

IX.

Creation and Re-Creation.

“Behold, I will pour out My Spirit unto you.”—*Prov. i. 23.*

We approach the special work of the Holy Spirit in Re-creation. We have seen that the Holy Spirit had a part in the creation of *all things*, particularly in creating *man*, and most particularly in endowing him with *gifts and talents*; also that His creative work affects the upholding of “things,” of “man,” and of “talents,” through the providence of God; and that in this double series of threefold activity the Spirit’s work is intimately connected with that of the Father and that of the Son, so that every thing, every man, every talent springs from the Father, is given disposition in their respective natures and being through the Son, and receives the spark of life by the Holy Spirit.

The old church hymn, “Veni, Creator Spiritus,” and the ancient confession of the Holy Spirit as the “Vivificans” agree with this perfectly. For the latter signifies that Person in the Trinity who imparts the spark of life; and the former means, “Seeing that the things which are to live and shall live are ready, come Holy Spirit and quicken them.”

There is always the same deep thought: the Father remains outside of the creature; the Son touches him outwardly; by the Holy Spirit the divine life touches him directly in his inward being.

However, let us not be understood to say that God comes into contact with the creature only in the regeneration of His children, which would be untrue. To the Gentiles at Athens, St. Paul says “In Him we live and move and have our being.” And again “For of His offspring we are.” (*Acts xvii. 28*) To say nothing of plant or animal, there is on earth no life, energy, law, atom, or element but the Almighty and Omnipresent God quickens and supports that life from moment to moment, causes that energy to work, and enforces that law. Suppose that for an instant God should cease to sustain and animate this life, these forces, and that law; in that same instant they would cease to be. The energy that proceeds from God must therefore touch the creature in the very center of its being, whence, its whole existence must spring. Hence there is no sun, moon, nor star, no material, plant, or animal, and, in much higher sense, no man, skill, gift, or talent unless God touch and support them all.

It is this act of coming into immediate contact with every creature, animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic, rational or irrational, that, according to the profound conception of the Word of God, is performed not by the Father, nor by the Son, but by the Holy Spirit.

And this puts the work of the Holy Spirit in a light quite different from that in which for many years the Church has looked upon it. The general impression is that His work refers to the life of grace only, and is confined to regeneration and sanctification. This is due more or less to the well-known division of the Apostolic Creed by the Heidelberg Catechism, question 29, “How are these articles divided?” which is answered: “Into three

parts—of God the Father and our creation, of God the Son and our redemption, and of God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.” And this, too, altho Ursinus, one of the authors of this catechism, had already declared, in his “Thesaurus,” that: “All the three Persons create and redeem and sanctify. But in these operations they observe this order—that the Father creates of Himself by means of the Son; the Son creates by means of the Father; and the Holy Spirit by means of both.”

But since the deeper insight into the mystery of the adorable Trinity was gradually lost, and the pulpit’s touch upon it became both rare and superficial, the Sabellian error naturally crept into the Church again, viz., that there were three successive periods in the activities of the divine Persons: First, that of the Father alone creating the world and upholding the natural life of all things. This was followed by a period of activity for the Son, when nature had become unnatural and fallen man a subject for redemption. Lastly, came that of the Holy Spirit regenerating and sanctifying the redeemed on the ground of the work of Christ.

According to this view, in childhood, when eating, drinking, and playing occupied all our time, we had to do with the Father. Later, when the conviction of sin dawned upon us, we felt the need of the Son. And not until the life of sanctification had begun in us did the Holy Spirit begin to take notice of us. Hence while the Father wrought, the Son and the Holy Spirit were inactive; when the Son undertook His work, the Father and the Holy Spirit were inactive; and now since the Holy Spirit alone performs the work, the Father and the Son are idle. But since this view of God is wholly untenable, Sabellius, who elaborated it philosophically, came to the conclusion that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were after all but one Person; who first wrought in creation as Father, then having become the Son wrought out our redemption, and now as the Holy Spirit perfects our sanctification.

And yet, inadmissible as this view may be, it is more reverent and God-fearing than the crude superficialities of the current views that confine the Spirit’s operations entirely to the elect, beginning only at their regeneration.

True, sermons on creation referred, in passing, to the moving of the Holy Spirit on the face of the waters, and His coming upon Bezaleel and Aholiab is treated in the catechetical class; but the two are not connected, and the hearer is never made to understand what the Author of our regeneration had to do with the moving upon the waters; they were merely isolated facts. Regeneration was the principal work of the Holy Spirit.

Our Reformed theologians have always warned against such representations, which are only the result of making man the starting-point in the contemplation of divine things. They always made *God Himself* the starting-point, and were not satisfied until the work of the Holy Spirit was clearly seen in all its stages, throughout the ages, and in the heart of every creature. Without this the Holy Spirit could not be God, the object of their adoration. They felt that such superficial treatment would lead to a denial of His personality, reducing Him to a mere *force*.



