
and mind) cannot be directly affected by what is outward (water, bread, wine). The
outward form of the sacraments corresponds and ministers only to outward part of the
human person, the flesh.

It is against the background of this dualistic understanding of Spirit and flesh that
the pneumatological achievement of Calvin’s eucharistic doctrine comes to light.
Certainly Calvin is in agreement with Zwingli that the ascension of Christ makes
corporeal and local presence impossible, but this does not bar us from being nourished by
the flesh and blood of Christ through the power of the Spirit. Zwingli so isolated the
sovereign operation of the Spirit from the sacraments that there was no possibility for a
bridge between their internal and external workings. Although Calvin was also concerned
to honor the sovereign operation of the Spirit, he nevertheless affirmed that in the

73 Zwingli, Letter to the Princes of Germany in On Providence and Other Essays, ed. Samuel M. Jackson
75 Zwingli, Commentary on True and False Religion, 181.
76 “[The] sacraments assist the contemplation of faith and conjoin it with the strivings of the heart . . . like
bridles which serve to check the senses when they are on the point of dashing off in pursuit of their own
desires, [the sacraments] recall them to the obedience of the heart and faith.” Zwingli, Exposition of the
Faith, 264.
outward sign of the sacrament God truly “offers and shows [exhibere] the reality signified to all that sit at that spiritual banquet.” The outward does affect a person inwardly (heart, soul, spirit) since there is no inherent opposition between the flesh and the Spirit. For Calvin the signs of the Supper do not merely represent Christ as they did for Zwingli, but they present him; they do not only symbolize, but they exhibit. The point of this language is that Christ himself is truly offered to believers through the sacramental signs. “We say Christ descends to us both by the outward symbol and by his Spirit, that he may truly quicken our souls by the substance of his flesh and blood.”

Calvin describes Christ’s movement towards us in the Supper as a “manner of descent by which he lifts us up to himself.” This descending and ascending movement of Christ happens through the special office of the Holy Spirit who is mysteriously able to communicate to us the whole heavenly Christ to us—body, blood and divinity. Rather than being opposed to the flesh, the Holy Spirit puts us in touch with Christ’s body because the Spirit originally poured forth from his body as new life to us. Calvin tries to communicate this distinct modality of the Spirit through appeal to various analogies and organic metaphors. In the Institutes he describes the bond of the Spirit as a “channel” to

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77 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.10.
78 Richard Muller notes how from the first edition of the Institutes (1536) to the end of his career, in characteristically non-Zwinglian fashion, Calvin employed Melancthon’s language of exhibere. Muller argues that Calvin intended the strong sense of exhibere which meant to “hold forth,” “tender,” “present,” “give,” “proffer,” “deliver,” or “produce.” From Zurich or from Wittenberg? An Examination of Calvin’s Early Eucharistic Thought,” Calvin Theological Journal, vol. 45.2, (2010), 248. In another article Muller notes the deepening of Calvin’s pneumatological account of the Supper. “Calvin’s increasing recourse to the agency of the Spirit in the Lord’s Supper did not intend . . . to cancel out his continued emphasis on Christ’s presentation or proffering of himself in the Supper, namely, his rather Melanchthonian use of exhibere.” Calvin on Sacramental Presence, in the Shadow of Marburg and Zurich,” 159.
79 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.24.
80 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.16.
81 “[T]here is no drop of vigor in us save what the Holy Spirit instills. For the Spirit has chosen Christ as his seat, that from him might abundantly flow the heavenly riches of which we are in such need” (Institutes 2.15.5).
Christ, and like “rays” from the sun. “For if we see that the sun, shedding its beams upon the earth, casts its substance in some measure upon it in order to beget, nourish, and give growth to its offspring—why should the radiance of Christ's Spirit be less in order to impart to us the communion of flesh and blood?”

This special bond presumes an inseparable relationship between Christ and the Spirit, and an intimacy so profound that the Spirit’s presence is nearly indistinguishable from Christ’s. Calvin’s point is that through the Spirit we really encounter Christ himself. In his last published work on the Supper he compares the eucharistic relationship between Christ and the Spirit to a tree’s movement of sap to the roots.

Our explanation is that the body of Christ is eaten, inasmuch as it is the spiritual nourishment of the soul. Again, it is called nourishment by us in this sense, viz, because Christ, by the incomprehensible agency of his Spirit infuses his life into us, and makes it common to us; just as in a tree the vital sap diffuses itself from the root among the branches, or as the vigor of the head is extended to the members.

The implied Christ-Spirit intimacy of these organic images is Calvin’s attempt to set his theology apart from Zwingli’s sacramental dualism. According to Calvin the Lord’s Supper reveals that the Holy Spirit is given the unique activity of transportation, that of crossing the distance between the believer who is on earth and Christ who is in heaven. Instead of Christ descending down to us corporeally, the Spirit lifts us up to him spiritually. Calvin’s view of the Supper seeks to create a sacramental space for the believer to be nourished by the flesh of Christ through the Spirit.

Calvin’s high estimation of the flesh of Christ is most clearly stated in his commentary on the bread of life discourse in John 6. “You will only find life in Christ

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82 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.12.
83 Calvin, *Best Method of Obtaining Concord*, 575 [my emphasis].
when you seek it in the substance of his flesh.” According to Calvin our souls feed on the flesh and blood of Christ in precisely the same way that the body is sustained by eating and drinking. Therefore, “they are false interpreters who lead souls away from the flesh of Christ.” We find a challenge to Zwingli’s dualism of flesh and Spirit most directly in Calvin’s exegesis of John 6:63. “[F]orced is the opinion about the antithesis—that it is the illumination of the Spirit that quickens. Nor are they right who say that the flesh of Christ profits inasmuch as it was crucified, but that when it is eaten it is of no advantage to us.” Calvin is clear that in the Supper not only do we spiritually receive the benefits of Christ (i.e. the sacrificial efficacy of his death), but we spiritually receive Christ himself. And the presence of the Spirit is not as a substitute presence for Christ or merely a work of illumination, but the divine agency that puts the believer in touch with Christ’s life giving flesh. Contrary to Zwingli the flesh of Christ has ongoing significance for the believer such that an antithesis of Spirit and flesh cannot be maintained. Calvin argues that we must follow Augustine’s interpretation of John 6:63. When we read that the “the flesh profits nothing” we should supply the word ‘only’ or ‘by itself’, because it must be joined with the Spirit. This fits well with the argument, for Christ is referring simply to the manner of eating. He does not exclude every kind of usefulness, as if none at all could be obtained from his flesh, but says that it will be useless if separated from the Spirit. For where does the flesh get its quickening power, but because it is spiritual. Therefore whoever stops short at the earthly nature of the flesh will find in it nothing but what is dead. But those who raise their eyes to the power of the Spirit with which

87 “I do not see how anyone can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a true participation in Christ himself. For those benefits would not come to us unless Christ first made himself ours” (Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.11).
the flesh is imbued, will feel from the effect itself and the experience of faith that quickening is no empty word.\textsuperscript{88}

According to Calvin the problem that Jesus confronts in John 6:63 is not the inherent uselessness of his flesh, but its uselessness if separated from the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ flesh spiritually understood (i.e. imbued with the Spirit) has quickening power for the believer. For Calvin incorporeal Spirit does not have ontological priority over that of material flesh; the relationship is not one of opposition—Spirit \textit{or} flesh—, but concord—Spirit \textit{and} flesh.\textsuperscript{89} The Holy Spirit and the flesh of Jesus work together since Christ’s saving body is imbued with the Spirit as pneumatological flesh.

On this point Calvin’s criticisms of Zwingli’s dualism echo those of Luther.

“Spiritual,” says Luther “is nothing else than what is done in us and by us through the Spirit and faith, whether the object with which we are dealing is physical or spiritual. Thus, Spirit consists in the use, not in the object, be it seeing, hearing, speaking, touching, begetting, bearing, eating, drinking, or anything else.”\textsuperscript{90} Luther assails Zwingli and his followers for thinking that material and physical reality stand in opposition to spiritual reality. The opposite is true: “The Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as Word, water, and Christ’s body and in his saints on earth.”\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Comm. John} 6:63 (CCNT). Calvin seems to believe this was an important point since he repeats his exegesis here almost verbatim in \textit{True Partaking}, 562-563.

\textsuperscript{89} So as not to caricature Zwingli’s thought we ought to appreciate that the dualism of body and spirit is driven more by his understanding of the glory and sovereignty of God than an anthropological dualism. See W. P. Stephens, “Zwingli on John 6:63: ‘Spiritus est qui vivificate, caro nil prodest.’ In \textit{Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation}, eds. Richard Muller and John Thomson. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996): 156-185.

\textsuperscript{90} Martin Luther, \textit{This is My Body} (LW 37), 92. I owe these references of Luther’s discussion of the Spirit to Paul Althaus, \textit{The Theology of Martin Luther}, trans. Robert Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 397.

\textsuperscript{91} Luther, \textit{This is My Body}, (LW 37), 95.
Calvin is in complete agreement with this side of Luther’s critique of Zwingli. However, he departs from Luther and later Lutherans over the doctrine of Christ’s ubiquitous humanity. Luther clearly has a place for the Holy Spirit in the Lord’s Supper, but it does not reference the Spirit in uniting us with the flesh of Christ, instead Christ’s omnipresent humanity accomplishes this. Calvin believes that Holy Scripture (in particular Romans 8:9) requires that we recognize Christ dwells in us only through his Spirit and that “the Spirit alone causes us to possess Christ completely and have him dwelling in us.”

Whereas Zwingli erred in not having a proper understanding of Christ’s *eucharistic flesh*, Calvin’s charge against the Lutherans, as we will see shortly, is that they fail to understand the meaning of Christ’s *ascended flesh*. According to Calvin the antithesis between the flesh of Christ and the Holy Spirit is not ontological opposition, but redemptive-historical—Christ has ascended bodily into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit as our comforter. Despite his differences with Zwingli on the status of Jesus eucharistic flesh, Calvin owes a great deal to Zwingli’s arguments based upon the ascension against a corporeal and local presence. Reckoning with Christ’s bodily ascension is essential for developing our understanding of how he specifies the relationship of the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ. However, before we can consider Calvin’s account of Christ’s ascension we must take a detour into Calvin’s dispute with the Lutherans over the notion of the *substance* of Christ which we receive in the Supper.

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92 This is an ecumenical need. In fact there appears to be unexplored eucharistic common ground between Luther and Calvin on the interrelationship of the Holy Spirit and the flesh of Christ.  
93 Luther’s early confrontation with Andreas Karlstadt may have prejudiced him from being more open minded about a pneumatological understanding of presence. See B.A. Gerrish’s discussion in “Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther’s Controversy with the Swiss,” 59-60.  
Grasping Calvin’s peculiarly pneumatological way of thinking about substance puts us in a position to appreciate his doctrine of Christ’s *ascended flesh*.

**The Spiritual Mode of *Substantia* in the Supper**

Jaroslav Pelikan observes that during the eucharistic controversies of the Reformation period that “it was alien to the Reformed to draw ontological parallels between the Eucharist and the incarnation” as the Lutherans did. However it *was* characteristic of Reformed theologians to distinguish their teaching on the Lord’s Supper by appeal to a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. According to Pelikan this was a point insufficiently grasped in Lutheran polemics. However, it is a mistake to press this distinction so far that one misses the real christological concern of the Reformed. When Calvin makes pneumatological criticisms of the Lutherans it was not because he thought they were too christological, rather he thought that their Christology was unable to account for the inseparability of the Christ-Spirit relationship. The received wisdom on the christological dispute between the two parties is that the Lutherans were concerned to

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96 It is typical to render the Christological concern of the Reformed as preserving the distinctness of the two-natures, but many accounts fail to appreciate how respecting the distinctness of the natures allowed for the unique work of the Holy Spirit to come into clearer perspective. It would seem that Pelikan does not have a firm grasp on these concerns since he fails to distinguish Calvin from the early Swiss eucharistic positions and does not seem to appreciate Calvin’s desire to meet the concerns of the Lutherans (*Reformation of the Church and Dogma*, 201-203).

97 “I think I have clearly demonstrated how nugatorily he [Heshusius] attempts to make a gloss of the immensity of God, that he may separate Christ from his Spirit. God, he says, fills all things, and yet does not sanctify all things by his Spirit. But the reason is, that God does not work everywhere as Redeemer. The case is different with Christ, who, in his character as mediator, never came forth without the Spirit of holiness. For wherever he is there is life. Therefore not to wander in vain beyond our bounds, let H. show that Christ considered as born of a Virgin to be the Redeemer of the world, is devoid of the Spirit of regeneration.” *True Partaking*, 568- 569.
preserve the *unity* of the person while the Reformed were concerned to preserve the *distinction* of the two natures. While this is generally true a more helpful statement with respect to Calvin is that he wanted to shift the mode of christological reflection in the Supper from one that concentrated on the ontological constitution of the person of Christ (i.e. relationship of divine and human natures) to one that reflects upon the whole person of Christ as the mediator, revealed in salvation history and working through his threefold office.  

Under this latter mode of christological reflection the person of the Holy Spirit takes on a prominent role in mediating to believers everything Christ accomplished in the flesh throughout the *historia salutis*. This mode of christological reflection is particularly important to keep in mind when it comes to understanding Calvin’s distinct understanding of the *substance* of Christ that is received in the Supper.

Calvin and the Lutherans did not agree on meaning of *substantia*. This becomes apparent when the Lutherans charge Calvin’s eucharistic theology with the error of Andreas Osiander. Osiander was once an insider within the Wittenberg Reformation who quickly became an outsider when he worked out a theory of justification that denied the forensic and imputed character of Christ’s righteousness. According to Osiander the righteousness that justifies is Christ’s “essential righteousness” which is possessed by believers through the indwelling of Christ according to his divine nature. This

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99 Calvin’s uses of *substantia* often varies in its meaning. For a helpful distinction between his different uses especially in conflict with the Lutherans see the much quoted treatment of the topic in Helmut Gollwitzer, *Coena Domini* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1937): 120-121. See Anthony Lane for a helpful treatment of substance in Calvin in the light of recent work on Calvin, “Was Calvin a Crypto-Zwinglian?” 30-34.

100 See *Last Admonition*, 484; *True Partaking*, 554.
righteousness so fully justified believers that they really become righteous. The Lutherans and the Reformed were united in their rejection of Osiander’s doctrine of justification. In fact Calvin himself devoted a lengthy rebuttal to Osiander’s doctrine of justification in his final 1559 edition of the *Institutes*. Nevertheless Hesclusius concluded that Calvin’s affirmation of a spiritual presence was merely the presence of Christ’s divine nature. In other words, Calvin’s rejection of a Lutheran corporeal presence amounted to a denial of the salvific significance of Christ’s flesh and therefore made him guilty of Osianderism.

The accusation of Osianderism perfectly illustrates the different christological models Calvin and the Lutherans used for interpreting the mode of Christ’s presence in the Supper. Insofar as the Lutherans were committed to an ontological incarnational analogy it was impossible to understand how a denial of corporeal presence could affirm any other presence than that of deity alone.\(^\text{101}\) Calvin certainly underestimated the extent to which his eucharistic thought swam against the powerful theological tide that regarded corporeality as a necessary condition for an affirmation of Christ’s real presence. Nevertheless Calvin is particularly incensed that the Lutherans would “bedaub us with the slime of their own Osiander, as if we had any kind of affinity with him.”\(^\text{102}\) Christ’s flesh does matter to Calvin.

I say that although Christ is absent from the earth with respect of the flesh, yet in the Supper we truly feed on his body and blood—that owing to the secrete agency of the Spirit we enjoy the presence of both. I say that

\(^\text{101}\) Here later Reformed and the Lutherans differences on the meaning of the *communicatio idiomatum* is instructive. The Reformed understood the communication of properties between the natures as occurring in *concreto*, which means that the two natures are joined as in the concrete person such that the interchange of attributes take place at the level of the person not between the natures. The Reformed accused the Lutherans of *communicatio idiomatum in abstracto*, i.e. an abstract consideration of the relation of the properties between the two natures distinct from their union in the person. See Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 72-73.

\(^\text{102}\) Calvin, *Last Admonition*, 488.
distance of place is no obstacle to prevent flesh, which was once crucified, from being given to us for food. Hesusius supposes, what is far from being the fact, *that I imagine a presence of deity only*. All the dispute is with regard to place.  

Again Calvin insists that the dispute has nothing to do with *whether* we enjoy the presence of Christ’s flesh and blood, but the *mode* by which it occurs. The mode is spiritual not carnal, which means that Christ is not drawn down from heaven but that we are lifted up to him.

The irony of the charge of Osianderism is not missed on Calvin, since the same criticisms he made of Osiander on justification are applicable to his Lutheran critics on ubiquity. Calvin argues that just as Osiander “despised the humiliated Christ” (i.e. salvific flesh) by his doctrine of essential righteousness so does the Lutheran doctrine of bodily ubiquity shows a similar diminution of the saving significance of Christ’s humiliated flesh. In the *Institutes* Calvin argues that the consequences of Osiander’s violent insistence upon Christ’s essential righteousness and essential indwelling is that “he holds that God pours himself into us as a gross mixture, just as he fancies a physical eating in the Supper.”

Osiander, as Calvin relates, also charges that anyone who denies his doctrine of essential righteousness is denying that Christ is substantially eaten in the

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103 Calvin, *True Partaking*, 554.
104 “Nay with the best right I throw back the empty talk at their own heads. By denying a humiliated Christ, they extinguish the whole substance of salvation, and impiously abolish an incomparable pledge of the Divine love towards us. If Christ was not emptied of his glory when he hung on a cross and lay in the sepulcher, where is the humiliation? They pretend that he was then possessed of celestial blessedness, and not only so, but that that flesh in which he suffered sat immortal in the heavens.” *Last Admonition*, 488.
Supper, and so is guilty of being “Zwinglian.” Here Zwinglianism amounts to a rejection of a substantial participation in Christ at the Supper.

Clearly Calvin and the Lutherans are using the language of substance with very different understandings as to its meaning. According to Calvin the Lutherans along with Osiander have an overly physical (and literal) understanding of the substance of Christ, which leads them to speak in many absurd ways. Calvin’s primary charge against Osiander’s doctrine of essential righteousness is “mixing Christ’s essence with our own.” Not only does this “gross mingling” blur the distinction between creator and creature but in its wake follow a whole host of theological confusions. Calvin fears that the same error of improper mixing occurs in the orthodox Lutheran account of eucharistic feeding. He affirms that the “substance of his [Christ’s] flesh, breathes life into our souls; nay, infuses his own life into us, provided always that no transfusion of substance be imagined.” Calvin refuses to relinquish the category of substance—“I deny not, indeed that those who exclude the substance of vivifying flesh and blood from the communion, defraud themselves of the use of the Supper.” However, he will not meet the Lutheran terms as to its meaning by bringing it down from heaven to be present in the elements and consumed corporeally. Calvin insists that we must remove from the concept of substance the “gross imagination as to the eating of flesh, as if it were similar to corporeal meat which is received by the mouth and descends to the stomach.”

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106 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.10.
107 Two in particular are a confusion of the grace of justification and sanctification and the trinitarian missions of the Son and Spirit. See *Institutes*, 3.11.5-8.
this “absurdity” is set aside there is no reason to deny that we are substantially fed by the flesh of Christ

because we are truly united into his body with him by faith, and so made one with him. Whence it follows, that we are conjoined by a substantial fellowship, just as substantial vigour flows from the head to the members. The explanation to be adopted will thus be, that substantially we become partakers of the flesh of Christ—not that any carnal mixture takes place, or that the flesh of Christ brought down from heaven penetrates into us, or is swallowed by the mouth, but because the flesh of Christ, in respect of its power and efficacy, vivifies our souls in the same way that bread and wine nourish our bodies.\textsuperscript{111}

The notion of “substantial fellowship” nicely captures the relational and dynamic quality of Calvin’s understanding. The substance of the Supper is not a quasi-material thing that can be transfused into a person: “How absurdly the schoolmen have defined grace, who have taught that it is nothing else but a quality infused into the hearts of men.”

According to Calvin grace is not a thing but a dynamic relation to God—“for grace, properly speaking is in God; and what is in us is the effect of grace.”\textsuperscript{112}

The Holy Spirit provides Calvin’s understanding of substance with its dynamic quality since it is through the Spirit that the “power and efficacy” of Christ’s flesh and blood vivifies our souls. Substantial feeding is a special ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It is declared in my writings more than a hundred times, that so far am I from rejecting the term substance that I ingenuously and readily declare, that by the incomprehensible agency of the Spirit, spiritual life is infused into us from the substance of the flesh of Christ. I also constantly admit that we are substantially fed on the flesh and blood of Christ, though I discard the gross fiction of a local intermingling.\textsuperscript{113}

\textsuperscript{111} Calvin, \textit{Best Method}, 577.
\textsuperscript{113} Calvin, \textit{True Partaking}, 507.
Calvin assures his critics that he does not strip the Supper of a substantial participation in Christ as long as that union is conceived as made possible by a “spiritual bond.” But this is precisely where the orthodox Lutherans and Osiander fail—both spurn the bond of the Holy Spirit: Osiander through a heretical theology of union that mixes essences, and the Lutherans through a doctrine of ubiquity that leads to the cosmic presence of Christ’s humanity. Calvin wants to dispel the idea that something is less substantial if it is not physical. The Holy Spirit is not less real than a carnal body; one does not need the presence of corporeal flesh in order to vouchsafe a substantial connection between the signum of the Supper and res of Christ—the Spirit is the guarantee (Eph. 1:13-14).

David Willis helpfully notes that “Calvin is not beginning with a general category—substance—of which Christ and our life are instances. The substance of the eucharist is the fundamental ontological fact, Christ himself. That is not a non-ontological statement; it is an ontological statement which forces into a subordinate position ancillary philosophical elucidations.” Another way to say this is that Calvin wants what is said about the “substance” of the Supper to conform to the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ as revealed in the historia salutis. From Calvin’s vantage point the Lutherans wanted to force the conversation on substance into abstractly conceived categories of divine nature or human nature, which is how they could accuse him of the error of Osiander. Rather than reflect on divine or human natures in isolation, Calvin prefers to think about the substance of the Supper in terms of what the biblical narratives reveal about the whole person of Christ. Killian McDonnell observes that for Calvin “To receive his person is to receive the whole Christ—body, blood, and divinity. To receive

114 Calvin, Institutes, 3.11.5-10.
115 David Willis, “Calvin’s Use of Substantia”, 300.
Christ is not to receive an abstraction.”¹¹⁶ When Calvin speaks of the Spirit mediating to us the whole Christ this is what he has in view—all the works of Christ accomplished in the flesh.

But what does it mean to have communion with the whole mediator? Calvin’s criticisms of Osiander’s Christology provide some further insight. Osiander reasoned that the righteousness needed for redemption so surpassed human nature that it could only be said to derive from Christ’s divine nature. Calvin agrees to the first premise but rejects the second.

For even though Christ if he had not been true God could not cleanse our souls by his blood, nor appease his Father by his sacrifice, nor absolve us from guilt, nor, in sum equal so great a burden, yet it is certain that he carried out all these acts according to his human nature. For if we ask how we have been justified, Paul answers, “By Christ’s obedience.”¹¹⁷

Calvin argues that righteousness is truly manifested to us only in the humanity of Jesus. This does not mean that human flesh alone saves us, but that everything necessary for salvation was accomplished according to the flesh of the one person of the God-man. Osiander’s christological error is to think abstractly about the two natures, rather than starting with the unity of Christ’s person as witnessed in the biblical narratives.

Although righteousness flows from God alone, we shall not have the full manifestation of it anywhere else than in Christ’s flesh. For in his flesh was accomplished man’s redemption; in it a sacrifice was offered to atone for sins, and an obedience yielded to God to reconcile him to us; it was also filled with the sanctification of the Spirit; finally having overcome death, it was received into heavenly glory. Therefore it follows that in it are placed all the parts of life, so that none can rightly complain that he is deprived of life because it is hidden far off.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Killian McDonnell, *John Calvin, the Church and the Eucharist*, 246. McDonnell describes Calvin’s understanding of substance as “soteriological personalism.”
¹¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.9.
¹¹⁸ Calvin, *Comm. John 6:51 (CCNT)*.
In the flesh of Christ the whole economy of redemption was accomplished for our salvation. There is nothing before, behind or above the flesh of Christ that is significant for salvation. Calvin leaves no room for the Christian to seek the benefits of salvation outside of this life-giving flesh in Osiander’s notion of deification.

Accordingly Osiander has a “half-Christ,” not the “whole Christ.”\textsuperscript{119} So when Calvin speaks of Christ’s flesh it does not refer to the human nature of Christ alone, but stands for the righteousness and salvation accomplished by the whole person of Christ. In this sense the flesh of Christ, understood as the bread of life in the sacrament, is a seal and pledge of our salvation. Calvin believes that the sacraments rightly orient our thinking on the relationship between the flesh of Christ and that of deity. “[T]hey teach that the matter . . . of righteousness and of salvation reside in his flesh not that as mere man he justifies or quickens by himself, but because it pleased God to reveal in the Mediator what was hidden and incomprehensible in himself.”\textsuperscript{120} Unlike Osiander Calvin refuses to pull apart the two natures of Christ and assign to them different roles in salvation or the eucharist. Our salvation was achieved in the obedient flesh of the mediator who is inseparably man \textit{and} God.\textsuperscript{121}

Calvin’s insistence that it is the whole mediator that we receive in the Supper lends a dynamic quality to what it means to be made partakers of the substance of Christ. This means that the focal point of the Supper centers upon what Christ \textit{does} in the flesh, instead of what he \textit{is} as flesh. Jesus “would not have been the bread of life for us if he

\textsuperscript{119} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.11.9.
\textsuperscript{120} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 3.11.9.
\textsuperscript{121} Stephen Edmondson shows how Calvin’s mediator Christology is a departure from the traditional medieval scholastic understanding of Christ as Mediator only according to the human nature. See \textit{Calvin’s Christology} (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 24-30.
had not been born and had not died for us, and if he had not arisen for us.” 122 From this follows the single consolation that what we derive from the Supper, namely, that “it directs our attention to the cross of Jesus Christ and to his resurrection.” 123 To speak of the whole mediator concentrates our attention upon his works (death and resurrection in particular) rather than his upon his person statically conceived (divine nature and human nature). For Calvin it is not participation in the divine nature that is our comfort, but knowing that our sins are forgiven because we have been made partakers of Christ’s death and passion; corporeal eating of the flesh of Christ is not our comfort, but knowing that “whatever materials of death may be in us that he nevertheless gives us life” through participation in his resurrection. 124 The flesh of Christ is a comfort to believers—not as interesting in itself—but as the instrument through which Christ accomplished our salvation.

The sum of this chapter is to argue that a special relationship exists between the Holy Spirit and the ascended flesh of the mediator. Calvin insists that if we are to “have part and portion” in all the graces which Christ purchased by his death “the thing requisite must be not only to be partakers of his Spirit, but also to participate in his humanity in which he rendered all obedience.” 125 By highlighting the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit he draws into focus the whole paschal mystery as relevant for salvation. The vivifying and salvific significance of the flesh of Christ is that it connects us to the whole person of Christ and so all the works he accomplished in the flesh. Why is the Spirit relevant for this? We might respond by saying that nothing in

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122 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.5.
123 Calvin, Short Treatise, 168.
124 Calvin, Short Treatise, 168.
125 Calvin, Short Treatise, 170.
Christ was accomplished without the Spirit. The miraculous work of the Spirit mediates the whole flesh of Christ to us. The same Spirit that conceived Christ in the womb of Mary, the same Spirit that was upon his flesh in vivifying and sanctifying power is the same Spirit that is upon us today communicating the salvific effects of what he accomplished in the flesh. The very possibility of the Spirit being given to us salvifically is based in what Christ accomplished in his flesh. Spirit unites us to the flesh of Christ and in uniting us performs the same work upon us as it did in the flesh of Christ. The Spirit is not simply communicating to us what Christ did on his own, the Spirit is communicating to us the work that he did in conjunction to the flesh of Christ, a work that is only transferable to us by virtue of Christ's having accomplished it fully, which is marked by the ascension.

**Contra Lutherans: On the Importance of Ascended Flesh**

“Why do we repeat the word ascension so often?”\(^{126}\) Calvin’s response to his own question is that it indicates movement from one place to another. Accordingly the dispute with the Lutherans “has everything to do with place.”\(^{127}\) The problem with the doctrine of ubiquity is that it refuses to acknowledge the central truth of the ascension: the body of Christ is no longer physically available to believers on earth. In Calvin’s mind failure to reckon with this redemptive-historical fact has perilous consequences. Calvin’s sense of soteriological urgency explains his vehement denunciation of ubiquity and the metaphorical interpretation of the ascension that follows from it: “height signifies

\(^{126}\) Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.27.

\(^{127}\) Calvin, *True Partaking*, 554.
only the majesty of his rule.” The Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity derives from an application of the christological concept of *communicatio idiomatum*, wherein the attribute of the omnipresence of Christ’s divine nature is predicated of his human nature. This means that Christ is able to be locally present in a special sense “in, with and under” the elements of the Supper by virtue of the omnipresence of his human nature. Insofar as Calvin understood and interpreted this doctrine in its eucharistic context it implied that Christ’s glorious and immortal body could “be contained in several places, in no place or in no form.” Such a notion, according to Calvin, undermined the true corporeality of Christ’s human nature and made his body to be a phantasm or apparition and so “raises Marcion from hell.” The Lutheran view violates two criteria that Calvin sets out for a proper understanding of Christ’s ascended humanity: “We must neither destroy the reality of the nature, nor derogate in any respect from his state of glory.”

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128 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.27. For a good treatment of Luther’s interpretation of ascension in the light of the dispute with Zwingli see David Steinmetz’s “Scripture and the Lord’s Supper in Luther’s Theology” *Interpretation*, 260-263.

129 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.17. In this place I must table questions related to the fairness, depth and accuracy of Calvin’s treatment of the developed Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. In repeating Calvin’s criticisms I do not assume—at least not without a more careful exposition and engagement from the Lutheran side—that everything he says about ubiquity follows. My purpose in this section is to highlight an aspect of Calvin’s pneumatology that is only accessible by drawing into focus his polemic against ubiquity. However I think it is important to point out a serious methodological difference between Calvin and the Lutherans in how they approached the question of eucharistic presence. Of course Calvin was aware of the Lutheran defense against his criticisms by appeal to distinctions between circumspective, definitive and repletive presences. However, for Calvin Scripture offered a less counter-intuitive and more straightforward way of resolving the matter of presence—it is through the Holy Spirit that we are united with Christ. Calvin refused to be dragged into a scholastic debate about fine distinctions between modes of presence when Scripture seemed to offer a simpler solution. Whether one agrees with Calvin’s criticisms of ubiquity or his own biblical reasoning, it is important to appreciate how he wanted to keep the conversation biblically oriented and free from scholastic speculation. In this regard Hermann Sasse’s criticism of the scripturally “groundless” character of Calvin’s teaching seems to be a rather crude reading of the Reformer. *This Is My Body: Luther’ Contention for Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publish House, 1959), 327.

How should bodies behave, then, according to Calvin? “It is the true nature of a body to be contained in space, to have its dimensions and its own shape.” This means that an immense body that is not constrained by location can no longer be considered a body; it is not able to be seen and touched. “If to fill all things in an invisible manner is numbered among the gifts of the glorified body, it is plain that the substance of the body is wiped out, and that no difference between deity and human nature is left.” This passage recalls how Calvin’s criticisms of ubiquity are similar to his critique of Osiander’s doctrine of justification. Osiander “despised the flesh” through his notion of essential righteousness; Calvin’s fear about ubiquity is that it “wipes out” the substance of the body by predicating an attribute of humanity only proper to divinity; both positions tend in the same direction—a confusion of humanity and divinity. Calvin will not abide either position since to rob Christ of his human nature is to divest him of his office as redeemer.

Calvin insists that the body of Christ in which we partake in the Supper must be the same body that was crucified and raised for our salvation. If ubiquity is true what could the apostle Paul possibly mean when he encouraged believers to await from heaven a Savior who will change their lowly bodies to be like his own glorious body? Does conformity to that glorious body mean that our bodies will also be invisible and infinite? To the contrary, Calvin argues, the precise reason Christ ascended into celestial glory was to make our bodies conformable to his. This means “there will be no conformity unless

133 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.29.
134 Calvin, *Last Admonition*, 385.
that flesh which is the type and model of our resurrection retains its dimensions.”¹³⁶ The believer’s hope for a future resurrection is overthrown if “a model of it is not exhibited in the flesh of Christ.”¹³⁷ Therefore preserving the continuity between the body of Jesus and the bodies of believers is crucial. If these bodies differ then Gregory of Nazianzus’s charge against Apollinaris applies: “what is not assumed is not healed.”¹³⁸ “To strip Christ’s body of its human nature is to make nil God’s salvation, for it denies the instrument God has chosen to give salvation to believers.”¹³⁹

A ubiquity doctrine also has trouble distinguishing between the different modes of Christ’s presence within salvation history. According to Calvin, omnipresent humanity collapses the resurrection, ascension and parousia into the reality of one undistinguishable presence of Christ in the world.

When Scripture speaks of the ascension of Christ, it declares, at the same time, that he will come again. If he now occupies the whole world in respect of his body, what else was his ascension, and what will his descent be, but an empty and fallacious show?¹⁴⁰

By refusing what he perceives to be a monistic presence of Christ in history Calvin’s orientation allows for “a pneumatological space” to appear “for the time between the times.”¹⁴¹ It is not timeless omnipresent flesh, but the Holy Spirit who eschatologically mediates to believers the person and works of Christ within history.

¹³⁶ Calvin, *Last Admonition*, 458.
¹³⁷ Calvin, *Last Admonition*, 391.
¹³⁸ David Willis draws this connection in “Calvin’s use of *Substantia*” 296; from Gregory’s epistles to Cledonius 101 and 102.
¹³⁹ Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 86.
Calvin’s insistence on respecting the distinct modes of Christ’s presence in salvation history is in part driven by his doctrine of the Spirit. The ascension in particular marks the beginning of a new work of the Holy Spirit in human history of which ubiquity cannot account. “Surely, the coming of the Spirit and the ascent of Christ are antithetical; consequently, Christ cannot dwell with us according to the flesh in the same way that he sends his Spirit.”\textsuperscript{142} As I have already said this antithesis is not the ontological antithesis of Spirit and flesh that Zwingli held, but an antithesis that arises on the grounds of salvation history.\textsuperscript{143} Calvin argues that Jesus makes clear to the disciples that it is to their advantage that he departs from them bodily in order that they may receive the Holy Spirit. “But that presence of Christ by which He offers Himself to us through the grace and power of His Spirit is far more useful and desirable than if He were present before our eyes.”\textsuperscript{144} According to Calvin Christ’s bodily ascension requires us not only to reckon with the concreteness of Jesus’ humanity but the new reality of the Holy Spirit. “Christ withdrew his bodily presence from his disciples in order to be with them in spiritual presence. There it is clear that he distinguishes the essence of the flesh from the power of the Spirit, by which we are joined to Christ, though we are otherwise separated from him by a great distance in space.”\textsuperscript{145} We forfeit and lose nothing by holding firmly to Christ’s bodily absence because “he is present to us in a better way, through the grace of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{142} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.17.26.
\textsuperscript{143} This salvation history distinction is clear in Calvin’s reflections on the Apostle’s Creed. See in particular \textit{Institutes}, 2.16.13-17.
\textsuperscript{144} Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 16:7 (CCNT).
\textsuperscript{145} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.17.28.
It remains for us to pull into focus the larger theological significance of Jesus’ ascended flesh for Calvin. By way of entry into this topic Julie Canlis notes some of the broader implications of the doctrine of the ascension in Calvin’s theology:

[F]irst it threw open the realm of pneumatology and, with it, the historical possibility of participation in God; second it represented the future of the Christian as koinonia: to be with God, in Christ; third, it functioned as a protective measure to keep God from being manipulated or “pulled down” to our sphere of idolatry and superstition.  

In the commentary on Acts 1 Calvin interprets the cloud that obstructs the disciples’ vision of the ascending Christ to be a sign that the disciples must no longer rely on their physical senses in how they relate to Christ. “Wherefore, let us first learn out of this place that we must not seek Christ either in heaven, either upon earth, otherwise than by faith; and also, that we must not desire to have him present with us bodily in the world; for he that doth either of those two shall oftentimes go farther from him.” This last sentence encapsulates the theological stakes for Calvin: positing a bodily presence of Christ in the Supper that violates the reality of ascension will actually lead us farther away from Jesus, not closer to him. Of course this is ironic when one considers that insistence on bodily presence was meant to secure precisely the opposite, the nearness of Christ to us.

Nevertheless Calvin argues that fidelity to the biblical witness requires that we reckon with Christ’s bodily absence; failure to do so will mean that we lose touch with the humanity of the real Jesus. In Ascension and Ecclesia, Douglas Farrow highlights Calvin’s theological insight into the significance of the ascension. “To maintain a real

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147 Julie Canlis, Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 113.
absence is also to maintain a real continuity between the savior and the saved.”¹⁴⁹ Farrow notes the timeliness of this insight because it is not the divinity of Christ that is a problem for the church today, but the humanity of Christ. “What is sacrificed for the sake of this Christus præsens, as Calvin noticed long ago is his specificity as a particular man. Christ everywhere really means Jesus of Nazareth nowhere.”¹⁵⁰

Unlike his Lutheran counterparts Calvin worked from the reality of ascension towards an understanding of eucharist presence rather than the other way around. Because of this emphasis on ascension there emerges in his theology an uneasy relationship between the absence and presence of Christ within the Supper.¹⁵¹ Calvin believed that maintaining continuity with the saving humanity of Christ meant demarcating his discontinuity with us, which meant his bodily absence. We are separated from Christ “by a certain species of absence, inasmuch as we are now distant from his heavenly dwelling, but by dwelling in us by his Spirit he raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigour of his flesh, just as the rays of sun invigorate us by his vital warmth.”¹⁵² Calvin’s understanding of eucharistic presence is a dialectic of presence and absence—bodily absence, but spiritual presence. Nevertheless—and this is a point the Lutherans seemed unwilling to grasp—even though we are spatially dislocated from the body of Christ we are not deprived of the “vivifying vigour of his flesh” on account of how the Spirit lifts us up to the heavenly Christ. Calvin’s insistence on the bodily absence must be read in the light of his eschatological understanding of the Supper.

¹⁵⁰ Farrow, Ascension and Ecclesia, 12.
¹⁵¹ Thomas Davis, This is my Body, 127.
¹⁵² Calvin, Exposition of the Heads of Agreement, 240.
The Eschatological Structure of the Spirit’s work in the Eucharist

If the work of the Spirit within the Lord’s Supper is to put believers in touch with the flesh of Christ the reality of ascension means the activity of the Spirit will have an upward trajectory. As the channel between us and the flesh of Christ the direction of flow is one that moves us upwards to the heavenly Christ.\(^\text{153}\) A few commentators have recognized the eschatological character of Calvin’s doctrine of the Supper as compared to his opponents. According to Farrow Calvin maintains eschatological continuity through discontinuity and “insists on our need for a heavenly christocentric and pneumatological concept of space as an alternative to an illusory ubiquity on the one hand and to a de-eschatologized local presence on the other.”\(^\text{154}\) Ronald Wallace observes that one of the merits of Calvin’s doctrine is that it leaves room for a more significant eschatology than his Lutheran opponents. For Calvin “heaven is a place removed from this earth [and so he] sees the ascension more clearly as the judgment of this world, and as an event pointing man to a destiny beyond and above this world.”\(^\text{155}\)

For all the Reformers the understanding of the Supper spoke volumes about the fundamental nature of Christian piety. Calvin ties the ascension to the question of the proper method of seeking Christ on earth. Should we seek Christ in the physical elements of bread and wine or in heaven where the Scriptures proclaim him to reside?

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\(^\text{153}\) Calvin frequently describes the sacraments as the ladders to heaven. See Last Admonition, 443 and Comm. Genesis 28 (CTS).


\(^\text{155}\) Ronald Wallace, Calvin’s Doctrine of Word and Sacrament (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), 225-226. Geoffrey Wainwright and Gregory Dix have recognized the eschatological character of eucharistic thought but have overlooked Calvin as an example of this.
[O]ur minds must not be fixed on the earth, but must ascend upwards to the heavenly glory in which he dwells . . . he has now ascended above the heavens, that no gross imagination may keep us occupied with earthly things . . . if this mystery is heavenly, nothing could be more unreasonable than to draw down Christ to the earth, when, on the contrary, he calls us upwards to himself.156

Calvin’s insistence that the Christian is called upward brings us back to the central role that sursum corda plays in eucharistic liturgy of the Reformed tradition. By faithful participation in the signs of bread and wine the believer in faith through the Spirit is joined to the heavenly Christ and all his benefits. This liturgical emphasis reflects Calvin’s eschatological declaration that a “wholehearted waiting and looking for Christ’s coming must affect the way that we live.”157 The problem with ubiquity, according to Calvin, was that it undermined eschatological hope by turning our attention away from the heavenly Christ to visible earthly elements. The substance of Christian hope is predicated on the promise of a future reality currently invisible and not yet fully experienced by the believer; if salvation is visibly present in the eucharistic elements it is no longer hope, but something else.158

It is not surprising that some recent theologians are uncomfortable with all of Calvin’s emphasis on ascension and being “lifted up” in the context of the eucharist. To them it smacks of Gnosticism as if “the natural human body is . . . arbitrary and to be escaped from rather than itself participating in the economy of salvation towards

158 Calvin, Comm. Romans 8:24 (CTS). “Hope extends to things which we have not yet experienced, and represents to our minds the image of things which are hidden and far remote, anything that is either openly seen or grasped by the hand cannot be hoped for . . . hope refers to the future and not a present good, it is never to connected to open possession. If, therefore, groaning is a burden to any, they are necessarily overthrowing the order which has been laid down by God, who does not call his people to triumph before he has exercised them in the warfare of suffering . . . those who seek visible salvation reject it when they renounce hope.”
transformation and redemption.” However inadequate a statement of Calvin’s actual theology this is, the objection accents the pronounced eschatological tension that informs Calvin’s eucharistic thought in contrast to local and corporeal understandings of presence. Calvin’s opposition of heaven and earth does not reflect a dualism of matter and spirit, but rather the irresolvable duality of Christian experience located between the tension of the first and final advent of Christ.

Christ has already restored everything by his death, but the full effect of this is not yet seen. This redemption is still in progress, and so ours is as well, as we continue to struggle under the burden of being servants. Christ’s kingdom has only just begun and will not be complete until the last day. Things that are linked to it are only partially visible. So when we view great confusion in the world this hope refreshes us, for one day Christ will come and restore everything. In the meantime, when we see the remains of sin clinging to us, and if we are surrounded on every side with sadness, we still hold on to the hope of resurrection.

The injunction to lift our minds high above the world is not an encouragement to flight from this world or to leave the body behind, but an encouragement to recognize the


160 Calvin, Comm. Acts 3:21 (CTS)

161 As a corollary of the Radical Orthodoxy critiques are charges that Calvin denigrates the significance of the human body in creation and redemption. Most noteworthy is Margaret Miles essay “Theology, Anthropology, and the Human Body in Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion.” Harvard Theological Review 74:3 (1981), 303-323. For a critical response to Miles assessment of Calvin see James C. Goodloe, “The Body in Calvin’s Theology” in Calvin Studies V, ed. John H. Leith (Davidson, NC: Davidson College, 1990), 113-117. Also helpful for understanding the soteriological significance of the body in Calvin is Thomas J. Davis, This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought. 79-90; and Barbara Pitkin “The Spiritual Gospel? Christ and Human Nature in Calvin’s Commentary on John” in The
direction from which the “restoration of all things will come,” namely the heavenly Christ. Calvin refuses to allow a space to open up between the object of our hope and the actual flesh of Christ; the fullness of our salvation dwells only in his flesh so we must turn our attention entirely too where he is at—heaven.

Christian meditation on the future life is not a rejection of the created world for the sake of an unrelated heavenly world; rather Calvin wants the hearts of believers to dwell upon that place where the flesh of Christ now resides because that is the place to which Christ is redemptively drawing all of creation. The significance of heaven as the current dwelling of Christ is reflected in Robert Jenson’s description of heaven as “the created future’s presence to God. But just so, “heaven” is, vice versa, also the created place for the presence of God.” As resurrected and ascended flesh, the flesh of Jesus is the future flesh of believers. The otherworldly character of Calvin’s eucharistic piety is meant to orient believers to the truth that the final redemption of this world and of human flesh, will only come to us from the eschatological body of Christ.

Heaven for Calvin, contra the charges of his Lutheran critics, is not a crassly literal place located somewhere among the stars, “heaven we regard as the magnificent palace of God, far outstripping all this world’s fabric.” When Calvin appeals to heaven he is drawing a contrast between the fallen condition of this current world and the perfected world to come. “Heaven denotes a place higher than all the spheres, which was

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Pitkin argues that Calvin’s commentary on John steers away from traditional christological reflections on the two-natures and so opens up a door for reflecting on human nature. She says that “Calvin sees the teaching about the incarnate Christ as the redeemer and agent of salvation as the Gospel’s central theme, and important and inevitable corollary lies in the idea of human nature as the object of salvation, which emerges as a recurring motif throughout his commentary” (190).

assigned to the Son of God after his resurrection. *Not that it is literally a place beyond the world*, but we cannot speak of the kingdom of God without using our ordinary language.*" And yet it would seem that Calvin’s insistence on continuity between Christ’s assumed body and his glorified one requires some notion of place in his understanding of heaven. What exactly heaven means cosmologically speaking is not entirely apparent in Calvin, but he is clear that heaven is the place of God’s reign. This reign of Christ, represented by the right hand of God, is not circumscribed to a place, but fills heaven and earth, being diffused everywhere; it is not a place but a power which the Father bestowed upon Christ to govern the whole cosmos. Calvin rejects the interpretation of his position that draws the conclusion that because the humanity of Christ is in heaven that the person of Christ is confined to a place.

*[T]hough withdrawn in respect of bodily presence, he yet fills all things, namely, by the agency of his Spirit. For wherever the right hand of God, which embraces heaven and earth, is diffused, there the spiritual presence of Christ, and Christ himself is present by his boundless energy, though his body must be contained in heaven.*

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164 Calvin, *Comm. Eph. 4:10* (*CTS*).

165 One of the most contested issues between the Lutherans and the Reformed concerned the meaning of heaven as the place and of “the right hand of God.” The Reformed insisted that ubiquity was impossible since the ascension marked “the distance of place” The Lutherans regarded this as an overly literal and theologically flat-footed interpretation of heaven. Calvin does not state the issue as baldly as the Zurichers who added to the final article (#26) of the *Zurich Consensus* that the body of Christ “is contained in heaven as a place.” In fact in private, the Lutheran sympathizer Martin Bucer complained at length to Calvin about the Zurich interpretation of heaven as a place which is reflected in the consensus (See Paul Rorem, “Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord’s Supper Part II. The Agreement,” 375 and 383). One cannot fairly charge Calvin with holding an overly spatial and literal understanding of heaven without qualification. In fact Thomas Davis insists that Calvin actually stands closer to Luther than Zwingli on the meaning of the ascended body. “Separation from Christ is not a function of distance; rather, distance is a metaphor of separation. In other words separation from Christ is not a function of physical removal, but it is that language of physical removal that best conveys to the human mind the reality of separation” (*This is My Body*, 136-137). As much as I agree with this as a theological position, this seems to me as a systematizing of Calvin’s thought rather than a reflection of his actual views. Calvin’s position strikes me as much less clear than Davis makes him out to be.

166 Calvin, *True Partaking*, 558-559.
The person of Christ is neither confined to heaven, nor present to us as abstract divinity; rather it is the whole and entire person of the mediator who fills heaven and earth through the agency of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{167} Calvin distinguishes his position from the Lutherans by appealing to Peter Lombard’s \textit{totus-totum} distinction. “Christ is whole everywhere, but not altogether” (\textit{Christus ubique totus est, sed non totum}).\textsuperscript{168} Here we bump into the christological concept that the Lutherans eventually label the \textit{extra calvinisticum}. The Word, as the second person of trinity, is fully united to human nature, but it is never totally contained by that humanity. This is a disputed and complicated aspect of Calvin’s (and Reformed) Christology that we will treat again in the next chapter. What is important to recognize here is that despite the heavenly location of Christ’s flesh, believers are not deprived of its efficacious presence since the whole mediator comes to us through the power of the Spirit.

The ascended and heavenly Christ stands at the center of Calvin’s eschatological thought, mediating and holding together the tension between Christ’s first advent and final return. David Hollwerda observes of Calvin’s eschatological vision that “Seeking the ascended Christ in heaven may never be separated . . . from an eager anticipation of his return. Since the perfected kingdom is already complete in him, the Christian is always waiting for the final, visible restoration of all things.”\textsuperscript{169} According to Calvin eschatological existence between the times will bear the shape of the cross. In fact “this is

\begin{footnotes}
\item[167] Calvin, \textit{True Partaking}, 558. “Therefore, since the whole Christ is everywhere [since as \textit{totus} he is ubiquitous], our Mediator is ever present with his own people, and in the Supper reveals himself in a special way, yet in such a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness [yet he is there \textit{totus not totum}]. For, as has been said, in his flesh he is contained in heaven until he appears in judgment” \textit{Institutes} 4.17.31.
\item[168] Calvin, \textit{Comm. Jeremiah} preface (CTS).
\end{footnotes}
the way that God wills to spread his kingdom.” In this sense the bodily absence of Christ in the Supper reinforces this eschatological reality as Christian existence under the conditions of the cross. And yet, despite Calvin’s emphatic denunciation of corporeal and local presence we should resist those who would interpret this to be a soteriological belittling of the body— of either Christ’s as life-giving or ours as a real object of salvation. Those who make such claims underestimate the seriousness with which Calvin speaks of the Holy Spirit’s capacity to make us to participate in the flesh and blood of Christ, and misunderstand the very reason Calvin insists on reckoning with the ascension. Moreover, these criticisms stem from inadequate attention to the significant differences between Calvin and Zwingli’s doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

This exposition of Calvin has sought to grapple with the implied doctrine of the Holy Spirit that makes possible Calvin’s conviction that “the body of Christ is in the pious by the agency of the Spirit.” The pneumatological union between the believer and the body of Christ Calvin believed to be a reality as palpable, intimate and true as any corporeal understanding of presence. This union is like the oneness of flesh between husband and wife. The husband and wife constitute one person; which certainly would not hold true with regard to any other kind of relationship. All depends on this, that the wife was formed of the flesh and bones of her husband. Such is the union between us and Christ, who in some sort makes us partakers of his substance. “We are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh,” (Genesis 2:23;) not because, like ourselves, he has a human nature, but because, by the power of his Spirit, he makes us a part of his body, so that from him we derive our life.

170 Calvin, Institutes, 3.20.42
171 Calvin, True Partaking 559.
172 Calvin, Comm. Eph. 5:30 (CTS).
Calvin insists that this Spirit connection we have with Christ “belongs not merely to the soul alone, but also the body, so that we are flesh of his flesh . . . Otherwise the hope of a resurrection were weak, if our connection were not of that nature—full and complete.”

There can be no stark distinction between the benefits and blessings of Christ and the participation in the flesh of his actual person. In this regard Calvin disagrees with Zwingli and Melanchthon who believed that to know Christ is to know his benefits without also participating in his Christ’s person. According to Calvin we can only receive the benefits of Christ when we obtain Christ himself. This is no small difference since it implies a different eucharistic piety and a different understanding of the Spirit.

And I further maintain that He is obtained, not just when we believe that He was sacrificed for us, but when He dwells in us, when He is one with us, when we are members of His flesh, when, in short we become united in one life and substance (if I may say so) with Him. Besides, I am paying attention to the implication of the words, for Christ does not offer us only the benefit of His death and resurrection, but the self-same body of Christ is really (*realiter*), to use the usual word, i.e. truly (*vere*) given to us in the Supper, so that it may be health-giving food for our souls. I am adopting the usual terms, but I mean that our souls are fed by the substance of His body, so that we are truly (*vere*) made one with Him; or, what amounts to the same thing, that a life-giving power from the flesh of Christ (*vim ex Christi carne vivificam*) is poured into us through the medium of the Spirit, even although it is at a great distance from us, and is not mixed with us (*nec misceatur nobiscum*).

A distinct pneumatology unfolds from Calvin’s eucharistic theology that specifies the Spirit’s work as life-giving by virtue of pouring Christ’s flesh into us. The flesh of Jesus is the material of the Holy Spirit used to sanctify and transform believers. This means that we cannot think about the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives without understanding how it mysteriously inserts us into the flesh of Christ. In the next chapter we will consider

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173 Calvin, *Comm. I Cor. 6:15 (CTS).*
174 Calvin, *Comm. I Cor. 11:24 (CCNT).*
how this Spirit-rich doctrine of the eucharist reflects the development of a Spirit-oriented Christology in the Reformed tradition.
Chapter Four

Christ and the Spirit

. . . being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin, of her substance . . .

The Lord Jesus in his human nature thus united to the divine, was sanctified, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, above measure; having in him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, in whom it pleased the Father that all fullness should dwell; to the end that, being holy, harmless, undefiled, and full of grace and truth, he might be thoroughly furnished to execute the office of a mediator, and surety. Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by his Father, who put all power and judgment into his hand, and gave him commandment to execute the same.

The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience and sacrifice of himself, which he through the eternal Spirit, once offered up to God . . .

To all those whom Christ hath purchased redemption . . . [He] effectually persuades them by his Spirit to believe and obey; and governing their hearts by his Word and Spirit.

~Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap. 8

The Holy Spirit and Experiential Christology

A theological tradition will not develop an abiding pneumatological piety if the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is not deeply embedded within the fabric of its doctrine of Christ. It is not surprising then that the pneumatic orientation of Reformed Christology would eventually bare the fruit of a rich Holy Spirit piety. Since the time of John Calvin a hallmark of Reformed theology has been the special attention it has given to the reality of the Holy Spirit in the person and work of Christ. This Spirit-oriented Christology came to its fullest expression among the Puritans and is amply illustrated in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. In response to the question (Q. 42) “Why is our Mediator called Christ?” the Larger Catechism responds with a succinct statement that places pneumatology directly in the middle of Christology:
Our mediator was called Christ, because he was anointed with the Holy Ghost above measure; and so set apart, and fully furnished with all ability, to execute the office of prophet, priest and king of his church, in the estate of both of his humiliation and exaltation.

Westminster theology makes clear that the Holy Spirit is integral to every aspect of who Christ is and what he does for our salvation: at the conception of his human nature, through the execution of his offices as prophet, priest and king, in offering himself up as a sacrifice, while in the estates of humiliation and exaltation, Christ exists and acts in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.¹

In Reformed pneumatology the person of Christ is the pathway of the Holy Spirit in the world, which means that the Spirit is mediated through the human nature and experience of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son. There is more Spirit, says Richard Sibbes, “in Christ than all creatures put together; than all angels, and all men, because the divine nature is nearer to Christ than it is to angels or to any creatures.”² It is this special relationship between the Holy Spirit and the person of Christ revealed in the economy of redemption that grounds and orders the understanding of the Holy Spirit’s work in creation, the church and the life of the believer. In fact, everything that can and must be said about workings of the Holy Spirit has a corresponding christological statement. This explains why a common characteristic of Reformed monographs on the Holy Spirit is that...

¹ No other Reformed confession has so thorough a statement of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the person and work of Christ as does the Westminster Confession. For this reason T.F. Torrance’s claim that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has “little place in Westminster theology” and is only “brought in incidentally and regarded instrumentally” is really quite unintelligible when one actually reads the confession itself and knows something about its background in Puritan theology (The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Faith. London: James Clarke & Co. Limited, 1959. cxı). Torrance and others make this charge against the Westminster Confession largely because it does not devote an independent chapter to the Holy Spirit. B.B. Warfield’s response to this criticism is instructive: the Westminster Confession has no independent chapter on the Holy Spirit because the whole work is a treatise on the Holy Spirit. Selected Shorter Writings of B.B. Warfield, Vol. 1 (Nutley, N.J., Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1973), 205.
each devotes significant space to expositing the relationship between the Holy Spirit in
the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is the Spirit-bearer and Spirit-sender, the result and the
starting point for all pneumatological experience. Echoing the Puritans T.F Torrance
captures the significance of Jesus bearing in his human nature the fullness of the Holy
Spirit:

He came as the Spirit who in Jesus has penetrated into a new intimacy
with our human nature, for he came as the Spirit in whom Jesus lived
through our human life from end to end, from birth to death, and beyond
into the resurrection. And therefore he came not as isolated and naked
Spirit, but as Spirit charged with all the experience of Jesus as he shared to
the full our mortal nature and weakness, and endured its temptation and
grief and suffering and death, and with the experience of Jesus as he
struggled and prayed, and worshipped and obeyed, and poured out his life
in compassion for mankind.

Jesus brings to mankind a new presence of the Spirit previously not communicable
because of human sinfulness, and the ontological gap between divinity and humanity. But
now the exalted humanity of the mediator, having made atonement for sins and ascended
to heaven is the center of God’s life giving presence in the world. However, Sibbes is
clear about the role that the incarnation plays in our experience of the Holy Spirit.

Adam himself received not his grace after so glorious a manner as we do,
for he received it from the Spirit nakedly considered as the third person in
the Trinity, and as all other creatures received their excellencies. But we

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5 “The gift of the Holy Ghost especially depends upon the glorifying of Christ. When he had fulfilled the work of redemption, and was raised to glory, God pacified gave the Holy Ghost as a gift of his favour.” Richard Sibbes, *Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law*, 209.
receive it from the Holy Spirit, which doth not only proceed from the Father and the Son, but cometh, as it were, through our own nature, which was marvelously united to God the Son, and made one with him, unto us, and worketh in us.⁶

Critical to keep in mind for Spirit-Christology in the Reformed tradition is its unswerving commitment to the incarnation as the necessary presupposition of Christ’s unique bearing of the Spirit and his subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit to us.

For the Puritans pneumatological reflection grows out of a devotional Christology that desired communion with Christ and conformity to his image.⁷ John Owen makes clear that pursuing Christ draws us into the reality of the Holy Spirit.

We are to know Christ so as to labor after conformity unto him. And this conformity consists only in a participation of those graces whose fullness dwells in him. We can therefore no other way regularly press after it, but by acquaintance with and due consideration of the work of the Spirit of God upon his human nature; which is therefore worthy of our most diligent inquiry into.⁸

According to Puritan thought the humanity of Jesus is the central soteriological object for understanding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Conformity to Christ means sharing in Jesus’ experience of the Holy Spirit, for in Jesus we encounter an experience and fullness of the Spirit that can be had nowhere else. “His fullness of the Spirit is as the fullness of a fountain ours is but the fullness of the cistern. He hath grace in the spring; we have it but in the conduit. His graces are primitive; ours derivative.”⁹ This brings us to

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⁸ John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, 188 [italics mine]. Sibbes makes a similar observation: “The same Spirit that purified his holy human nature cleanses us by degrees to be suitable to so holy a Head, and frames the judgment and affections of all to whom he shows mercy to concur with his own, in laboring to further his end of abolishing sin out of our natures.” The Bruised Reed (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 44.
a crucial axiom in Reformed pneumatology: our experience of the Holy Spirit is continuous with the humanity of the incarnate Jesus, not in the form of repetition, but participation. As a man Jesus stood where we stand: as a creature totally dependent on God. He was born of a woman, grew in knowledge and wisdom, faced temptation, prayed, depended on divine strength and encouragement, learned obedience through his suffering, felt God’s absence, wept, experienced pain and suffered death. He was baptized in the Spirit, becoming the Spirit-bearer, in order that he might baptize us with his own Spirit (John 1:33). This Spirit does not come to us as a “naked Spirit,” forming and renovating our natures de novo; Jesus’ relationship to the Holy Spirit was original, ours is not; rather we receive the Spirit of Christ, Spirit charged with the experience of Jesus, Spirit that communicates the salvation accomplished in his person, Spirit that causes us to participate in his ascended and heavenly humanity. Sibbes nicely summarizes the heart of Reformed pneumatology:

The more Christ is discovered, the more is the Spirit given; and according to the manifestations of Christ what he hath done for us, and what he hath, the more the riches of Christ is unfolded in the church, the more the Spirit goes along with them. The more the free grace and love of God in Christ is made known to the church, the more Spirit there is; and again back again, the more Spirit the more knowledge of Christ; for there is a reciprocal going of these two, the knowledge of Christ and the Spirit.10

The Holy Spirit and the communicatio gratiarum

The Reformed tradition has a soteriological interest in the humanity of Jesus that is coordinated with its prioritizing of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ. An utmost concern from the beginning within Reformed circles was to maintain the unabridged

humanity of Jesus in the midst of his hypostatic union with the divine Logos. For this reason when it came to understanding the effects of the hypostatic union upon Christ’s human nature the Reformed emphasized the *communicatio gratiarum* (communication of graces) in contrast to the Lutheran embrace of the *communicatio idiomatum* (communication of attributes).¹¹ Francis Turretin notes,

> Christ does not speak of that which was communicated to the human nature by the Logos in the personal union (Matt 28:18), but only shows what was given to him by God, the Father, for the execution of his office, not in the union, but after the resurrection. He does not speak of the power (which is an essential property of God), but of the delegated power (which is a personal function of the Mediator); he does not say *pasa dynamis* [all power], but *pasa exousia* [all authority].¹²

Turretin names two kinds of graces that arise in the light of the hypostatic union: the grace of eminence (*gratia eminentiae*) and habitual graces (*gratiae habituales*). The former specifies the dignity of Christ’s human nature as elevated above all other creatures and the latter the gracious dispositions that the Holy Spirit bestows on the human nature of Christ. These dispositions are gifts, observes Richard Muller, which consists in “the knowledge of God, the soundness and perseverance of will, and great power of action, beyond the natural capacity of human beings.”¹³ Turretin notes how these habitual graces of the Spirit were not infinite, but finite gifts which were the “highest and most perfect in

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¹³ Muller, *Dictionary*, 72.
their own order . . . but according to the capacity of the recipient in the order of created gifts.”

The Lutherans, by contrast, interpreted the extraordinary powers of Christ to be rooted in the communication of attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) and the communion of natures (*communio naturarum*) resulting from the hypostatic union, which meant that Christ’s human nature *did* receive infinite gifts on account of the communion of the human nature with the divine Logos. Lutheran scholastic Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586) argues that the gifts bestowed on the human nature of Christ “must not only be considered in an absolute sense, so to speak, as if the humanity were only ornamented with them according to itself” but also “in order that it [human nature] can be fully and properly prepared instrument with and through which the deity of the Logos exercises and carries out its activities.” The Reformed were very critical of the way the Lutherans rendered the human nature of Christ into an “instrument” of the divine Logos, claiming that this dissolved into mere appearance the development of Jesus’ humanity and his life in the state of humiliation. Herman Bavinck charges that according to Lutheran Christology

> It is plain that this view of the communication of proper qualities completely robs the communication of gifts of its meaning: why should gifts be needed when divine attributes are shared! While Lutheran Christology still speaks of gifts, it actually does not know what to do with

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15 Muller, *Dictionary*, 95.
them and no longer has room even for Christ's anointing with the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{17}

In Reformed thinking the Lutheran view of the \textit{communicatio idiomatum}, most especially the affirmation of a \textit{genus maiestaticum}, threatened to undermine the continuity of Jesus’ full humanity and experience with our own; and this was seen to be directly correlated with a diminished place for the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ.

The point in recalling this period of polemical theology is not to stir up old controversies, but to draw attention to the pneumatological implications of the debate on the communication of attributes. What is clear is that the Reformed position on this issue would eventually lead to a more developed Spirit-oriented Christology. John Owen, who was quite removed from polemics with the Lutherans, still complained that in the Lutheran \textit{communicatio idiomatum} “there doth not seem to be any need, nor indeed room, for any such operations of the Spirit; for could not the Son of God himself, in his own person, perform all things requisite both for forming, supporting, sanctifying, and preserving of his own nature without the especial assistance of the Holy Ghost?”\textsuperscript{18} Owen proposes a provocative alternative, not only to the Lutheran position but also to standard Chalcedonian options for rendering the relationship between the divine and human natures within the hypostatic union. He argues that the only direct and immediate action of the divine Son upon the human nature “was the \textit{assumption} of it into subsistence with himself.”\textsuperscript{19} Owen goes on to argue

That all other actings of God in the person of the Son towards the human nature were \textit{voluntary}, and did not necessarily ensue on the union


\textsuperscript{18} Owen, \textit{Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit}, 160.

\textsuperscript{19} Owen, \textit{Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit}, 160.
mentioned; for there was no transfusion of the properties of one nature into the other, nor real physical communication of divine essential excellencies unto the humanity . . . the human nature, therefore, however inconceivably advanced, is not the subject of infinite, essentially divine properties.\textsuperscript{20}

These comments, while surely a development of Reformed thinking, are in line with traditional accounts of the Reformed doctrine of the communication of properties. For Owen this distinction makes room for the Holy Spirit who is the “immediate, peculiar, efficient cause of all external divine operations.” By claiming that the divine Son was responsible for the assumption of the human nature (\textit{anhypostatically} understood) Owen avoids the charge of adoptionism, but in highlighting the voluntary character of the communication between the natures he safeguards the integrity of Jesus’ humanity while at the same time opening up a pneumatological clearing. “Whatever the Son of God wrought in, by, or upon human nature, he did it by the Holy Ghost, who is his Spirit, as he is the Spirit of the Father.”\textsuperscript{21} We see a reciprocal movement in Owen’s theology between Jesus as actively wielding the Spirit and passively receiving the Spirit. Alan Spence summarizes the implications of Owen’s position, noting that “it would appear that his [Christ’s] human nature is not directly determined by his divinity, but has its own principle or center of operation, experiencing and knowing God through the Spirit.”\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Owen, \textit{Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit}, 161.
\textsuperscript{22} Alan Spence, “Christ’s humanity and Ours: John Owen” in \textit{Persons, Divine, and Human : King’s College Essays in Theological Anthropology} eds. Christoph Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh : T & T Clark, 1991), 83. See also Spence’s comprehensive treatment of Owen’s Christology, \textit{Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology}. (London: T&T Clark International, 2007). Spence’s work on Owen’s Spirit-Christology is excellent, especially as he puts it into conversation with traditions both ancient and contemporary, but he overestimates the extent to which Owen was a path breaker within the Reformed tradition. To a large extent the main theological pieces of Owen’s Spirit-Christology were already in place in Reformed theology; Owen’s contribution was how he synthesized all the strands into one.
Here we encounter the christological root of Reformed pneumatology: the Holy Spirit is central to the Christian life because the Holy Spirit was central in the life of Christ.

While Owen’s thought was in line with the broader stream of Reformed Christology his reflection on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the humanity of Jesus is one of the most developed within the tradition. What he demonstrates, along with other Puritan theologians, is that a robust christological commitment to the full unabridged humanity of the mediator opens up a substantial space for the work of the Holy Spirit within the church and the life of the Christian. This theological commitment explains a dual yet deeply integrated devotion within Puritan piety to the humanity of Jesus and the person of the Holy Spirit. This strong affirmation of the continuity between Jesus’ experience and our own, which the Puritans bring to its fullest development, becomes a cornerstone of Reformed pneumatology and spirituality.

23 Devotion to the humanity of Christ does not mean devotion to the human nature as opposed to the divine nature; rather devotion to the humanity of Christ refers to the manner in which the theological accent of reflection falls on the historical character of the mediator’s redemptive work and experience. Richard Muller argues that Reformed Christology does not fit the traditional “christology from above” or the modern “christology from below”, but is “a christology developed out of a historical line of covenant-promise, which points, out of soteriological necessity to the concrete, historical person of the God-man.”

Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 1986), 29.

24 Bruce McCormack confirms the comprehensiveness of the Holy Spirit’s role in the development of Reformed Christology. “By way of conclusion, we may say that the Reformed understanding of incarnation and atonement distinguishes itself through its continuous emphasis on the distinction of the divine being and human being and through the very prominent role it assigns the Holy Spirit as the Power which joins together divine being and human being without setting aside the distinction. It is the Spirit who brings divine nature and human nature together in the hypostatic union and mediates between them. [McCormack here seems to go beyond even Owen]. It is the Spirit who empowers and makes possible the obedience of the Son in and through His human nature. It is the Spirit who joins us to the Son, thereby effecting our sanctification and our justification. And it is the Spirit who “glorifies” believers by glorifying the Son in eternity.” For Us and Our Salvation, 36.
**Eucharist and Spirit-Christology**

At this point it is important to recall the eucharistic orientation of this project. It is a common observation that the eucharistic debates of the 16th century were in large part disagreements over Christology. Werner Elert claims that “the whole dispute with regard to Christology had its origin in the doctrine of Holy Communion.”  

This is essential to keep in mind since eucharistic concerns, while not wholly determinative of Reformation era Christology, exerted profound influence in setting the course of development within Reformed and Lutheran theology alike. While it is difficult to ascertain the order of the relationship: whether it was christological doctrine leading eucharistic theology, or eucharistic theology leading christological doctrine—likely it was both, dialectically working themselves out—what is clear is how the eucharistic context became the proving grounds for doctrinally orthodox and spiritually compelling reflection on the person and work of Christ.

In the last chapter I argued that a feature of Calvin’s Lord’s Supper theology was the way it put in place a framework for a mutually reinforcing relationship between a preservation of the unabridged humanity of Jesus (illustrated in a rejection of ubiquity and transubstantiation), and a robust account of the work of the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption (affirmed by the *sursum corda* work of the Spirit). Essential to Calvin’s eucharistic theology was his shift away from a mode of christological reflection that concentrated on the ontological constitution of the person of Christ (i.e. relationship of divine and human natures) to one that reflects upon the whole person of Christ as the

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mediator, revealed in salvation history and working through his threefold office. Under Calvin’s model of christological reflection the person of the Holy Spirit takes on a prominent role in mediating to believers everything Christ accomplished in the flesh throughout the *historia salutis* because the Spirit was fundamental to the execution of Christ’s office as mediator. In line with this idea Owen argues that in the economy of salvation after Christ’s ascension it is the Holy Spirit who “supplies the bodily absence of Jesus Christ.” Owen intends by this something very different from the charge against the Reformed that the Holy Spirit becomes a mere proxy or substitute for an absent Christ. The Holy Spirit “effects what he [Christ] hath to do and accomplish towards his [people] in the world; so that whatever is done by him, it is the same as if it were wrought immediately by the Lord Christ himself in his own person, whereby all his holy promises are fully accomplished towards them that believe.” The Reformed understanding of eucharistic participation corresponds to this christological-pneumatology emphasis. With the Lutherans’ the Reformed are deeply concerned to preserve the unity of the person but through different theological avenues: the former proceed towards that unity via reflection on the person *qua* person in the hypostatic union; the Reformed in a faithful adherence to the unitary work of the person of the mediator (God *and* man) as revealed in salvation history. As a consequence of this christological difference there emerges in Reformed thought a redemptive-historical orientation to the interpretation of the

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26 Martin Chemnitz is a good example of eucharistic reasoning that takes the hypostatic union as the christological starting point for reflection. He argues that “since the natural and essential properties and conditions of a physical body do not permit or allow such a body to be present in different places at the same time, and since the adversaries complain that this kind of presence conflicts with the reality of Christ’s nature, it must surely be demonstrated that, because of the hypostatic union of the divine logos with the assumed human nature, the Son of God can manifest the presence of his body and blood.” *The Two Natures of Christ*, 22.


28 On the contrast of Reformed Christology from the “generally a-historical and metaphysically conditioned Christologies of Chalcedon and the medieval scholastics” see Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 33.
substance of Christ around which eucharistic participation is centered. This in turn opens up more room for the Holy Spirit as the communicative agency that brings Christ to us as well as giving Reformed eucharistic piety a strongly trinitarian orientation. In this chapter I make this pneumatic Christology more explicit and argue that there is a clear path of theological development between the eucharistic oriented Christology of the early Reformed tradition and the later devotional pneumatology and Christology of the Puritans.

The Office of Mediator and the Spirit

Many have drawn attention to the strongly pneumatic character of Calvin’s Christology. This orientation pivots around a fundamental axiom running throughout his theological works, already highlighted in Puritan pneumatology, that Christ cannot be separated from the Spirit or the Spirit from Christ.

It is a mistake to imagine that the Spirit can be obtained without obtaining Christ; and it is equally foolish and absurd to dream that we can receive Christ without the Spirit. Both doctrines must be believed. We are partakers of the Holy Spirit, in proportion to the intercourse which we maintain with Christ; for the Spirit will be found nowhere but in Christ, on whom he is said, on that account, to have rested; for he himself says, by the prophet Isaiah, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me.” (Isaiah 61:1;

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Luke 4:18.) But neither can Christ be separated from his Spirit; for then he would be said to be dead, and to have lost all his power.\textsuperscript{32}

It is important to take note of the meaning of Calvin’s claim that without the Spirit Christ “would be said to be dead, and to have lost all his power.” This statement has two interrelated meanings in Calvin’s theology: the first is without the Spirit the work of Christ remains outside the believer and without transforming effect; the second is without the Holy Spirit Christ cannot complete his office as mediator.

In what sense was the Holy Spirit essential for Christ’s execution of his office as mediator? According to Calvin the Holy Spirit is not a superfluous divine agency alongside the indwelling Logos, but fundamentally constitutive for an interpretation of Christ’s person and work. Julie Canlis argues that Calvin “shifted the primary bond between the human Jesus and the Father from a divine substance to the divine person of the Spirit. This opens up a new realm for the Spirit’s operation in the life of Jesus, where the Spirit has its own particular mission from the Father in conceiving, anointing, and empowering Jesus’s mission.”\textsuperscript{33} Calvin puts enormous weight on Christ being anointed with the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of his office as mediator. “Now, it was necessary that Christ should be endued with the Spirit of God, in order to execute that divine office, and be the Mediator between God and men; for so great a work could not be performed by human power.”\textsuperscript{34} Christ came “endowed with the Holy Spirit in a

\textsuperscript{32} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Eph.} 3:17. Calvin says quite strikingly that to seek Christ without the Spirit is to make the former to be like a “dead image or carcass.” (\textit{Comm. Romans} 8:9). On not separating the Spirit from Christ see also \textit{Comm. John} 16:14. Unless otherwise noted all references from Calvin’s commentaries in this chapter are taken from the Calvin Translation Society edition (CTS).

\textsuperscript{33} Julie Canlis, \textit{Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2010), 97.

\textsuperscript{34} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Isaiah} 42:1.
Calvin’s soteriological category of mediator highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in his understanding of the constitution of the person of Christ. Speaking of the Spirit he says,

> [W]e ought to know that he is called “Spirit of Christ” not only because Christ, as eternal Word of God, is joined in the same Spirit with the Father, but also from his character as the Mediator. For he would have come in vain if he had not been furnished with this power. In this sense he is called the “Second Adam,” given from heaven as “a life giving spirit.”

Why would Christ have come in vain if he had not been furnished with the Holy Spirit? If Christ is God manifested in the flesh (*Deus manifestus in carne*)—a crucial category for Calvin—what is his divinity lacking that this mediatorial work can only be accomplished with the Holy Spirit? Answering these questions points us towards what makes Calvin and later Reformed Christology a distinct development within the tradition of orthodox Chalcedonian Christology.

Richard Muller has shown how the Reformed, beginning with Calvin, developed new structuring patterns and categories for treating the person and work of Christ. These new structures, most notably the two states of Christ (humiliation and exaltation) and his threefold office (prophet, priest and king), were biblical generated concepts that became integral christological principles that conditioned the Reformed reception of traditional christological dogma. Chalcedonian Christology as it had been worked out within medieval scholastic theology tended to be oriented around the general categories of natures, person and union, and in large part was driven by concerns related to how the

35 Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.2.
36 Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.2.
37 Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 17-38.
union of the two natures was metaphysically possible. On the whole it was a “Christology from above,” which emphatically stressed the divine nature of Christ in comparison to his human nature, and in standard textbooks treated the person of Christ in isolation from the work of Christ. This tended to give traditional Christology something of an ahistorical and metaphysical framework that on the surface seemed removed from the biblical categories for treating the person of Christ. One of the effects of this Christology was to severely diminish the role of the Holy Spirit in the understanding of the person of Christ. Even though Reformed Christology was committed to the two-natures, one person doctrine of Chalcedon it sought to move beyond the abstractly conceived person-work conceptuality towards something more firmly rooted in the biblical economy.

Unlike the typical scholastic Christology of his time Calvin does not begin his treatment of Christ with a doctrine of the union of the two natures in one person, but with

38 The Chalcedonian categories were much more determinative of early Lutheran Christology; Martin Chemnitz’s, The Two Natures of Christ is a good example of this. Chemnitz begins his work with a brief definition of christological terms (person, nature, hypostasis, subsistence, deity, humanity etc. . .) then proceeds to exposit in order the divine nature, the human nature, the hypostatic union and finally the communication of attributes. One senses very little of the narrative shape of the biblical accounts as methodologically determinative of Chemnitz’s Christology. However, in fairness, the scholastic character of his Christology is conditioned by polemical concerns. Later Lutheran Christology seems to be less scholastic in form and is responsible for developing the biblical-christological category of the two estates (humiliation and exaltation), in addition to adopting the Reformed concept of the threefold office into their christological reflections.

39 Surely Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure are less susceptible to these christological charges, but the Reformers were clearly reacting against a real strain of scholastic treatments of Christ in their time. In a not so veiled swipe at medieval scholasticism of his day Calvin says “The reason why the Papists have nothing more than a shadow of Christ is that they have been careful to look at his mere essence, but have disregarded his kingdom, which consists in the power to save” (Comm. John 1:49). Quite famously Philip Melancthon argued that we know Christ most fully when we approach him in terms of the categories of law, sin and grace. “For from these things Christ is known, since to know Christ means to know his benefits, and not as they [Papists] teach, to reflect upon his natures and the modes of his incarnation. For unless you know why Christ put on flesh and was nailed to a cross, what good will it do you to know merely the history about him?” Loci Communes in Melanchthon and Bucer. vol. 19 The Library of Christian Classics, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 21-22.

an “essentially Anselmic argument concerning the necessity of the mediator, the God-man.” According to Muller, Calvin mobilizes this Anselmic argument to generate a new structuring pattern for his Christology as a whole. The effect is a principle of mediation as the proper ground of Christology. This means that the “person-work paradigm is superseded by a doctrinal model in which the function of mediation becomes determinative and the person of Christ must be understood in and through his office.”

Calvin defends the two-natures doctrine, but he subordinates and reinterprets it according to the biblical concept of the mediator understood through the threefold office. The majority opinion of medieval scholastic theologians was that Christ was mediator according to his human nature alone, but Calvin asserts that “those things which apply to the office of the mediator are not spoken simply either of the divine nature or the human.” Calvin likes the category of mediator because it comprehends both natures at once and so sets forth Christ’s “true substance most clearly of all.” This shift to a mediator paradigm has the effect of making it impossible to reflect on the person of

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41 Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 27. Anselmic refers to Anselm of Canterbury’s (1033-1109) work on the doctrine of atonement found in the *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God became Man). It is not clear that Calvin was familiar with this text in particular, but Anselmian thought was “in the air.” This Anselmian orientation remained decisive for the development of Reformed Christology and is particularly evident throughout the Heidelberg Catechism (Most prominently in Q &A 12-19). Dutch Neo-Calvinist Arnold van Ruler makes a suggestive observation regarding pneumatology and Anselmian soteriology: “the more one considers the salvation given in Christ in “anselmian” terms, the more a relatively independent pneumatology becomes necessary. As long as the heart of the salvation in Christ is only apparent to God’s eyes, then what happened in Christ, in his cross and resurrection, still needs to be unveiled before our eyes. That is why the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the establishing of the apostolic office, and the calling together of a confessing congregation, are all necessary.” *Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics: Essays Toward a Public Theology*, trans. John Bolt (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 49.

42 Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 28.

43 Calvin, *Institutes* 2.14.3. On the history of the mediator concept and its use among the Reformers see Stephen Edmundson. *Calvin’s Christology* (Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2004), chapter 1. Reflecting on the role of both natures in this mediator Christology, Richard Muller observes that Christ’s “human nature is capable of performing a redemptive act representative of and in the place of mankind, and the divine nature is capable of both sustaining the human nature throughout the ordeal of its saving work and of rendering the work performed through the instrumentality of the human nature of infinite value by reason of the infinite worth and power of his divinity.” *Dictionary*, 188.

Christ apart from the work of Christ; person and work are integrated, which means that the unity of the person is to be found in the unity of his work. By stressing mediation as an act of the divine-human person through the offices, Calvin is able to affirm the union of the two-natures in a more straightforwardly biblical manner rather than according to the abstract and speculative categories that grew up around the Chalcedonian formula. And having worked out these new patterning categories within the context of the temporal economy of salvation, Calvin’s Christology possesses a dynamic soteriological quality and historical form. Heiko Obermann has described this as a shift of accent from “a two-natures Christology to an offices Christology, converging towards a Mediator-theology.”

This shift leads to two interrelated emphases that highlight the person of the Holy Spirit in the context of Christology: the first is a concern to affirm in the person of Christ an unabridged humanity and second is the development of the concept of mediatorial office. In line with what we have already observed of later Reformed Christology concerning the *communicatio gratiarium* Muller notes that in the “interest of establishing the integrity of this sanctified humanity as human, Calvin stresses the bestowing of “gifts” upon Christ by the Spirit as distinct from the issue of the *communicatio idiomatum* within the person of the incarnate one.” For Calvin and the Reformed tradition, even

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45 “And indeed, faith ought not to be fixed on the essence of Christ alone (so to speak), but ought to attend to His power and office, for it would be of little advantage to know who Christ is, if this second point were not added, what he wishes to be toward us, and for what purpose the Father sent Him.” Calvin, *Comm. John* 1.49.
46 Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 27
though the divine and human natures are inseparably united in Christ’s person, there is no divinization of the human nature by the indwelling Logos.

Closely tied to the idea of the Spirit bestowing gifts upon the person of Christ is the reason they are given: for the execution of his mediatorial office. For Calvin the mediatorial office is threefold in form and encompasses the totality of Christ’s redeeming work. It grows out of God’s covenant relationship with the human race which he administered through the calling and appointing over his people of prophets, priests and kings. Under the old covenant these anointed offices were distinct, sometimes at odds with one another, and always filled by fallible individuals; but in Christ the offices are perfectly executed and harmoniously united in his person. The Scriptural meaning of “Christ” and “Messiah” means “the anointed one” which implies that office itself, understood redemptive-historically, is constitutive for a proper understanding of the person of Christ. G. C. Berkouwer observes that the biblical concept of office is “superpersonal” which means that the commissioning of a specific work comes from beyond the person.49 Office is not something that belongs to the person but is conferred upon them. Of course when it comes to the person of Christ office is not merely a garment he wears temporally, it truly discloses his eternal nature as the Son of God.50 In the biblical history the symbol of this divine commission or conferral of an office was...

50 This is the importance of Christ’s twofold anointing in Reformed theology. Although the concept is not clearly worked out in Calvin’s theology the seeds of it are there. What the twofold anointing means is that Christ is not only anointed according to his incarnate human nature, but as the second person of the trinity. Christ is mediator according to his divine nature and in this sense he is anointed to this role within the trinitarian economy. This means that Christ’s office of mediator does not cease once he has accomplished it—but he will remain the mediator between God and man throughout eternity. Along these lines see Richard Muller response’s to J. Moltmann’s charge that incarnation is ultimately superfluous for Calvin’s Christology: “Christ in the Eschaton: Calvin and Moltmann on the Duration of the Munus Regium” *Harvard Theological Review* 74:1 1981 (31-59).
that of anointing — we see it in reference to prophets (I Kings 19:16), priests (Lev 8:12) and kings (1 Sam 16:13). The anointing with oil symbolizes the gift of the Spirit because the power to execute the office does not reside in the one who is called, but the one who calls.  

In the person of Christ it is similar; he is anointed with the Spirit so that he might perfectly execute the office of prophet, priest and king. The concept of mediatorial office is fundamentally pneumatological in nature, which demonstrates how deeply woven the doctrine of the Spirit is within the fabric of Reformed Christology.  

### The Threefold Office and the Two Estates of Christ

In the rest of this chapter I offer a pneumatic exposition of the threefold office (munus triplex) in the light of the two estates of Christ. Christ is mediator and fills the threefold office according to both natures. The threefold office is the most appropriate christological loci to explore the relationship of Christ and the Spirit because it comprehends the soteriological significance of everything he did from birth to death and from resurrection through ascension. As established above, the mediatorial office is pneumatological in nature, rooted within the covenantal narratives of Scripture and comprehensive of all aspects of the person and work of Christ. We are justified in articulating Spirit-Christology in terms of the threefold office because Calvin’s own

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51 Calvin notes that the “metaphor of anointing is usual so often as mention is made of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. It is now applied unto the person of Christ, because by this means he was consecrated a king and priest by his Father. And we know that in time of the law, oil was a solemn token of consecration.” Comm. Acts 10:38.

52 Krusche, Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin, 153.
account gives us an explicitly pneumatological exposition of each office. My systematic exposition takes Calvin’s treatment as a jumping off point, but I rely also on other Reformed theologians that have developed this important christological concept. By no means is this meant to be a comprehensive treatment of the threefold office; instead I limit my discussion of each office to what it reveals about the Holy Spirit’s interaction with the person and work of Christ within salvation history.

The threefold office is a soteriological lens that tends to be applied to the work of Christ more synchronically than diachronically. Indeed from heaven Christ exercises all three offices at the same time and even during his earthly ministry the functioning of the various offices were always overlapping. Nevertheless the peculiar work of each office is best understood to be appropriated to a set of specific actions or key events in the life of Christ much the same way that classical trinitarian theology taught that different works were appropriated to the various persons of the trinity (e.g. Father as Creator, Son as Mediator and Spirit as Consummator). On its own the threefold office cannot adequately capture the historical and progressive nature of the work of Christ. Herein lay the importance of the doctrine of the two estates of Christ for Christology: it helps us grapple with the theological movement of the mediator from his state of humiliation (status humiliationis) to the state of exaltation (status exaltationis)—although even the two estates doctrine defies a strictly linear interpretation of history. First formulated by Lutheran theologians and embraced by the Reformed, the doctrine of the two estates

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emerged out of a reflection on the *kenosis* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11.\textsuperscript{54} The outlines of the distinction exist *in nuce* within Calvin’s theology, but the doctrine only becomes a fully formed and determinative christological category in later Reformed thought. Berkouwer argues that the doctrine was “meant to do justice to the testimony of scripture concerning the historical progress of Christ’s life from humiliation to exaltation, from suffering to glory.”\textsuperscript{55} For the Reformed the mediator’s state of humiliation begins with the eternal Son’s decision to become incarnate, extends throughout his entire life, death and three days in the tomb, while the state of exaltation begins at his resurrection and carries on through his ascension to heaven. In contrast to the Lutherans, the Reformed desired to adhere more strictly to the biblical narrative concerning Christ’s life and therefore allow no concurrence between the two estates. In order to be faithful to the narrative sweep of salvation history we need to attend to the meaning of each office at various points within the movement of the life of Christ starting with his birth and extending through his ascension to heaven.

**Prophetic Office and the Spirit**

The prophetic office according to Calvin is fundamentally a teaching office. However, this means much more than merely the communication of information; it entails a deeply sacramental understanding of the Word’s power and presence. When God appointed a prophet that person was “filled with the Spirit of God after a peculiar

\textsuperscript{54} There are significant differences between the Lutherans and the Reformed in how they interpret the two estates that are reflective of their different christological commitments. On these differences see Muller, *Dictionary*, 287-289.

manner” such that they became “organs of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{56} The prophets did not come forth in their own name or authority nor did they share their own opinions: insofar as they surrendered their faculties to the inspiration of the Spirit they were the voice of God to the people.\textsuperscript{57} It was critical that the Spirit of God fall upon the prophet so that his words would have authority and efficacy. In a technical sense the prophets were not bearers of a new revelation but “expounders of the law and messengers of God’s will.”\textsuperscript{58} Commenting on the comparison of Christ to the prophet Elijah, Calvin argues that Elijah is representative of all the prophets and is the most distinguished among them for he “restored worship of God which had been corrupted, and stood unrivaled in his exertions for vindicating the law and true godliness, which was at that time almost extinct.”\textsuperscript{59}

Although Calvin does not develop the idea, signaling out Elijah is significant for understanding how the prophetic office was about more than communicating mere knowledge about God. Elijah was an interpreter of God’s will and law for the people, but what this entailed was healing the sick, pronouncing judgment on false religion, and confronting a wicked political regime.

For Calvin the prophetic office entailed an eschatological component—the prophets were heralds of the coming kingdom of Christ. They taught the nation of Israel about covenant life and doctrine, and called for obedience, but they also proclaimed hope for a future messiah. Calvin notes that the “task common to the prophets was to hold the church in expectation and at the same time to support it until the Mediator’s coming.”\textsuperscript{60}

This is what made John the Baptist unlike all other previous prophets, for John did not


\textsuperscript{57} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Ezekiel}. 3:15.


\textsuperscript{59} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Matt}. 17:3.

\textsuperscript{60} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.15.1.
“make known redemption at a distance and obscurely under shadows, but proclaimed that the time of redemption was now manifest and at hand.”

Christ is “the head of the prophets, holds the chief place,” and alone is the source of all the revelations that previous prophets made, nevertheless he takes up the prophetic office in a similar fashion—through the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. This anointing demonstrates that he is not to be regarded as a private individual, but as one who discharges a public office. Calvin sees the gospel of Luke’s application of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 to the ministry of Jesus as programmatic for understanding how Christ fulfilled the prophetic office. Luke says,

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus is anointed by the Spirit “to be a herald and witness to the Father’s grace,” yet in a manner uncommon to other prophets. As the mediator Jesus became the representative of his people, the head of grace (gratia capitis), into which all believers are incorporated. So when Jesus received the Spirit, it was not only for his own office of teaching but “for his whole body that the power of the Spirit might be present in the continuing preaching of the gospel.” Jesus received the fullness of the Spirit in his prophetic office so that the church’s teaching office might be anointed in and through him. According to Calvin, Jesus is the “perfect doctrine” that brings an end to all prophecies. The prophetic dignity of his office “leads us to know that in the sum of doctrine as he has given it to us all parts

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63 Calvin, Institutes, 2.15.2.
64 Calvin, Institutes, 2.15.2.
of perfect wisdom are contained.” In Christ are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and understanding (Col 2:3), and outside of him there is nothing worth knowing because those who receive his prophetic ministry with faith “have grasped the whole immensity of heavenly benefits.”

In the order of salvation history the prophetic office of Christ comes first—Jesus makes his public entrance as the herald of salvation and prophet of righteousness. Therefore the office is rightly interpreted most immediately in terms of Christ’s estate of humiliation. Reformed scholastic J. Heidegger notes that, “Christ was never not a prophet, as he was never not a savior and mediator. But he was chiefly so when he appeared in the flesh.” Yet Christ does not cease to exercise his prophetic office in the state of exaltation, but speaks to us “from the lofty throne of his heavenly glory.” He does this chiefly through the preaching ministry of his church, which is centered in the inspired text of Holy Scripture. Calvin does not draw an explicit connection between the prophetic office of Christ and a doctrine of Word and Spirit, but Werner Krusche rightly claims that Calvin’s account of scriptural inspiration and illumination as well as his understanding of the divinity and the authority of the Bible are all properly understood to be a function of Christ’s prophetic office. This connection becomes more developed in later Reformed theology. John Owen observes

It was requisite unto the office of this great prophet of the church . . . that he should have power and authority to send the Holy Spirit to make his revelations of divine truth [i.e. Scripture] effectual unto the minds of men.

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not only to make known and declare the doctrines of truth . . . but also to irradiate and illuminate our minds, so that we might savingly apprehend them.\textsuperscript{70}

Prophetic instruction involves an outward promulgation of the truth, but also an internal illumination of it by the Holy Spirit, through whom the external truth penetrates our hearts in a way that is authoritative and transforming. It is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that makes the prophetic office not just a ministry of the \textit{informing Word}, but of the \textit{transforming Word} (Jer. 23:19; Isa. 55:11; Heb. 4:12). We observed in chapter two that the doctrine of Word and Spirit is a centerpiece of Reformed pneumatology; here we note specifically how it is grounded in the Christ-Spirit relationship accounted for in Jesus exercise of the prophetic office. It is important to remember the understanding of the preached Word as sacramental in its effects, and the sacraments as “visible words”—both hold out a participation in the very reality to which they bear witness.

Unfortunately Calvin’s interpretation of Isaiah 61:1-2 and Luke 4:18-19 tends to spiritualize the meaning of the poor, the oppressed and the blind, which allows his account of the prophetic to skew too much in a didactic direction and miss the wholism of the office. In Luke-Acts Jesus’ ministry of healing through the power of the Spirit is central to the prophetic task. “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” so that he went around “doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38). Commenting on this text, Calvin highlights the central role of the Spirit for Jesus’ ministry. “For the power wherein Christ exceeded proceeded from the Spirit alone. Therefore, when as the heavenly Father anointed his Son, he furnished him

\textsuperscript{70} John Owen, \textit{The Glory of Christ} (Works v.1), 95.
with the power of his Spirit.”  

Jesus’ miracles serve to “allure the world with the sweet taste of goodness and grace to love him and to desire him,” nevertheless Calvin seems to identify this healing ministry with the kingly office.  

Later Reformed theologians would recognize more clearly the relevance of Jesus’ miraculous activity for his prophetic office.  

Insofar as Jesus’ healing ministry foreshadows his restoration and healing of a fallen creation it applies to his kingly office, but his healing ministry also played the role of confirming and guaranteeing his proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus’ message becomes authenticated not only through miracles, but also through a life lived in love, mercy and holiness, and in a martyr’s death. The prophet Jeremiah foreshadows the kind of prophet that Jesus would become—one who proclaimed his message through the example of righteous suffering. Jesus’ death according to his priestly office is an atoning sacrifice because it takes away the sins of the world, but Jesus’ death according to the prophetic office is a martyr’s death because it proclaims his innocence while revealing the wickedness of the powers of this present age. The prophetic office addresses the world not only via words and ideas, but through the embodied and exemplary actions of Christ’s life. This is another sense in which the prophetic office points us toward an understanding of the Word as sacramental. Jesus prophetic message is inextricably bound up with who he is and what he did, which is an embodied reality.

Nancy Duff has complained that “the church has tended to reduce the prophetic office to Christ’s teaching and example, that is, to the moral influence of the

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73 Henrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources, 456.
atonement.”

This happens in part because the unity and oneness of the offices in the person of Christ is forgotten. The three offices are overlapping and interpenetrating of one another, not unlike the manner in which the theological tradition has described the interrelations of the persons of the trinity. Of the mediatorial offices of Christ, the prophetic is the most underdeveloped in Calvin’s theology and the later Reformed tradition. The prophetic office is not merely a ministry of information but leads us to put our faith in Christ’s work as priest and king, but again functions sacramentally by causing us to enjoy eschatologically the reality to which it points.

Duff argues that “the prophetic office identifies revelation not as the imparting of knowledge but as apocalyptic event.” Revelation understood as apocalyptic brings into existence what was not before; it is the divine breaking into the present such that the message conveys the reality it proclaims. The Second Helvetic Confession (chapter one) famously says that “Preaching the Word of God is the Word of God.” Proclaiming the Word of God creates the reality to which it testifies; it brings about what it promises. Jesus as the incarnate Word embodied this principle. “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” was Jesus’ single sentence commentary on the prophecy of Isaiah concerning his messianic ministry (Luke 4:21). Jesus is saying, ‘This promised word which for all these years you have longed and anticipated . . . it is happening right here, right now. I am that Word.’ Again it is critical to remember that the Word as effectual, as event, as manifestation of the reality itself, is only possible in the presence and power of

76 This is broadly agreed upon among Calvin scholars Jansen, Calvin’s Doctrine of the Work of Christ, 102; Richard Muller, “Christ in the Eschaton,” 40 fn. 31.
77 Duff, “The Atonement and the Christian Life,” 28
the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not merely the subjective confirmation in us of the objective Word that remains outside of us, but recalling Louis-Marie Chauvet’s observation the “Spirit appears as the agent of God’s embodiment: it gives body to the word.”

Calvin clearly had an eschatological understanding of the prophetic office, but he only applies it to those prophets that looked forward to the messiah, and does not develop the category in terms of Christ’s own fulfillment of the office. One of the problems here is that the eschatological-apocalyptic nature of Jesus’ life and preaching remains underdeveloped. With the advent of Christ there is a shift in the eschatological nature of the office: the kingdom of God is present no longer simply by anticipation (prophets of old), but in reality. The kingdom is present and making its effects felt, but it is not yet fully consummated. The apocalyptic character of the prophetic office reminds the church that its proclamation of the gospel is always situated within the space of the already-not-yet, between the parallel and diverging histories of Jesus’ and our own. The message of the gospel becomes manifest as a tearing at the seams of this present age, as interruption and judgment upon systems and orders of the ruling powers (Gal 1:4; Col 1:13; I Cor 2:6-8).

One of the jobs of the prophets of old was to be intermediaries between God and the religious and political establishment. Jesus’ prophetic message and existence were a continual challenge to the ruling powers and authorities. The category of apocalyptic helps us understand the inherently social-political dimension to the prophetic office since

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80 I am indebted to Rev. Michael Matossian for this observation in particular and was benefited on many other points in regard to the Reformed understanding of prophetic office.
it is directed at revealing and judging those oppressive spiritual systems—religious, social and political—that pervert the truth and justice of God. And in this there is a clear connection between apocalyptic and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is associated with the “kingdom of God” (Rom 14:17, Matt 12:28), the “powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4), and “will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8). The Spirit is the “first-fruits,” “down payment” and “seal” of our final redemption (Rom. 8:23. II Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14). Through the power of the Spirit the gospel proclamation of the prophetic office mediates between this age and the age to come. All of this has a deeply eucharistic resonance in Paul who teaches us that Supper is itself part of this prophetic office because whenever we celebrate it we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (I Cor. 11:26).

The Priestly Office and the Spirit

According to Gary Badcock in Calvin’s theology “the pneumatological aspect of Christ’s priestly office is underdeveloped in the account of the triplex munus.”

Gary Badcock, *The Light of Truth and the Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 103. Badcock qualifies this statement noting that Calvin has already established the centrality of the Spirit in other areas.

In another place Calvin states that the “peculiar office of Christ was, to appease the wrath of God by atoning for the sins of the world, to
redeem men from death, to procure righteousness and life.”\textsuperscript{83} If the Holy Spirit is absent or underdeveloped in the priestly work of Christ it will surely become evident as a pneumatological deficiency in the application of salvation. Such a suspicion has been born out in recent pneumatological criticisms of the classical Protestant view of justification understood as the forensic imputation of Christ’s righteousness.\textsuperscript{84} Even Badcock, who is sympathetic with the Reformation, claims that in adopting such a view of justification the “Reformers initiated a profound change in the Christian life . . . [which] results in a certain displacement of the Spirit from the center of the scheme of salvation.”\textsuperscript{85} In the next chapter I will deal more directly with such objections, but here I want to consider the potential christological basis for these criticisms. Ralph Del Colle observes that if “the pneumatological dimension of Christian salvation is to be fully articulated—e.g., that the Christian life is life in the Spirit—then it is necessary to explicate how the being and event of incarnation/redemption is pneumatology.”\textsuperscript{86} In light of Calvin’s claim that the priestly work is “the principal point on which . . . our whole salvation turns” it is of critical importance that we understand the role of the Holy Spirit in this work.\textsuperscript{87}

In order to establish the Spirit’s relationship to Christ’s priestly work there needs to be clarity about all that the office entails. According to Calvin the priestly office

\textsuperscript{85} Badcock, \textit{The Light of Truth and Fire of Love}, 97.
\textsuperscript{87} Calvin, \textit{Institutes} 2.15.6. See also similar comment Comm. \textit{Psalm} 110:4. In terms of the close relation between justification and the work of the priestly office consider Calvin’s claim that justification is “the main hinge on which religion turns” (\textit{Institutes}, 3.2.1).
comprises the twofold work of reconciliation and intercession. On the one hand Christ assuages the wrath of God towards sinners and on the other he pleads on their behalf in order to obtain God’s favor. Both works “must begin from the death of Christ in order that the efficacy and benefit of the priesthood may reach us.”

The atoning death and resurrection of Christ is the epicenter of his priestly work, yet “from the time when he took the form of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation in order to redeem us.” While the perfection of salvation consists in his sacrificial death, the whole course of his obedient life is fundamental to that atoning work. More than any of the other mediatorial offices of Christ, the priestly makes the innate moral character of the office bearer to be fundamental to the execution of the office. Of the three offices in the Old Testament, the priestly was the one where the holiness and purity of the office-bearer was most critical to the function of his task. In this sense it was necessary that Christ be our “pure and stainless Mediator” so that through his holiness we would be reconciled to God.

Another prerequisite of Christ’s priestly office was that he share with us a common humanity. This is fundamental to the priestly theology of the book of Hebrews. Jesus is the great high priest who was “made like his brothers in every respect” and was able to sympathize with their weakness because in every manner he was tempted as they were but was without sin (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). For Calvin the efficacy of Christ’s priestly office entails an unswerving commitment to Jesus’ unabridged humanity for if we “make

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88 Calvin, Institutes 2.15.6.
89 Calvin, Institutes 2.16.5.
90 Calvin, Institutes 2.15.6.
Christ’s human nature so unlike ours, the main support of our faith is overturned.”  
Commenting on Hebrews 5:1 he notes that “it was necessary for Christ to be a real man; for as we are very far from God, we stand in a manner before him in the person of our priest, which could not be done, were he not one of us.” The temptation in dealing with the priestly office is to so fixate on Christ’s sacrificial death that we miss the soteriological centrality of affirming his common humanity with us, which was necessary if he was to be our true representative. As our great high priest Christ had to be holy and human, in fact “whenever Scripture calls our attention to the purity of Christ, it is to be understood of his true human nature.”

In Calvin the holiness and true humanity of Jesus’ priestly personhood are theologically linked in his conception through the Holy Spirit. At his birth Jesus “was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam’s fall.” For Calvin Jesus’ miraculous conception through the Virgin does not so much confirm his divinity, as that of his true humanity. In his commentary on Luke 1:35 Calvin begins to spell out the critical role that the Holy Spirit played in establishing Jesus’ true humanity.

It ought to be observed also that Christ, because he was conceived by a spiritual power [i.e. Holy Spirit], is called the holy seed for, as it was necessary that he should be a real man, in order that he might expiate our sins, and vanquish death and Satan in our flesh; so was it necessary, in order to his cleansing others, that he should be free from every spot and blemish. Though Christ was formed of the seed of Abraham, yet he contracted no defilement from a sinful nature; for the Spirit of God kept him pure from the very commencement: and this was done not merely that he might abound in personal holiness, but chiefly that he might sanctify

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93 Calvin, *Institutes,* 2.13.4.  
94 Calvin, *Institutes,* 2.13.4.
his own people. The manner of conception, therefore, assures us that we have a Mediator separate from sinners.95

Here we encounter the first crucial role that the Holy Spirit plays in the priestly office: preparing the true and sanctified humanity of our great high priest.

The later Reformed tradition developed this reflection on the relationship between Jesus’ conception and the priestly office. The writer of Hebrews’ statement a “body you have prepared for me,” Abraham Kuyper interprets as a pneumatological statement (Heb. 10:5b). Of course the preparation of Jesus’ body is a work of the entire trinity—Kuyper denies that the Spirit “was the father of Jesus according to his human nature”—but “it cannot be denied that in preparing the body of the Lord there is a peculiar work of the Holy Spirit.”96 This peculiar work consisted in the creation of Jesus’ human nature on the one hand, and on the other keeping his humanity from being defiled by sin. John Owen observes the unity of this work: “The human nature of Christ being thus formed in the womb by a creating act of the Holy Spirit, was in the instant of its conception sanctified, and filled with grace according to the measure of its receptivity.”97

At the conception of Jesus there is a great convergence between the Spirit’s creating work and the Spirit’s redeeming work. In the creation of the first Adam the Spirit of God breathed life into the dust forming a man (Gen 2:7); at the creation of second Adam the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin, bringing to conception “a child who will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). In the old creation Job declares the “Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life” (Job 33:4). The Psalmist sings of how God (the Spirit) formed his innermost being and knit him together

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97 John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, 168.
in his mother’s womb (Ps 139:7,13). In the new creation believers enter the kingdom of God by being conceived through the Holy Spirit, being born again/from above (John 3:5-8). Owen observes of Jesus that just as “in his incarnation he took upon him our flesh and blood by the work of the Spirit, so in our regeneration he bestoweth on us his flesh and blood by the operation of the same Spirit.”

Jesus’ conception through the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary forms the first redemptive-historical link between the work of the Spirit in the old creation and the work of the Spirit in the new. The second will happen with his bodily resurrection. In the body of Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit’s work of creation and redemption meet in one place.

Calvin develops the priestly theme of the mediator’s common humanity even further: “Christ is a brother to us, not only on account of unity as to flesh and nature, but also by becoming a partaker of our infirmities, so that he is led, and as it were formed, to show forbearance and kindness.” Establishing the utter continuity of Jesus’ experience with a common human experience is fundamental to the fulfillment of the priestly office. “Thus he not only really became a man, but he also assumed all the qualities of human natures.” Those qualities according to Calvin include natural aspects of human finitude such as ignorance, developmental growth and the need for acquired knowledge and

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99 John Owen draws the connection between creation and redemption at Jesus’ conception in another way. He sees in the Spirit’s “overshadowing” of Mary “an allusion unto the expression of the original acting of the Holy Spirit towards the newly produced mass of the old creation” (Luke 1:35; Gen 1:2). There it is said of the Spirit that there was “hovering” and “moving” over the original creation “for the formation and production of all things living; for both the words include in them an allusion unto a covering like that of a fowl over its eggs, communicating, by its cognate warmth and heat, a principal of life unto their seminal virtue.” Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, 166.
100 Calvin, Comm. Heb. 5:1.
101 Calvin, Comm. Heb. 4:15.
experience; as well as the infirmities and weaknesses of humanity under the curse of sin, like sorrow of soul, anxiety, grief, dread of death and fear of God’s judgment.

Calvin rejects the widespread scholastic opinion on the beatific knowledge of Christ and rejects interpretations of Jesus’ ignorance as merely the concealment of knowledge that appeared with the progression of time.\textsuperscript{102} “There is no doubt whatever, that it was the design of God to express in plain terms, how truly and completely Christ, in taking upon our flesh, did all that was necessary to effect his brotherly union with men.”\textsuperscript{103} Affirming such a natural development of Jesus is another opportunity for Calvin to highlight the work of the Holy Spirit in his humanity. “Christ received, in his human nature, according to his age and capacity, the increase of the free gifts, “in gifts and graces of the Spirit” that out of his fullness, he may pour them out upon us; for we draw grace out of his grace.”\textsuperscript{104}

Jesus clothed himself not only with human flesh, but with human feeling. As our priestly representative, who bore in his person our sins, Jesus appeared before the judgment seat of God as a sinner.\textsuperscript{105} This means that the “death which he underwent must have been full of horror, because he could not render satisfaction for us without feeling, in his own experience the dreadful judgment of God . . . Let us know that death was not a sport and amusement to Christ, but that he endured the severest torments on our

\textsuperscript{104} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Luke} 2:40. Commenting on the same text Calvin says that Jesus “was invigorated in spirit and was full of wisdom. Luke thus declares, that whatever wisdom exists among men, and receives daily accessions, flows from that single fountain, from the Spirit of God.”
\textsuperscript{105} See Stephen Edmundson’s treatment of Calvin’s view of atonement and the way that it compares and contrasts with Anselm’s (\textit{Calvin’s Christology}, 96-111).
It was not mere physical death that Jesus feared, but the terror and dread of being swallowed up as a sinner under the curse and wrath of God. “And surely no more terrible abyss can be conceived than to feel yourself forsaken and estranged from God: and when you call upon him, not to be heard. It is as if God himself had plotted your ruin.” Calvin sounds strikingly modern in his affirmation of Jesus’ experience of God abandonment. Such fear according to Calvin compelled Jesus to pray for deliverance from death—“let this cup pass,”—made him sweat drops of blood, and caused him to cry out in agony from the cross—“my God, my God why have you forsaken me.” To exempt him from the internal reality of these terrors or to imagine his anguish was anything less severe than would be our own is a diminishment of our salvation; not only was it useful that he experience these feelings, but necessary so that he “might attain victory over them for us, but also that we may feel assured that he is present with us whenever we are tried by them.”

Given the authenticity of Jesus’ suffering, what sustained him amidst the pitch blackness that extended from Gethsemane through Golgotha to the grave? According to Calvin, it was the Spirit of God. Jesus experienced a terror and dread of God’s judgment which “would have swallowed up a hundred times all the men in the world; but by the

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107 Calvin, Institutes, 2.16.11.
108 On account of the fact that Jürgen Moltmann in the Crucified God excludes from his interpretation of the crucifixion any sense of God’s active punishment of human evil and sin, Calvin’s understanding of Jesus’ God abandonment is infinitely more serious and harrowing an experience than the now widespread modern idea that God’s wrath must be understood in purely passive terms.
110 Calvin, Comm. Heb. 4:15; see also Comm. Psalms 22:1.
amazing power of the Spirit he achieved victory.”111 Jesus prayed because “when he commenced a warfare of so arduous a description, he needed to be armed with a remarkable power of the Spirit.”112 Calvin’s messianic interpretation of Psalm 22 repeats this sentiment. King David (and Jesus by messianic application) was “not buffeted with the waves of affliction like a rock which cannot be moved, but was agitated within by sore troubles and temptation, which through infirmity of the flesh, he would never have been able to sustain had he not been aided by the power of the Spirit of God.”113

In what sense did Jesus experience God abandonment? Calvin rejects the opinion of those that argue that Jesus’ cry of dereliction was for the sake of those people listening. Utmost in Calvin’s exegesis of the mediator’s suffering is that it be not merely an external suffering “exhibited to the eye,” but reflect the powerful and violent inward sadness of his soul. And yet Calvin will not say that Christ was utterly consumed with despair. “Though the perception of the flesh would have led him to dread destruction, still in his heart faith remained firm, by which he beheld the presence of God, of whose absence he complains.”114 Calvin is affirming a kind of presence-in-absence experience of God at the cross. As Jesus was in the throes of death “the weakness of the flesh was still visible, and the divine power of the Spirit was not clearly seen before his resurrection; yet God determined by this, as a sort of preparation, to shadow out what he was shortly afterwards to do, that he might exalt gloriously above the heavens his Son, the conqueror of death.”115 Here Calvin affirms that even in the bowels of Jesus humiliation there are premonitions of Jesus’ exaltation—resurrection already being

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111 Calvin, Comm. Matt. 27:46 [my italics].
“shadowed out” in the cross. This points us ultimately to the inseparability of cross and resurrection as a single soteriological event and how the Spirit of God is the bridge between those two seemingly insuperable realities. Calvin makes clear that the Spirit of God is not absent in supporting Jesus in his suffering, even though Spirit is not perceived.

It is this presence-in-absence experience of God which Jesus endures that puts us in mind of what some have called the “kenosis of the Spirit.” Lyle Dabney has argued that pneumatology needs to recognize that “the Spirit of God is the Spirit of the cross, that is to say the Spirit of the resurrection and death of Jesus Christ.”

Calvin would certainly affirm this understanding of the Spirit’s work; as we will see he has plenty to say about the Spirit in terms of cross and resurrection. Dabney offers a profound trinitarian reflection on the nature of the Spirit’s presence at the cross that helpfully exegetes the pneumatological direction of Calvin’s own reflection on Jesus’ death. Dabney observes that each of the triune persons experienced Jesus’ death on the cross differently.

For the Father and the Son the cross means absence: the Father’s loss of his beloved Son, the Son’s experience of abandonment by the one whom he had addressed as ‘abba.’ But the Spirit suffers neither such a ‘loss’ nor such an ‘abandonment.’ Rather, what the Spirit experiences is a function not of absence, but of presence. For the Spirit of the Cross is the presence of God with the Son in the eschatological absence of the Father. Thus, whereas the cry of Jesus reveals the yawning chasm of loss and desolation that opens to separate Father and Son, no such chasm exists between the Crucified one and the Spiritus Crucis, the One who suffered death on the cross and the Spiritus Vivificans. Indeed, it is precisely the kenotic work of the Spirit of life to plunge himself into death, hell and the grave, to ‘empty himself’ into the abyss of death and raise the one who, by virtue of that

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self-same Spirit, gave himself to death on the cross to gain new life for all creation.  

Jesus’ experience of the presence-in-absence of God, who we have identified as the *Spirit of the cross*, foreshadows our eucharistic experience of Christ in the Spirit. Whenever, we celebrate the Supper we experience the Spirit of the Cross—with all its inklings of our own resurrection—as “the presence of God with the Son in the eschatological absence of the Father.” For us the eschatological absence of the Father now corresponds to the bodily absence of the ascended Son, who has gone to be with the Father (John 13:1-3; 14:12; 16:10). However, when Jesus returns again bodily he will abolish once and for all the absence of the Father in creation by handing over “the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he [Christ] must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet” (1 Cor 15:24). Calvin reminds us that in the Supper we experience Christ “by a certain species of absence, inasmuch as we are now distant from his heavenly dwelling” but that the same Spirit that comforted Jesus at the cross now dwells in us and “raises us to heaven to himself, transfusing into us the vivifying vigour of his flesh, just as the rays of sun invigorate us by his vital warmth.”

Not only does the Spirit empower the Son in his human nature to faithfully complete his earthly passion, the Spirit makes the death of Christ to be an efficacious sacrifice in the heavenly realms. “For though Christ offered a visible sacrifice, yet, as the Apostle tells us (Heb. 9:14) it must be viewed spiritually, that we may enjoy its value and its fruit.” Hebrews tells us how we are cleansed by the “blood of Christ, who through the *eternal Spirit*, offered himself without blemish to God” (Heb. 9:14). Some

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117 Dabney, *Pneumatologia Crucis*, 524 [italics original].
interpreters have understood the “eternal spirit” to be only a reference to Jesus’ divine nature, but Calvin insists that it is the Holy Spirit. The relationship between the sacrifice of Christ and the Holy Spirit is central for understanding the heavenly priesthood of Christ—and it is here that Jesus’ work in the state of humiliation begins to transition into the state of exaltation. “Christ’s death is to be estimated, not by the external act, but by the power of the Spirit. For Christ suffered as man; but that death becomes saving to us through the efficacious power of the Spirit; for a sacrifice, which was to be an eternal expiation, was a work more than human.”¹²⁰ This is as clear a statement as any on the centrality of the Holy Spirit for the constitution of Christ’s priestly office. And this is more than a passing reference in Calvin’s theology. It was “through the power of the Spirit, which gloriously appeared in the resurrection and ascension of Christ” that he now exercises his “celestial priesthood.”

Thus his flesh, which proceeded from the seed of Abraham, since it was the temple of God, possessed a vivifying power; yea, the death of Christ became the life of the world, which is certainly above nature. The Apostle therefore does not refer to what belongs peculiarly to human nature, but to the hidden power of the Spirit; and hence it is, that the death of Christ has nothing earthly in it . . . We must always hold this truth that when the Apostle speaks of the death of Christ, he regards not the external action, but the spiritual benefit. He suffered death as men do, but as a priest he atoned for the sins of the world in a divine manner; there was an external shedding of blood, but there was also an internal and spiritual purgation; in a word, he died on earth, but the virtue and efficacy of his death proceeded from heaven.¹²¹

Calvin is clear that the sacrificial death of Christ is as much a pneumatological event and action as it was christological.¹²²

¹²¹ Calvin, Comm. Heb. 8:2-4.
¹²² For similar reflections of Calvin’s see Comm. John 17:1.
The Holy Spirit is essential to the exercise of Christ’s priesthood in the state of exaltation. The apostle Peter tells believers that they are called “in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood” (1 Peter 1:2). Reflecting on this text Calvin notes that under the old sacrificial system the sprinkling of blood was done by the hand of the priest, but now “the Holy Spirit sprinkles our souls with the blood of Christ for the expiation of our sins.”

Here we encounter the Christological root of Calvin’s robust understanding of the applicative ministry of the Spirit. This applicative work is peculiar in being a communicative work of the Spirit. We saw that the death of Christ became an efficacious sacrifice through the power of the Spirit, now the Spirit “makes the fruit of Christ’s death to come to us; yea he makes the blood shed for our redemption to penetrate our hearts, or, to say all in one word, he makes Christ with all his blessings to become ours.” It is the special office of the Holy Spirit, according to Calvin, to apply the blood of Christ to the lives of believers; and this blood is comprehensive of the whole work of Christ. Calvin appeals to a multitude of the Spirit’s actions that are included under this blood applying ministry. The Spirit “cleanses our consciences by the blood of Christ,” brings “renewal to obedience and ablution by the blood,” makes us “conformable to his death,” and sprinkles our souls with his blood “for the expiation of sins.” It is important to note that Calvin includes expiation—the remission of sins—as one of the blood applying works of the Spirit. The work of expiation is typically associated with the doctrine of justification and understood in terms

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123 Calvin, Comm. I Peter 1:2.
of the forensic category of imputation—but in Calvin’s mind this distinctly Christological work does not exclude the operation of the Holy Spirit.  

The Kingly Office and the Spirit

According to Calvin under the old covenant God did not permit the blending of the offices of priest and king; but in the person of the mediator—who is a king, and priest after the order of Melchizedek—Christ unites in himself both offices (Gen. 14:8; Ps. 110:4; Heb. 7:1).  

“Christ’s kingdom is inseparable from his priesthood.” His “reign is holy and inseparably connected with the temple of God.” Not only does the conjunction of the priestly office with the kingly set Christ apart from previous kings—God revoked Saul’s kingship over an unlawful sacrifice and Uzziah was struck with leprosy when he offered incense to God (1 Sam. 8-14; 2 Chron. 26:16-21); but the royal dimension of Christ’s priesthood shows its superiority to the earthly Levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:11). The priesthood of Christ is celestial, royal and spiritual: it is celestial in that he continues to exercise it from his heavenly state of exaltation; it is royal because his kingly power cannot be defeated; and it is spiritual in that “the whole strength, power, and majesty” of his priestly kingdom consists in gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Of all the mediatorial offices the kingly is the most explicitly pneumatological. This means a number of different things for Calvin. First, “Christ’s kingdom lies in the

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130 Calvin, Comm. Isaiah 11:1.
Spirit, not in earthly pleasures and pomp.”\textsuperscript{\textasteriskcentered 131} Calvin seeks to draw a contrast between the heavenly and spiritual nature of Christ’s kingdom with that of the fleshly and political kingdoms of this world. This kingdom “lies hidden in the earth, so to speak, under the lowness of flesh.” As a spiritual reality it is an eschatological kingdom that requires “faith to ponder that visible presence of Christ which he will manifest at the Last Day.”\textsuperscript{\textasteriskcentered 132} Second the kingly office is Spirit-centered because it coincides in salvation history with the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. From his state of heavenly exaltation Christ sends the Holy Spirit in order to execute, establish and administer his kingdom. According to Calvin “the office of the Holy Spirit was nothing else than to establish the kingdom of Christ, and to maintain and confirm forever all that was given him by the Father.”\textsuperscript{\textasteriskcentered 133} The third pneumatological dimension of the kingly office is how Christ receives the Spirit “without measure” in order that he might pour out upon all his people the gifts of the Spirit (John 3:30). There existed a royal work of the Spirit that preceded the advent of Christ since “there never was any portion whatever of righteousness in the world that did not proceed from the Spirit of God, and that was not maintained by his heavenly power; as none of the kings of the earth can frame or defend good order, except so far as he shall be assisted by the same Spirit.”\textsuperscript{\textasteriskcentered 134} Yet in his kingly office Christ receives the Spirit in a special way—“there is no drop of vigor in us save what the Holy Spirit instills. For the Spirit has chosen Christ as his seat, that from him might abundantly flow the heavenly riches of which we are in such need.”\textsuperscript{\textasteriskcentered 135} Christ was

\textsuperscript{131} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.15.5.
\textsuperscript{132} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.16.17.
\textsuperscript{133} Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 16:14
\textsuperscript{135} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.15.5.
anointed for our sake that we may “all draw out of his fatness” because our life proceeds from his life “as rivulets from a fountain.”\textsuperscript{136}

The visible symbol of Christ’s kingly anointing happens in the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him in the form of dove at his baptism.\textsuperscript{137} “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain,” John’s gospel tells us, “this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:32). Calvin interprets Jesus’ baptismal scene to be the public coronation of Christ to the office of mediator. While aspects of all three offices are implied it is the kingly office that takes center stage since it is only the prerogative of the heavenly king to bestows the riches of the Spirit through baptism. “At that time, therefore, he received the Spirit not only for himself, but for his people; and on that account his descent was visible, that we may know that there dwells in him abundance of all gifts of which we are empty and destitute.”\textsuperscript{138} Calvin notes that, insofar as Christ was man he needed to receive the Spirit, but more importantly Jesus’ anointing shows us that “he is clothed with a new power of the Spirit, and that not so much for his own sake, as for the sake of others. It was done on purpose, that believers might learn to receive, and to contemplate with reverence, his divine power, and that weakness of the flesh might not make him despised.”\textsuperscript{139} Calvin is clear to remind us that Jesus was not destitute of the Spirit before his baptism, but that his baptism was to demonstrate his move from private life to public office.

The kingly office is fundamental in the constitution of the church. As the head of the church strength proceeds from Christ to individual members, as he “causes his

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{136} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Heb}. 1:9.
  \item \textsuperscript{137} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.15.5.
  \item \textsuperscript{138} Calvin, \textit{Comm. John} 1:32.
  \item \textsuperscript{139} Calvin, \textit{Comm. Luke} 3:21.
\end{itemize}
heavenly anointing to flow over the whole body of his Church.”

It is important to remark here that the work of the Spirit in the kingly office, especially as it is manifested in Jesus’ state of exaltation, marks a transition point between Christology proper to the work of the Holy Spirit in the *ordo salutis* and in the life of the church. The operation of the Holy Spirit in the threefold office is the bridge between the accomplishment of salvation in the person of Christ and its application and effectiveness in us. In the words of Jonathan Edwards, “The oil that is poured on the head of the church runs down to the members of his body and to the skirts of his garment (Psalms 133:2).”

We have already treated of Christ’s kingly anointing at baptism, but the full exercise of his kingly office really commences with his resurrection from the dead, which is where the Reformed tradition marks the beginning of the state of exaltation. Calvin observes that the resurrection expressly declares Jesus’ power over all things. At the resurrection Christ “emerged as the conqueror of death” through the divine power of the Spirit. He “was vivified by the Spirit; for the resurrection was victory over death and the completion of our salvation.” Calvin notes that Christ gained victory “not by aid sought from another, but by the celestial operation of his own Spirit.” Here he expresses his commitment to the Latin *filioque* doctrine, which means that Christ’s resurrection is made possible through the Spirit by virtue of the fact that as the eternal

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142 For the Lutherans on account of their different understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* and the two estates the exaltation of Jesus actually begins with his descent into hell.
144 Calvin, *Comm. 1 Peter* 3:17.
Word he was joined with the same Spirit as that of the Father. The incarnate Son is not only he who receives the Spirit, but he who sends the Spirit. As the eternal Son Christ created and continues to sustain the world through the Spirit; as the Redeemer Christ regenerates and sanctifies through the Spirit. In the resurrection—as was the case in Jesus’ conception—we see the convergence of the Spirit’s creating and redeeming work in one place but with a difference: now Christ is actively wielding the power of the Spirit in his capacity as the eternal Son within the economy of salvation. Contrary to the ancient adoptionist heresy that made the Spirit wholly constitutive of Jesus’ divine identity, Calvin declares that in “the resurrection so great a power was displayed by the Holy Spirit, that it plainly showed Christ to be the Son of God.” The resurrection is Jesus asserting his own divinity in a special manner. It is only because he was the eternal Word in the flesh that he was able to “exercise a real celestial power, that is, the power of the Spirit, when he rose from the dead.” Here we ought to note in passing that Calvin’s commitment to the *filioque*, and for that matter the later Puritans who likewise shared this commitment to the Latin trinitarian tradition, in no way results in a subordination of the Spirit to the Word or is evidenced by a diminished pneumatology.

Framed by the *filioque*, Calvin is able to offer a rich trinitarian account of the resurrection. He observes that in many passages of Scripture sometimes Christ claims for

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147 For a good treatment of Calvin’s *filioque* pneumatology see Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, 126-130.
148 On these “two distinct powers which belong to the Son” see Calvin, *Comm. John* 1:5.
152 *Pace* Lyle Dabney’s claim that the Reformers “continued the medieval subordination of Pneumatology to Christology, as symbolized in their adoption of the *Filioque*” ("Pneumatologia Crucis: Reclaiming Theologia Crucis for a Theology of the Spirit Today,” 515).
himself the glory of his resurrection and sometimes it is attributed to the work of the Father. These two realities are not in contradiction.

But let readers observe here, that the Spirit is, without any distinction, called sometimes the Spirit of God the Father, and sometimes the Spirit of Christ; and thus called, not only because his whole fullness was poured on Christ as our Mediator and head, so that from him a portion might descend on each of us, but also because he is equally the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, who have one essence, and the same eternal divinity.  

In another place Calvin offers us a helpful exegetical clue for understanding why the Scripture differentiates between the Father and the Son’s sending of the Spirit. “Both statements are true and correct; for in so far as Christ is our Mediator and Intercessor, he obtains from the Father the grace of the Spirit, but in so far as he is God, he bestows that grace from himself.”

What the resurrection event highlights about the person of the Spirit is how the Spirit is the immediate instrumental power by which God effects and accomplishes all things within the material creation. The Spirit hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation (Gen. 1:2), breathed life in Adam’s body (Gen. 2:7), sustains all created life (Ps. 104:29-30), put flesh on the bones in the dry valley (Ez. 37), overshadowed the womb of Mary in Jesus’ conception (Luke 1:35)—and now raises Jesus from the dead (Rom. 1:4; 8:11). Commenting on the four winds from heaven in the prophetic book of Zechariah, Calvin claims that “all the revolutions seen in the world proceed from the Spirit of God.” According to Calvin there is nothing that happens in creation that does not in some manner involve the Spirit. “God’s Spirit is one, yet all actions proceed from him, and

whatever is done in the world can with no impropriety be attributed to his Spirit.”¹⁵⁵ Now in salvation history “the peculiar office of the Spirit is to make us partakers not only of Christ himself, but of all his blessings.”¹⁵⁶ Even though there is a very close mutuality and convergence of Christ and the Spirit in economy of redemption Calvin insists on respecting the non-identity and distinction of the persons. We will return to this idea when we take up the trinitarian dimension of the extra calvinisticum.

This brings us full circle within the trinitarian trajectory of Calvin and the Reformed understanding of salvation. Christ humbled himself in the flesh and opened to us the fountain of blessed immortality not “merely to raise us to the sphere of the moon or of the sun, but to make us one with God the Father.”¹⁵⁷ There are not two distinct economies, one of the Spirit and the other of the Son, or one economy of the Spirit collapsed wholly into that of the Son, rather one economy of the Christ and Spirit in relationship into which believers are drawn and directed upward towards the Father. Rowan Williams describes this work as the Spirit’s “pressure upon us towards Christ’s relation with the Father, towards the self secure enough in its rootedness and acceptance in the ‘Father’, in the source and ground of all, to be ‘child’, to live vulnerably, as a sign of grace and forgiveness.”¹⁵⁸ The distinctness of the Spirit’s personhood does not consist in securing some quasi-independent conceptual space from either the Father or the Son,

¹⁵⁵ Calvin, Comm. Zechariah 6:5. Along similar lines Richard Sibbes observes that the “Holy Ghost is the substantial vigour of all creatures whatsoever. All the spiritual vigour of every thing comes from the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit from Christ . . . The Spirit is a vigorous working thing, and therefore all three persons take upon them the name of Spirit, but the Holy Ghost especially, because he is the spiritual vigour. The Spirit is an operative thing. The spirits are the quintessence and extraction of things, that is nothing but operation. God that is nothing but a pure act is said to be spirit. Those that have the Spirit of God are full of act and vigour” (Excellency of the Gospel Above the Law, 218).
but in how the Spirit makes us uniquely to participate in the *Abba* relationship that the Son has with the Father (Rom 8:15-17). Calvin’s understanding of eucharistic grace, which is representative of the Reformed tradition, coheres with its trinitarian spirituality: we are “one with the Son of God not because he conveys his substance to us [i.e. divinity], but because, by the power of his Spirit, he imparts to us his life and all the blessings which he has received from the Father.” Of the threefold offices of Christ the kingly office most clearly highlights the trinitarian economy of God since it points us toward the final triumph of Christ in the Spirit who reconciles an alienated humanity to God the Father.

*Extra Calvinisticum and the Holy Spirit*

What the Lutherans labeled the “*extra calvinisticum*” became one of the most controversial christological differences between Reformed and Lutheran theology to emerge out of the eucharistic debates of the sixteenth century. According to the Reformed, in the incarnation the divine Logos, never ceases to be the transcendent second person of the trinity who continually sustains and governs all of creation by virtue of his divinity. Even though the Word was fully united to a human nature, he was never totally contained or confined within that nature, such that in the midst of the incarnation he is conceived to exist beyond (*extra*) his human nature. Calvin understands this truth to be a deep mystery of the faith: “the Son of God descended from heaven in such a way that, without leaving heaven, he willed to be born in the virgin’s womb, to go about earth,

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159 Calvin’s theology of adoption demonstrates a deeply trinitarian and pneumatological sensibility. See Julie Canlis’ extensive treatment of the issue: *Calvin’s Ladder*, 130-158.
and to hang upon the cross; yet continuously filled the world even as he had done from the beginning.\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 2.13.4} Contrary to Lutheran claims, the \textit{extra} was not an invention of the Reformed, but clearly taught within the Catholic tradition by theologians such as Augustine, Athanasius and Thomas Aquinas.\footnote{On the history of the concept see David Willis, \textit{Calvin’s Catholic Christology: The Function of the So-Called extra Calvinisticum in Calvin’s Theology} (Leiden: Brill, 1966), chapter 2.} For the Reformed the \textit{extra} played a special role in the dispute with the Lutherans over the \textit{communicatio idiomatum}; it preserved the transcendence of Christ’s divinity and safeguarded the integrity of his human nature. In his treatment of the Supper Calvin appeals to the logic of the \textit{extra} to argue against the doctrine of ubiquity.

In this manner, he is said to have descended to that place according to his divinity, not because divinity left heaven to hide itself in the prison house of the body, but because even though it filled all things, still in Christ’s very humanity it dwelt bodily, that is by nature, and in a certain ineffable way. There is a commonplace distinction of the schools to which I am not ashamed to refer to: although the whole of Christ is everywhere, still the whole of that which is in him is not everywhere . . . [O]ur mediator is ever present with his own people, and in the Supper reveals himself in a special way, yet in a way that the whole Christ is present, but not in his wholeness [i.e. bodily].\footnote{Calvin, \textit{Institutes} 4.17.30.}

Here Calvin relies on an admittedly subtle scholastic distinction in order to maintain that the whole (\textit{totus}) of the mediator (God-man) is present everywhere yet not wholly (\textit{totum}), that is corporeally.\footnote{For a fine exposition of the \textit{totus-totum} distinction in Calvin see Paul Helm, “Intermediate States” in \textit{Calvin at the Centre} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 298-302.} What obtains in this concept for Calvin is the conviction that we deal with the whole person of Christ through the Spirit, and not merely his divine nature in separation from the human, but we do not deal with the Christ’s wholeness in the form of a bodily presence, since that would require a new conception of what a human body is.
The *extra* does not divide the person of Christ, nor does it mean that believers only interact with the divine nature in the absence of Christ’s bodily presence on earth. According to Calvin and the later Reformed tradition a bodily presence of Christ in the eucharist elements *is not* a condition for enjoying the whole person of Christ—body, blood, divinity. However the Lutherans had little patience for the Reformed distinctions on this issue (similar to Reformed impatience towards the Lutherans on ubiquity) and responded with the maxim *Logos non extra carnem*. The Word is not beyond the flesh: wherever Christ is present as God he is always present there in his humanity. The *Formula of Concord*, quoting Martin Luther, says that we would have a “poor sort of Christ, if he were present only at one single place, as a divine and human person, and if at all other places he had to be nothing more than a mere isolated God and a divine person without humanity.”165 The Lutherans anathematized the Reformed on the *extra* and uncharitably interpreted it to mean that “after he [Christ] redeemed us through his suffering and death, he has nothing more to do with us on earth according to his human nature.”166 This they believed also extended to the Reformed understanding of the preached Word and the administration of the sacraments of which they said that “Christ is present with us on earth . . . only according to his deity, and that this presence of Christ has absolutely nothing to do with the assumed human nature.”167

Calvin and the Reformed are clear in answering the Lutheran charges. As the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Q &A 48) responds “Christ’s divinity is surely beyond the bounds of the humanity he has taken on, but at the same time his divinity is in and

165 Quoting Luther, The Solid Declaration Art 8. (BC) 632.
166 *Formula of Concord*, Art. 8.13 (BC), 513.
167 Solid Declaration Art. 8 (BC) 634 [my italics].
remains personally united to his humanity.” The Reformed tradition holds that the personal union between the humanity and divinity in Christ means that there is no possibility for a divine nature independent of the incarnate Christ. Commenting on the Heidelberg Catechism’s treatment of the issue Jan Rohls notes that the intention of the extrinsic is not to separate the divinity from the humanity:

Yet if the two natures are supposed to be united without confusion, ubiquity cannot be predicated of his human nature . . . yet it does not follow from this rejection of the ubiquity of Christ’s body that Christ could ever be present to us in separation from his human nature. The presence of Christ always means the presence of the divine-human mediator.168

Peter Martyr (1499-1562) in his debate with Johannes Brenz (1499-1570) on eucharistic Christology makes a similar point. Martyr rejects Brenz’s characterization of the Reformed position. The humanity of Christ cannot exists without being joined to his divinity, however the eternal Son’s assumption of flesh does not restrict the immensity of the divine nature to the narrow limits of flesh or expand the humanity so that it fills every place that divinity exists.

You think that there is a tearing apart of the person if the divinity is held to be where the humanity is not present. This is completely untrue, because it suffices for the divinity, although immense and infinite, to support and sustain by its hypostasis that humanity wherever it is. Granted then that the body of Christ is in heaven and no longer dwells on earth, still the Son of God is nonetheless in the church and then everywhere; he is never so freed from his human nature that he does not have it engrafted in him and joined in the unity of his person in the place where his human nature is.169

It is a fundamental claim of the Reformed teaching that the unity of Christ’s person is not threatened or divided on account of how Christ human nature makes its effects felt from

the place of heaven. Nothing of the divine nature departs from the person of Christ if the divinity is in some place the humanity is not. Although the divinity of Christ is everywhere by no means does it “cast away or cut off from it the humanity . . . There’s no way that could happen since it has the humanity inhering and fixed in its hypostasis forever.”\(^\text{170}\) If the Logos were ever conceived to be beyond the humanity by separation the man Jesus would cease to exist. According to Francis Turretin the divine nature is beyond (extra) the human not by separation, but by non-inclusion. “It is one thing for the Logos to be without the flesh by non-inclusion and in this sense it is conceded because it is not included in it, being infinite. It is another thing to be out of it by separation (which is denied) because although it is not included still it is nowhere separated from the flesh.”\(^\text{171}\) The Reformed tradition is clear that although the divine nature is not confined within the human nature—simply because human nature entails the circumscription of some kind of space — there is no part of God that is not united to the human nature or only partly united.\(^\text{172}\) Jesus of Nazareth truly is the exact representation of God’s glory and being and in whom the fullness of the divine nature dwells (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:19).

For Calvin what diffuses Christ’s presence to the church is not the divine nature in abstraction nor an omnipresent humanity but the ministry of the Holy Spirit who communicates to us the whole Christ. It is important to recognize that the extra

\(^{170}\)Martyr, *A Dialogue on the Two Natures of Christ*, 31. This seems to address the fear that the extra sets up the possibility of a “God behind God” scenario. Karl Barth expressed Lutheran fears of the extra calvinisticum, and Barth interpreter Bruce McCormack has pushed the logic of Barth’s criticisms of the classical Reformed view even further. See McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), chapters 7 and 10. This is not the place to address this lively debate except to say that the concerns that Barth and McCormack raise are not problems that would have taken Calvin and the Reformed scholastics by surprise, however, they were not compelled to abandon their thinking along these lines.


\(^{172}\)Paul Helm, “The Extra” in *Calvin at the Centre*, 65.
calvinisticum is not an exclusively christological concept, but a pneumatological as well. Christ is present through the Spirit who is able to communicate the whole reality of the ascended Christ. Here we ought to recall John Owen’s claim that the “Holy Spirit supplies the bodily absence of Christ.” While the Lutherans turn to a concept of Christ’s ubiquitous humanity in order to account for the full presence of the mediator after his ascension, the Reformed appeal to the agency of the Holy Spirit for the very same purposes. Setting polemics aside, it must be recognized that both theological traditions are most conceptually strained precisely at the same point, namely, how to account for the mysterious and efficacious presence of the whole person of Christ within the church subsequent to his bodily ascension to heaven.

As I have demonstrated in my treatment of the threefold office, the Holy Spirit is constitutive for the person and work of Christ. Building on Werner Krusche’s work, David Willis argues that the extra has special pneumatological significance in Calvin’s theology.

The extra calvinisticum emphasizes that the God at work in Jesus Christ is one and the same God who sustains and orders the universe. He is the triune God, as is manifest in the prominent role assigned to the Holy Spirit in the dynamics of the incarnate life. The humanity can develop in a special way without transgressing the bounds of genuine humanity because the gifts which the logos conveys to it by his Spirit.

Calvin’s treatment of the extra has a clear triune shape that accents the trinitarian nature of our experience of Christ in the Supper. Christ comes to us “by the virtue of the Spirit

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173 Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit, 199.
174 David Willis, Calvin’s Catholic Christology, 6-7. According to Krusche, the extra “ist nicht lediglich eine Konsequenz aus dem Princip: finitum non capax infinitum (eine Formulierung, nach der man bei Calvin übrigens vergeblich suchen wird) sondern es ist pneumatologisch gefordet.“ Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin, 128.
and his own divine essence.”¹⁷⁵ Properly speaking, in part because of Calvin’s commitment to the *filioque*, there is a twofold presence in the Supper of Christ and the Spirit, but these presences are not distinguishable in our experience because together they form the substance of a single dispensation.¹⁷⁶ The miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit unites us with Christ as one body such that even though he resides in heaven he is truly our food. “Thus I teach” says Calvin, “that Christ, though absent in body, nevertheless not only is present with us by his divine energy, which is everywhere diffused, but also makes his flesh give life to us. For seeing he penetrates us by the secrete influence of his Spirit.”¹⁷⁷

Christ and the Spirit are clearly implied in the theological action of the Supper, but this does not exclude the person of the Father. Calvin begins his treatment of the Supper in the *Institutes* reflecting on the sacrament as a fatherly gift from heaven. Our most excellent “Father concerned for his offspring . . . undertakes to nourish us throughout the course of our life” through the Supper.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, the ascended Christ has gone to be with the Father in heaven. Now he sits at the Father’s right hand which means Christ has everything in common with Father who has appointed him to govern, sustain and rule the world, and “especially manifests the presence of his grace in governing his church.”¹⁷⁹ It was the mission of the Son to “gather believers into participation with the Father.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Calvin, *Comm. Jeremiah* from Dedicatory Preface
triune reality of how Christ in the Spirit “descended to us, to bear us up to the Father, and
at the same time to bear us up to himself, inasmuch as he is one with the Father.”\textsuperscript{181}

\textsuperscript{181} Calvin, \textit{Institutes} 1.13.26.
Chapter Five

Spirit and Eschatology

All monisms appear to me to be death for a pneumatology. In this regard too, a leap is the characteristic mark of the Spirit. Both in mediating and in appropriating salvation, the Spirit leaps from one form to another in a continuous and never-ending round dance.

~Arnold van Ruler

The grammar of our talk about the Holy Spirit . . . [is the] grammar of the interplay in the human self between the given and the future, between reality as it is and the truth which encompasses it; between Good Friday and Easter. If there can be any sense in which Spirit is a bridge concept, its work is not to bridge the gap between God and the world or even between the Word and the human soul, but to span the unimaginably greater gulf between suffering and hope . . .

~Rowan Williams

Ordo Salutis and Corpus Christi

“They are false interpreters [of the eucharist] who lead men away from the flesh of Christ.” We find these words of John Calvin in his commentary on Jesus’ bread of life discourse from John chapter 6. Calvin says you “will only find life in Christ when you seek the substance of life in his flesh.” When he speaks of the “flesh” Calvin has in mind the actual body of the mediator, but flesh is a synecdoche for the whole of redemption itself, for by it, “life is procured for us, in it God is reconciled to us, and in it we have all the parts of salvation accomplished.” Calvin rejects the interpretation that reads John 6 as an explicit treatment of the sacrament, yet he is clear that there is nothing said there “that is not figured and actually presented to believers in the Lord’s Supper.” The holy Supper is the seal of this discourse, illustrating its truth and sacramentally communicating

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5 Comm. John 6:54 [my emphasis].
its reality. This raises the fundamental issue that will preoccupy us in this final chapter, namely, the relationship between the Lord’s Supper and the ongoing application of redemption in the Christian life. How is the *ordo salutis* related to the *corpus Christi*? In answering this question an eschatological picture of the person and work of the Holy Spirit emerges.

Calvin’s high view of the flesh of Christ reflects the central place that the apostle Paul himself gives the body of Christ in his account of salvation. In more than a few places Paul makes the flesh/body of Christ identical with the whole of salvation itself. Jesus is our peace “who has made us both one [Jew and Gentile] and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph. 2:14). He has reconciled us to God “in his body of flesh by his death” (Col. 1:22; Eph. 2:16). The believer has died to the law “through the body of Christ” and now belongs “to him who was raised [bodily] from the dead” so that he or she might live “the new life of the Spirit” (Rom. 7:4-6). Not only was the whole of salvation accomplished in the flesh of Christ, but this salvation has implications for how we treat our bodies in this present age: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power” (I Cor. 6:13-14). For Paul moral life in this age is predicated on continuity between the body we now possess and the one we will have after the resurrection. As an act of worship we are commanded to present our *bodies* as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:20). Paul makes the whole of salvation to depend on the

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7 Ernst Käsmann calls this a tremendous statement, “If this is not viewed as a reckless overstatement, it shows that the apostle intends man to be understood entirely in the light of his corporeality and that that is why he relates even Christology and soteriology to it.” *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 19.
bodily resurrection of Jesus. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (I Cor. 15:17). Resurrection saves human beings as corporeal beings. The fullness of redemption hinges on having a transformed body at the final resurrection (Rom 8:24). To put this in the category of ordo salutis the whole application of redemption in the Spirit reaches its final installment in a thoroughly corporeal event—our bodily resurrection and glorification. Just as we have born the image of the man of dust (Adam), at our final resurrection we shall bear the image of the man from heaven (Christ); at that time our lowly bodies will be conformed to the glorious body of our Savior (1 Cor. 15:49; Phil 3:21). Richard Gaffin observes that the “somatic aspect of resurrection, even more than what has been experienced, will disclose the full dimensions of the Holy Spirit’s work in the believer.”\(^8\) This is a key thought: the full work of the Spirit will obtain in a bodily reality—glorification—the final step of ordo salutis, which is a corporeal transformation that is utterly pneumatological and eschatological. The resurrection of the body, therefore, represents our total hope for a spiritual-physical transformation in which human nature is fully enlivened and renovated by the Holy Spirit.

The deeper question of this chapter, concerns not simply how the Lord’s Supper relates to Christian spirituality, but the role that the body of Christ (corpus Christi) plays in the application of redemption (ordo salutis) itself. Clearly the flesh of Christ is the center of redemption accomplished, but what is its ongoing relevance for redemption applied, especially when that application is conceived as primarily the work of the Holy Spirit? How is the pneumatologically oriented doctrine of ordo salutis related to the

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christological and sacramental doctrine of *corpus Christi?* Fundamental to the argument of this chapter is that the entire *ordo salutis* must be ordered to and governed by the structure of redemptive history. In this case Jesus’ bodily resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit has central significance. There are clear consequences here for an interpretation of the Lord’s Supper as well. Eucharistic theologies of real presence have tended to regard the *incarnation* as having critical structural significance for interpretations of the sacrament, while memorialist understandings have taken Christ’s *sacrificial death* as central.\(^9\) Without neglecting the importance of either emphasis, the proposal of this chapter is that Jesus’ *bodily resurrection* offers a more promising basis upon which to think about eucharistic presence and participation. In Paul, the resurrection is the central event in salvation history around which a theology of union with Christ develops. By highlighting resurrection within the eucharistic context as the basis of our union with Christ, the close connection between the sacrament and the reality of *ordo salutis* follows naturally.\(^10\) The problem with the incarnational and sacrificial analogies is their difficulty in doing justice to the eschatological character of the eucharistic rite, and insofar as these two emphases in eucharistic reflection order the orientation of piety, then the understanding of salvation applied (*ordo salutis*) also suffers an eschatological deficit.\(^11\) Both analogies in different ways tend to stumble in sustaining a balanced

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\(^9\) See Herman Ridderbos, for an exegetical critique of the incarnational reading of the Lord’s Supper. However, Ridderbos’ own *Zwinglian* interpretation suffers from a narrowly sacrificial reading of the Supper which is evident when he says the Supper “belongs to the miracle of Christ’s *work*, and not that to his *person.*” This is a distinction quite foreign to the apostle Paul, especially a text like 1 Cor. 10:16. *The Coming of the Kingdom,* trans. H. de Jongste ed. Raymond O. Zorn (Philadelphia: P&R, 1962), 436-437.


pneumatological reading of the Lord’ Supper: the incarnational analogy by making the
Spirit superfluous to an operation of the incarnate Logos in the Supper, and the sacrificial
by wholly spiritualizing the presence of Christ. With resurrection as a departure point we
have the advantage of keeping the corporeal dimensions of salvation central (a concern of
eucharistic theologies of real presence) without committing to a theology of divinization
which Reformed theology fears is entailed by eucharistic doctrines of real presence.

For Paul the resurrection of Jesus is an eschatological convergence within
salvation history of pneumatology and Christology. At the resurrection the “last Adam
became a life-giving Spirit” (πνεῦμα ζωοποιούν) (1 Cor. 15:45b). This is not a timeless
description of Christ, rather Paul indicates that in being raised from the dead something
happened to Jesus: he became (ἐγένετο) something, namely, a new creation from which
the Holy Spirit now proceeds to us. This is pneumatology understood as the culmination
of Christ’s redemptive-historical work. Concerning this verse Richard Gaffin observes
that “it would make no sense for Paul to argue for the resurrection of believers as he does
if Christ were “life-giving” by virtue say, of his pre-existence or incarnation—or any
other consideration other than his resurrection.”12 On the occasion of Jesus’ exaltation
(resurrection and ascension) “the Holy Spirit became Christ's possession to such a high
degree that he himself can be referred to as the Spirit.”13 The intimacy and identity of
Christ and the Spirit is so close that Paul even says “Now the Lord [Christ] is the Spirit”
(2 Cor. 3:17). Here we might gloss this difficult passage by saying that the Spirit is the

Evangelical Theology, 41/4 (Dec. 1998), 578. For another exegetical treatment that affirms Gaffin’s
interpretation see Scott Brodeur, The Holy Spirit’s Agency in the Resurrection of the Dead: An Exegetical-
Theological Study of 1 Corinthians 15,44b-49 and Romans 8,9-13 (Rome: Editrice Pontifica Universita
Academic, 2006), 499.
Lord (Christ) insofar as Christ can only be apprehended under the conditions of existence in history, which means that now that he is beyond history by virtue of his ascension he comes to us through the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{14} Paul is not concerned here with ontological distinctions between trinitarian persons, but the functional and dynamic identity of Christ and the Spirit within the economy of salvation. Richard Sibbes maintains that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit before the resurrection.

But the fullest degree of declaration and manifestation of the Spirit upon Christ was after his resurrection; after he had satisfied fully for our salvation . . . When he had fully suffered for us, that stay of his glory, his abasement was taken away, and then nothing appeared but all glory and Spirit in Christ . . . he appeared to be King and Lord of all in the resurrection. \textit{Thus we see how Christ is that Spirit; that is, he is full of the Spirit in regard of himself.}\textsuperscript{15}

At the resurrection the human nature of the incarnate Logos forged a bond and intimacy with the Holy Spirit on behalf of the human race that did not previously exist. Jesus’ resurrection is the beginning of new creation because through his body the Spirit of creation (\textit{Spiritus Creator}) has passed and now \textit{become} available to us as redeeming Spirit (i.e. “Holy” Spirit). The cosmic truth about Jesus’ resurrection is that “in a certain way his body contains all of creation within itself.”\textsuperscript{16} His resurrection was not the renewal of merely one isolated body, but the first-fruits of a new creation that eventually

\begin{footnotes}
\item[16] Jean Borella, \textit{The Secret of the Christian Way}. trans. and ed. G. John Champoux (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 160. Reflecting on the significance of this resurrection body Borella says that “the marvelous events of the Incarnation and the Resurrection are specifically meant to revolutionize our way of seeing things, to induce us to enter a new order of reality by aligning us with it and it alone . . . The irruption of the Resurrection within our world tears us away--in proportion to our faith--from the horizontal relationships that connect us to each other and to things, that is to the ensemble of relationships that define the "world." It reorients us to the vertical relationship that springs from the Glorious Body ascending into Heaven: a Body infinitely more real than anything we have experienced, a real and not a metaphoric Body that reveals, beyond the utmost reaches of our imagination, "a new Heaven and a new earth"; in short, a new creation that is in reality the true creation that was created” (160).
\end{footnotes}
will embrace heaven and earth from top to bottom. Just as in Christ Jesus all things were created and hold together (Col.1:17), now in his broken and resurrected body the renewal of all creation has been achieved and holds together. This means that Spirit can only be known and given to us christologically— as “formed Spirit” (filoque), coming to us from the glorified body of Jesus which is the epicenter and source of that life-giving work of the Holy Spirit. In the resurrection spirituality and corporeality have embraced in the form of a single historical event. When we turn to the issue of eucharistic participation, there is an intimacy and relatedness of Christ and the Spirit (a near functional identity) that is the theological basis for understanding how the natural body and blood of Christ truly becomes present to us in and through the presence of the Holy Spirit—for in a manner of speaking “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17). The Christus praesens is actualized in the Supper “through the modality of the agency of the Spiritus praesens, the two hands of the divine presence being neither separable nor identical.”

In chapter three we observed how Calvin’s emphasis on ascension gave his eucharistic theology an eschatological dynamic. Here we need to unpack some of the implications of this eschatology especially as it forms a bridge in our experience between the body of Christ and the ongoing operation of the Spirit. In a statement we have already considered, but is important to revisit because of how it encapsulates the nexus of Calvin’s eschatology, pneumatology and eucharistic theology, he says,

Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secrete power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness

by our measure. What then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: *that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.*

The Holy Spirit is the divine agency that overcomes the distance of things separated by space. Here, in particular, Calvin has in mind the cosmological distance that separates the localized body of Christ in heaven from believers who are on earth. John Nevin offers a helpful systematic interpretation of these spatial categories.

Neither ascent or descent here are to be taken in any outward or local sense; they serve merely to express metaphorically the relation of the two orders or spheres of existence, which are brought into opposition and contrast. The whole *modus* of the sacramental mystery transcends the category of space; it belongs to heaven, as a higher order of life.

Building on Nevin’s interpretation, Thomas J. Davis argues that the language of separation in Calvin is not a function of actual cosmological distance but rather distance is a metaphor for eschatological separation. In chapter three we considered Calvin’s interpretation of heaven, and found that it was metaphorical and *not* the crassly literal place of Lutheran accusation. However, despite Calvin’s nuance, Douglas Farrow rightly observes that his doctrine suffers a certain eschatological deficit by being too oriented around spatial categories to the neglect of the temporal ones. In order to fill out and correct this eschatological deficiency in Calvin’s eucharistic-oriented pneumatology one

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18 Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.10 [my italics].
20 Thomas J. Davis, *This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 136. There is some difference of opinion in Calvin scholarship on whether to interpret his discussion of heaven in literal-cosmological terms of space or metaphorical-metaphysical ones. What Calvin’s actual position was is here beside the point since I am more concerned with the systematic question of coherency. In this respect the stronger theological position is the one with the metaphorical-metaphysical cast, and it comes with ecumenical benefit of helping close the distance between the Reformed and Lutheran eucharistic theology (On this rapprochement see Davis, *This is My Body*, 127-139).
might better say ‘the Spirit truly unites things separated by space and time.’ In other
words the Spirit is not simply mediating the heavenly Christ to us across vast distances of
cosmological space, but the Spirit mediates Christ to us across the distance of
eschatological time—which in reality is that which truly separates us from enjoying the
local and corporeal presence of the body of Christ (Rom 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).
One could argue that the spatial duality between heaven and earth really addresses the
separation between our time and God's time, God's history from our history. Spatial
metaphors are really a function of the temporal ones. However we cannot dispense with
the category of space altogether since we are dealing with an actual body; and a body to
remain a body must take up residence in some spatial location. Temporality, however,
should be the primary term. Properly speaking, what separates us from the glorified body
of Christ is not the space between heaven and earth, but the eschatological distance and
interval between ‘this present age’ and the age to come. The eschatological work of the
Spirit then takes place in mediating between bodies, separated by space and time—
between the body of one believer to that of another within the corporate body of the
church, between the eucharistic body (bread) on earth and its heavenly source in the
ascended body of Christ, between the resurrected body of Christ and the afflicted bodies
of believers that await their final resurrection.

Around this eucharistic-oriented pneumatology emerge the interrelated themes of
corporeality and temporality. Both are crucial to an eschatological interpretation of the
ordo salutis and the Lord’s Supper. Corporeality speaks to how grace is mediated to
human beings because they have personal bodies and on account of the fact that salvation

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itself was accomplished in the very flesh of Jesus. Temporality addresses how the “then and there” of redemption accomplished is related to the “here and now” of redemption applied. It gets at how saving events distant from us in time become relevant and contextualized through the Holy Spirit. As we will see the themes of temporality and corporeality are united in Paul’s eschatological theology of Christ’s death and resurrection. T.F. Torrance shows how these strands belong together. “The Church as the Body of Christ is the sphere on earth and within history where through the Spirit the redemption of the body and the redemption of time anticipate the parousia.”23 What we will find in our relating of ordo salutis and the Lord’s Supper is that the former finds its full eschatological expression in the latter, for in the sacrament we anticipate the resurrection of the body. In and through the Supper “we are given our clearest understanding of the participation of the Church in the redemption of the body and the redemption of time.”24

The pneumatological significance of ordo salutis

The ordo salutis is one of the most significant categories in post-Reformation theology for the development of Protestant pneumatology.25 One cannot dismiss the idea without dismissing a great deal of Reformation pneumatology. Ordo salutis (order of salvation) is a distinctly post-Reformation doctrine that reflects the development of a Protestant theology of grace which sought to distinguish itself from Roman Catholicism. It is important to recognize that there are two distinct, although not entirely separable,
senses in which the term has been employed. The more widely used and technical
meaning understands *ordo salutis* to be the comprehensive and systematic outworking of
the order and sequence (logical, temporal and causal) of the application of salvation to
the individual life of the believer.\(^2^6\) *Ordo salutis* accounts for the movement of grace
throughout the whole life of a person from spiritual birth through their death and final
resurrection. Each Protestant tradition varied the sequence and arrangement of the terms,
but each generally agreed upon the specific topics to be treated: election, (effectual)
calling, regeneration, union, faith, repentance, conversion, justification, adoption,
sanctification and glorification.\(^2^7\) The second more generic meaning of *ordo salutis*,
clearly taught by the early Reformers and even tacitly affirmed by later Protestant critics
of the doctrine, is the notion that there is an ongoing application of salvation that is
distinct from its once-for-all accomplishment in Jesus Christ (*historia salutis*).\(^2^8\) In order
to affirm this minimalist understanding one need not commit to a settled “order.” The
critical theological significance of the *ordo salutis* lay in this second, minimalist
distinction. Through this distinction the Reformers sought to account for the relationship
between the completed work of Christ, which all believers have full access to by faith
alone, and the actual realization of that salvation within their own life. The Reformation
teaching on justification drew the distinction between redemption accomplished and


\(^{2^7}\) The *ordo salutis* became a way that various Protestant traditions worked out their distinct theologies of grace. In fact, it is virtually impossible to talk about what distinguishes Reformed, Lutheran and Wesleyan theologies of grace from one another without being pulled, in one form or another, into a technical discussion of *ordo salutis*. In the light of the widespread criticisms of the doctrine it is important to keep in mind how important a role that the doctrine has played and continues to play in articulating a distinctly Protestant theology of grace.

redemption applied with a sharpness and clarity that hitherto had not occurred in the theological tradition. And in this sense, arguably, it is the Reformation doctrine of justification (now clearly differentiated from sanctification) that lies at the root of the *ordo salutis* tradition.

The development of *ordo salutis* reflects formal and structural changes within the theological tradition that resulted from the Reformers polemic against the medieval penitential system and its “tendency to make the work of Christ peripheral, in a practical sense, to the application of grace.”\(^{29}\) In Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*, a doctrine of the sacraments follows immediately upon Christology. Thomas says, “After considering those things that concern the mystery of the incarnate Word, we must consider the sacraments of the Church, which derive their efficacy from the Word incarnate Himself.”\(^{30}\) Richard Muller observes of the Catholic tradition that sacraments must follow Christology “because the issue is not so much the application of Christ’s benefits as the dispensation of grace within the church and through the church’s proper work, *ex opera operato.*”\(^{31}\) The Reformation doctrine of justification upended this soteriological structure by making possible a direct appropriation of Christ and his saving grace through believing faith. Muller notes that the “causality of salvation now appears as mediated by Christ” not through “the sacramental system but the grace of God directly accessible in Christ, the *medius* and *mediator.*”\(^{32}\) This explains why in the emerging theological systems of Protestantism, typically, an expanding treatment of *ordo salutis*

\(^{29}\) Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 1986), 73.


\(^{31}\) Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 73.

\(^{32}\) Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 73.
intervenes between the treatment of Christology and the doctrines of church and sacrament.\(^{33}\) It is significant to note that in the wake of this theological restructuring a dogmatic space is opened up for pneumatology to develop and flourish. Unfortunately as this ordo salutis tradition developed, cleavages emerged (as we saw in chapter one) between a pneumatological piety and a robust doctrine of church and sacrament.

The problem of ordo salutis

In the last one hundred years the developed doctrine of ordo salutis has come under severe theological criticism and as with so many other important dogmatic trends within the 20th century, Karl Barth has led the way. In his 1923 lectures on the Reformed Confessions, Barth claims the Protestant doctrinal tradition of ordo salutis meets its finest expression in the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher. In Barth’s theological vernacular this is the worst criticism to be leveled against a doctrine. According to Barth the development of ordo salutis after the Reformation was a slow descent from the objectivity of grace in Christ to the subjectivity of grace enclosed in the consciousness of the believer. With irony Barth describes this downward movement,

The earthly analogy of the divine action now begins to become important and interesting. The dark night of objectivism in which the Reformers, under the weight of medieval tradition, had still remarkably enough remained, now begins to fade, and gradually, from very far away, the pleasant morning of that day dawns on which Schleiermacher, that self-styled “Moravian of a higher order,” will discover, as the actual finisher of the work began by Luther, that the essence of theology is the analysis of pious self-consciousness. This will be the day on which the Erlangen

\(^{33}\) Calvin’s Institutes is a good example of this theological re-organization. In book II Calvin deals with Christology and soteriology (“The knowledge of God the redeemer in Christ”), book III treats of pneumatology and what we might with some anachronism call ordo salutis (“The way in which we receive the grace of Christ: what benefits come to us from it, and what effects follow”) and book IV with ecclesiology and sacramentology (“The external means or aims by which God invites us into the society of Christ and holds us therein”).
theologian Hoffmann will compose the statement that defines at least two centuries of theology: “I, the Christian, am the most appropriate content of my science as a theologian.”

Barth’s assessment of *ordo salutis* hardly improves thirty years later when he treats the themes of justification and sanctification in the *Church Dogmatics*. Although admitting that *ordo salutis* sometimes was treated as a logical sequence, Barth claims that on the whole the doctrinal *loci* referred to the temporal outworking of the individual’s salvation that in turn corresponded to a series of distinct divine actions within time. Barth’s objection is twofold: first, to the inherent subjectivism of the doctrine; and second to fragmenting the unitary divine event of salvation into a series of discrete historical moments. While he recognizes the salutary impulse of *ordo salutis* to reflect on the Holy Spirit’s application “to the needy human subject of the salvation objectively accomplished in Jesus Christ,” Barth rejects it as a “psychologistic pragmatics in soteriology.”

The more *ordo salutis* was emphasized the more theology became entangled in conceptual arbitrariness, speculation and artificial psychologizing about human experience, and the less rooted in the objectivity of grace. Barth was not alone in his criticisms of *ordo salutis*, but in fact represented a widely shared sentiment among other dialectical theologians of his day that were “especially antagonistic to the theological subjectivism of the nineteenth century.”

The importance of Barth’s critique of the *ordo salutis* tradition is in reminding theology to think about the application of salvation not from the perspective of the

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individual believer, but from the perspective of Christ himself. However, his rejection of ordo salutis leaves very little room in his theological system to address the nature of Christian experience or the possibility of growth in grace. Hans Urs von Balthasar expresses a Roman Catholic criticism of Barth that in most regards could easily have been made from the perspective of Reformed confessionalism.

Too much in Barth gives the impression that nothing much really happens in his theology of event and history, because everything had already happened in eternity: for example, there is Barth’s weariness, or, at best, an overly delicate application of ontic categories, in his treatment of grace and justification. Then there is his ascription of the effects of the sacraments to the cognitive order alone, since he rejects the Catholic and Lutheran doctrine that the sacraments effect and cause real change. And finally he transposes both forms of time (or aeons) into pretemporal eternity, where sin is ever-past and justification ever-future, and rejects all talk of growth, progress—even of a possible lapse or loss of grace and of faith. In short, Barth rejects all discussion of anything in the realm of the relative and temporal that would make for a real and vibrant history of man with his redeeming Lord and God.

In the older Protestant tradition, ordo salutis was precisely that place where theology could speak in a pneumatological voice about a “real and vibrant history” that humans have with their redeeming Lord and God. And von Balthasar helpfully shows the correlation between Barth’s refusal to talk about the experience of grace and his problematic dismissal of the sacraments as means of grace. Here I would simply point out

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37 A.T.B. McGowan, “Justification and the ordo salutis,” 158
38 Barth deals with the existential aspects of salvation under the category of vocation (See Church Dogmatics, 4.3). Reinhold Niebuhr once characterized Barth’s ethics as the great eschatological airplane that never lands. A similar criticism can be leveled of Barth’s account of sanctification and the believer’s experiences of grace. For an elaboration of these criticisms see Bo Karen Lee “The Holy Spirit and Human Agency in Barth’s Doctrine of Sanctification” (Koinonia XII.2, Fall 2000): 173-93; Michael Horton, People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 171-176; and G.C. Berkouwer, The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth, trans. Harry Boer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 253.
that there is a theological link between *experiencing* grace in the context of the *ordo salutis* and the sacraments as effectual means of grace.

A brief word needs to be spoken in defense of *ordo salutis* as it relates to the Christian experience of grace. As the work of B.B. Warfield reminds us, there has always been a strong link between a Reformed theology of grace and the prominence of devotional reflection on the Holy Spirit. In the Puritan era we encounter a proliferation of devotional writings on the Holy Spirit, which reflect a distinctly Reformed spiritual tradition. One historian notes that we should not be surprised that high Calvinists should be drawn to the Holy Spirit since “from the angle of piety this was a way of grounding religious experience in a supernatural divine life to which every step of the Christian life could be referred as the agent.”

Barth’s criticism of the subjective excesses of the *ordo salutis* notwithstanding, the Reformed tradition has always regarded the application of salvation to be “no less an essential constituent of redemption than the acquisition of it.” There is soteriological continuity between redemption accomplished and redemption applied: Christ continues from heaven his prophetic, priestly and kingly work through the Holy Spirit. “The application of salvation is his work. He is the active agent. By an irresistible and inadmissible grace, he imparts himself and his benefits to his own.”

The difficulty is articulating the christological-pneumatological transition between redemption accomplished and redemption applied. How is it possible to think about the *ordo salutis* not from the perspective of the individual Christian, but from the perspective of Christ himself within the *historia salutis*?

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Resurrection and *Ordo Salutis*

We encounter a reformulation of *ordo salutis* in the work of Westminster Seminary theologian Richard Gaffin that helps us in this regard. The problem with the traditional *ordo salutis*, according to Gaffin, is not its tendency towards subjectivism, but its marginalization of the soteriological significance of Christ’s resurrection. In Reformed theology the accomplishment of salvation as a once-for-all event nearly always refers to Christ’s atonement for sin (i.e. his sacrificial death), as distinct from his resurrection. “Interest in the resurrection for the most part has been restricted to its apologetic value and as a stimulus to faith . . . or sealing the effectiveness and facilitating the applicability of the redemption wrought by Christ’s death.” Consequently the work of Christ that is “applied” in the context of *ordo salutis* has primary reference to his death. This being the case it is difficult to understand how Christ’s resurrection is a constitutive element that is the very heart and essence of redemption.

The impetus of Gaffin’s criticism does not grow simply from general dogmatic concern, but a fresh biblical-theological reading of the apostle Paul. The tendency of Reformed theology has been to locate the overall structure of Paul’s theology in an *ordo salutis* scheme which has obscured the eschatological scope of his soteriology and the centrality of his doctrine of resurrection. Gaffin claims that the “center of Paul’s teaching is not found in the doctrine of justification by faith or any other aspect of the *ordo salutis*. Rather, his primary interest is seen to be the *historia salutis* as that history has reached its

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43Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption*, 11-12. See footnote number 2 for brief survey of traditional dogmatic treatments of atonement and resurrection within Reformed theology that bear this out.
eschatological realization in the death and especially the resurrection of Christ.”

Here it is worth noting that Gaffin is not alone in challenging this approach to Paul from a confessional Reformed standpoint. His work builds in important ways on biblical scholars Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007), and most especially Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949). Gaffin’s challenge to the older Pauline interpretation does not mean he abandons, as Barth does, the dogmatic structure of ordo salutis, rather he re-conceives it as thoroughly ordered to and rooted in Christ’s resurrection as the central event of salvation history. What then is the soteriological significance of the resurrection, especially as it relates to ordo salutis? According to Gaffin,

To Paul’s way of thinking, as long as Christ remains dead, Satan and sin are triumphant, or, more broadly, the dominion of the old aeon remains unbroken. Strictly speaking, not Christ's death, but his resurrection (that is, his exaltation) marks the completion of the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption. . . . In fact, only by virtue of his resurrection is his death a dying to sin. A soteriology structured so that it moves directly from the death of Christ to the application to others of the benefits purchased by that death, substantially short-circuits Paul's own point of view. For him the accomplishment of redemption is only first definitively realized in the application to Christ himself (by the Father through the Spirit) at the resurrection of the benefits purchased by his own obedience unto death.

Most significant here is the claim that the event of the resurrection is the “application” of the full benefits of Christ’s saving obedience to his own person. Here the soteriological structure of redemption accomplished/applied is drawn into the orbit of salvation history itself; rather than being merely an extraneous conceptuality, the application of redemption (through the Spirit) is something Jesus himself experienced on our behalf, and the basis upon which we can now receive it through his Spirit.

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Governing all of Paul’s reflection on spiritual existence in the present age is the presupposition of the underlying unity between the resurrection of Jesus and that of believers. The “newness of life” in which the Christian walks is a function of his or her being united with Christ in his resurrection. 47 This is what it means to be “in Christ,” namely, to be participants in his dying and rising. However, we taste only the beginning of this resurrection life, we have the first-fruits and down payment, but we still await the full resurrection of our bodies (2 Cor 4:16). Gaffin observes that there is an organic tie between three aspects of resurrection in Paul’s thinking: “the resurrection of Jesus from the tomb, the initial soteric experience in the life history of believers and the future bodily resurrection of the believer.” 48 What this means is that the different aspects of the ordo salutis (e.g. justification, sanctification, adoption, glorification) are explanatory of a soteriological complex that triangulates Christian experience as situated between these three modalities of resurrection. 49

Of critical importance to Paul’s resurrection theology is the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit in raising Jesus from the dead. Although Paul does not express it directly the deep presupposition of all his thinking is that God raised Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. 50 Vos is particularly helpful in drawing out this truth as it relates to existential union with Christ. “On the one hand the resurrection as an act is derived from

47 See Rom. 6:3-11; Eph. 2:5-6; Gal 2:19-20; I Cor. 15:12-29; 2 Cor. 4:14.
48 Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption, 60.
49 Gaffin is not breaking new ground within Reformed theology. The Heidelberg Catechism Q & A. 45 recognized these three aspects as the benefits we receive of Christ’s resurrection.
50 Gordon Fee is the noteworthy exception to Pauline interpreters who recognize that Jesus was raised by the agency of the Spirit. God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 808-811. On this account Fee’s interpretation seems to be overly fearful of an adoptionist interpretation of Paul’s Christology. For an exegetical defense of the idea that God raised Jesus from the dead through the agency of the Holy Spirit see Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption, 66-74; Gaffin, “Life-Giving Spirit: Probing the Center of Paul’s Pneumatology”; and Geerhardus Vos, The Pauline Eschatology. (Phillipsburg, PA, P&R, 1994), 159-179.
the Spirit, on the other hand the resurrection state is represented as in permanent
dependence on the Spirit, as a pneumatic state.”

Life in Christ and life in the Spirit is one and the same thing. In fact Paul links the power of new life through the Spirit by an analogy between Jesus’ resurrection and the present experience of the Christian. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he will also give life to your mortal bodies” (Rom. 8:11).

On the one hand the Spirit is the resurrection source, on the other He appears as the substratum of the resurrection life, the element, as it were, in which, as in its circumambient atmosphere the life of the coming aeon shall be lived. He produces the event and in continuance underlies the state which is the result of it. He is creator and sustainer at once, the Creator Spiritus and the Sustainer of the supernatural state of the future life in one . . . 

It is not a surprise then, that as the substratum of resurrection life itself, the Holy Spirit has traditionally been regarded as the divine agency underlying the entire reality of ordo salutis. Not only does grounding ordo salutis in Christ’s resurrection highlight its pneumatic character and christological center, but it gives it an eschatological dynamic.

Vos argues that Paul links the Spirit and resurrection “not because he conceives of the future life in analogy with the present life, but for the very opposite reason—because he conceives of it as essentially distinct from the present life, as moving in a totally different element.” Resurrection life of the Spirit is eschatological life of the age to come. Accordingly Paul recasts the reality of redemption within a broad eschatological perspective that links the believer’s salvation with the realization of the eschaton. The problem with the traditional account of ordo salutis according to Gaffin is that it “lacks

52 Vos, The Pauline Eschatology, 163.
the eschatological air which pervades the entire Pauline soteriology. Or to put it the other way around, the former point of view amounts to a definite de-eschatologization of Paul’s outlook. For him soteriology is eschatology.”

The Pauline understanding of present Christian existence consists of “an eschatological tension between resurrection realized and yet to be realized [that] is totally foreign to the traditional ordo salutis.” Typically eschatology was only considered under the category of glorification, which left treatments of justification, adoption and sanctification with no clear relationship to the future, or Christ’s resurrection. As Gaffin’s exegesis demonstrates the principal categories that Paul uses to explicate the believer’s experience of redemption are the same categories he uses to expound the meaning of Jesus’ own resurrection.

“Justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification as applied to Christ are not separate, distinct acts. Rather each describes a different facet or aspect of the one act of being raised from the dead.” The structure of ordo salutis then, is not merely the application of the benefits accruing from Christ’s death, rather it is existential union with Christ as resurrected, such that justification, adoption, sanctification and glorification are exponential and explanatory of what it means for believers to be raised with Christ.

A recovery of resurrection and eschatology brings the historical orientation of biblical revelation and redemption to the forefront. Paul’s governing interest lay not in anthropology, an ahistorical account of divinization or a coordination of the terms of ordo salutis abstractly considered, but an exposition of the history of redemption which has climaxèd in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This redemptive-historical, eschatological content of Paul’s theology is reflected in what Herman Ridderbos calls a

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54 Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption, 138.
55 Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption, 138.
56 Gaffin, Resurrection and Redemption, 127.
Christology of “redemptive facts.” In making resurrection central, not only is eschatology restored to soteriology, but the historical character of redemption is emphasized. Eschatology in this case is history. According to Vos, “Eschatology even of a primitive kind yields ipso facto a philosophy of history . . . and every philosophy of history bears in itself the seed of theology.” When Paul explicates salvation history, the Spirit’s involvement in the death and resurrection of Jesus is especially prominent. Even when he draws antithetical contrasts between Spirit (pneuma) and flesh (sarx) history remains the controlling factor.

If the sphere of the sarx is evil, this is not due to its natural constitution, because it is material or sensual, but because it has historically become evil through the entrance of sin. And when Paul views the pneumatic world as the consummated world, this also is not due simply to its natural constitution as the ideal non-sensual world, but because through the Messiah it has become the finished product of God’s designs for man.

The pneuma-sarx antithesis then is not a contrast between material and spiritual reality (as it was for much Hellenistic thought), but an eschatological contrast of two different ages that the epochal events of Christ’s death and resurrection have created.

This brings us back to the status of ordo salutis within Reformed soteriology. Although Gaffin’s work criticizes traditional versions of the doctrine, he argues that Paul’s redemptive-historical and eschatological emphasis does not exclude a treatment of individual-experiential aspects of salvation. It is a false opposition that forces a choice between historia salutis and ordo salutis. Quoting John Murray, he says “It is necessary to stress both aspects, the past historical and the experiential in their distinctness, on the

58 Vos, The Pauline Eschatology, 61. Arnold van Ruler argues that “the Spirit can only be dealt with within a philosophy of history.” (Calvinist Trinitarianism and Theocentric Politics), 77.
one hand, and in their inter-dependence on the other . . . Something occurred in the past
historical which makes necessary what is realized and exemplified in the actual life
history.”\textsuperscript{60} Surely the controlling focus of Paul’s theology is the \textit{historia salutis} but “he is
cconcerned with matters of individual appropriation . . . . as they are integrally tethered to
and flow from his redemptive historical focus.”\textsuperscript{61} By recognizing the importance that
resurrection plays in Paul’s theology we have a theological avenue for understanding how
the application of salvation can be understood from the perspective from Christ himself
rather than the individual Christian. The contribution of Gaffin’s work is that he clearly
roots the existential aspects of \textit{ordo salutis} squarely in the \textit{historia salutis} reality of
Christ’s death and resurrection. Union with Christ, as we will see, provides the
framework for the whole \textit{ordo salutis} and stems from the redemptive-historical
relationship between Christ and the Spirit given with the former’s exaltation (resurrection
and ascension). An \textit{ordo salutis} reconstructed on these grounds provides us with an
objective pneumatology that in turn allows for an articulation of the experience of grace
that is christocentric, eschatological and ecclesial.

\textbf{Life-Giving Union and Forensic Justification}

The 19\textsuperscript{th} century eucharistic controversy between American Reformed theologians
John Nevin and Charles Hodge was in large part a dispute over the proper ordering of
soteriological metaphors. At one level it was a dispute about the \textit{ordo salutis}. What should
have priority in Reformed theology, union with Christ or a forensic doctrine of

\textsuperscript{60} Gaffin, \textit{Resurrection and Redemption}, 53.
\textsuperscript{61} Gaffin, \textit{By Faith, Not By Sight}, 24.
justification? For Hodge, who stood squarely within the tradition of federal Calvinism, justification was primary, which meant the crucial soteriological category was “imputation.” According to E. Brooks Holifield, “Hodge feared that Nevin’s language about the mystical union covertly substituted a theory of inherent righteousness for the doctrine that God graciously “imputed” Christ’s righteousness to the elect believer.”

Nevin did not reject the centrality of justification (forensically understood) but he objected to accounts like Hodge’s which he thought made the reality of salvation “an abstraction, a simple thought in the Divine Mind, setting man free from guilt in a purely outward way.”

Their differing soteriological concerns are reflected in diverging interpretations of the Lord’s Supper.

As we noted in chapter one, in his review of *The Mystical Presence*, Hodge identifies two positions within Reformed confessionalism on the nature of Christ’s presence in the Supper. This was one of the few points in Hodge’s treatment of the Lord’s Supper where Nevin was in agreement. What divided Nevin and Hodge was a disagreement about what it means to receive the *substance* of Christ’s body and blood.

According to Hodge,

> All the Reformed answered, that by receiving the body and blood of Christ, is meant receiving their virtue of efficacy. Some of them said it was their virtue as broken and shed, i.e., their sacrificial virtue; others said, it was a mysterious, supernatural efficacy flowing from the glorified body of Christ in heaven; and that this last idea, therefore, is to be taken into the account, in determining the nature of the union between Christ and his people.

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Hodge argues for the first option, that sacramental eating refers to receiving the sacrificial virtue and efficacy of Christ’s atoning death. This view according to Hodge ought to have higher authority since it harmonizes better with the other doctrines of the Reformed churches, especially its doctrine of justification. 65 The idea of a sacramental feeding on the glorified body of Christ is “an uncongenial and foreign element” within Reformed theology due in part to an overly literal interpretation of John 6:54-58 and Ephesians 5:30, along with the early Reformed desire to placate the Lutherans. 66 Hodge believes that the sacrificial efficacy reading is more in line with the Reformed doctrine of justification since the idea of receiving the sacrificial virtue of Christ’s death coheres better with the notion of imputed righteousness. In this regard Nevin was right to observe a trajectory in Hodge’s theology of the Lord’s Supper that thinks about grace in strongly extrinsic categories.

Despite his concern to safeguard a forensic and synthetic doctrine of justification, Hodge affirms that there is a real union with Christ that is not merely moral or legal, but a union that is mystical, supernatural, vital and representative. 67 This is a union not only with the benefits of Christ but with his very person and presence through the operation of the Holy Spirit. Hodge does not object to the prominence of union with Christ, he objects to the type of union that implies “there is on our part any participation of Christ’s human body or of his human nature as such.” 68 Such an understanding, Hodge believes, attributes to the body of Christ a vivifying efficacy based upon its union with the divine nature that flows over into the life of the believer. Receiving the substance of Christ’s

67 Hodge, 228; See also Hodge’s Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 127.
68 Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 255.
body, therefore, comes to mean that we receive “its virtue and vigor, not merely as a sacrifice, but also the power inherent in it from its union with the divine nature.”\textsuperscript{69} Not only does this shift the locus of salvation from the atoning death of Christ to that of the incarnation, but Hodge detects in this formulation a subtle theory of divinization.\textsuperscript{70} According to Hodge union with Christ can involve no “participation of his human body, nature or life.”\textsuperscript{71}

Rightly, Nevin points to an imbalance in Hodge’s interpretation of the \textit{historia salutis} in the way that he relates the “institution wholly to Christ’s death, as something past” and “will hear only of communion with his \textit{death}.”\textsuperscript{72} Nevin agrees that the sacrificial dimension of the sacrament is central, in fact, it is “the great object to be apprehended” for our salvation.\textsuperscript{73} Here Nevin even extols Zwingli’s recovery of the commemorative aspect of Christ’s death as more sound than Luther who neglected the sacrificial theme in order to emphasize life-union with Christ.\textsuperscript{74} Nevertheless Nevin firmly denies that there is an inward contradiction between the two views. “The life of Christ is the true and real basis of his sacrifice, and so the natural and necessary medium

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\item \textsuperscript{69} Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 250.
\item \textsuperscript{70} This is precisely Bruce McCormack’s fear about Calvin’s eucharistic theology. See “What’s At Stake in Current Debates over Justification: The Crisis of Protestantism in the West” in \textit{Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates}, eds. Daniel Trier and Mark Husbands (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004.) 104-106. In later work McCormack’s objection against divinization persists but he seems to have a more positive interpretation of Calvin’s eucharist theology. See “Union with Christ in Calvin’s Theology: Ground for a Divinization Theory?” in \textit{Tributes to John Calvin}, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010), 504-529.
\item \textsuperscript{71} Hodge, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 255.
\item \textsuperscript{72} Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 541-542.
\item \textsuperscript{73} Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 459.
\item \textsuperscript{74} “Luther had good reason to insist on the idea of a real life-union with Christ in the sacrament; but he had no right to deny at the same time, the direct reference it bears to the sacrificial value of his death. Here Zwingli showed himself more sound than his opponent, by intonating as he did the commemorative relation of the ordinance to the broken body and shed blood of the Redeemer.” Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 461.
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of communion with it for the remission of sins.”75 This translates into how we account for the interrelationship of the soteriological themes of imputation and participation. An external imputation of Christ’s righteousness must depend ultimately on “an inward, real unity of life with the person of Christ without which it could have no reason or force.”76 Nevin rejects an account of justification that imagines that “the merits of Christ’s life may be sundered from his life itself, and conveyed over to his people under this abstract form, on the ground of a merely outward legal constitution.”77 Participation in the justifying merit and benefits of Christ assumes participating in the substance of his person, which Nevin identifies with his glorified humanity. Although Hodge claims that he does not divide the person of Christ from his meritorious work, in denying union with Christ’s glorified humanity, Nevin argues that Hodge divorces the life of Christ from the death of Christ.78

In refusing to allow the human side of Christ’s life (mysteriously) to be the source, seat and medium of grace, Nevin charges Hodge’s account of Christ’s atoning death with soteriological reductionism.

Strange, that there should seem to be any contradiction here, between the grace which we have by Christ’s death, and the grace that comes to us through his life. Could the sacrifice of Calvary be of any avail to take away sins, if the victim there slain had not been raised again for our justification, and were now seated at the right hand of God as our advocate and intercessor? Would the atonement of a dead Christ be of more worth than the blood of bulls and goats, to purge the conscience from dead works

75 Nevin, “Doctrine of the Reformed Church,” 450.
and give it free access to God? Surely it is the perennial, indissoluble life of the once crucified Redeemer, which imparts to his broken body and shed blood all the power to abolish guilt. Nevin makes clear that the efficacy of Christ’s sacrificial work depends on the entire scope of his life, death, resurrection and ascension. The reality of salvation is not simply a series of events once accomplished that now exist only to be recalled in the memory of the church; these events have perpetual significance and ongoing force because their “once for all” character reaches throughout all time. This is only possible because the “life in which it [salvation] has been rendered continues to live and make itself felt . . . the atonement in this view, is a quality or property of the glorified life of the Son of Man.” The purchase of Christ’s sacrificial death is not separable from his person, but is the “quality and property” of his life, of his own glorified body. Thomas the disciple discovered this when he put his fingers in the nail marked hands of the resurrected Jesus (John 20:27), and the book of Revelation gives us a vision of Jesus “as a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev 5:6, 13:8). The glorified body of Jesus, ascended to heaven, bears within itself the whole history of redemption. No more does Jesus cast off his body when he gets to heaven, than are we able to pry apart the historia salutis from his person. “The flesh of Christ, then, or his humanity, forms the medium, and the only medium, by which it is possible for us to be inserted into his life. To have a part of him at all, we must be joined in the flesh.” The spirituality of the Lord’s Supper epitomizes this theological reality; in it the sacrifice of Christ has a present reality for Christian existence precisely because it is rooted in his glorious humanity.

80 Nevin, “Reformed Doctrine of the Church,” 547 [my italics].
81 Nevin, “Reformed Doctrine of the Church,” 509.
Union with Christ has been the central category in Reformed treatments of the *ordo salutis* from the beginning. Heinrich Heppe sums up its importance when he says, “At the root of the whole doctrine of the appropriation of salvation lies the doctrine of the *insitio* or *insertio in Christum*, through which we live in him and he in us.”82 Union with Christ is a broad and embrace subject, not simply one moment in the application of redemption but underlying every step from start to finish.83 Invariably discussions about the meaning of union lead back to Calvin since he was the first in the Reformed tradition to frame applied soteriology in terms of the believer’s union with Christ. In a programmatic statement at the beginning of book 3 of the *Institutes*, Calvin states

> [W]e must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us. Therefore, to share with us what he has received from the Father, he had to become ours and dwell within us.84

Here we encounter the basic *ordo salutis* distinction between redemption accomplished and applied, but with the clear understanding that the accomplishment of salvation is for no effect if Christ remains “outside of us” or we are “separated from him.” Salvation was accomplished *apart* from us, but it does not save us *without* us, nor does it remain remote from us as something external and outside. This means, according to Calvin, there must be a vital union between Christ and the believer in order for salvation to actually take effect. From the human side this happens through believing faith, but Calvin clarifies that Christ becomes ours and we enjoy all his benefits only through the bond of the Holy Spirit, who effectually unites us to him and causes us to “grow into one body with him.” Union with

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84 Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.1.
Christ provides the setting and context for all the saving benefits of Christ—and that includes justification. Even though Calvin does not elaborate an *ordo salutis* in the way that the later theologians would he gave the tradition its original pneumatological impulse in this area for “the Spirit alone causes us to possess Christ completely and have him dwelling in us.”

For Calvin union with Christ is “best seen as shorthand for a broad range of themes and images which occur repeatedly through a wide range of doctrinal loci.” As an integrative concept union binds together in one all the different aspects and moments of salvation, and forms a bridge between redemption accomplished and applied.

For this is the design of the gospel, that Christ may become ours, and that we may be engrafted into his body. Now when the Father gives him to us in possession, he also communicates himself to us in him; and hence arises a participation in every benefit . . . when the Christian looks to himself he finds only occasion for trembling, or rather for despair; but having been called into the fellowship of Christ, he ought, in so far as assurance of salvation is concerned, to think of himself no otherwise than as a member of Christ, so as to reckon all Christ’s benefits his own.

Not only is union with Christ the “design of the gospel” but by being united with him we participate in his every benefit, which includes fellowship with the Father. Union does not merely explain the mechanics of the communication of grace it is the bedrock of the believer’s assurance. “I do not see how anyone can trust he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a

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86 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.12
88 Calvin, *Comm. I Cor. 1:9* (CTS).
true participation in Christ himself.” Union is the foundation of our reception of all the benefits of Christ (comprehensive of the whole *ordo salutis*), and it is precisely through the Lord’s Supper that we have the assurance of the truth of this union, of being “engrafted into his body.”

But does this understanding of union with Christ subvert a forensic doctrine of justification? Does participation in the life-giving humanity of Jesus make redundant an imputation of his righteousness? In recent Protestant theology there has been a renewed interest in relational and participatory categories for salvation, but this has largely come as a backlash towards the legal and forensic concerns of the Reformers’ doctrine of justification. For many a robust doctrine of union with/participation in Christ is incompatible with a forensic imputation of his righteousness. Much of this criticism views the doctrine of justification as if it were the “central dogma” of the Protestant system to which every other soteriological motif is subordinated. On this interpretation

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89 Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.11.
90 Many assume that the New Perspective on Paul has dethroned the classical Protestant interpretations, but this is far from the case. The New Perspective on Paul, N.T. Wright in particular, has brought some helpful corrections to evangelical interpretations of Paul, especially as they have tended towards an individualistic conception of salvation and denigration of the *ecclesia*. However, I remain convinced that the Reformers were much more nuanced biblical interpreters than the caricatures one meets among modern biblical scholars, and were essentially correct in their interpretations of justification. In defense of the old position see Guy P. Waters, *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 2004); Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Cornelius Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul* (Banner of Truth, 2006); D.A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien and Mark Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, 2 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).
91 In part this questioning of a forensic justification has gone hand in hand with a questioning of the basically Anselmian doctrine of atonement that was interpreted by Lutheran and Reformed in terms of penal substitution. Most notable in this suspicion and downplaying of forensic categories is Julie Canlis, in what is otherwise a very nice treatment of Calvin understanding of participation (*Calvin’s Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 139-147.
forensic imputation pushes out the relational and participatory aspects of salvation. The mistake here is to suppose that justification explains the entirety of the Reformers’ theology of grace, when in fact it was one piece—albeit a very important one vis-à-vis the Roman Catholic doctrine of inherent righteousness—of a more comprehensive applied soteriology. These criticisms tend to isolate justification from its placement in the broader context of the ordo salutis, and then criticize it for failing to perform certain functions that other concepts in the ordo salutis, such as regeneration, adoption or sanctification, were meant to address. Moreover, these criticisms fail to appreciate what forensic categories actually accomplish in Protestant (Pauline) soteriology. As Geerhardus Vos notes, the forensic “revolves around the abnormal status of man in the objective sphere of guilt, and deals with all that is to be done outside of man, in order to its reversal” such that instead of being unrighteous he may become in legal standing righteous before God.\textsuperscript{93} To dispense with the forensic is to jeopardize the “for us” dimension of salvation.

Again for Reformed theology union is the setting of justification. According to John Owen, union with Christ is “the ground of the actual imputation of his righteousness unto us; for he covers only the members of his own body with his own garments, nor will cast a skirt over any who is not "bone of his bones, and flesh of his flesh."\textsuperscript{94} Recalling the

\textsuperscript{93} Vos, The Pauline Eschatology, 148. Forensic acquittal assumes legal guilt. For a biblical exposition of the legal aspects of sin as guilt see Gaffin, “By Faith, Not By Sight,” 28-35.

\textsuperscript{94} John Owen, Commentary on Hebrews. (Works v. 21). Similarly, Calvin: “I confess that we are deprived of this utterly incomparable good until Christ is made ours. Therefore, that joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts—in short, that mystical union—are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body—in short because he deigns to make us one with him. For this reason, we glory that we have
work of Gaffin and Ridderbos justification is neither the central or great unifying doctrine of Pauline soteriology. “Present union with Christ—sharing with him in all he has accomplished and now is by virtue of his death and resurrection—that is as much as anything at the center of Paul’s soteriology.” Paul is clear that there is no justification apart from being “in Christ” (Gal. 2:17; Phil. 3:8-9). Union emerges as central in his thought, not only because it forms a pneumatological bridge between the historia salutis and ordo salutis but because it comprehends the entirety of the latter. The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q&A 69) confirms this teaching that justification, sanctification, adoption and all other aspects of the ordo salutis “manifest” our union with Christ.

However, to claim such prominence for union is not to deny the forensic and legal aspects of justification. It simply means that justification does not have a discrete structure as a stand-alone imputative act with no clear reference to our relational life “in Christ.” The question is how a forensic imputation of Christ’s righteousness relates to union with Christ. It is important to recognize that there is one union with Christ that has both forensic and renovative aspects. One of the problems with many discussions is that they interpret union/participation exclusively in terms of personal renewal and renovation. When one makes this assumption an imputation of Christ’s righteousness necessarily belongs outside the context of union, and hence makes union merely one step

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95 Gaffin, “By Faith, Not by Sight,” 40.
96 This is the idea behind Calvin’s doctrine of the duplex gratia (double grace): “By partaking of him [union], we principally receive a double grace: namely, that being reconciled to God through Christ’s blamelessness, we may have in heaven instead of a Judge a gracious Father [justification]; and secondly, that sanctified by Christ’s spirit we may cultivate blamelessness and purity of life [sanctification].” *Institutes* 3.11.1
in the ordo salutis subsequent to justification, rather than being the reality that underlies and unifies the whole. The Reformed understanding of union seeks to maintain the personal distinction between Christ and the believer, between being “in him” and him being “for us/me.” This is an understanding of “differentiated union.” Without this distinction, which a forensic understanding of justification provides, one of two problems within the context of union confront us: either the union itself and the fact of the relationship becomes the grounds of our salvation, or the righteousness and obedience produced in that union by the transforming work of the Holy Spirit does. What is the ultimate ground of our justification? Is it “resident in Christ as distinct from the believer, in the bond between Christ and the believer itself, or in the believer as distinct from Christ”? The Reformation was clear that the grounds of justification must be found in the righteousness of Christ as complete and distinct from the believer. Calvin states that “our righteousness is not in us but in Christ, that we possess it only because we are partakers in Christ.” This means that even in the midst of union there is a very real sense in which Christ remains “outside” of the believer.

This “outside” that imputation preserves should not be construed in terms of the extrinsicism of which Nevin complained against Hodge, or the “legal fiction” of which the Catholics accused the Reformers. The legal and forensic language of justification

97 “Christ’s death and resurrection, which occurred for our sins and unto our justification, could take place in our behalf and in our stead for the very reason that as the Son of God he entered into our mode of existence, and in that mode of existence God not only delivered him up “for us,” but also made us to be “in him.” Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of his Theology, 169
98 This is the term Todd Billings uses to describe Calvin’s distinct metaphysics of participation in the divine life see, Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 16-17.
99 Gaffin, By Faith, Not by Sight, 51.
100 Calvin, Institutes, 3.11.23.
marks an eschatological interval within the believer’s experience of redemption. Gaffin notes the eschatological shape of the classic Reformation doctrine of justification:

> The Reformation we should not forget, was a (re)discovery, at least implicitly, of the eschatological heart of the gospel; the *sola gratia* principle is eschatological in essence. Justification by faith, as the Reformers came to understand and experience it, is an anticipation of final judgment. It means that a favorable verdict at the last judgment is not an anxious, uncertain hope (where they felt themselves abandoned by Rome) but a present possession, the confident basis of the Christian life.\(^{102}\)

In terms of our union, justification points to a participation in Christ that is whole and secure, but not fully consummated. “The believer’s permanent and irreversible eschatological status in his justification does not mean that he or she is totally free from sin. Quietly literally, the believer exists *torn between the epochs of the first and last Adams.*”\(^{103}\) We have the “firstfruits of the Spirit” yet we groan inwardly as we eagerly await our adoption and “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23). We await a savior from heaven who will “transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20; Cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-5:5). Here it is worth noting that Paul links our consummated union with Christ with the coming into a possession of a resurrection body like his own.

> Union with Christ, as we have observed, “in its entirety is essentially and necessarily resurrection life.”\(^{104}\) Christ’s own resurrection—*not* the incarnation—is the christological entry point within the *historia salutis* by means of which the believer’s union with Christ takes place. (Incarnation, we might say is the necessary condition for the possibility of this union, but not its sufficient basis). Properly speaking we are incorporated into the complex of his death *and* resurrection, which are inseparably given

\(^{104}\) Richard Gaffin, “‘Life-giving Spirit’: Probing the Center of Paul’s Pneumatology,” 585.
in Christian experience; nevertheless it is Christ’s own resurrection that makes him available to us via the Spirit. And as the substratum of resurrection life the Spirit plays the crucial role in forging and maintaining our union with the glorified Christ.

Here we must consider how Paul relates justification and resurrection through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the mystery of godliness 1 Timothy 3:16 says that Christ was “manifested in the flesh” and “justified [vindicated] in the Spirit” (ἐδικαίωθη ἐν πνεύματι). Commentators have recognized in this statement a redemptive-historical parallelism between Jesus’ state of humiliation and exaltation, with justification in the Spirit being a reference to Jesus’ resurrection.  

This is clearly stated in Romans 4:25, where Paul tells us that Jesus was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.” What can it mean that Jesus was raised for our justification? On the basis of these passages some theologians have challenged the forensic interpretation of justification as “pneumatologically barren” and needing to be replaced by a view of justification as “a work of the Spirit in the risen Christ toward the renewal of all creation.” A major assumption of this criticism is that if justification is to be adequately pneumatological it must be understood primarily in transformative rather than forensic categories. I cannot deal fairly with this important new proposal and its criticisms of the traditional doctrine of justification. However, without accepting the charge of pneumatological barrenness we do well to remember that pneumatology cannot

105 Cf. 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 1:4. See Gaffin commentary on this text: Resurrection and Redemption, 119-120.
bear the full weight of a theology of grace without a distortion to Christology—
pneumatomonism is just as problematic as christomonism. What a forensic imputation of
Christ’s righteousness secures is the utterly christocentric character of salvation as
distinct from the (pneumatic) renewal that takes place within the believer. Justification as
forensic is one way to highlight the Christus praesens within salvation history from the
Spiritus praesens. In terms of a theology of trinitarian appropriations imputation
underscores that the accomplishment of salvation is appropriated to the second person of
the trinity, although not to the exclusion of the person of the Spirit, or the Father for that
matter. In wanting to expunge the forensic from justification we endanger the distinct
characteristic of Christ’s sacrificial death and its contribution within the economy of
salvation. It is only when justification is over-interpreted (e.g. made to explain the whole
of salvation) or torn away from its context in the ordo salutis, does it imperil a healthy
doctrine of the Spirit. The question we must consider is what kind of pneumatological
reading of justification is possible on the basis of the traditional Protestant doctrine of
justification. Here we find that justification forensically understood, far from being
pneumatologically barren points us towards a dynamic and eschatologically rich doctrine
of the Holy Spirit.

A comparison of adoption and justification is helpful for understanding how a
generally forensic concept is not opposed to a pneumatological reality.107 Paul sees the
Spirit entering the sphere of justification and adoption, even though both retain their
forensic force as declarative pronouncements that establish the believer’s inalienable

107 Some have charged that the theme of adoption, which was so central to Calvin’s theology, was
overlooked and underdeveloped in subsequent Reformed theology (most recently Julie Canlis, Calvin’s
Ladder, 131). For a more charitable assessment of adoption in the Reformed theology, see Joel Beeke,
Heirs with Christ: Adoption in the Puritans, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) which
contains copious historical references to the theme and its development in Reformed theology.
status before God. Justification is an acquittal from all guilt and the reckoning of righteousness (overcoming our condemnation); and adoption is inclusion within the family of God with all the rights and privileges of children (overcoming our alienation).108 Adoption is a soteriological category that is simultaneously relational/participatory and legal/forensic; it points to a conferred status that is not ours by nature, but brings with it the reality to which it testifies in the person of the Holy Spirit.109 The pneumatological significance of adoption (and justification) is not as a description of the subjective state of the believer (in the form of an actual transformation or renewal), but points us backwards to an objective activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of Christ (historia salutis) to which we have now been incorporated as participants.110 Adoption is pneumatological incorporation into “Son-like life” since the Spirit is the communion between the Father and the Son. To be recipients of the Spirit of adoption is to be drawn into the Father-Son relationship. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was facing the reality of his imminent death and in anguished prayer cried out, “Abba, Father” (Mark 14:36).111 Now believers participate in this prayer of Jesus, and have received the

108 We should note the interwoven themes of justification and adoption in Romans chapter 8, in particular the juxtaposition of 8:1 with 8:15. We also see justification and adoption closely related in Galatians 3-4. Also see Turretin’s illuminating discussion of the interrelationship of adoption and justification within the context of union with Christ (Elenctic Theology, vol. 2, trans. George M. Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 668-669).
109 John Owen offers this definition of adoption: “Now, adoption is the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God, with his investiture in all the privileges and advantages of that family.” Communion with the Triune God, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossways Books, 2007), 335. Jesus is the true Son of God who at his baptism received the Spirit of sonship not on the basis of another or even on the basis of what he did, but according to his nature. (“This is my Son in whom I am well pleased”)
110 In its treatment of the ordo salutis the Westminster Larger Catechism (Q &A 67-82) distinguishes between the acts of God (justification and adoption) and the works of God (effectual calling and sanctification), which is crucial for distinguishing between the forensic and renovative dimensions of salvation.
basis of this communion as the “Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15; Cf. Gal. 4:6). Reflecting on this adoption-pneumatology Karl Barth says,

And he is God’s child as he receives the Holy Ghost. One can and should also say conversely: He receives the Holy Ghost as he is God’s child. At all events, in receiving the Holy Ghost he is what in himself and of himself he cannot be, one who belongs to God as a child to its father, one who knows God as a child knows its father, one for whom God is there as a Father is there for his child . . . This child, sinful man, can meet this Father, the holy God, as a child meets its father, only where the only begotten Son of God has borne away his sin. His reconciliation does not consist in his being placed with the Son of God. It consists in what the Son of God has done and suffered.\(^{112}\)

The irrevocably forensic character of adoption does not produce a merely notional understanding of our status as God’s children, rather it is the basis of it as a certainty. Here we should recall the biblical contexts of the invocation of “Abba, Father.” In the garden before Jesus’ prayer he tells his disciples that his “soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Mark 14:34). Shortly after this Jesus is betrayed by Judas. For believers the Spirit of adoption is promised to them as a comfort in the midst of sorrow and suffering (Rom. 8:17-23). We are able to cry Abba now because Jesus first cried Abba on our behalf. The Spirit is sent into contexts of suffering not as triumphal Spirit, but as the Spirit of Gethsemane and Golgotha. Our relationship with the Spirit of adoption is grounded in Jesus’ “Abba, Father” cry, in fact from his anguished prayer proceeds the Spirit directly to us, who now helps us in our weakness, interceding for us with groanings too deep for words (Rom. 8:26). The forensic assures us of our inalienable status as truly adopted even in the midst of disruptive and incomplete experiences of God’s presence in the world.

Although we possess the full legal rights of being adopted children of God there is a manner in which we still await the full consummation of this adoption in the resurrection (Rom. 8:23).

Here there are many similarities with the doctrine of justification. Just as adoption assures us of our state of reconciliation despite experiences of alienation, justification assures us of our state of righteousness despite experiences of sinfulness. For Jesus his resurrection is his justification as the last Adam. “The possession of the Spirit is for Paul the natural correlate, the crown and in so far the infallible exponent of the state of δικαιοσύνη [righteousness] . . . in His resurrection-state Christ is righteousness incarnate.”¹¹³ What is sometimes overlooked in the biblical texts referring to Jesus’ justification by the Spirit is their historia salutis background. As with adoption, it is not a subjective work of the Spirit in the believer that is in view, but an objective work of the Spirit in the life of Christ that we are made to participate. There is an eschatological difference in how adoption and justification apply to the person and experience of Jesus, and how they apply to believers. The forensic character of justification and adoption ensures that we respect the eschatological difference between Jesus’ experience of resurrection and our own. Just as we do not share fully and completely yet in sonship with the Father as Jesus does, neither do we share in the full transforming effects of justification (righteousness) as Jesus does. The forensic ensures this distinction, while also keeping us in our experiences of grace from collapsing the Christus praesens into the Spiritus praesens.

For Paul the enlivening of Christ is “judicially declarative not only . . . in connection with his messianic status as son, his adoption, but also with respect to his (adamic) status as righteous. The constitutive, transforming action of resurrection is specifically forensic in character.”  

Here we should remember that it is not only justification or adoption that is explanatory of Christ’s resurrection for Paul, but also sanctification and glorification. What the *ordo salutis* tradition sometimes conceived as distinct acts/moments in the application of redemption, for Paul are rather “different facets or aspects of the one act of incorporation with the resurrected Christ.” Jesus’ resurrection is the basis of a forensic principle that is no less transformative in its effects; for in the resurrection God’s declaration of Jesus’ justification (righteousness) is completely coordinated with the reality itself—he is “righteousness incarnate.” Vos offers a weighty reflection on the consequences of Jesus’ justification for our possession of the Spirit:  

> It is especially by considering the nexus between Christ and the believer that this can be most clearly perceived: in the justification of Christ lies the certainty and root of the Christian’s resurrection. For the supreme fruit of Christ’s justification, on the basis of passive and active obedience, is nothing else but the Spirit, and in turn the Spirit bears in Himself the efficacious principle of all transformation to come, the resurrection with its entire compass included. Resurrection thus comes out of justification, and justification comes after a manner most carefully to be defined, out of the resurrection; not to be noted, out of the spiritual resurrection of the believer himself. On the basis of merit this is so. Christ’s resurrection was the *de facto* declaration of God in regard to his being just.  

Significant here is the notion that the “Spirit bears in Himself the efficacious principle of all transformation to come.” This is a rather succinct statement of Paul’s pneumatology of firstfruits and sealing. This is justifying Spirit. Indeed Jesus’ justification is a reality that

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is thoroughly forensic and transformative at the same time—God’s *de facto* declaration. However, as justification is applied to us it is transformative only eschatologically, for justification cannot be the pronouncement of a partial righteousness or a progressing righteousness, but only a completed righteousness which will be *de facto* (analytic) for us only at our own bodily resurrection. And yet God declares us justified now, which means we must possess it in some sense forensically (i.e. synthetically, not by nature).

“The justifying aspect of being raised with Christ does not depend on the believer’s subjective enlivening and transformation (also involved, to be sure, in the experience of being joined to Christ), but on the resurrection approved righteousness of Christ which is his (and is thus reckoned his) by virtue of the vital union established.”

The forensic aspect of justification accounts for the eschatological disjunction between Jesus’ resurrection and our own. Justification by faith is synthetic for us because “it is analytic with respect to Christ (as resurrected).”

We come away from this dense reflection with an awareness of the Spirit’s eschatological presence to us in our justification. This understanding coheres with the deeply eschatological picture of the Spirit that we encounter throughout the New Testament. As the agency of God reigning over his people in the “last days” the Spirit is associated with the “kingdom of God” (Rom 14:17, Matt 12:28), the “powers of the age to come” (Heb 6:4), and described as the “first-fruits,” “down payment” and “seal” of our final redemption (Rom 8:23; II Cor 1:22, 5:5; Eph. 1:14). The Pauline language of “first-fruit,” “deposit” and “seal” expresses how the believer possesses the Spirit as the first-installment of his or her eschatological existence, as the guarantee that what has been received in part will be fully received at the return of Christ and the resurrection of the

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body. Resurrection as we have noted is an innately eschatological event, the inaugurating moment of the new age. In fact the whole basis of Christian hope in the resurrection of the body is grounded in the reality of believers’ present possession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:23). “The death and resurrection of Jesus in their eschatological significance control Paul’s teaching on the work of the Spirit.”  

An eschatological doctrine of the Spirit has important consequences for what it means to discern the supernatural work of the Spirit in the world. The Spirit’s consummating work cannot be understood as a progressive unfolding of a history of causes and effects, or in terms of an evolving immanent principle within nature—eschatology is not teleology. The eschatological structure of the Spirit’s work is more like time in reverse rather than the logical and historical unfolding of something like Hegelian Geist. Eschatology means that the Spirit "moves out of the future into the present, rather than the reverse. That is, the future is not so much an extension of the present (although it can be put that way) as the present is an anticipation of the (eschatological) future."  

This helps us understand why soteriological new life in the Bible is so often depicted in the apocalyptic category of the divine in-breaking of heaven into the present world which disrupts it and then renews it. Apocalyptic is not utter discontinuity of this age with the age to come, but the establishment of eschatological continuity through discontinuity. We should not minimize or neglect this discontinuity since it points to the fact that this world still awaits God’s final judgment and its full renovation. This means the work of the Spirit of God among the body of believers will be one marked by an uneasy

120 On the rootedness of the Pauline conception of new creation within Jewish apocalyptic categories see Moyer V. Hubbard, New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 54-75.
relationship with ordinary human history. The redemptive change that the Spirit brings about within creation is apocalyptic in the sense that it cannot be comprehended or anticipated by what has preceded it in nature and history; it can only be grasped by what has gone ahead of it in time, namely the crucified, resurrected and ascended Lord. It is significant that the church does not receive the Holy Spirit before the ascension of Christ—the Spirit does not emanate to us from below, but from above. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit is poured out on the church from heaven, the eschatological place of Christ’s rule (Acts 2:2). By recognizing that the Spirit comes from the future (heaven) into the present we preserve its supernatural and miraculous agency over-against confusion with worldly causalities and agencies. The work of the Spirit then has the character of an “infringement on our time, an eschatological reordering of our being to the fellowship of the Father and the Son, and to the new creation.”¹²¹ But note that in emphasizing this eschatological aspect of the Spirit we are far from denying that the Spirit is truly at work bringing about redemptive transformation within creation here and now. However, this renewal is centered, in particular, within the church as the beachhead of new creation (Rom. 8:19-21).

**Ordo Salutis and the Eucharistic Body**

The whole *ordo salutis* is symbolized and efficacious in the Lord’s Supper. This means that the Supper is the sacramental *application* and celebration of the redemption *accomplished* in Jesus’ death and resurrection. We gave considerable space in the last section to a consideration of how union and justification interacts with a eucharistic  

¹²¹ Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia*, 257.
theology. One could profitably extend this reflection to other concepts within *ordo salutis* such as adoption, sanctification and glorification. It is important to reiterate the basic premise of this chapter, namely that the body of Christ is significant for every aspect of our experience of the ongoing application of redemption. With palpable force, the ritual action of the Supper links the body of Christ to the ongoing application of redemption. And again, this notion of application is not a theological abstraction or mere mechanism, but flows from redemption history itself, and is descriptive of our Spirit-enabled union and communion with Christ’s life-giving flesh.

We considered the eschatological operation of the Spirit in the *ordo salutis* now we turn to an examination of the eschatology and pneumatology in the context of the Supper. The Lord’s Supper specifies the eschatological character of the Holy Spirit’s work in the economy of redemption. Many theologians have demonstrated the linkages between the eucharist and eschatology, and eschatology and the Holy Spirit, but not enough reflection has been given to the inter-connection between all three—Spirit, eucharist and eschatology. One of the issues that we have been addressing from an *ordo salutis* perspective is how the church discerns the presence of eschatological Spirit within her midst. Here we note a parallel between discerning eschatological Spirit and discerning the body and blood of Christ within the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:29). The Lord’s Supper is clearly an eschatological rite— as often as we eat the bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes (I Cor 11:26). Jesus tells his disciples that he will not eat again of the Supper “until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Going hand in

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122 On the eschatological character of the Supper see Geoffrey Wainwright’s, *Eucharist and Eschatology.*
hand with the Supper as eschatological is its significance as redemptive-historical.\textsuperscript{123} Just as with the \textit{ordo salutis}, the Lord’s Supper is grounded and governed by the structure of redemptive history. Insofar as the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit and the history and destiny of Jesus are intertwined the discernment of one is closely related to the discernment of the other. This is the basis for identifying the eucharist as a definite site for reflecting on the church’s eschatological experience of the Spirit. Douglas Farrow has observed that

\begin{quote}
The eucharist provides a definite point of reference for the church's epiclectic appeal, an interpretive eschatological community through the work of the Spirit who constitutes it as an eschatological community through communion with Jesus. The eucharist lends to the church its eschatological dynamic, as a participation both in the brokenness of the crucified and in the victory of his resurrection and ascension to the Father.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

Farrow notes that when the early Christian eschatological orientation was eclipsed by an over-emphasis on the sacrificial and ontological dimensions of the Supper, talk about the eucharist and talk about eschatology went their separate ways. This was an injurious development for eschatology \textit{and} pneumatology since "it became possible to identify the eschatological work of the Spirit in terms not reconcilable with the eucharist—in terms of Constantine, for example, or of other rather more esoteric advents of a Montanist variety."\textsuperscript{125} This highlights the common fate that pneumatology and eschatology share when they are separated from the christologically orienting context of the eucharist.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{125} Farrow, “Eucharist, Eschatology, and Ethics,” 201.
\end{flushright}
But how exactly does discernment of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper aid us in discerning the presence and pattern of the Spirit’s work in the world? We should begin by noting how Calvin's dialectic of presence and absence within the Lord’s Supper coordinates to the tension within eschatology between continuity and discontinuity. How one articulates the relationship of this tension says a lot about one’s overall eschatological orientation. If Christian hope is totally continuous with our present existence it is difficult to see how God’s work is not merely “an extension of our present experience, an evolution from our present state, ultimately indistinguishable from the human project of perfection.”126 On the other hand if Christian hope is totally discontinuous then how could we even speak of it or find comfort in it for our present experience? The proper pattern for relating the eschatological tension of continuity and discontinuity is found in the death and resurrection of Christ. Christoph Schöwbel notes that the “discontinuity is stressed by the emphasis on the real death of Jesus; he suffers death as the disruption of all active relations in which human life is lived. The continuity is located in the faithfulness of God who raises Jesus from the dead.”127 As Schöwbel goes on to point out this pattern of cross (discontinuity) and resurrection (continuity) forms the central content re-enacted in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Yet, eschatological discussions often come up short, not for the reasons given above, but on account of an ambiguity regarding the primary content to which continuity and discontinuity refer. Does the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity refer primarily to the individual’s experience of redemption (simul justus et peccator), or the dynamic between the present and the future (already-not-yet), or the discernable-indiscernible

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127 Christoph Schöwbel, “Last Things First?” 239.
effects of redemption in the world (new creation-old creation)? Properly speaking it can be none of these. Given that *ordo salutis* is prioritized to the *historia salutis*, the eschatological tension is not a theologically abstract scheme or descriptive of anthropological state, but a christological content, one which the eucharist points us towards. The core problem of continuity and discontinuity is christological, yet christological in a redemptive-historical sense, rather than a metaphysical sense. The eschatological interval we experience now is rooted in the difference between Jesus’ history and our own. As the Scriptures attest, our history is bound up with that of Jesus, which means that the fundamental eschatological tension of the Christian life, as Farrow argues, is between “two parallel but diverging times or histories—Jesus’ and ours.”

This accounts for the central eschatological importance of the ascension for a Reformed doctrine of the Supper, since the ascension marks the bodily absence of Christ from our present history. The eucharist gives this dialectic of continuity and discontinuity not simply a christocentric pattern (cross-resurrection) but a christological content (Jesus’ history-our history) as its ultimate eschatological point of reference.

For if our destiny is really bound up with [Christ’s] . . . this is known to us and realized for us only in the paradox of the *hoc est corpus meum*, that is, in the eucharistic exchange. And the eucharistic exchange from our perspective remains incomplete—*signum* hindng *res*, presence testifying to absence. Thus, at the very place where continuity is established discontinuity also intrudes.

One can see that this description of Christ’s eschatological presence in the Supper coheres nicely with the account of union with Christ and justification that I sketched earlier. Such an eschatology points further to an experience of the Spirit that reflects in the words of Geoffrey Wainwright, certain “polarities of hiddenness and visibility

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128 Farrow, “Eucharist, Eschatology and Ethics,” 203 fn.19
129 Farrow, “Eucharist, Eschatology and Ethics,” 203.
(contestability and incontestability), interruption and permanence, limited extension and universal scope, incomplete obedience and complete service, spoilt joy and perfect bliss.”

The fundamental work of eucharistic Spirit is a ministry of eschatological union, one that mediates between an experience of the cross (discontinuity) and the resurrection (continuity) and negotiates the difference and overlap between the judgment that awaits this present age and the glory of the age to come. Eucharistic Spirit keeps us in constant contact with the glorified humanity of Jesus, or recalling Calvin’s words he “pours the flesh of Christ into us.” Michael Horton nicely captures this distinct eschatological work of the Spirit in the Supper.

It is therefore crucial to recognize that the Spirit is not a replacement for Jesus nor a parallel redeemer. The Spirit does not fill up the gap between the Jesus of history and our history; on the contrary, the Spirit's presence causes us to deeply sense that difference precisely to the degree that the Spirit generates consummation with Christ. The Spirit’s work both measures and mediates the eschatological difference between the head and his members.

All of this is critical for what it means for us to have experiences of the Spirit today.

Eucharistic Spirit ties our experience in the closest possible manner to the flesh of Christ. On the one hand it means that we never experience the Spirit in the triumph of resurrection without the rupture of the cross; on the other it means experience of the Spirit expresses itself, not as something purely psychological and interior, not as something exotic or “meaningful,” nor as a general experience of “the sacred”, but rather as gracious insertion and nurture within the personal and salvific history Christ, which manifests itself as corporate and exocentric existence within the body of Christ. By

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insisting on the distinct humanity of the ascended Christ Calvin keeps the category of (Spirit) experience christocentrically oriented and ecclesiially located.

**The Holy Spirit and Time**

Finally, the *ordo salutis* raises the question of how the “then and there” of redemption accomplished is related to the “here and now” of redemption applied. Here we have to do with the theme of contextualization and the relationship between Christology (then and there) and pneumatology (here and now) within the ongoing economy of salvation. In order to adequately answer this question we must attend to the convergences and distinctions of the *Christus praesens* and the *Spiritus praesens* within our experience of salvation. This work has assumed a classically orthodox understanding of trinitarian persons (Augustinian) that recognizes their mutuality, indestructible relatedness— even *functional* identity in the *one* act of God in salvation towards us (*ad extra trinitatis opera sunt*)—yet ultimately maintains that there is a non-identity between Christ and the Spirit in their respective presences to us. Here we find that distinguishing the *Christus praesens* and *Spiritus praesens* within the *ordo salutis* is safeguarded and guided by similar distinctions that arise on eucharistic grounds. Ralph Del Colle offers some perceptive insights on this front:

First, the *Christus praesens* is marked by a corporeality which relates to the universal nature of what it means to be human in the light of God’s salvation, whereas the *Spiritus praesens* engages the human spirit in the diversity of human persons present to each other in the redeemed

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132 A proper understanding of contextualization depends on striking the right balance of the Christ-Spirit relationship within salvation history. “A neglect of either Christ or the Spirit in the economy of salvation allows Christian praxis to fall into one of two extremes: either to claim identity without relevance, or relevance without identity” (Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, 8). Over-contextualization embraces pneumatology at the expense of Christology, while under-contextualization embraces Christology at the expense of pneumatology.
community with all its attendant specificity of time, space and culture. Secondly, the *Christus praesens* is experienced in the modality of a faith posture that is anamnetic and kerygmatic, whereas, the *Spiritus praesens* is known in the modality that is epiclectic and charismatic.

In this chapter we have insisted on a *somatic* interpretation of the *ordo salutis* and the Supper. We are now in a better position to appreciate how this emphasis keeps the *Christus praesens* within our grace-experiences from being swallowed up by an interpretation of the *Spiritus praesens*. Corporeality in this case, identified as the *Christus praesens*, intervenes in our understanding of *Spiritus praesens* and prohibits any identity between the person of the Spirit and human experience (i.e. enthusiasm). Justification as forensic marks the difference between Jesus’ resurrection as his consummated experience in the Spirit, and our resurrection experience which is real, yet still incomplete, fragmentary and thus, eschatological. Del Colle goes on to explain how the eucharist helps distinguish the presence of Christ and the Spirit in Christian spirituality. “*Christus praesens* is actualized through sacramental sign and symbol as well as in the faith and praxis of believers. Although mediated by the Spirit, the corporeality of the glorified Christ is only properly his. Sacramentally present and eschatologically yet to be consummated, this somatic dimension is not a property of the Spirit.” When we remove the central theme of Christ’s corporeality from our interpretations of the sacrament or the *ordo salutis* we expose our spirituality to the enthusiasm, subjectivism and individualism that characterizes a great deal of popular piety in Protestant evangelical circles today.

On the other hand the *Christus praesens* depends entirely on *Spiritus praesens*. Only through the *Spiritus Praesens* can the “then and there” of redemption accomplished

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133 Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit*, 176.
(Christus praesens) become the “here and now” of redemption applied. The actualization and contextualization of redemption within time depends on the person of the Holy Spirit. Here we recognize that the same Spirit that anointed the person of Jesus, accompanying and empowering his every moment with the historia salutis, this divine person now forms the vital link between Jesus and ourselves, making his sacrificial death and resurrection present to us and relevant beyond its original time. “The temporality of Jesus thus continues in history in the temporality of the Holy Spirit and the time of the church: ‘The Holy Spirit . . . is himself the continuity between the historical and glorified Christ and the Church.’”

This understanding of the Spirit’s temporality was familiar to Calvin. He considers the question of how the ancient Israelites were said to have been nourished by the (eucharistic) flesh of Christ as they wandered in the desert.

Since we now eat the body and drink the blood of Christ, how were the Jews partakers of the same spiritual meat and drink, when the flesh of Christ was not yet in existence for them to eat? To that I reply that although the flesh of Christ did not yet exist, it was food for them all the same. And that is not a piece of useless sophistry; for their salvation depended on the benefit of the death and resurrection, and for that reason on the flesh and blood, of Christ. Therefore it was necessary for them to receive the flesh and blood of Christ, so that they might share in the blessing of redemption. The receiving of it was the secret work of the Holy Spirit, who was active in such a way in that the flesh of Christ, even if it was not yet created, might be efficacious in them.

Calvin is clear that after Christ's historical advent that the church’s experience of Christ is fuller, but important about this passage is the manner in which the Holy Spirit liberates the death and resurrection of Christ from “its temporal coordinates and propels the

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135 Calvin, Comm. I Cor. 10:4 (CTS).
redemptive act throughout time towards any person in history."\(^{136}\) Not only does the Spirit overcome the temporal distance between Christ and us today, but in the opposite direction as well, between Christ and the saints under the conditions of the old covenant. The Holy Spirit enabled believers under the old covenant to participate in a reality that historically speaking had not yet happened. The Holy Spirit is the agency of God by which salvation becomes specific to humans in all times and places. The Lord’s Supper accentuates and clarifies how Christ is present to us in history, for when we encounter his presence in the bread and wine we receive the promises of forgiveness and new life in a most specific time and place, and given in the form of a most intimate personal address. Recall that the sacraments are the grace of God communicated to humans as accommodated to their bodies, which represents an engagement with human nature and experience in the most specific and intimate way.

The Spirit is that which makes the pastness of Christ and his future contemporaneous with our own time. We come to understand more fully how the ministry of the Spirit is to contextualize the work of Christ into the spaces, cultures, experiences and languages of our own time. This contextualization happens when we are able to see how our time is situated in the middle of Christ's time and this is precisely one of the pneumatological works of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus identifies memory of himself as a work of the Holy Spirit in us (John 14:26). When we turn to the institution of the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’ instruction to the disciples to “do this in anamnesis of me” (Luke 22:19), it is not implausible to see the Holy Spirit as active also in that

remembering—even as we recognize his explicit invocation in epiclesis.\textsuperscript{137} There is a necessary relationship between Christus praesens and Spiritus praesens in our memory and knowledge of Christ. Spirit is the modality by which the Christus praesens becomes the basis of our ecclesial and spiritual life.\textsuperscript{138} A spiritual understanding of remembering (i.e. one guided and effective through the Holy Spirit) contributes to a dynamic concept of memory that expands out beyond the confines of pastness into the present and future. In fact the kind of anamnesis in which Jesus instructs his disciples at the Last Supper was in a real sense memory of the future. Jesus had not been crucified, resurrected or ascended at the time of the Last Supper, and yet all of these events are proleptically assumed in what the disciples are instructed to recall in the act of anamnesis. Our anamnesis—experience of the paschal mystery continues to be shaped by Jesus’ promise not to eat and drink again of the Supper until what was signified is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:25). According to Dom Gregory Dix, the “whole conception of anamnesis is itself eschatological.”\textsuperscript{139} Anamnesis does not look backwards to a remote past or forward to a distant future, instead the past of Christ is opened to us as something that bears upon our present by pulling us into the future. Alasdair Heron shows how opening up the third dimension of the future allows us to integrate past and present in a proper relation.

\textsuperscript{138} Ralph Del Colle, Christ and the Spirit, 176.
\textsuperscript{139} Dix explains the realistic force that the Greek word anamnesis had for the early church. “We have to take account of the clear understanding then general in a largely Greek-speaking church the word anamnesis as meaning a ‘re-calling’ or ‘re-presenting’ of a thing in such a way that it is not so much regarded as being ‘absent’, as itself presently operative by its effects. This is a sense which the Latin word memoria and its cognates do not adequately translate, and which the English word ‘recall’ and ‘represent’ will hardly bear without explanation, still less the such words as memorial and remembrance.” (The Shape of the Liturgy (London: Dacre Press 1945), 245). Here we might note a striking similarity between this conception of anamnesis and Calvin’s idea of exhibere. On the use of the term in Calvin see Muller “From Zurich or from Wittenberg? An Examination of Calvin’s Early Eucharistic Thought”, Calvin Theological Journal, vol.45.2, (2010), 248.
Our present time is related to a past which is not only past but future, in that Christ himself is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last. Our present stands in a twofold relation to him whose past is not merely past to us but also lies before us. He is not simply fixed in an ever-receding remoteness, for there he was, is and will be the creative and transforming and saving power of God in and as man for us. There rather than in continuance, re-presenting, remembering, or any other form merely linear, temporal transmission, lies the secret of his presence now.¹⁴⁰

In the eucharist Christ stands before us; not behind us or alongside us. The question of his presence cannot be reduced to an argument about pastness (and hence absence) or present presence, but past, present and future meeting in him. In part what we remember in the Supper is beyond history, namely, the ascension, Christ’s heavenly session, and the Second Coming. It is better to think of the eschatological orientation of the Supper not as having to do exclusively with incomplete future events over-against already accomplished past events, rather the eschaton is a combination of past, present and future made available to us through the person of the “eternal Spirit” (Heb. 9:14). The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in incorporating us into God’s time, for the Spirit is the agency of God that is sovereign over all time.¹⁴¹ The Spirit allows us to grapple with Christ under the conditions of history. In this sense the Spirit eucharistically mediates to us an experience of time as eschatological time. “The Holy Spirit therefore is God-at-the-end-of-the-world, God reigning over his people at the last time, God creating and sustaining a community in whom mankind can be enlightened by faith and return to him in worship and love as the first fruits of a new creation.”¹⁴² Our experience of eschatological Spirit finds its most complete expression in the visible church as a eucharistic community.

¹⁴¹ Hanson, *Attractiveness of God*, 122.
¹⁴² Hanson, *Attractiveness of God*, 121-122.
Conclusion

Spirit, Eucharist and Church

The same hand which laid this foundation doth also finish the building. The same Spirit which was given unto him, 'not by measure’ . . . And this belongs unto the establishment of our faith, that he who prepared, sanctified, and glorified the human nature, the natural body of Jesus Christ, the head of the church, hath undertaken to prepare, sanctify and glorify his mystical body, or all the elect given unto him of the Father.

~John Owen, Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit

Different conceptions of the eucharist reveal different conceptions of reality. John Nevin was correct when he observed that the Lord’s Supper belongs “to the inmost sanctuary of theology, and [is] intertwined particularly with all the arteries of the Christian life.” Regardless of the unsavory character of eucharistic disputes over the centuries it was generally understood that a great deal was at stake for theology and piety. For the Protestant Reformers the interpretation of the Lord’s Supper spoke volumes about the nature of worship, the understanding of the person of Christ, the experience of grace and the duty of the Christian in the world. John Calvin thought it was a “perilous thing” not to have a clear understanding of an ordinance “which is so requisite for our salvation.”

According to Nevin the “doctrine of the eucharist is intimately connected with all that is most deep and central in the Christian system as a whole; and it is not possible for it to undergo any material modification without a corresponding modification at the same time

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1 Nevin, The Mystical Presence: A Vindication of the Reformed Or Calvinistic Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, ed. Augustine Thompson, O.P. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 47. Similarly Hebert Vorgrimler observes: “Here, as with no other sacrament, the objective rite and the deepest subjective, emotional and mystical piety are united; the most important human capabilities (music, architecture, crafts, painting, and poetry) are brought into its service; all the theological disciplines have striven and are still striving for knowledge, insight, and a way in which to do it justice; and all the doctrines of the faith from the theology of creation to eschatology come together in this one sacrament.” Herbert Vorgrimler, Sacramental Theology, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 132. (Thanks to Chris Dorn for this reference).

2 Calvin, Short Treatise on the Lord’s Supper, (TS) 165.
of the theory and life of religion on other points.”

So central to the Christian faith was the Lord’s Supper that Nevin thought broad spiritual renewal depended on a full recovery of its theology and practice within the life of the church. Archibald A. Hodge rhapsodizes on why the Lord’s Supper best expresses the Christian’s total experience of salvation in Christ:

There is no figure in the world which expresses more adequately this absolute entire reception, appropriation, and assimilation of another than that of eating and drinking. We incorporate the whole Christ and all his offices and work into our personal characters and lives. We freely give and Christ takes immediate possession of our whole selves, all our potentialities and activities, forever. Throughout every octave of our spiritual nature every chord is attuned and brought into exquisite harmony in response to the transcendent mind and spirit of Christ.4

It is through the Holy Spirit that Christ takes possession of all that we are and is the means by which we brought into “exquisite harmony” with him.

A major claim of this work is that the Reformed doctrine of the Lord’s Supper reflects an understanding of person and work of the Holy Spirit as the reality creating agency of God in the world. In the context of the Supper the Spirit mysteriously becomes the very communion we enjoy with the person of Christ, not as a proxy or substitute for Christ himself, but by making his true body and blood available to us as food and drink for our souls. Here we recall John Owen’s claim that it is the Holy Spirit who supplies to us the bodily absence of Christ. God comes to us in the time between Jesus’ ascension and return in the person of the Holy Spirit who does not present himself but the absent Jesus (John 14:15-18). If the eucharist is “anything more than an exercise in subjectivity,” says Douglas Farrow, “[it] means precisely that we who are not contemporaries of the historical

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Jesus can become so in the power of the Spirit. And the ascension means that this
eucharistic becoming involves us in a future quite different from that of the world.”⁵
Throughout this work I have argued that the whole of life in the Spirit is oriented and
structured around the eucharistic and eschatological reality of union with the glorified
body of Christ. “There is only one body which the Spirit builds up and quickens and that is
the body of Christ.”⁶ All the powers of new creation are concentrated in and pour forth
from the crucified and resurrected body of Christ. This means our enjoyment of the
fullness of life in the Spirit depends upon our being incorporated into his body. These
claims about the Spirit have been explored along the lines of a conception of
sacramentality and a close reading of the Supper, as well as in terms of Christology and an
account of the ordo salutis. Now we must briefly consider how it relates to a doctrine of
the church as the body of Christ.

In our own day eucharistic understanding has become an index for ecclesiology. It
is commonly repeated refrain that “the eucharist makes the church.”⁷ As John Nevin
rightly perceived, the question of eucharist is profoundly tied up with the question of
church, but from a Reformed perspective one cannot say that “eucharist makes the
church” without significant qualifications. A more accurate statement of Reformed and
arguably Lutheran ecclesiology is that “the Word makes the church.” For the magisterial
Reformers the doctrine of the church is enclosed in a theology of the Word of God. The
church is a creature of the Word (creatura verbi divini). Martin Luther nicely summarizes

⁵ Douglas Farrow, Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for
Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 258.
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⁷ In particular see the work of Paul McPartlan, The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John
Zizioulas in Dialogue (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993); and Sacrament as Salvation: An Introduction to
Eucharistic Ecclesiology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995).
this understanding: “the church owes its birth to the Word, is nourished, aided and
strengthened by it, it is obvious that it cannot be without the Word. If it is without the
Word it ceases to be a church.” In the beginning Jesus Christ—the Logos—spoke the
world into existence and today he speaks his church into existence. The church is the
assembly of believers that are called to true faith by Word and Spirit. The church is not a
voluntary society of people who decide to join after they have saving faith, nor on the
other hand, does the church ever become an institution that can be directly identified with
the grace that it proclaims. The church is a witness and herald of Jesus Christ and by
means of the Spirit’s unswerving commitment to be effectually present in Word and
sacrament, the church is truly a locus of grace in the world, but never the possessor of
that grace. Most claims that “eucharist makes the church” entail a commitment to the
conversion of the eucharistic elements, a view of eucharistic sacrifice, and an
understanding of episcopacy as a necessary prerequisite for eucharistic validity. These of
course are non-starters for Reformed doctrine of the church. The overarching problem
with this ecclesiology from a Reformed perspective is the concern that the person of
Christ is absorbed into a doctrine of the church.

However, to decline the claim that “eucharist makes the church” is not a denial of
the eucharist as important for an account of the church. The Reformers believed that
Christ summons his church into being through Word and sacrament. As I argued in
chapter two a full appreciation of the Word requires an understanding of the sacraments

8 Martin Luther, Concerning the Ministry (1523) (LW 40).
9 “It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly
of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered
according to the gospel.” Art. 7 Augsburg Confession (BC).
10 See criticism of Michael Horton, “Calvin’s Eucharistic Ecclesiology” in Tributes to John Calvin: A
as indispensible.\textsuperscript{11} The sacraments are visible words (\textit{verbum visibile}) that play a critical role in the church’s coming into existence. Properly understood when we affirm that the church is a creature of the Word we are affirming that the preached Word, baptism and the eucharist all taken together \textit{make the church}. Calvin claims that we should not doubt that a true church exists wherever “we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution.”\textsuperscript{12} While the preached Word addresses all in the community in general the sacraments address persons in particular and so synthesize, unify and create community. The sacrament of baptism is the concrete incorporation of persons into the body of Christ, while the Supper renews and nourishes the life of believers within this corporate body. One of the problems of over-emphasizing the eucharist is that it tends to marginalize the theological significance of baptism and the preached Word for ecclesiological definition. However, in the Lord’s Supper, as with no other practice of the church the believer is united to Christ in a mystical and reciprocal bond that simultaneously unites her with every other believer (1 Cor. 10:16-18). The eucharist alone does not make the church, but the eucharist is critical for a proper understanding of the church, especially as it relates to her visible presence in the world. Here one’s view of the relationship between of the presence of Christ and the sacramental elements plays a crucial role.

If the Catholic transubstantiation of bread and wine into the very body and blood of Jesus verges on regarding the visible church and the person of Christ as identical, then

\textsuperscript{11} Calvin notes that “We are justified by faith alone, therefore not the sacraments. But we are not so raw as not to know that the sacraments, inasmuch as they are the helps of faith also offer us righteousness in Christ. Nay, as we are perfectly agreed that the sacraments are to be ranked in the same place as the word, so while the gospel is called the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believeth, we hesitate not to transfer the same title to the sacraments.” \textit{Last Admonition to Joachim Westphal}, (TS), 400.

\textsuperscript{12} Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.1.9.
the Zwinglian separation of the sign from the grace it signifies makes it impossible to see how God’s saving activity can be associated with a creaturely, visible and corporeal reality. Calvin insisted that the sign of the sacrament and the grace which it signifies must neither be confounded nor separated. The Supper testifies and seals our communion with Christ not through “presenting a vain and empty sign, but by manifesting there the effectiveness of his Spirit to fulfill what he promises. And truly he offers and shows the reality their signified to all who sit at that spiritual banquet.” Calvin points us to the person of the Holy Spirit, rather than to scholastic explanations, for understanding how sign and reality are linked in our sacramental experiences. Again, his theology represents a via media between saying too much or too little when it comes to the sacraments. To sever the link of the Spirit is to lose a firm grip on our doctrine of the church. Scottish Presbyterian Geddes MacGregor spells out the consequences:

The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is so vital to the Reformed tradition that even the slightest neglect of it leads rapidly to catastrophic decline in the life of the Church. So closely is it related to the Reformed ecclesiology that its repudiation would imply the repudiation of the doctrine of the Church itself, and the substitution for this of a Separatist ecclesiology . . . For the Eucharist cannot become, in the Reformed Church, a mere ‘naked and bare sign’ without the Church becoming likewise a ‘naked and bare sign.’

A low doctrine of the church is the inevitable outcome of the Zwinglian separation of the sign and signified. According to Michael Horton this separation opens up a “fissure in ecclesiology from top to bottom between the visible church as a historical institution with its structure, offices, order and sacraments on the one side and the invisible church as a

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13 Calvin, Institutes, 4.17.4.
relatively unknown and unknowable community of believers on the other.”¹⁵ Some have sought such a division and separation of sign and signified in the name of making room for the Spirit, but in fact such a move is the result of an enervated pneumatology incapable of understanding how the Spirit truly makes the body of Christ available to believers through the visible church.

In the introduction I stated my hope that this work would contribute to a revitalization of the spirituality of the visible church. I intend by this description precisely the opposite of a spiritualization of the church, which is a natural consequence of the Zwinglian separation of sign from the reality. The spirituality of the visible church speaks to how the Holy Spirit is uniquely present in the visible-local church, supplying to us Jesus’ bodily absence by anointing with power the concrete practices that unfold from faithfulness to the means of grace. This is an especially important point in the light of the fact that in recent Reformed ecclesiology a conception of invisibility has often outstripped and even displaced the reality of visibility as essential for a definition of the church. Charles Hodge illustrates this thinking:

[T]he conception of the Church as the communion of saints, does not include the idea of any external organization. The bond of union may be spiritual. There may be communion without external organized union. The Church, therefore, according to this view, is not essentially a visible society; it is not a corporation which ceases to exist if the external bond of union be dissolved. It may be proper that such union should exist; it may be true that it has always existed; but it is not necessary. The Church, as such, is not a visible society. All visible union, all external organization, may cease, and yet, so long as there are saints who have communion, the Church exists, if the Church is the communion of saints.¹⁶

¹⁶ Charles Hodge, Discussions in Church Polity (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 4-5.
To be sure Hodge is far from denying that the church has an actual visible presence within the world, but he denies the concept of visibility as essential for a definition of the church. The church is visible “only in the sense in which believers are visible.”\(^\text{17}\) He goes on to claim that wherever “there are true believers, there is the true Church; and wherever such believers confess their faith, and illustrate it by a holy life, there the Church is visible.”\(^\text{18}\) For Hodge what constitutes the visibility of the church is the assembly of believers, but what is missing in his account are the actual means and mechanisms by which God constitutes and sustains that holy assembly of believers in the world. Hodge’s definition of the visible church leans heavily on the third mark of the church, discipline (i.e. moral distinctness from the world), but does not seem to apply to the other two marks, the pure preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments.\(^\text{19}\) However, if these two indisputably visible marks of the church are not an essential component for a definition of the true church, it is uncertain how they could ever be regarded as important for Christian life and spirituality. Whenever the visible church and the means of grace become “less than dispensable, they have already become, for those who so regard them, potentially enemies of the spiritual life.”\(^\text{20}\) Here Hodge’s battle against what he labeled “Churchianity” comes to mind.\(^\text{21}\) What is severely lacking in Hodge’s account of the church are the actual means by which Christ communicates himself to us in the world.

\(^{17}\) Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity*, 55.  
\(^{18}\) Hodge, *Discussions in Church Polity*, 56.  
\(^{19}\) On the marks of the true church see *Belgic Confession* article 29 (*ECRC*).  
\(^{20}\) MacGregor, *Corpus Christi*, 196.  
One finds a similar pattern of thought in Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) who claimed that “the reality and fullness of the Church of Christ cannot exist on earth.”22 There is a great curtain that hangs between the heavenly and earthly church that hinders the latter from penetrating “into the real essence of the church.”23

Therefore, all that remains possible to us on earth is first, a mystical communion with that real Church, by means of the Spirit, and in the second place, the enjoyment of the shadows which are displaying themselves on the transparent curtain before us. Accordingly no child of God should imagine that the real Church is here on earth.24

One cannot help discerning in Kuyper’s descriptions of shadows against the transparent curtain, that ecclesially speaking we are in a situation not much better than those poor individuals in Plato’s allegory of the cave whose perception of reality consisted of watching the movement of shadows against the wall. In fact there is a Platonic dualism that has affected many Reformed accounts of church and sacrament. For sure one can find in Hodge and Kuyper positive statements about the visible church and the sacraments, but the reality of the visible church is so severely diminished in their theology that affirmations seem more or less like concessions to the primary thrust of ecclesial spiritualization.

Peter Leithart has aptly called this “ecclesiological Nestorianism.”25 Although both Hodge and Kuyper vehemently deny the Nestorian separation of natures with respect to the person of Christ, when it comes to his corporate person it would appear to

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be another matter. Again John Nevin was quite keen about how an account of the eucharist led directly into one’s conception of the church. According to Nevin the existential “reality of Christianity” depends on its communication to us through the visible church.\textsuperscript{26}

[T]he historical church must be visible, or in other words, not merely ideal, but actual. The actual may indeed fall short immeasurably of the idea it represents; the visible Church may be imperfect, corrupt, false to its own conception and calling; but still an actual, continuously visible church there must always be in the world, if Christianity is to have either truth or reality in the form of new creation. A purely invisible church has been well denominated a \textit{contradictio in adjecto}: since the very idea of a Church implies the manifestation of the religious life, as something social and common.\textsuperscript{27}

A properly Reformed understanding of the Lord’s Supper \textit{necessitates} an account of the visible church, otherwise, the sacrament itself is reduced to a spiritual metaphor for something that merely happens to us on some invisible plane. In Calvin’s theology a close connection between the Lord’s Supper and the church permeates all his eucharistic theology.\textsuperscript{28} When it came to the issue of abstaining from the table, Calvin cautions the believer not to hold out too long “seeing that in so doing he deprives himself of the communion of the Church, in which all our well-being consists. Let him rather contend against all the impediments which the devil throws his way, and not be excluded from so great a benefit, and from all the graces consequent thereupon.”\textsuperscript{29}

The role of the visible church is hardly a secondary or ancillary matter for the early Reformed tradition. Echoing Calvin’s statement that it is spiritually disastrous for a

\begin{enumerate}
\item Hodge was right in criticizing Nevin on the notion that the church was an ongoing incarnation.
\item John Nevin, \textit{Mystical Presence}, 4-5.
\item Geddes MacGregor, \textit{Corpus Christ}, 180.
\item Calvin, \textit{A Short Treatise (TS)}, 180-181.
\end{enumerate}
person to withdraw from the bosom of the church,\textsuperscript{30} Reformed scholastic Francis Turretin argued that,

\begin{quote}
[T]here is no salvation out of the church (no more than out of the ark; nor does anyone have God as his Father in heaven whose church is not his mother on earth), nothing ought to be dearer to our hearts than that this mother may be known (in whose bosom God has willed us to be educated and to be nourished). It behooves us to be directed by her care until we grow up and arrive at the goal of faith.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

One finds a similar sentiment in the \textit{Belgic Confession} (art. 28), “We believe that since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, regardless of his status or condition.” In the early Reformed tradition one does not find the sharp distinction between the visible church and invisible church. Traditionally when the Reformed said that there was no salvation outside the church it is the visible church, not the invisible church that they had in mind.

Surely, this concluding reflection on ecclesiology provokes and raises more questions than it provides answers. A logical sequel to this dissertation is a work fully devoted to drawing out the implications of a eucharist-oriented pneumatology for an understanding of ecclesiology. This dissertation has sought to defend the basic insight of John Nevin’s eucharistic theology, that the less embodied a theology and spirituality become in its ecclesial and sacramental practices the more rationalistic and unspiritual it

\textsuperscript{30}“For there is no other way to enter into this life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh . . . Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation. . . It is always disastrous to leave the church.” Calvin, \textit{Institutes}, 4.1.4.

will become over time. In other words the less one thinks about the person of the Holy Spirit in terms of the person of Jesus Christ and his vital communication to us through Word and sacrament the more anemic will one's pneumatology become, not less.
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