Hence we have spared no pain, and omitted no detail, in order, by the grace of God, to place before the Church two distinct thoughts, viz.:

First, *The work of the Holy Spirit is not confined to the elect, and does not begin with their regeneration; but it touches every creature, animate and inanimate, and begins its operations in the elect at the very moment of their origin.*

Second, *The proper work of the Holy Spirit in every creature consists in the quickening and sustaining of life with reference to his being and talents, and, in its highest sense, with reference to eternal life, which is his salvation.*

Thus we have regained the true standpoint requisite for considering the work of the Holy Spirit in the re-creation. For thus it appears:

First, that this work of re-creation is not performed in fallen man independently of his original creation; but that the Holy Spirit, who in regeneration kindles the spark of *eternal* life, has already kindled and sustained the spark of natural life. And, again, that the Holy Spirit, who imparts unto man born from above gifts necessary to sanctification and to his calling in the new sphere of life, has in the first creation endowed him with natural gifts and talents.

From this follows that fruitful confession of the unity of man's life before and after the new birth which nips every form of Methodism¹ in its very root, and which characterizes the doctrine of the Reformed churches.

Second, it is evident that the work of the Holy Spirit bears the same character in creation and re-creation. If we admit that He quickens life in that which is created by the Father and by the Son, what does He do in the re-creation but once more quicken life in him that is called of the Father and redeemed by the Son? Again, if the Spirit's work is God's touching the creature's being by Him, what is re-creation but the Spirit entering man's heart, making it His temple, comforting, animating, and sanctifying it?

Thus following the Sacred Scripture and the superior theologians, we reach a confession that maintains the unity of the Spirit's work, and makes it unite organically the natural and the spiritual life, the realm of nature and that of grace.

Of course His work in the latter surpasses that in the former:

First, since it is His work to touch the inward being of the creature, the more tender and natural the contact the more glorious the work. Hence it appears more beautiful in man than in the animal; and more lustrous in the spiritual man than in the natural, since the contact with the former is more intimate, the fellowship sweeter, the union complete.

Secondly, since creation lies so far behind us and re-creation touches us personally and daily, the Word of God directs more attention to the latter, claiming for it more prominence in our confession. But, however different the measures of operation and of energy, the Holy

¹ For the sense in which the author takes Methodism, see section 5 in the Preface.

Spirit remains in creation and re-creation the one omnipotent Worker of all life and quickening, and is therefore worthy of all praise and adoration.

X.

Organic and Individual.

"Where is He that put His Holy Spirit among them?" --*Isa. lxiii. 11.*



The subsequent activity of the Holy Spirit lies in the realm of grace.

In nature the Spirit of God appears as creating, in grace as re-creating. We call it *re-creation*, because God's grace creates not something inherently new, but a new life in an old and degraded nature.

But this must not be understood as tho grace restored only what sin had *destroyed*. For then the child of God, born anew and sanctified, must be as Adam was in Paradise before the fall. Many understand it so, and present it as follows: In Paradise Adam became diseased; the poison of eternal corruption entered his soul and penetrated his whole being. Now comes the Holy Spirit as the physician, carrying the remedy of grace to heal him. He pours the balm into his wounds, He heals his bruises and renews his youth; and thus man, born again, healed, and renewed, is, according to their view, precisely what the first man was in the state of rectitude. Once more the provisions of the covenant of works are laid upon him. By his good works he is again to inherit eternal life. Again he may fall like Adam and become a prey of eternal death.

But this whole view is wrong. Grace does not place the ungodly in a state of *rectitude*, but *justifies* him—two very different things. He that stands in a state of rectitude has certainly an original righteousness, but this he may lose; he may be tried and fail as Adam failed. He must vindicate his righteousness. Its inward consistency must discover itself. He who is righteous to-day may be unrighteous to-morrow.

But when God justifies a sinner He puts Him in a totally different state. The righteousness of Christ becomes his. And what is this righteousness? Was Jesus in a state of rectitude only? In no wise. His righteousness was tested, tried, and sifted; it was even tested by the consuming fire of God's wrath. And this righteousness converted from "*original rectitude*" into "*righteousness vindicated*" was imputed to the ungodly.



Therefore the ungodly, when justified by grace, has nothing to do with Adam's state *before the fall*, but occupies the position of Jesus *after the resurrection*. He possesses a good that can not be lost. He works no more for wages, but the inheritance is his own. His works, zeal, love, and praise flow not from his own poverty, but from the overflowing fulness of the life that was obtained for him. As it is often expressed: For Adam in Paradise there was first work and then the Sabbath of rest; but for the ungodly justified by grace the Sabbath rest comes first, and then the labor which flows from the energies of that Sabbath. In the beginning the week closed with the Sabbath; for us the day of the resurrection of Christ opens the week which feeds upon the powers of that resurrection.

Hence the great and glorious work of re-creation has two parts: