

SPIRITUAL

GIFTS

A Report of the
Commission on Theology and Church Relations
of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Gift Inventories

Introduction

C. Peter Wagner, who has been called “the most articulate spokesman for the use of spiritual gifts in evangelism,” states:¹

A relatively new thing has happened to the church of Jesus Christ in America during the decade of the seventies. The third Person of the Trinity has come into his own, so to speak. Yes, the Holy Spirit has always been there. Creeds, hymns and liturgies have attested to the central place of the Holy Spirit in orthodox Christian faith. Systematic theologies throughout the centuries have included sections on “pneumatology,” thus affirming the Holy Spirit’s place in Christian thought.

But rarely, if ever, in the history of the church has such a widespread interest in moving beyond creeds and theologies to a personal experience of the Holy Spirit in everyday life swept over the people of God to the degree we are now witnessing. The most prominent facet of this new experience of the Holy Spirit is spiritual gifts.²

This renewed interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and a growing emphasis on the teaching of Scripture regarding “spiritual gifts,” have also been evident within The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod during the past several decades. Various evangelism, stewardship, and church growth efforts and programs in use throughout the Synod in recent years have given attention to the place of “spiritual gifts” in the life and growth of the church and have sought to help people identify and use such gifts.

In its 1987 report on *Evangelism and Church Growth* the Commission on Theology and Church Relations stated:

It is important that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod maintain a clear, Scriptural position regarding spiritual gifts. On the one hand, pastors and congregations should encourage their members to receive with thanksgiving the gifts which God in His grace gives and then to use them to His glory and for the edification of His church. On the other hand, Christians should also acknowledge that God gives spiritual gifts as He wills and in accord with the needs of His church.³

Making reference to this report, the 1989 synodical convention noted that “concerns have been expressed about the use of spiritual gift inventories and the general subject of spiritual gifts.” The convention commended the CTCR’s report to the Synod “for reference and guidance” and encouraged the Synod to “continue to make use of the document and the principles it provides regarding the subject of spiritual gifts.” At the same time, the Synod formally

¹ Delos Miles, *Church Growth, A Mighty River* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981), 129.

² C. Peter Wagner, *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1979), 19.

³ Cf. *Evangelism and Church Growth with Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 43.

requested the CTCR to “study in more detail the subject of spiritual gifts and specifically the use of spiritual gift inventories and report the results of the studies to the church.”⁴

It is in response to this specific request of the Synod that the CTCR presents this report on “Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Gift Inventories.” The report begins with “A Brief History of Spiritual Gift Inventories,” followed by a “Biblical Analysis of Spiritual Gifts” in part 2. Part 3 of the report offers “A Theology of Gifts and Callings within the Church,” which seeks to place the topic of spiritual gifts into its proper perspective within the context of the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed.

I. A Brief History of Spiritual Gift Inventories

The concern for Christians to discover and develop their spiritual gifts appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. C. Peter Wagner refers to it as a “new thing.”⁵ Historically the emphasis on spiritual gifts coincides with the rise of two important theological and ecclesiastical movements in the latter half of the 20th century. Both of these movements strongly advocated the need for a renewal of the church and identified spiritual gifts as one of the keys to the church’s renewal.

The first movement that helped create and contribute to the current interest in spiritual gifts was the Pentecostal movement, out of which arose the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement. The latter has proven to be more of an interdenominational movement than the former. During the 1960s and 1970s the neo-Pentecostal movement found its way into many of the mainstream Christian denominations such as Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Presbyterianism. Reflecting on the characteristics of these movements, Wagner has observed that “the most prominent facet of this new experience of the Holy Spirit is spiritual gifts.”⁶ According to his research, the bulk of the literature on spiritual gifts has appeared since 1970. In fact, he contends, more has been written on this subject since 1970. In fact, he contends, more has been written on this subject since World War II than during the previous 1,945 years put together.⁷ Generally speaking, the neo-Pentecostal and charismatic movements have focused largely on the so-called miraculous or “sign” gifts, especially glossolalia (speaking in tongues), healing, and miraculous powers. These have been discussed in two previous CTCR reports.⁸

The second movement that has contributed to an intense interest in the subject of spiritual gifts—although for slightly different reasons—is the so-called Church Growth Movement, which many identify as having originated in its contemporary form at Fuller Seminary, California.⁹ Unlike those involved in neo-Pentecostalism, the advocates of the Church Growth Movement tend not to focus on the so-called “sign” gifts. They emphasize instead the less spectacular gifts listed in the Bible. Also unlike neo-Pentecostalists, who stress a distinct second experience of the Spirit manifested by gifts, proponents of the Church Growth Movement assume that certain gifts have already been given to all Christians at some point in time. They maintain that every

⁴ Resolution 3-16, “To Study Subject of Spiritual Gifts,” *1989 Convention Proceedings*, 119.

⁵ Wagner, 26.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸ *The Charismatic Movement and Lutheran Theology*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1972, and *The Lutheran Church and the Charismatic Movement: Guidelines for Congregations and Pastors*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1977.

⁹ Cf. *Evangelism and Church Growth*.

Christian possesses at least one gift and that many have several gifts in varying numbers, degrees, and variations. This is the basis for the belief that if the church can mobilize its people to discover, develop, and use their particular gift(s), it cannot help but grow in numbers and vitality.

It is the Church Growth Movement that has given rise to the development and use of spiritual gift inventories. These are instruments designed to aid the church in discovering and implementing the spiritual gifts of its members. The first to gain widespread popularity was the “Modified Houts Questionnaire,” developed by the Fuller Institute for Evangelism at Fuller Seminary. This inventory was modified for a Lutheran audience by David Hoover and Roger Leenerts in a program called *Enlightened with His Gifts*.¹⁰ The various inventories were further adapted for use by an individual congregation at St. Paul, Trenton, Michigan and for use on a district-wide scale in Texas. The latter served as a model for the “Personal Renewal Study,” part of a larger stewardship education process known as “His Love—Our Response.” This program gave spiritual gift inventories widespread exposure among the laity of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.¹¹ Another program that has been used by congregations within the Synod is *Gifted for Growth*, prepared by the Church Growth Institute at Corunna, Indiana.¹²

In addition to drawing upon the “Modified Houts Questionnaire” for formulating questions and evaluations, each of the above programs relies heavily on C. Peter Wagner’s presentation of the biblical imperative and theological basis for spiritual gift inventories in *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. This dependence is evident from the expressions of indebtedness to Wagner in the prefaces, heavy reliance on his definition and enumeration of spiritual gifts, and the use of Wagner’s steps for discovering spiritual gifts. Wagner’s observation that there is much repetition in the literature on this subject also holds true with respect to these programs.¹³ Given the importance of Wagner’s book for providing these programs with a biblical framework and hermeneutic for spiritual gifts, much of the following will interact with his work.

A. Paradigm for Understanding Spiritual Gifts

Somewhat surprisingly, the starting point for Wagner’s discussion of spiritual gifts is not the doctrine of the Holy Spirit but the doctrine of the church. Instead of focusing on the book of Acts and the outpouring of the Spirit (as in Pentecostalism), Wagner contends that the hermeneutical key for discovering the biblical teaching on spiritual gifts is Rom. 12:4, where Paul describes the church as a body composed of many members. In the body every Christian has a place (cf. 1 Cor. 12:18). On the basis of Paul’s metaphor of the church as a physical body made up of different members and functions, the church member is encouraged to ask, “Where do I fit in?” “How do I know whether I am an ear or a hand or some other part of the body?”¹⁴ Spiritual gift inventories are designed to assist in answering these questions.

The use of the “body” metaphor as a basis for understanding spiritual gifts is also characteristic of a number of programs in use within the Missouri Synod. *Enlightened with His*

¹⁰ David W. Hoover and Roger W. Leenerts, *Enlightened with His Gifts: A Bible Study on Spiritual Gifts* (St. Louis: Lutheran Growth, 1979).

¹¹ Cf. Robert W. Schaibley, “Measuring Spiritual Gifts,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 3 (Winter 1989): 423-41.

¹² Kent R. Hunter, *Gifted for Growth: An Implementation Guide for Mobilizing the Laity* (Corunna, Ind: The Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center, 1983).

¹³ Wagner, 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

Gifts explains that spiritual gifts help answer the questions “How do I fit in?” “What is my part in the church?” “What can I do?” “What should I do?” “What is my role in the task of ‘making disciples of all nations?’”¹⁵ Similarly, *Gifted for Growth* states, “The body of Christ is the concept used in all three major sections of the New Testament treatment of spiritual gifts.”¹⁶ Every Christian has a function and every gift is necessary. On the basis of this assumption, an emphasis is placed on the need to organize Christians according to their gifts. As Hunter concludes, “gifts could radically revolutionize the way the church operates.”¹⁷

B. Purpose of Spiritual Gifts

What is the purpose of helping each person find a place within the church? Viewed within the context of the church as a body with many different members—each of which needs to be healthy and functioning for the body to be healthy and growing—spiritual gifts are seen as the key to the mobilization of the members. This mobilization, in turn, spurs the growth of the body. This point is expressed in the very title of Wagner’s book: *Your Spiritual Gifts Can Help Your Church Grow*. “Ignorance of spiritual gifts,” he warns, “may be a chief cause of retarded church growth today.”¹⁸ Conversely, “Understanding spiritual gifts...is the key to understanding the organization of the church.”¹⁹

Highlighting the connection between gifts and growth, Kent Hunter titles his book *Gifted for Growth*. In the Introduction of this book Hunter maintains that “Spiritual gifts are a means to an end: the long haul, the mission and ministry of the body of Christ.”²⁰ Spiritual gifts must be seen within the “biblical context of growth.” In the Conclusion of the book, he offers both a word of caution and a word of encouragement. “The use of spiritual gifts,” he says, “is no guarantee that your church will grow. Other factors could be stronger to prohibit growth.” However, “in ninety-nine percent of Christian churches, the mobilization of God’s people according to God’s plan of gifts will bring about a tremendous change in the internal and external growth of the church.”²¹ The authors of *Enlightened with His Gifts* also affirm, though less strongly, “Spiritual gifts play a significant role in church growth.”²²

In addition to contributing to the growth of the church, the discovery of spiritual gifts (it is claimed) will enhance the life of the Christian. “First of all,” says Wagner, “you will be a better Christian and more able to allow God to make your life count for Him.”²³ Other books and guides that are directed more toward a Lutheran audience tone down this assertion of Wagner’s without rejecting its basic contention. The author of *Gifted for Growth* testifies: “For me, it has been one of the most rewarding growth adventures of my Christian life.”²⁴ Similarly, *Enlightened with His Gifts* suggests that spiritual gifts “are one of the keys to spiritual maturity.” The authors do caution that although spiritual gifts may be “a key” they are not “the key” to a

¹⁵ Hoover and Leenerts, 6.

¹⁶ Hunter, 151.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸ Wagner, 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

²⁰ Hunter, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

²² Hoover and Leenerts, 5.

²³ Wagner, 49.

²⁴ Hunter, 4.

Christian's spiritual development.²⁵ Later, the authors enumerate several other benefits that follow from the discovery of spiritual gifts, such as giving "direction" to one's life in God's kingdom and enabling people and congregations to "come to life."²⁶

Wagner goes on to affirm that the discovery and deployment of spiritual gifts will benefit not only individual Christians but also the church as a whole.²⁷ *Enlightened with His Gifts* agrees: "All the members of the church will be able to work together in love, harmony, and effectiveness...the discovery, development, and use of spiritual gifts will do a lot to eliminate pride, false humility, and envy." In addition, "the church will mature" and with that maturity "the church will grow."²⁸ Finally, Wagner notes that the "most important thing that knowing about spiritual gifts does is that it glorifies God."²⁹ *Enlightened with His Gifts* echoes the sentiment that "God will be glorified."³⁰

C. Definition of Spiritual Gifts

What is a spiritual gift? Since the definition given by the various authors follows nearly verbatim the one given by Wagner, the following will serve as a basic starting point: "A spiritual gift is a special attribute given by the Holy Spirit to every member of the Body of Christ according to God's grace for use within the context of the Body."³¹ Several aspects of this definition are noteworthy. First, the importance of the body as the context for the discussion of spiritual gifts is emphasized. Second, a spiritual gift is defined as a "special attribute." Others refer to it as a "special ability." As we will see, the term "spiritual gift" nearly always has reference to a particular capacity or skill that one has been given. Third, every Christian has been given at least one gift. Fourth, these gifts are given by the Holy Spirit at a particular point in time simultaneously with or subsequent to one's conversion.

It may be helpful to give some precision to this definition by examining those things that are *not* generally regarded as spiritual gifts. First, spiritual gifts are not equivalent to natural talents. This is because, as Wagner insists, "having natural talents has nothing directly to do with being a Christian or being a member of the body of Christ."³² Thus, for example, abilities such as those required for fixing automobiles, cooking, and working are not spiritual gifts. Even if such natural gifts are dedicated to the service of the Gospel, they should not be regarded as spiritual gifts. Wagner says that spiritual gifts are not to be regarded as "dedicated natural talents." He does concede, however, that in some cases ("not all, by any means") God may transform a natural talent into a spiritual gift. As a case in point he cites a salesman who, once converted, went on to become one of the most successful evangelists in Southern California.³³

Second, spiritual gifts are not identical with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). The latter category has to do more with ethical qualities that all Christians hold in common and should exhibit. Although they are not identical with spiritual gifts, Wagner believes that they are prerequisite for the proper use of spiritual gifts. Possessing spiritual gifts without the fruit of the

²⁵ Hoover and Leenerts, 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁷ Wagner, 50.

²⁸ Hoover and Leenerts, 65; cf. Wagner, 50.

²⁹ Wagner, 51.

³⁰ Hoover and Leenerts, 66.

³¹ Wagner, 42.

³² *Ibid.*, 86.

³³ *Ibid.*, 87.

Spirit is compared to having automobile tires without any air inflating them. The car is not going to travel very far very quickly. Whereas all Christians should exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, different spiritual gifts are given to different people.³⁴

Third, spiritual gifts are not understood as a particular role or ministry. For example, prayer, faith, giving, and serving are roles that all Christians are to carry out. The difference between a gift and a role may be illustrated by reference to the role a person is to fulfill inside and outside of marriage. While all Christians have the role of remaining celibate until they marry, others have the gift of celibacy and thus have no desire to marry. Similarly, all Christians have faith, but not all have the gift of heroic faith. All have the role of contributing from their resources to the mission of the church, but not all have the gift of giving above and beyond that which is expected of everyone.

D. Everyone Has a Gift

As noted earlier, one of the basic premises of spiritual gift inventories is the conviction that every Christian is given at least one gift. This is consistent with and flows from the working paradigm of the church as a human body. Every Christian is a member of the body of Christ and has a role to play within the body. Accordingly, every Christian has been given a gift that defines that person's place within the body and is especially suited for carrying out the functions of that role, whether as a toe, a foot, a hand, or an arm. One of the biblical texts used to support the assertion that everyone has at least one gift is 1 Peter 4:10: "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Another text frequently cited is 1 Cor. 12:7, where Paul says: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Although every Christian has at least one gift, many may well possess several gifts at the same time and in various "gift mixes."³⁵

E. Discovering, Developing, and Using Spiritual Gifts

In many respects, the discovery and use of gifts is viewed by advocates of spiritual gift inventories as the key to the health of the church. Wagner says,

I do not think I am amiss in stating that one of the primary spiritual exercises for any Christian person is to discover, develop and use his or her spiritual gift. Other spiritual exercises may be equally as important: worship, prayer, reading God's Word, feeding the hungry, or what have you. But I do not know of anything *more* important than discovering, developing and using spiritual gifts.³⁶

He argues that for 1,900 years the church has been operating under "Plan B" of God's mission for the church by not helping its members discover and use their spiritual gifts. "Plan A" involves consciously emphasizing and working toward the discovery, development, and utilization of spiritual gifts.³⁷ Two basic principles apply: God wants every Christian to have and use a spiritual gift and he wants "lost sheep" to be found. *Gifted for Growth* also contends,

³⁴ Ibid., 88-89.

³⁵ This term is used regularly by Wagner and those who rely on his works.

³⁶ Wagner, 44.

³⁷ Ibid., 47.

“Three of the most important goals in you Christian life are to discover, develop, and use the spiritual gifts God has given you.”³⁸

The advocates of spiritual gift inventories cite a number of passages as explicit exhortations to discover one’s spiritual gifts. For example, Wagner suggests using as a “starting point” Paul’s exhortation in Rom. 12:3 to “think soberly” about one’s self.³⁹ The authors of *Enlightened with His Gifts* refer to Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 12:1, “Now about spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed.”⁴⁰

How does a Christian go about discovering his or her spiritual gift(s) or “gift mix”? Wagner lists five steps, which are duplicated nearly verbatim in *Gifted for Growth* and *Enlightened with His Gifts*. According to the acrostic arrangement in *Gifted for Growth*, the steps entail the following:

1. Explore the Possibilities.
2. Experiment with as Many Gifts as You Can.
3. Examine Your Feelings.
4. Evaluate Your Effectiveness.
5. Expect Confirmation from the Body of Christ.⁴¹

F. Cataloging the Gifts

Opinions about precisely how many spiritual gifts are enumerated in the New Testament vary from author to author. Most authors confine themselves to the lists of gifts found in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. A few include Heb. 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 7. Wagner advocates an open-ended approach to the issue of the total number of gifts, suggesting that there may be some gifts that are not even listed in these texts. For example, one might add the gift of music or craftsmanship or “names.” As we have noted, however, he doubts that fixing automobiles should be classified as a spiritual gift.⁴² Moreover, some Christians may possess the same gifts but in different shadings and degrees.

Largely on the basis of the biblical texts, Wagner identifies 27 gifts.⁴³ *Gifted for Growth* follows Wagner’s lead in enumerating the same 27 gifts.⁴⁴ These include prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, mercy, wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, apostle, helps, administration, evangelist, pastor, celibacy, voluntary poverty, martyrdom, hospitality, missionary, intercession, and exorcism. *Enlightened with His Gifts*, on the other hand, lists only 20. These include apostle, prophet/prophecy, evangelist, pastor-teacher, exhortation, word of wisdom, knowledge, serving, helps, leadership, administration, giving, showing mercy, discerning spirits, faith, hospitality, tongues, interpretation of tongues, healing, miracles.⁴⁵

³⁸ Hunter, 9.

³⁹ Wagner, 35.

⁴⁰ Hoover and Leenerts, 23.

⁴¹ Hunter, 9-14; cf. Wagner, 116-33 and Hoover and Leenerts, 66-67.

⁴² Wagner, 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 39-73.

⁴⁴ Hunter, 17-63.

⁴⁵ Hoover and Leenerts, 40-63.

G. Classifying the Gifts

Both Wagner and Hunter tend to avoid any classification or categorization of spiritual gifts. *Enlightened with His Gifts* organizes the gifts into three groups: Speaking Gifts, Serving Gifts, and Sign Gifts. Similar groupings can be found in an earlier book by Leslie Flynn in which he organizes the gifts around the theme of “Speaking, Serving, and Signifying.”⁴⁶ The last category is emphasized less than the first two, perhaps to avoid the problems associated with gifts closely identified with the charismatic movement. In the literature as a whole, not much is said about the need to classify the gifts according to distinct categories such as these. For the most part, such classifications appear to serve as teaching/learning aids.

II. Biblical Analysis of Spiritual Gifts

The definition, enumeration, and use of spiritual gifts are derived principally from four New Testament texts: Romans 12 (which actually contains two separate lists of gifts), 1 Corinthians 12 (which also contains two lists), Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4. Several common features stand out in these texts. First, each of the three Pauline texts employs the “body” metaphor, which (as we have seen) is usually regarded as the key to the proper understanding and use of spiritual gifts. Second, each of the four passages contains what appears to be a “list” of spiritual gifts. These lists serve as the basis for developing spiritual gift inventories. Due to limitations of space, we will focus our “biblical analysis” on Paul’s argument and discussion in 1 Corinthians 12-14, calling attention to pertinent points from the other texts.

A. The “Body” Metaphor as an Interpretive Key for Spiritual Gifts

As discussed earlier, most proponents of spiritual gifts inventories hold that the “body” metaphor serves as a paradigm containing a programmatic imperative to seek the growth of the church through a process of discovering, developing, and deploying the Spirit’s gifts. Therefore we will first examine Paul’s use of this metaphor in the context of his discussion of spiritual gifts. As we will see, Paul’s use of the body as a metaphor for the church does shape his treatment of the gifts in significant ways—but not in the way that many proponents of spiritual gift inventories would suggest. Paul uses this metaphor to argue for the unity and maturity of the body, not the external growth of the church.

1. The “Body” within Paul’s Argument

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul deals with some very specific matters that were troubling the church at Corinth and had led to open division within the congregation. One serious problem was excessive individualism, which had fractured the congregation. Already in chapter one Paul confronts the partisanship exhibited by some of the Corinthians who attached themselves to Paul, or Apollos, or to someone else. This problem arises again in chapters 12-14, this time in connection with spiritual gifts. The preference for some gifts over others is one of the factors contributing to divisions among the Corinthians.

⁴⁶ Leslie B. Flynn, *19 Gifts of the Spirit: Which Do You Have? Are You Using Them?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1977), 32.

The opening verses of 1 Corinthians 12 set the stage for Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts. Here Paul provides a standard for evaluating the gifts—namely, the confession of Christ. In answer to the question “Who has the Holy Spirit?” Paul states, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is Lord.” Conversely, all who “pledge allegiance” to the princes of this world curse Jesus. Everyone who confesses Christ shares in the same Spirit. The confession of Christ thus provides the starting point and context for Paul's subsequent discussion of the Spirit's manifestations.

After laying the basic foundation in verses 2-3, Paul unfolds his argument in chapters 12-14 around the two poles of unity and diversity. He weaves these themes together like strands of hair being woven into a braid. Paul's repetition of the words *varieties* (NIV: *different kinds*) and *same* in verses 4-6 highlights the theme of diversity and unity developed in subsequent verses.

There are *different kinds* of gifts, but the *same* Spirit.

There are *different kinds* of service, but the *same* Lord [=Christ].

There are *different kinds* of working, but the *same* God [=Father] works all of them in all men.⁴⁷ (NIV)

Verse 7 provides a transition from Paul's general statements in verses 1-6 to the specific matters at hand in verses 8-31. Verse 7 also provides the thesis that Paul develops in the discussion that follows: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Two points are worth noting. First, what were referred to earlier as “workings,” “services,” and “gifts” are now called “manifestations of the Spirit.” Paul had previously attributed these items to the individual persons of the Triune God, but he now attributes them specifically to the Holy Spirit. Second, Paul emphasizes in verse 7 that whatever the gift, it is given for the common good.

In verses 8-10 the apostle applies the theme of diversity in unity specifically to the Corinthians.

To *one* is given through the *Spirit* the utterance of wisdom, and
to *another* the utterance of knowledge according to the *same Spirit*,
to *another* faith by the *same Spirit*,
to *another* gifts of healing by the *one Spirit*,
to *another* the working of miracles,
to *another* prophecy,
to *another* the ability to distinguish between spirits,
to *another* various kinds of tongues,
to *another* the interpretation of tongues.

The phrases “to one” and “to another” highlight the diversity of the Spirit's manifestations. Paul's stress on the “same” or the “one” Spirit draws attention to the singular, unitive source of these manifestations. Paul concludes this section by noting that the same Spirit distributes these various gifts as he wills.

In verse 11 Paul begins the second half of his thesis, namely, that the gifts are given for the common good. Here he introduces the metaphor of the human body into the discussion of gifts. This metaphor appears in all three Pauline texts and is integral to Paul's argument in each

⁴⁷ “Distribution” or “apportionment” might be a better translation here than “varieties” (RSV), “different kinds” (NIV), or “diversities” (NKJV). In addition to stressing the variety of gifts, these terms draw attention to the source of the various gifts, namely, God, Lord, Spirit.

chapter. He uses it to apply the theme of diversity in unity both to the source and to the purpose of the gifts. The gifts are grounded in the unity of God and are given for the unity of the church. Thus the body metaphor may be seen as an interpretive key for the proper understanding of spiritual gifts. It is critical, however, that this key be viewed in light of Paul's discussion of the relationship between unity and diversity within the body.

In view of the factions within the congregation, Paul uses the "body" metaphor to plead for unity and to exhort the Corinthians to use their gifts for the common good of the entire body. His goal is to pull the Corinthians together by pulling them to Christ. Furthermore, over against an overriding preference for the gift of tongues, Paul seeks to broaden the horizon of the Corinthians by unfolding the entire spectrum of the Spirit's manifestations. Far from identifying one gift as the best or as the exclusive manifestation of the Spirit, Paul makes it clear that the Spirit manifests himself through a wide variety of gifts, none of which may be excluded. This implies that the body needs such diversity. Without it the body would be an incomplete and dysfunctional entity.

Using the illustration of the body, Paul addresses two different groups within the congregation. In verses 14-19 he encourages those who might feel that their gifts are inferior or unnecessary by reassuring them that the body needs the contribution of each member. In verse 20-26 Paul speaks to the "elitists" in the congregation who have the attitude toward others, "I don't need you."⁴⁸ He singles out those manifestations that were being "claimed" or "exalted" over the others (celibacy, tongues, wisdom). Those who have a more "spectacular" gift, says Paul, have no right to tell other Christians that their gifts are less valuable or important. Yes, some gifts may be more spectacular, but there is only one Lord. No manifestation of the Spirit may be regarded as unimportant or less valuable than another.

On the basis of this discussion in chapter 12, Paul goes on to show how the Corinthians are to use their gifts in love for the common good (1 Corinthians 13). He admonishes them "in a most forceful manner that love must permeate and motivate their use of spiritual gifts or they become meaningless and useless."⁴⁹

2. The Imperative of Unity in the "Body" Metaphor

The analysis above indicates that Paul does not employ the "body" metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12 to encourage the Corinthians to discover and use their manifold gifts for the explicit purpose of mission and evangelism.⁵⁰ The problem in Corinth is not that the Corinthians were failing to make use of their gifts—if anything, they were using them to the point of abusing them! They were preoccupied with determining which gifts were most desirable and valuable. They were apparently using them in such a way that the ranking of and preference for certain gifts had caused division and jealousy within the congregation.

Paul employs the body metaphor to call upon the Corinthians to live together, work together, and serve one another within the body. He grounds the truth that Christians constitute

⁴⁸ See D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 48.

⁴⁹ *Charismatic Movement*, 20.

⁵⁰ This, of course, does not suggest that the Spirit does not give gifts for the evangelizing of the world (cf. *Charismatic Movement*, 16; 21). Cf. also *Evangelism and Church Growth*, 20: "As His children Christians have the promise that God through His Holy Spirit will work in them both the will and the ability to be His instruments in bringing the message of salvation to a dying world (Phil. 2:13). To that end he gives Christians gifts of grace, skills and aptitudes which enable them to perform this important service."

one body in Christ on the fact that all of them were baptized in on Spirit into one body. “The oneness of the body, the church, predicated on the fact that *all* its members have been baptized in one Spirit into this body, is now applied to the problems in Corinth.”⁵¹ Paul stresses that all Christians have been baptized into the body of Christ, and all are made to drink of the one Spirit (v. 13).⁵² Consequently, Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts does not concentrate on the external *growth* of the body, but on the *unity* of the body.

The apostle’s use of this metaphor follows from his thesis in verse 7. When he says, “to each is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” it is not immediately evident, as some spiritual gift inventories would suggest, that he is referring to the common good of the human race. The context indicates that Paul has in mind the “common good” of the church.⁵³ In other words, Paul addresses the use of these gifts “intra-body” or “intra-congregation,” not “extra-congregation” (outside the body). This point cannot be overemphasized. The gifts are not given simply to help the body grow or to enable the members to “do their part.” Paul’s concern is that each member of the body function “individually and purposefully for the health and well-being of the whole body.”⁵⁴ Only after underscoring the unity that exists in the body of Christ despite a diversity of gifts, races, and nationalities (Jews and Greeks), does Paul proceed (on this basis) to discuss the proper use of the gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 12 and 14, therefore, Paul makes it clear that in the body of Christ the eye may not say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” Similarly, the members of the body are to have equal concern for each other (12:25). Paul’s concern for the “common good” leads him to “liken the Spirit-filled church to a human body in which all ‘the members have the same care for one another,’ so that ‘if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.’”⁵⁵ The gift of prophecy edifies the church. One who prophesies speaks to the church (14:4, cf. 14:26). The “intra-congregational” concerns behind Paul’s use of the “body” metaphor also emerge later in chapter 14 when he discusses the public worship service and encourages the Corinthians to do everything in an orderly fashion (14:40).

3. The Different Gifts within the One Body

In a sense, the analogy of the body enables Paul to “level the playing field” when it comes to “ranking” the gifts. Because we all belong to one body, it is finally not important which gift or task a person possesses and exercises. Whatever gift we have, we have received it from God. Thus Paul can rejoice in the marvelous diversity of gifts exhibited in the church at Corinth precisely because they are *gifts*. He does not revel in some over others—special endowments over natural talents, miraculous over nonmiraculous abilities or offices. Every gift, no matter what its nature of definition, remains a gift of the one God for the purpose of building up the body. “What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor. 4:7). Regardless of the differences between and varieties of the Spirit’s manifestations, they all come from God. This is the crucial point.

⁵¹ Carson, 47.

⁵² The last phrase could be read as a reference to the Lord’s Supper, which also has profound implications for the unity of the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:23-24).

⁵³ *Charismatic Movement*, 20.

⁵⁴ Martin Franzmann, *Alive with the Spirit* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1973), 39.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

In addition to downplaying the distinction between the various gifts by directing the Corinthians' attention to the giver of all good gifts and to the unity of the body that he creates, Paul uses the image of a body and its members to turn on its head the ranking of gifts. The "best gifts" go to the bottom of the list. The "less spectacular gifts" go to the top of the list. Thus the "most important gifts," members, or functions in a body are not necessarily those that are "most spectacular." On the contrary, the unseemly parts of the body are of equal importance. Paul's reversal of the Corinthians' ranking reflects his "theology of the cross"⁵⁶ articulated earlier in his epistle. In chapters 1-3 Paul extolled the foolishness of the cross and contrasted it with the wisdom of the world. In chapter 12 Paul extols those gifts that appear less spectacular, useful and distinctive, and says that they too have an essential role to play within the body of Christ.

No gift can be ranked in importance before God. The value of any gift does not lie in its intrinsic nature. Paul assesses the gifts on the basis of their value for building up or edifying the body. Under certain circumstances, some gifts may be more beneficial for the body. A gift is to be evaluated not on the basis of what it does for me, but in terms of its value for my brother or sister in Christ. In this way Paul demotes the gifts the Corinthians had exalted among themselves and promotes the gifts that benefit others. The Corinthians need not covet a gift or a place in the body that they have not been given. Paul wants them instead to focus on the welfare of their neighbors. He therefore subordinates tongues, placing them at the bottom of the list because this gift benefits only the individual. At the same time, he elevates the gift of prophecy to the top of the list because it edifies the body.

While Paul blurs and seemingly ignores the distinctions between the gifts, it might be asked whether or not spiritual gift inventories accentuate the differences and elevate the importance of spiritual gifts as special endowments (as opposed to natural talents given by God). A similar danger emerges in the way that many in the charismatic movement tend to stress charismatic and spectacular gifts over the noncharismatic and nonspectacular gifts. When certain gifts are emphasized over others the distinction between the gifts is radicalized, and this—as in Corinth—often leads to division.

B. The Spiritual Gifts within the Body

Spiritual gift inventories have raised a number of questions about the listing and cataloging of the gifts, the nature and definition of the gifts, and the purpose or function of each gift. How many gifts are there? Can new ones be added that are not listed in the Bible? Is the list closed or open? Are spiritual gifts latent natural abilities (talents possessed by a person that were not utilized prior to that person becoming a Christian) or must they be distinguished sharply from natural talents? In what way do spiritual gifts differ from the roles and activities to which God calls his people? Finally, can spiritual gifts be sharply distinguished from the fruit of the Spirit? Spiritual gift inventories need to answer these questions and to provide fairly precise definitions of each spiritual gift in order to compose the questions that allow people to determine which gifts they have received.

Surprisingly, in his discussions of the gifts Paul displays very little interest in defining individual gifts or distinguishing between them. His treatment of the gifts, in fact, appears rather

⁵⁶ The phrase "theology of the cross" has reference to Scripture's teaching that God often reveals his grace and glory by "hiding" it under suffering, weakness, and deprivation. The greatest example of this, of course, is God's revelation of grace in the cross and suffering of Christ. See Heino O. Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," in *Accents in Luther's Theology*, ed. Heino O. Kadai (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967).

haphazard. Distinctions are not drawn clearly, with the result that many gifts appear to overlap others. Consequently, there is a lack of consensus among scholars about the definition and nature of the items in Paul's lists. Paul seems to be saying, "in whatever way the Spirit manifests himself within the church for the sake of the church, receive it as his gift. It is a work of the Spirit." Paul's focus on the unity of the body and the subsequent "flattening" of distinctions between the gifts is evident in his listing and arrangement of the gifts, in his definition of the gifts, and also in his use of the term *charismata*.

1. The *Ad Hoc* Character of Paul's Lists of Gifts

Each of the Pauline texts gives the strong impression that the apostle is addressing an *ad hoc* situation. This is one of the reasons that Paul's lists of gifts cannot be easily catalogued. The lists appear as illustrative examples applied to the particular situation he is addressing. The gifts as such do not seem to be Paul's primary concern. Hence, it is not his intention to present a comprehensive "theology of spiritual gifts" or to draw up a program for discovering and exercising the gifts. He is not concerned about the numbers and kinds of "spiritual gifts," but about probing and exposing the underlying problems in Corinth. Paul's concern, for example, is not that the Corinthians lack "church growth principles" and need to use gifts as one of the solutions to stagnant growth. Nor is the problem at Corinth that people are failing to discover and develop their spiritual gifts, so that Paul must show them how. The problem is one of division resulting from a wrong evaluation and prioritization of certain gifts.

To take a case in point, Paul addresses the topic of tongues not because tongues *per se* were the problem, but because of the divisions they were causing within the congregation. In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul focuses on those gifts that were being evaluated too highly and were therefore causing problems, as well as those gifts that needed to be given more prominence but were being valued too little. This helps to explain the attention given to the gift of tongues in 1 Corinthians and its corresponding absence in the other lists. In response to the Corinthians' preference for this gift, Paul insists that God is the source of all gifts and that he provides many different gifts for the good of the church.

If Paul's lists were primarily illustrative, this would help to explain the almost haphazard arrangement and listing of the gifts.⁵⁷ The lists do not appear to be arranged in any pattern, nor are they comprehensive. Nine gifts are enumerated in the first list of 1 Corinthians 12 and nine gifts are enumerated in the second found later in the same chapter. Yet the two lists have only five gifts in common, and between them they name just 13 different gifts. In Romans 12 Paul lists seven gifts, five of which are not found in either list of 1 Corinthians 12. Ephesians 4 mentions five gifts, two of which are found nowhere else. (Similarly, two gifts appear in 1 Peter 4 that are not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament.) No single gift occurs in all five lists, and thirteen gifts (of the twenty or more distinct gifts) occur in only one of the five lists.⁵⁸ Therefore, these lists "cannot be combined to make *the* list; they are more illustrative than

⁵⁷ John R. W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

exhaustive.”⁵⁹ The gifts selected for mention are “merely *representative* of the diversity of the Spirit’s manifestations.”⁶⁰

Paul’s *ad hoc* treatment of spiritual gifts also would suggest that we adopt a relatively open-ended approach to the question of the total number of gifts as well as to their appearance in the church today. This can be viewed from two perspectives. First, it is certainly possible that some of the gifts Paul mentions would cease to exist after a period of time, particularly if and when the need for those particular gifts within the church has ceased to exist or when the Spirit has made other provisions. This might be the case with such gifts as apostles, prophets, and speaking in tongues. Second, this open-ended approach allows for the possibility that the Spirit may add new gifts at a later time as needs arise within the church that did not exist previously. It would then be appropriate to recognize and thank God for the gifts that enable people to be hymn writers, poets, composers, architects, writers, broadcasters, and so on. The Spirit’s gifts may decrease or increase in accordance with the Spirit’s will and the needs of the church.

2. Are Spiritual Gifts Special Abilities or Latent Capacities?

Spiritual gift inventories generally define a spiritual gift as a special ability bestowed by the Spirit upon an individual at the time of conversion or at some time subsequent to conversion. As a result, they distinguish gifts of the Spirit rather sharply from gifts of creation (natural talent). The former are given only to Christians, the latter to all people. The inventories also tend to imply that these gifts of the Spirit are not merely roles or offices, but are qualities or talents given by the Spirit that people possess, presumably, as long as they remain Christians. Finally, a clear distinction is usually made between the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit (moral transformation). The gifts will vary from person to person, but the fruit of the Spirit is manifested (although in varying degrees) in all Christians.

Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts, however, leads to conclusions quite different than these. Any attempt to identify the precise nature of spiritual gifts is frustrated by Paul’s *ad hoc* treatment of the gifts. Nowhere does he define a spiritual gift so narrowly as to limit it to a special ability. His use of the term *charismata* and his listing of the gifts encompass a wide range of phenomena. Again, it is as if Paul were saying, “wherever and whenever the Spirit is at work manifesting himself and building the church, you may regard it as a gift of the Spirit.” In the discussion that follows, we will examine the terms *charismata* and *pneumatika* and then attempt to determine which gifts, if any, may properly be described as “special abilities.”

a. Are *Charismata* and *Pneumatika* “Special Abilities”?

Both of these terms are the most likely candidates for the title or translation of “spiritual gifts.” Interestingly, both are distinctive to Paul. Of the two, *charismata* is used far more frequently in Paul’s writings than is *pneumatika*. The former could be translated “gifts of grace” or “expressions of grace.” The latter could be translated as “expressions of the Spirit.”

⁵⁹ *Fourteenth Hayama Missionary Seminar: The Contemporary Work of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Carl C. Beck (Tokyo: [n.p.], 1973), 9. Cf. Stott, 88.

⁶⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987), 585.

Charismata

The term *charisma* (the singular form of *charismata*) is found 16 times in the Pauline writings and once in 1 Peter (4:10). Its range of meaning overlaps considerably with *charis* (grace). It should not be surprising that an apostle who delights in extolling the grace of God would devote attention to gifts that are given freely by God. The word as used by Paul embraces a wide variety of gifts and types of gifts, none of which can be restricted to “special abilities” of a Christian.

In Rom. 1:11 Paul uses the term in connection with mutual encouragement, but does not seem to have any particular gift in mind. Several times in Romans *charisma* involves the gift of eternal life. For example, in Rom. 5:15-16 the *charisma* is that which issues in eternal life in contrast with the death brought upon all humankind by Adam. In the next chapter Paul contrasts the *charisma* of eternal life with the wages of sin that is death (Rom. 6:23). Later in Romans *charisma* refers to the election of Israel (Rom. 11:29). It is not until chapter 12 that Paul actually uses the term *charisma* in connection with a particular listing of gifts.

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians by reminding them that they do not lack any of the *charismata* as they await the Lord’s return (1 Cor. 1:7). This could be a reference to the items listed later in chapter 12. In 1 Cor. 7:7 Paul says that each person has been given a *charisma* from God, one “this” and another “that” (NIV). In the context, “this” or “that” refers either to the gift of marriage or the gift of celibacy. While “celibacy” might be conceived of as a special ability, it is difficult to see how marriage fits into this category. The remaining five uses of *charismata* are found in chapter 12 where Paul refers to “varieties” of gifts (12:4, 31) and to the gifts (plural) of healing (12:9, 28, 30).

Of special interest is the use of *charismata* in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 12 in conjunction with two other terms. In verses 4-6 Paul indicates that there are different kinds of *gifts, service, and workings*. First, there are *charismata* (expressions of grace); second, there are *diakoniai* (forms of service); and finally there are *energemata* (workings, energies, activities, or powers).⁶¹ The term service (*diakonia*) in verse 5 is used in the New Testament for all kinds of work, such as waiting on tables (Acts 6) and collecting money for the poor (2 Cor. 8:4-5). Everyday acts of service also seem to be included in this term. The word workings (*energemata*) appears to designate various ways in which God’s power is applied. “It is almost coextensive with *charismata*, but it gives prominence to the idea of power rather than that of endowment.”⁶²

Paul uses all three terms to describe the full range of the so-called spiritual gifts. On the basis of 1 Cor. 12:4-6, James Dunn maintains that these three expressions are alternate ways of discussing the same phenomenon. “All the *charismata* are acts of service, all are actions wrought by God, all are manifestations of the Spirit for the common good.” In verse 7 all three terms are subsumed under the phrase “manifestation of the Spirit.” On this basis, Dunn maintains that *charismata* refer to “concrete actions, actual events,” not to latent possibilities or hidden abilities. A “*charisma* is an event, an action enabled by divine power; *charisma* is divine energy accomplishing a particular result (in word or deed) through the individual.”⁶³ When a

⁶¹ Cf. Stodd, 87.

⁶² Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978), 264.

⁶³ James Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 209.

healing takes place, it manifests the work of the Spirit and is thus a gift of the Spirit. From this perspective, the “gifts” would seemingly include such things as abilities, offices, roles, and tasks.

In 2 Cor. 1:11, Paul refers to the “gracious favor” (NIV) granted him in response to the prayers of many—his divine deliverance, an action of God on his behalf. In 1 Tim. 4:14 he warns Timothy not to neglect the *charisma* given him through the laying on of hands. Later Paul exhorts Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God received through Paul’s laying on of hands (2 Tim. 1:6). The gift, while not specified, may well refer to the ministry to which Timothy had been called. Hence, Paul cautions Timothy not to curtail that ministry by laziness, timidity, or lack of self-discipline.

This brief survey suggests that the term *charisma* cannot be regarded as a technical term for either supernatural gifts or special abilities. It can refer to the gift of encouraging, the gift of generous giving, the gift of marriage or celibacy, or even (as it does repeatedly) to the gift of salvation. Paul does not differentiate sharply between these various gifts. Not even in 1 Corinthians 12- 14 does *charismata* “acquire a semitechnical force.”⁶⁴ What all these items have in common and what binds them together is that they are expressions of grace, they are gifts. They are given freely by God out of the sheer generosity of his divine grace.

Pneumatika

Pneumatika is the other term that is often translated as “spiritual gifts.” Like the term *charismata* it is fairly distinctive of Paul, who uses it in at least three ways.

The adjective *pneumatikos* differs from *charisma* in its range of meaning. It modifies another word by indicating that it is in some way “spiritual.” In Rom. 1:11 it qualifies *charisma* itself. Later in Romans Paul indicates that the law is spiritual, given or revealed by the Spirit (7:14). In 1 Cor. 15:44- 46 the apostle describes the resurrected body as a spiritual body. Paul refers to spiritual blessings given by the Spirit in Eph. 1:3. Col. 1:9 highlights spiritual understanding, and Paul speaks of “spiritual songs” in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. As a substantive (noun) *pneumatikos* can refer to a spiritual person or to spiritual people. These are people who appear to be possessed by the Spirit or who manifest the Spirit (see e.g., 1 Cor. 2:13, 15; 14:37; Gal. 6:1). Both Paul and his opponents at Corinth claimed to be “spiritual.” As a neuter plural it refers to “spiritual things.” This is most clearly seen in 1 Cor. 9:11 where Paul contrasts the activities and attitudes of the Spirit with those of the flesh (cf. Rom 1 15:27).⁶⁵

When Paul opens his discussion in 1 Corinthians 12 with the words, “Now concerning *pneumatikon*,” he seems to be taking up a specific question that has arisen in Corinth and that he now intends to answer over the course of the next three chapters. The question centers on the word *pneumatikon*. Taken as masculine, it can refer to spiritual people (2:15; 3:1; 14:37). Taken as a neuter it can refer to spiritual things (9:11; 14:1; 15:46). The former might be the preferable reading, since the term would then serve to frame Paul’s discussion by opening and closing the chapter with a reference to the real root of the problem in Corinth, i.e., so-called “spiritual people.” The reading “spiritual things” (neuter noun) is supported by the subject matter of the chapter, since the discussion that follows is devoted primarily to the topic of “spiritual gifts.” In this case, *pneumatikon* would best be seen as generally synonymous with *charismata*. The use of this term in 1 Cor. 2:13 and 14:1 would seem to confirm this view. If we take into account the ambiguity of this term, the question that Paul seeks to answer in his discussion might be phrased

⁶⁴ Carson, 21.

⁶⁵ Cf. Dunn, 208.

“Is it really true that spiritual manifestations (*pneumatika*) constitute unfailing evidence of spiritual people (*pneumatikoi*)?”⁶⁶

b. Do “Gifts” Refer to Abilities, Offices, Persons, Roles, or Activities?

If the *terms charismata* and *pneumatika* warn against drawing the line too narrowly around the nature of spiritual gifts by defining them as “special abilities,” the individual *items* that Paul lists lead to the same conclusion. Do these items refer to people, offices, roles, responsibilities, abilities, or actual events? Each of these options has its supporters. It is possible that the answer is “Yes!” Paul does not appear to distinguish sharply between spectacular and nonspectacular gifts, between natural talents and special endowments, between abilities and roles, offices and people. Enough ambiguity exists regarding the nature of each gift that any interpreter ought to pause before confidently characterizing the nature of the gifts. The point remains: whatever the manifestation, whatever its nature, whatever its definition, it comes as a gracious gift of God. The same God works all things. Paul seems to cast the net as widely as possible. This approach is supported by the following considerations.

In the first place, a number of the items that Paul lists seem to refer either to offices to which some are appointed or to the people who serve in these offices. This is particularly true of the lists in Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28-30. In Ephesians Paul says that Christ gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. In 1 Corinthians Paul ranks in order apostles, prophets, and teachers. The emphasis is on what these persons or groups of people do—on their roles rather than on their persons.

Second, a number of items appear to refer to actual events or activities rather than to latent abilities. Rom. 12:4 speaks of many members with different functions. If the gifts (*charismata*) of verse 6 refer back to verse 4 the emphasis is on the functions. In verse 7 Paul goes on to talk about *how* these activities are to be carried out: Whoever does (this), let him do it (in his way). In verse 8 Paul shifts to the use of substantive participles which also point to the activity or task of a given person. Paul says that those who exhort, who give, who lead, who show mercy should do so joyfully, willingly, etc. In this context a spiritual gift does not appear to refer to the possession of a latent ability (whether used or unused) but to the actual use of the ability.

Third, some gifts do seem to point in the direction of some ability or capacity within an individual. But even in these instances it is not entirely clear whether Scripture has in view a supernatural ability or a natural ability used in the service of the Spirit. Carson notes that the four lists “as a whole contain an impressive mixture of what some might label ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’ endowments, or ‘spectacular’ and ‘more ordinary’ gifts.”⁶⁷ Some gifts are clearly supernatural, such as tongues, miracles, and healing. Others seem comparatively mundane, such as the showing of mercy. The latter category can hardly be restricted to specific endowments distributed by the Spirit at Baptism as if they had no foundation in natural talents or gifts. “This suggests in turn that Paul would not have been uncomfortable with spiritual gifts made up of some mix of so-called natural talent—what he would consider still to be God’s gift—and of specific, Spirit-energized endowment.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Carson, 22.

⁶⁷ Carson, 37.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

It seems, then, that Paul includes a wide variety of phenomena and manifestations of the Spirit under the rubric of “spiritual gifts.” Despite the distinctions noted above regarding the nature of spiritual gifts, there probably exists considerable overlap between gifts, abilities, tasks, offices, and events. The gift of tongues, healings, or miracles may be the bestowal of a gift that previously was not possessed. Moreover, if the gifts are defined as tasks, there are certainly activities carried out by a Christian that he or she did not perform prior to becoming a Christian. The fact that Paul does not categorize, define, or divide and subdivide the various gifts provides further evidence of the *ad hoc* nature of his presentation. Is it possible, for example, that every person has either the gift of marriage or celibacy? Again, it is not clear whether Paul is speaking of abilities or roles or people. One might also ask whether the fruit of the Spirit of Galatians 5 can be excluded completely from the category of gifts of the Spirit, particularly when the entire gift of salvation is referred to as a *charisma*.⁶⁹

3. Identifying and Defining the Gifts

We have seen in the above discussion that it is difficult to determine whether spiritual gifts in Paul’s writings refer to abilities, roles, persons, or events. It is equally difficult to define with any degree of precision the individual items in Paul’s lists. A brief summary of the gifts bears this out. What is the distinction, for example, between “utterance of knowledge” and “utterance of wisdom?” Both expressions occur in close connection with prophecy and teaching (1 Cor. 13:2; 14:6; cf. Col. 1:28). The gift of exhortation or encouragement in 1 Cor. 14:3, 31 is described as being part of the prophetic activity. Pastors and teachers likewise are closely related to one another. The gift of “the working of miracles” (*dynameis*, 1 Cor. 12:10, 28; cf. “faith,” 1 Cor. 12:9; 1 Cor. 13:2) could correspond to gifts of healing (1 Cor. 12:9, 28), glossolalia (1 Cor. 12:10, 28), and the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor. 12:10, 30). Service (*diakonia*) in Rom. 12:7 could probably be understood in a way similar to the activity carried out by “helpers” (*antilempseis*) in 1 Cor. 12:28.

If Paul is using the lists of various gifts as examples to serve his main point, this would mitigate against attempts to draw sharp lines of distinction between the various gifts. Taken as a whole, the evidence suggests “not only that we do not have here a systematic discussion of ‘spiritual gifts,’ but also that there is some doubt as to whether the apostle himself had precise and identifiably different ‘gifts’ in mind when he wrote these words.”⁷⁰

Consequently, there continues to be debate over the definition of nearly every gift in the various lists. In the discussion that follows, therefore, we do not intend to give precise definitions, but only to highlight the difficulties of determining the content of each term with any degree of certainty.

a. The Gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

In the first list of 1 Corinthians 12 (vv. 8-11) Paul names the following gifts: “utterance of wisdom,” “utterance of knowledge,” “faith,” “gifts of healing,” “working of miracles,” “prophecy,” “distinguishing between spirits,” “various kinds of tongues,” and “the interpretation of tongues.” In this list he does not make sharp distinctions between the miraculous and

⁶⁹ Cf. *Charismatic Movement*, 17: “Here it should be noted that St. Paul lists the less spectacular gifts of the Spirit, namely, the more common attitudes and spiritual qualities of the Christian that result from his regeneration.”

⁷⁰ Fee, 586.

nonmiraculous, between office and quality, or even between natural talent and special endowment. In fact, a number of these gifts appear to overlap with one another.

Utterance of Wisdom and Utterance of Knowledge

These two gifts appear to be so closely related that it is not entirely clear how they differ from each other. Paul's choice of terms is undoubtedly prompted by the situation in Corinth itself (cf. chapters 1-3). The "utterance of wisdom" might be thought of as "practical knowledge" (*sapientia*) and "utterance of knowledge" as a more theoretical or doctrinal form of knowledge (*scientia*). The problem, however, is that Paul himself appears to make no such distinction. In 1 Cor. 2:6 "wisdom" is essentially doctrinal and refers to the fundamental message of Christianity. From 1 Cor. 8:10-11 we learn that "knowledge can be immensely practical."⁷¹

The expression "utterance of wisdom" calls to mind a problem that Paul addressed in 1 Cor. 1:17-2:16. In light of Paul's argument in 2:6-16, the "utterance of wisdom" revealed by the Spirit is not some special understanding of the "deeper things" or the "mysteries" of God. Rather, it involves "the recognition that the message of Christ crucified is God's true wisdom, a recognition that comes only to those who *have* received the Spirit."⁷² Spiritual utterances that proclaim Christ crucified may well be what is referred to here.

There are also some ambiguities connected with the meaning of the gift "utterance of knowledge." Some exegetes suggest that this expression refers to a supernatural endowment. Others see it as something "more akin to inspired teaching, perhaps related to receiving Christian insight into the meaning of Scripture."⁷³ In light of 1 Corinthians 1-3, it may also refer to God's plan of salvation and the benefit of salvation.⁷⁴

Paul's way of describing the nature and transmission of the gifts is also rather ambiguous. With respect to their nature, Dunn argues that "for Paul wisdom and knowledge as such are not to be thought of as *charismata*; only the actual utterance that reveals wisdom or knowledge to others is a *charisma*."⁷⁵ In the case of either gift, it is possible that the message conveyed came directly from the Spirit and was then transmitted to the congregation. It is also possible, however, that the content and message was acquired through instruction or personal experience.

Faith

This gift and those that follow appear to be supernatural manifestations of the Spirit. The faith of which Paul speaks seems to be distinct from saving faith, which all Christians share. Some refer to it as "heroic faith," a faith that enables a person to perform some extraordinary work. It is described in 1 Cor. 13:2 as a faith that can move mountains. It may also refer to a supernatural conviction that God will reveal his power or mercy in a special way in a specific instance. Carson suggests that this type of faith enables a believer to expect God to work in a certain way even if a promise cannot be claimed.⁷⁶ One might ask how this gift differs from

⁷¹ Carson, 38.

⁷² Fee, 592.

⁷³ Ibid., 593.

⁷⁴ Dunn, 219-20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁶ Carson, 39.

miracles of healings. There are, after all, many examples in the gospels where such a faith is associated with a miracle or a healing (e.g., Matt. 9:22,29; 15:28; Mark 10:52; 11:22; Luke 5:20; 17:19; 18:42).

Gifts of Healing

The gifts of healing undoubtedly involved miracles in some form or another. Interestingly, *both* terms are plural, so that the literal translation is “gifts of healings” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:28, 29). This expression is subject to a variety of interpretations. The plural *gifts* and the plural *healings* may suggest either different gifts or different types of healings. The plural *charismata* could indicate that this was not a “permanent” gift but that each manifestation was a “gift” in its own right.⁷⁷ It could also suggest that “not everyone was getting healed by one person, and perhaps certain persons with *one* of these gifts of healing could by the Lord’s grace heal certain diseases or heal a variety of diseases but only at certain times.”⁷⁸

The Working of Miracles

“The working of miracles” (literally “workings of powers”) also appears in the plural. But how does this gift differ from gifts of healings or the gift of faith? It may be that “all healings are demonstrations of miraculous powers, but not all miraculous powers are healings.”⁷⁹ It is also possible that this manifestation covers supernatural activities other than the healing of the sick, such as exorcisms, miracles in nature, and the like. The relationship between gifts of faith, healings, and miracles suggests that these gifts overlap with each other to some extent.⁸⁰

Prophecy

Paul encourages his readers to seek the gift of prophecy above all others (1 Cor. 14:1). Unlike tongues, which edifies the self, prophecy builds up, exhorts, and encourages the church (1 Cor. 14:5). A detailed discussion of the range of phenomena that may be covered by the term “prophecy” is beyond the purview of this document. Several observations, however, are in order. First, although Paul says that prophecy is for the “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” of the congregation (14:3), he does not define prophecy. It would seem that preaching, teaching, and prayer, for example, serve the same ends. Second, there is evidence to suggest that prophecy in the New Testament includes what we would today call preaching or expounding Scripture. Certainly in the Old Testament most prophecy announced judgment and salvation, called for reform, and instructed the people. Third, 1 Corinthians 14 suggests that prophecies were “spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, intelligible messages, orally delivered . . . for the edification or encouragement of the people.”⁸¹

⁷⁷ Fee, 594.

⁷⁸ Carson, 39.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Fee, 595.

Distinguishing between Spirits

Paul may have in mind the ability to identify false spirits, which often manifested themselves in connection with a display of miraculous power. Since “distinguishing between spirits” immediately follows prophecy on Paul’s list of gifts, it is possible that he has in mind something more closely related to prophecy. Perhaps it should be viewed as paralleling the “interpretation of tongues” and as performing similar functions. If so, it may have involved discerning, differentiating, or properly judging prophecies as in 1 Cor. 14:29. The language of “spirits” would then refer to prophetic utterances (cf. 1 John 4:1, where distinguishing between spirits is related in some way to doctrinal or confessional discernment).

Various Kinds of Tongues

This is mentioned last, perhaps to highlight the Corinthians’ special interest in this manifestation of the Spirit, which occasioned Paul’s entire discussion of gifts. This gift “in the case of the Corinthians, apparently had reference to a ‘language,’ unintelligible to others as well as to the speaker, by which a Christian praised God.” St. Paul obviously regarded it as an authentic gift of the Spirit, but he emphasizes that it “can be useful in the church only if it is supplemented with the gift of interpretation (v. 5), for only then will it edify the church.” It should also be “carefully noted that the apostle in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 is not discussing the gift of tongues for the purpose of encouraging or assisting the Corinthians in acquiring this gift.” In this specific context “his purpose is rather to point out dangers and abuses that have resulted from its misuse and to encourage the use of other spiritual gifts, especially prophecy.”⁸²

Interpretation of Tongues

On account of the apparent unintelligibility of tongues, this gift “evidently was the ability to transmit the content and message of such ‘language’ for the benefit and edification of the speaker and other members of the body of Christ.”⁸³ According to 1 Cor. 12:7, 10, 27-30 it, too, is a manifestation of the Spirit. However, it is not entirely clear whether this gift refers to an *ability* to interpret or whether the reference is to the actual *event* of the interpretation.

b. The Gifts of 1 Corinthians 12:28-31

Paul now gives substance to his preceding arguments that the Corinthians are all individually parts of the one body of Christ (vv. 28-29) and that God is responsible for the diversity that makes up the body (vv. 4-6, 11, 18, 24b). Significantly, he begins with a list of *persons*, naming those whom God has appointed in the church: apostles, prophets, teachers (cf. Ephesians 4). The fourth and fifth items (miracles and gifts of healing) parallel the listing in verses 8-10. The sixth and seventh items (helpers and administrators) are new to the discussion. These two gifts, unlike the others in verse 28, are not repeated in verses 29-30; in fact, they are not mentioned again in the New Testament. This list thus includes personal ministries, *charismata*, and deeds of service. Taken together they encompass a wide range of service and activities in the church.

⁸² *Charismatic Movement*, 20-21.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 20.

Apostles

Paul lists apostles in first place. Interestingly enough, whereas the other gifts were manifested in the congregation at Corinth, there is no evidence that Paul believed that each local church had its own apostles. Perhaps they are mentioned first here in order to highlight their role in building up the body and to serve as a reminder of Paul's own ministry as an apostle.

Prophets

Paul lists prophets second. It is not clear whether Paul has in mind a "specific group of people known as 'prophets' vis-à-vis 'apostles' and other members of the community" or whether the phrase is purely functional and refers to anyone who exercises the gift of prophecy.⁸⁴ If this gift is seen as a fulfillment of Joel 2:28-30, it would seem to be available to all Christians following the coming of the Spirit in his fullness at Pentecost. 1 Cor. 14:1 suggests that all Spirit-filled people were potentially prophets. We may conclude from Eph. 2:20 and 4:11, however, that there were some who regularly functioned as prophets and were an identifiable group.

If we assume that Paul's understanding of prophecy is shaped by his own background in Judaism and his knowledge of the Old Testament, then a prophet would by definition be a person who spoke to God's people at the impulse of the Holy Spirit. In keeping with the Old Testament, prophecy involves proclamation more than prediction, although the latter could certainly be included (e.g., Acts 11:28; 21:10-14). Herman Ridderbos suggests that prophets were "Spirit-impelled proclaimers of the Word of God to the church, who unfold God's plan of redemption as well as elucidate and impress upon it the significance of the work of God in Christ in a pastoral and paraenetic sense."⁸⁵ The prophetic message is to be tested as to its genuineness and truth (1 Thess. 5:21; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37-40). Thus Paul gives specific directives about prophecy in worship (1 Cor. 14:29-40). Time should be set aside not only for prophecy but also for the judgment of others (i.e., the whole congregation).

Teachers

Paul mentions teachers third. Teaching is intrinsic to the office of apostle and of bishop or overseer.⁸⁶ In Eph. 4:11 Paul links teachers with pastors, which suggests a broader scope of meaning. The functions of teaching might include upbuilding, comforting, and spiritual direction. It is difficult to distinguish with any degree of precision the activities of teachers from those of prophets. Teaching may involve a source less direct than that of prophecy, conveying instead the "tradition" of the church. It could refer to the catechumenate, oral tradition, and/or doctrine as well as the church's practices and forms of worship. Finally, however, it is not clear whether this gift designates a particular office or a role assumed by some or all Christians in certain circumstances.

⁸⁴ Fee, 620.

⁸⁵ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard DeWitt (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1975), 451.

⁸⁶ Carson, 91.

Miracles and Gifts of Healings

See the section above on 1 Cor. 12:8-11. “The emphasis here is not on the people who have these gifts, but simply on the presence of the gifts themselves in the community.”⁸⁷

Helpers and Administrators

Two new gifts are introduced here. In both cases it is unclear whether the gifts refer to persons or abilities. The first, *antilempsis* (“helper”), is spoken of only here in the New Testament (see Luke 1:54, Acts 20:35, and 1 Tim. 6:2 for the use of the cognate verb). It appears to be a general term that refers to all kinds of assistance. At the very least, the word implies that some Christians were to attend to the physical and spiritual needs of others within the community. It may be similar to the final three items in Rom. 12:8 (service, giving to others in need, doing acts of mercy).

The second term (in its singular form, *kybernesis*) literally means the piloting or steering of a ship. It appears in Acts 27:11 and Rev. 18:17 with the apparent meaning of “steersman” or “pilot.” In the Septuagint (Prov. 1:5; 11:14; 24:6) *kybernesis* includes the idea of giving guidance to someone. The term might involve leadership or even administration (although “administration” in modern English conveys the idea of administrative skills, which is probably not what Paul had in mind). A more accurate translation “might be ‘acts of guidance,’ although it may refer to giving wise counsel to the community as a whole, not simply to other individuals.”⁸⁸ *Kybernesis* could thus refer to guiding or governing others, perhaps taking leadership of and responsibility for certain tasks and activities.

Tongues and Interpretation of Tongues

See the sections above on 1 Cor. 12:8-10 concerning “Various Kinds of Tongues” and “Interpretation of Tongues.”

c. The Gifts of Romans 12

Romans 12 (vv. 6-8) lists as gifts prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, contributing, giving aid, and doing acts of mercy. As is the case with the gifts previously discussed, none of these gifts is easily identifiable, nor is it readily apparent whether they refer to qualities and capacities or offices and tasks.

Prophecy

Paul writes here that prophecy must take place according to the analogy of faith (cf. the discussion on 1 Corinthians 12 above). “Evidently a more objective norm is intended here, namely, the faith according to its content, or, in general, Christian doctrine.”⁸⁹ This may correspond to the need for judging prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12.

⁸⁷ Fee, 621.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 622.

⁸⁹ Ridderbos, 451.

Service

“Service” and “serving” (*diakonia*) could refer to a wide range of ministries. A server can refer to a waiter who serves the meals (Luke 22:27) or to one who carries out domestic chores (Luke 10:40). Ridderbos observes, “Perhaps the word that in general can denote every act of service, in Rom. 12:7, where the point is just that of specialization, has the significance of helping work of love, practical rendering of service, as it is also employed elsewhere in Paul (cf. Rom. 15:31; cf. v. 25; 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Cor. 8:4ff.; 9:12ff.).”⁹⁰ *Diakonia* could well have the same general meaning as the term *antilempsis* has in 1 Cor. 12:28.

Teaching and Exhorting

Both of these terms may refer to aspects of a public speaking ministry, each possibly including the other. A person can encourage by teaching and teach by encouraging. Encouraging may encompass a slightly wider range of meaning than teaching, all the way from “entreating” to “comforting” to “exhorting.” Exhortation can also be used in connection with prophecy and the teaching office (cf. Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:28-29).

We cannot easily distinguish between “natural” and “supernatural” gifts with respect to teaching and exhorting because both of these activities are carried out also by non-Christians. We commonly speak of some people as “born teachers” and others as having a gift for sensitivity and encouragement. The difference between non-Christian and Christian teachers and “encouragers” would seem to be primarily in the area of subject matter (the content of teaching and exhorting), though they may also differ with respect to why and the way in which they teach and encourage. Stott suggests that a link between preconversion natural talents and postconversion spiritual gifts may exist in the case of “the one who teaches” (Rom. 12:7) and “the one who exhorts” (Rom. 12:8).⁹¹

Contributing, Giving Aid, Showing Mercy

The gifts listed in verse 8 are striking not because they are obviously miraculous or spectacular but, on the contrary, because they are “positively mundane.”⁹² Paul exhorts the church in Rome: “he who contributes, in liberality: he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” (12:8). “Contributing” refers to the giving of money and is used in Eph. 4:28 of giving to those in need. Of the three gifts mentioned in this passage, the most ambiguous is the giving of aid. The term Paul uses here may have reference to someone who “rules” or “takes the lead,” and designates church leaders in 1 Thess. 5:12 and 1 Tim. 5:17. “He who does acts of mercy” denotes a person who helps others in need. This activity, it might be noted, is not limited to Christians. What appears to be new here, or at least distinctive of the Christian, is not the act, role, or ability (in and of themselves) but the objective and the motive for doing these things. These activities help build up the body of Christ and are carried out willingly and cheerfully.

Precisely how these three gifts differ from one another is not clear from the text. Ridderbos concludes that “it is no simple matter to form a clear idea of all these descriptions and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 465.

⁹¹ Stott, 93.

⁹² Ibid., 91.

to make a precise distinction, for example, between distributing and doing acts of mercy.” The former may have the poor in view while the latter is to be taken in a more general sense. As Ridderbos points out, however, “the acts of service of 1 Corinthians 12:28 could then embrace the one as well as the other.”⁹³

d. The Gifts of Ephesians 4

Eph. 4:11 describes gifts more in terms of people and offices than abilities: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” Paul seems to be saying that Christ gave some people to the church who were apostles and prophets (etc.), or that he gave the office and commission to be apostles and prophets to certain people within the church (or both).

Evangelists

Only Ephesians 4 mentions evangelists as a gift. Since this word occurs only three times in the New Testament, it is hard to establish its precise meaning.⁹⁴ It seems to refer to men who set out to proclaim the Gospel to unbelievers (Acts 8:4; 21:8; cf. the use of the participle in Acts 8:12, 35, 40) or to those who served as helpers to the apostles. In 2 Tim. 4:5, Paul exhorts Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist.” Whether Paul has in mind an office or simply the activity of evangelizing is open to question. Ridderbos suggests that in the early years of the church evangelists “frequently formed the link between the apostles and the leading figures in the church. With the dying out of the apostles the evangelists disappear as well.”⁹⁵

Pastors and Teachers

Pastors are mentioned together with teachers in Eph. 4:11. At the very least, this suggests a close relationship between the two.⁹⁶ Pastors are entrusted with the leadership and care of the church (see Acts 20:28 where the presbyters of Ephesus are charged to look after the flock). 1 Peter 5:4 speaks of Christ himself as the pastor and overseer of the church. It is not clear from the text how pastors are to be distinguished from teachers.⁹⁷ It may be that the latter were charged with instruction and the former with guidance or oversight.

In connection with the pastor’s task of leading, we might also note that in Rom. 12:8 Paul exhorts the one who gives leadership (*ho prohistamenos*) to exercise this *charisma* with zeal. He uses the same word (in its plural form, *prohistemi*) in 1 Thess. 5:12 and links it with those who admonish. In 1 Tim. 3:4 the demand is made that overseers rule their own house well (*prohistamenon*). In 1 Tim. 5:17 ruling well is ascribed to presbyters. As with the other gifts,

⁹³ Ridderbos, 456.

⁹⁴ Even though the word *evangelist* is rare, Paul does call himself a *keryx* (“preacher” or “proclaimer”) in 1 Tim. 2:7 and 2 Tim. 1:11, which would have to be considered in the same word group.

⁹⁵ Ridderbos, 454.

⁹⁶ The use of the single article (*tous de poimenas kai didaskalous*) may indicate that Paul is referring here to one office with two functions. See *The Ministry: Office, Procedures, and Nomenclature*, A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1981, 14.

⁹⁷ Cf. Henry P. Hamann, “The Translation of Ephesians 4:12—A Necessary Revision,” *Concordia Journal* 14 (January 1988): 42-49 and “Church and Ministry: An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:1-16,” *Lutheran Theological Journal* 16 (December 1982): 121-28.

this could refer to both an office and an activity with the emphasis on the latter. In both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 Paul may be alluding to presbyters or bishops.

4. Is Everyone Gifted?

The New Testament seems to indicate that the Spirit has manifested himself in the life of every Christian in some way, however dormant or unused a particular gift may be.⁹⁸ All four chapters in which a listing of gifts occurs support this conclusion.

I bid *every one* among you . . . to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him Having gifts that differ . . . , let us use them (Rom. 12:3, 6).

All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to *each one* individually as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11).

But grace was given to *each* of us according to the measure of Christ's gift (Eph. 4:7).

As *each* has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace (1 Peter 4:10).

To say that everyone has a gift does not mean that everyone has been given a special intellectual ability or physical skill. These gifts could involve an office, a task, a role, an opportunity, or an ability.

Paul says that the Spirit apportions to the many his manifestations "as he wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). This passage could also be rendered "as he sees fit or just as he pleases."⁹⁹ We recall that Jesus says that the Spirit, like the wind, "blows where it wills" (John 3:8). The emphasis in 1 Cor. 12:11 is less on the Spirit's deliberation and more on his freedom to distribute the gifts or to manifest himself as he chooses.

Two additional points might be made. First, to say that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he pleases implies that we dare not "box the Spirit in" or expect him to act in every case in accordance with our expectations or desires. He may or may not provide the church with all of the gifts at any one time or in any given place. Some gifts may disappear, others may be added. Some may appear in one place at one time, others in another place at another time. God does not promise all the gifts to any one person (cf. 1 Cor. 12:29-30). This does not mean that we cannot desire certain gifts. Paul encourages us to do this. But the desire for a particular gift is to correspond to a particular need in the congregation. Thus in 1 Cor. 12:31 Paul encourages the Corinthians to desire those gifts that edify others.

Second, the Spirit distributes these gifts just as *he wills*. Whatever gifts the Spirit may give, they are given by his own free will. Every gift is first and foremost a gift of grace, not a "right" or "reward." The distribution of gifts is a sovereign, freely determined act of the Spirit. It is precisely for this reason that they are gifts of *grace*. Nor can one gift be claimed to be "intrinsically" or "inherently" better than another. They all alike are gifts.

⁹⁸ Stott, 104.

⁹⁹ Fee, 599.

Summary

A number of points can be drawn from the biblical material to provide some guidelines or parameters for a discussion of spiritual gifts.

Defining a Spiritual Gift

The biblical data make it clear that any attempt to formulate a precise and comprehensive definition of a spiritual gift is fraught with difficulties. No definition, therefore, will be able to take into account the full range of what the Scriptures teach in this area. Given that caution, however, a tentative definition might include the following ideas:

Spiritual gifts are best defined as particular manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7) that call the members of the church to action in a manner that confesses Christ and builds up the body of Christ. These gifts or manifestations of the Spirit may take the form of activities, abilities, offices, roles, and even people.

Although this definition is somewhat general, it does capture the truth that the biblical teaching about spiritual gifts is “richer, broader, and more flexible than some have suggested.”¹⁰⁰

The Nature of Spiritual Gifts

In light of the above definition, several facets of spiritual gifts must be kept in mind:

1. Gifts and talents are closely related. Natural abilities or creaturely gifts are God’s gifts as well (Gen. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 4:7; James 1:7). What do we have that we have not received? “Talents and gifts, then, are neither antithetical nor simply identical.”¹⁰¹ Some suggest that a spiritual gift is a God-given ability that has “caught fire.” Others suggest that the difference between a gift and a talent lies in the way that believers exercise their talents with a Christ-like character and attitude.
2. Some of the gifts exhibit a supernatural character, such as a heroic faith, the gifts of miracles, and the gifts of healings. These must also be taken into account, but they are only a part of the total Scriptural picture of spiritual gifts.
3. There is a close relationship between gifts and gifted persons. The lists of gifts include both abilities and persons. Paul speaks of prophecy (1 Cor. 12:10) and prophets (1 Cor. 12:28), of teaching and teachers. He moves freely between the two and makes little distinction between them.¹⁰²
4. Spiritual gifts and tasks of the church also go hand in hand. “Neither gifts without tasks nor tasks without gifts is a tolerable situation. God’s call is not merely to privilege, but also to responsibility. There is work to do.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Boyd Hunt, *Redeemed! Eschatological Redemption and the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1993), 49. The discussion below follows closely Hunt’s very helpful treatment of this topic.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁰² Ibid., 52.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 55.

Identifying the Spiritual Gifts

1. The New Testament lists of gifts are not exhaustive. The four primary lists vary significantly from one another. The reason undoubtedly lies in the different situations addressed by the apostle. He selects the gifts in each list to address specific situations in the congregation.¹⁰⁴
2. The *ad hoc* character of Paul's lists also indicates that many of the gifts cannot be identified or categorized with any degree of precision. Instead, there exists considerable overlap between many of the gifts.

The Purpose of the Gifts

1. Gifts function within the body. "Faced with excessive individualism at Corinth, [Paul] broadened the teaching on gifts to stress their corporate dimension." The corporate nature of the gifts and their use indicates that the members of the body need one another. As a result, no room is left for excessive individualism, rivalries, contentions, and jealousies that divide Christians.¹⁰⁵
2. The "carnal" Corinthians, it seems, were "miracle-hungry." They focused more on the "visibly miraculous" than on the whole range of gifts given by the one Spirit to build up the body of Christ.¹⁰⁶

III. A Theology of Gifts and Callings within the Church

The development and use of spiritual gift inventories raise a number of important theological and practical issues that need to be addressed within the church. By attempting to assist people find their "place" or "niche" in the body of Christ, spiritual gift inventories draw attention to the desire of Christians to serve their Lord with their talents and gifts in some capacity within the church. They also highlight the need of many pastors and the church at large to identify people for service and to equip them for living out their lives as witnesses for Christ. In many ways these concerns focus on the larger issues of Christian piety and the doctrine of sanctification.

A. Life in the First and Third Articles¹⁰⁷

In order fully and adequately to address the concerns raised by the desire to live as Christians and to serve God within the church, we can expand the theological parameters of the discussion in what follows in this section. This can be done by drawing on some significant theological resources within the Lutheran tradition that have been neglected in recent times or overshadowed by other issues, but are now in need of renewed emphasis.¹⁰⁸ These resources

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 53.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 285-322.

¹⁰⁷ What we refer to here as "Life in the First and Third Articles" has been described by others as life in the "two realms" or "two governments." See the discussion that follows.

¹⁰⁸ Gustaf Wingren has been most helpful in bringing this issue to the forefront of theological discussion as a corrective to the theology of Karl Barth and Oscar Cullmann, who tended to minimize the importance and role of

include the First Article as an integral part of the theological framework provided by the entire Apostles' Creed, within which framework the church can think through many of the issues involved here. At times Christians may give the impression that they are "Second or Third Article people" who are only concerned with "personal salvation" and the life hereafter or those matters that pertain only to the realm of the church. As a result, the First Article and its implications for life in this world recede into the background of Christian thought and practice. When this happens the danger arises that one not only distinguishes between the works of God but actually separates them from each other. The end result is that the gifts and works referred to in the First Article have little to do with the works of God presented in the Second and Third Articles and vice versa.

Spiritual gift inventories run the risk of doing precisely this—namely, dichotomizing the Creed. They tend to view the matter of gifts and roles too narrowly or restrictively by confining them to the Third Article. With that consignment comes either a corresponding valuation of spiritual gifts and churchly tasks above the more ordinary, everyday tasks of living the Christian life within one's vocation, or at the very least a benign disregard for the latter. More often than not, proponents of such inventories acknowledge that the talents we have been given in the First Article may be used within the church, but they frequently do not seem to regard them as highly as the so-called spiritual gifts of the Third Article. As a corollary, work within the church becomes regarded as intrinsically more valuable than work within the world, that is, within our vocations. After all (so the thinking goes), within the church we are serving the Lord! In actual practice, it also easily happens that those who are active within the walls of the congregation (serving on various boards, committees, and organizations) are given more recognition, and that those who faithfully labor as witness-bearing Christians in their vocations are ignored and overlooked.

To be sure, the work of God in creation must be distinguished from his work in redemption and sanctification. To an extent it can be said that God works one way among all people within the world and another way among his own people within the church. But there is also continuity in his work. What God has created he has also redeemed and sanctified. He redeems, restores, and resurrects our bodies; he does not annihilate them. As he has worked through creation to give us life and sustain our lives, so God redeems and sanctifies us through the elements of creation, through the incarnation of Christ, through water, and through bread and wine. Thus creation serves redemption and redemption fulfills creation. This means that one article of the Creed, in this case the First Article, informs and shapes the other two, which build upon it. In many respects, the First Article provides the foundation and framework for the other two articles. It provides the context and the setting for Christians to serve their neighbors within everyday life and occupations. This perspective and approach highlight the continuity rather than the discontinuity between the gifts associated with each of the three articles.

One way of approaching the issue of spiritual gifts within the context of the First and Third Articles is to ask the questions "What is general and applicable to all, Christian and non-Christian alike?" and "What is distinctively Christian about these gifts?" One can err in opposite directions in answering these questions. The first is to declare that there is nothing distinctively Christian about spiritual gifts. In other words, there are no such things as spiritual gifts or activities apart from creaturely gifts and tasks. This position highlights continuity at the risk of losing sight of the distinctive nature of the Second and Third Articles. The opposite extreme is

creation as a framework for theology. See, e.g., Gustaf Wingren, *The Flight from Creation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1971).

to insist that there are no spiritual gifts apart from what have been given exclusively to believers. Only those gifts bestowed at Baptism or subsequent to conversion may be regarded as spiritual gifts. They share little if anything in common with creaturely or natural gifts. This position takes discontinuity to an extreme. Between these two extremes lies the equally important question “How do ‘spiritual gifts’ relate to ‘creaturely gifts’?”

B. Gifts of Creation

A consideration of the creative work of God in the First and Third Articles will show that attempts to restrict spiritual gifts to “capacities” or “abilities” (much less to gifts bestowed with or subsequent to faith) is too narrow a focus and ignores the breadth of Scripture’s thought on the subject. The First Article broadens the horizon for identifying and defining the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts. The gifts of creation embrace much more than the skills or abilities that each person possesses. Beginning with our individual personhood, these gifts include our eyes and ears, reason and all our senses. They include the basic necessities of life such as bodily nourishment, shelter, work, tasks, and community. Indeed, they reach out to embrace all of creation, including the natural environment as well as human societies and government.¹⁰⁹ In each case we confess these gifts in the First Article as gifts received from God. This confession brings out the truth “What have you that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7) The doctrine of creation teaches us that the “absolute creator is the gracious giver.”¹¹⁰

One of the hallmarks of the First Article is its exultation in the variety and diversity of God’s wondrous creation. Even if we limit ourselves to the subject of the human creature, we cannot but be awestruck at the variety and diversity of God’s work. Creaturely gifts come in every conceivable shape, size, and kind. God has endowed his human creatures in particular with an amazing variety of intellectual abilities and artistic talents. To some are given tremendous athletic skills and to others unique powers of perception. Some are adept at working with their hands. Others prefer to work with their minds. The variety and diversity of all these creaturely gifts distinguish one person from another and make each person unique. No two people share identical personalities, interests, skills, or abilities. To a large extent these differences determine our identity, what we do, and where we carry out our lives. This is what Lutheranism has traditionally understood by “vocation.”

Although our creaturely gifts define us as individuals and distinguish us from one another, it is only as we are unlike that we can help and complement each other by providing what others lack. God created us for community, with the result that we have a need for one another (Gen. 2:18: “It is not good that the man should be alone”). God has ordered everything in the world so that each part of creation has its place within the whole and functions for the benefit of the whole. Genesis 1 already accents the order and distribution of the various elements of creation from days two through six. It lays special emphasis on the ordering of these activities as God’s way, through creation, of providing a home for God’s human creatures and for the sustenance of their lives.¹¹¹ Psalm 104 especially highlights and praises “the order of the

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), 80-108. Bayer outlines and discusses the way in which Luther unfolds his discussion of the First Article in expanding, concentric circles. See also Oswald Bayer, “I Believe That God Has Created Me with All That Exists. An Example of Catechetical-Systematics,” *Lutheran Quarterly* VIII:2 (Summer 1994), 129-61.

¹¹⁰ From an unpublished paper by William Weinrich, “Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Way of God,” 8.

¹¹¹ Interestingly, days three through six are given disproportionately more space than days one and two of creation. It is precisely those things created on days three through six that have a more direct bearing upon the life

world as a network of mutual aid and assistance between the creatures which in the final analysis is God's own gracious and preserving work."¹¹² In this context each person has a gift, task, place, and role to use as channels of his or her creative goodness for others.

God has not only provided the orders of creation, he has also placed upon them his divine blessing. By means of the divine blessing (Gen. 1:28, "be fruitful and multiply") God has given creation the capacity to bring forth life and has given humankind the ability to propagate, that is, to give life and to provide for all that is necessary to sustain life. Thus, the word that created out of nothing continues to prove effective. It carries with it God's life-giving power. "Without it there would be no real life."¹¹³ The divine blessing continues God's work in creation,¹¹⁴ so that the work of creation itself continues (*creatio continua*).¹¹⁵ God continues to create through the orders and structures of creation, which in turn function as what Luther often referred to as "masks of God."¹¹⁶

1. The Use of Gifts and Talents within Creation

God intends that every person, together with his or her gifts and abilities, serve as an instrument of blessing for others. For this reason, it is proper to speak of all his creatures, including his human creatures, as co-workers—although not co-creators—with God. Luther writes in the *Large Catechism*:

Our parents and all authorities—in short, all people placed in the position of neighbors—have received the command to do us all kinds of good. So we receive our blessings not from them, but from God through them. Creatures are only the hands, channels, and means through which God bestows all blessings. For example, he gives to the mother breasts and milk for her infant, and he gives grain and all kinds of fruit from the earth for man's nourishment—things which no creature could produce by himself.¹¹⁷

of God's human creatures. The flow of thought is such that these days are all preparatory for the culmination of God's creation on day six.

¹¹² From an unpublished paper by William Weinrich, "God, the Creator," 4.

¹¹³ Claus Westermann, *Creation*, trans. John J. Scullion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 46.

¹¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 24. The fulfillment of the blessing is most evident in the gift of children and the list of generations. It might well be noted that where the modern person speaks of success, the Old Testament believer spoke of blessing.

¹¹⁵ It is noteworthy that *bara*, "to create," is often used in close proximity to *barak*, "to bless" (Gen. 1:21-22, 27-28; 2:3; 5:1-2). This suggests that creation and blessing are linked to divine purpose.

¹¹⁶ In Luther's view, "the external things and relationships in which man lives represent God to him; they are God's 'masks'" (Gustaf Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, trans. Carl C. Rasmussen [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957], 117). Luther says: "All our work in the field, in the garden, in the city, in the home, in struggle, in government—to what does it all amount before God except child's play, by means of which God is pleased to give his gifts in the field, at home, and everywhere? These are the masks of our Lord God, behind which he wants to be hidden and to do all things" (Ibid., 137-38). As Wingren explains, "Instead of coming in uncovered majesty when he gives a gift to man, God places a mask before his face. He clothes himself in the form of an ordinary man who performs his work on earth. Human beings are to work, 'everyone according to his vocation and office': through this they serve as masks of God, behind which he can conceal himself when he would scatter his gifts" (Ibid., 138). "A mask both conceals and reveals the Creator. So it is that orders and offices and stations are also *larvae Dei* [masks of God] through which God is constantly confronting human beings with his will and power" (Donald R. Heiges, *The Christian's Calling*, rev. ed. [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 52).

¹¹⁷ LC I, 26.

All of our talents and abilities, everything that comprises who we are, God has bestowed on us through the agency of our parents and those given responsibility for us.

As we receive gifts from God through his creatures, we in turn become channels for God's creative activity to flow out to others. Biblically this thought is captured in the creation account—humankind was made in the image of God and was given the commission to exercise dominion over the earth. The image of God (Gen. 1:26-28) not only differentiates God's human creatures from the rest of creation. It entitles them to represent God on earth and to manage as benevolent kings the earthly estate established by the Creator. In the words of Ps. 8:5, "Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor." To be "crowned" means to be given the glory and honor of ruling wisely and benevolently over the works of the Creator's hands. In Christ we see most blessedly and perfectly the nature of this dominion. But even Adam and Eve, as God's creatures, faced creation in behalf of the Creator. They were to carry out God's will for his creation and to embody his concern for the preservation of life. They were to be co-workers with God in the ongoing work of creation. This applies now to all people, Christian and non-Christian alike. To be sure, the latter often serve as instruments of God unwittingly and unwillingly, but God continues to carry out his work even through non-Christian parents, employers, and government leaders.

The image of God is closely tied to the subsequent commission to have dominion over the earth. Throughout the Old Testament the vocabulary of dominion describes the rule of kings (Psalm 8; 72) who were to personify God's own gracious rule. "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:6). Gen. 2:15 shows that dominion means neither domination nor autonomy, but responsibility for the care and cultivation of the earth. Human beings are to oversee the earth and to ensure that it continues to provide what is needed for the promotion and preservation of life.¹¹⁸ Initially, this took the form of two basic ways of life: the agricultural-sedentary and the nomadic. Thus we find Cain farming and Abel shepherding (Genesis 4). The working out of God's commission soon resulted in a succession of achievements such as the building of cities, the cultivation of art and music, and the development of technology (Gen. 4:17-26). By and large, the Old Testament presents a positive view of the development and progress of civilization into areas of specialization as it grew out of the dominion mandate in Genesis.¹¹⁹

As we face creation and one another as God's representatives, the job descriptions that set forth our duties and responsibilities are given in and with the orders and structures of creation itself. God has given each person a "location" or "place" where each can use his or her gifts for others. In fact, each person will stand in one or more locations at any given time. We may be parents and children, husbands or wives, neighbors and friends, employers or employees, officials and citizens.

Our location within this network of human relationships describes our role and to some extent prescribes it.¹²⁰ The needs of those whom we find around us function as God's calling to be his co-workers in creation. If I am a father, I have the calling to care for my children. If I am a spouse, I am called to cherish my mate. We are doing what we have been given to do when we do these things. In each case, the needs of these people (and perhaps the needs of all of creation)

¹¹⁸ James Limburg, "The Responsibility of Royalty: Genesis 1-11 and the Care of the Earth," *Word and World* 11 (Spring 1991), 124-30.

¹¹⁹ For another excellent example of the way in which the Old Testament values are expressed, see Eccl. 2:24-25.

¹²⁰ Heiges, 50-51.

function as God's call to help. In each of these locations we make use of our gifts—to feed and clothe our children, to help and to befriend our neighbors, or to render services for our employers in return for income that is used to maintain our earthly life. The Ten Commandments are rooted in creation and set forth how we may properly use our gifts in the service of God's creation within our vocation or station.

Among the most precious and useful of all the gifts given to humankind in creation to assist in carrying out the commission of dominion is the gift of reason. "The creature is given the capacity to act commensurate with its nature; and this capacity to act is exercised by a freedom commensurate with the divine intent."¹²¹ This gift is used to decide how, where, when, and to what extent we serve as God's co-workers. Within the parameters of our creaturely contingencies, we may use reason creatively to find as many different ways to use our talents and time as there are people. This shows that the work that God has given us to do is not something static. By means of a genealogy Gen. 4:17-26 shows us that the commission to work "includes the whole problem of the division of work as well as the progress in art and technology."¹²²

The discussion above leads to the conclusion that through the use of the faculties of our mind, we may develop many tools and instruments to help people uncover their talents and find a place within God's world to work and play. These instruments may reveal weaknesses to be strengthened or strengths that are underutilized. Such discovery may lead to new directions in one's life or open new doors of opportunity for service. Thus, tools have been developed for use within schools and by counselors (e.g., the Strong Vocational Interest Inventory and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory). Occasionally the church may make use of similar instruments, such as those administered at the seminaries (e.g., the Myers-Briggs Inventory and Profiles in Ministry), to assist in drawing up personal profiles of students. Such tests are designed to assess the strengths and weaknesses of students so that the seminary may better help them employ their God-given talents within the church when they become pastors. They are not intended to provide infallible assurance of the Spirit's presence or to measure the extent of the Spirit's activity within students.

It would seem that spiritual gift inventories belong in a category similar to the above. There are no biblically prescribed inventories or strategies to discover, develop, and deploy our gifts. God has given us the gift of reason to develop such instruments and tools. Their usefulness, therefore, should be subject to the same scientific standards of accuracy and completeness as are applied to similar tools used within society at large. In other words, they should be subject to the standards of reason.

2. The Misuse of Gifts and Talents

God's plan for creation, however, has not worked out as he intended. His creative work has been hindered and obstructed in large part because his human creatures have coveted created things and thereby have turned these First Article gifts into idols. Indeed, "acquisitiveness . . . constitutes the basic attitude of unbelief toward the giving and creative God" and "automatically

¹²¹ Weinrich, 4.

¹²² Westermann, 21. The New Testament continues this approval of the value and necessity of work in everyday occupations (Mark 6:3; Acts 18:3; 1 Tim. 5:8; 2 Thess. 3:10-12; Titus 3:1; cf. 1 Cor. 7:20). Cf. Heiges (38-39) for a helpful discussion of this subject.

implies an attitude of lovelessness” toward others.¹²³ The First Commandment highlights the basic way in which God and his human creatures relate to one another: God gives, we receive. All idolatry may be described as a failure to recognize the Creator as distinct from the creature. A refusal to receive is a refusal to be a creature. Wingren describes this frustration of creation as follows:

By seeking his God in Creation, which itself needs what man needs, [man] does not achieve the life which he seeks but only death, and his unbelief grows stronger. By clinging to the things of Creation without being capable of abandoning them for fear of losing them, the door through which man ought to pass in order to give to his neighbor becomes barred even more tightly, and his unkindness to his fellow beings grows stronger. By thus bowing down to what is created, as though he were subordinate to it, and by making himself a slave to it, man loses the possibility of standing over Creation and ‘ruling’ it and ‘subduing’ it to himself (Gen. 1, 28).¹²⁴

What is said here applies not only to possessions, but to time, tasks, talents, and abilities. When these are coveted and used purely for personal gain or satisfaction they cannot benefit the neighbor. When we commit such sin we promote our own interests at the expense of our neighbor. The selfish use of possessions and talents cannot help but be destructive of both the family and the larger community. Covetousness and the misuse of talents results in judgment and the dominion of death, that is, the dislocation of creation and God’s life-giving activity in creation.¹²⁵

Despite the impact of covetousness and the ensuing obstruction of God’s creative intentions, God’s creative work continues. Humankind has not been able to thwart totally the creative work of God. Following the fall into sin God’s creative activity has taken on a Law-Gospel dimension. God’s creative work continues to “promote blessing and life and to thwart damnation and death.”¹²⁶

Not even the most sinful and disobedient person, nor even the devil himself, the prince of evil spirits, can bring God’s work to naught. This is true of his first creation as well as of his creative, ongoing struggle against the powers of death and destruction. Through his law and order of creation God constantly maintains life and blessing in the midst of that world where man’s sin spreads death and damnation.¹²⁷

The world continues to bear its bounty. Governments seek to maintain the peace and bring prosperity. Parents continue to provide for their children. Yet in each case the scars of sin are evident everywhere we look. It is a testimony to God’s goodness and creative activity that these things continue to happen despite sinful humankind’s every attempt to destroy the structures of creation and the fabric of the human community. God works through doctors to heal others even if they egotistically seek to benefit themselves. He continues to work through farmers and merchants who provide food even though their thoughts may be wholly consumed

¹²³ Gustaf Wingren, *Creation and Law*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), 50.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁶ Regin Prenter, *Creation and Redemption*, trans. Theodor I. Jensen (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 202.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

with amassing a fortune. “The will of the Creator runs like an undercurrent beneath the stream of human works, and is not disturbed even when the surface is ruffled.”¹²⁸ Like a levee, God’s creative activity seeks to hold back death even though it does not destroy death (the destruction of death is the proper work of Christ). The First Article stabilizes the patient in order that he may be rolled into the operating room of the Second Article.

C. Second and Third Articles: The Sanctifying Spirit and Spiritual Gifts

Apart from the Second and Third Articles and as a result of the fall into sin, what is unique and distinctive of each person is often viewed by that individual as his or her own personal possession. Instead of seeing God’s gifts as having been given for the benefit of others—as channels through which his goodness may flow through us and out to others—we use them for self-serving and self-promoting purposes. Due to sin creation itself has gone awry, with the result that its structures, orders, and gifts have been fragmented. It should not be surprising, therefore, that our creaturely gifts and abilities are so often unused, underused, or even misused.

In the Second Article we see that Christ redeems and restores us to himself, thereby inaugurating a new creation, a restoration and reclamation of all that has gone awry. In the Third Article we encounter the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The peculiar gifts ascribed to the Spirit in the Third Article flow from the gifts won in the Second Article. In the Second Article we confess that Christ obtained them, in the Third that he dispenses them. The Holy Spirit bestows on us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation obtained by Christ. This is the distinctive and, indeed, the unique gift of the Third Article. The common gift of the forgiveness of sins stands out as the hallmark of the Third Article. We all are given the same forgiveness of sins. We have been given the same confession of Christ. The gift of forgiveness that leads us to confess Christ as Lord is found nowhere but in the church where it is dispensed.

In the catechisms Luther shows the Holy Spirit to be the sanctifying Spirit. The Holy Spirit sanctifies by enlightening and calling us. He sanctifies us by giving to us the blessings of Christ.¹²⁹ Thus sanctification embraces my whole person and everything I do—who I am before God and my actions toward others. With this theme Luther unites what may appear to be five disparate items mentioned at the end of the Apostles’ Creed: the Holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. The Spirit sanctifies us by gathering us into the church. In this church he sanctifies us daily through the forgiveness of sins, and finally through the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit will have important implications for our understanding of the Spirit’s work within us and the use of our talents, energies, and interests. In the First Article we confess God as Creator. In the Third Article we confess him as the one who sanctifies and recreates. This has ramifications both for our individuality and for our life together in community.

1. Diversity in Unity: Many Members and Gifts

¹²⁸ Wingren, *Creation and Law*, 96.

¹²⁹ Although the term *sanctification* may be used to embrace (1) justification and the subsequent inner transformation of the Christian or (2) only the moral transformation, we should also note that it may also be used, as Luther frequently uses it in the Large Catechism, as (3) synonymous with justification.

The individuality of each believer is neither destroyed nor suppressed within the body of Christ, the church. The Third Article neither disparages or diminishes the importance of the gifts of creation nor ignores their use within the church. The unity that we have in Christ does not destroy the integrity and diversity of God’s creation. Forgiveness abolishes the curse of sin and ultimately destroys the power of sin, but it does not destroy the creature. The Spirit restores and purifies what is creaturely, he does not replace it. God has worked in and through creation to give, sustain, and protect life. He has entered our history to rescue us by means of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. He also sanctifies us through creaturely means—water, words, bread, and wine. In the same way God continues to make use of his creation (including our creaturely gifts and activities) as the means through which he desires to work—not only in the First Article, but in the Third Article as well. God not only uses creaturely gifts for the extension of life in the world but he also brings them into the service of the Gospel. When the Spirit works through a believer for ministry, he “works with that person’s God-given individuality and identity.”¹³⁰ The image of the body presupposes a variety of members with different functions: eyes, ears, hands, feet, and so on. God created it this way. Paul reinforces this thought when he stresses that God has “arranged” the members in the body and “composed” its parts (1 Cor. 12:18, 24).

As the forgiveness of sins and Baptism restore us to our proper place before God and place us under one head, Jesus Christ, they also free and recreate us to live as God intended. As the forgiveness of sins restores us to our proper standing before God, it begins to reclaim all of our gifts and talents for their proper use and purpose in God’s service. Since the Spirit’s work is to sanctify, it seems reasonable to suggest that “spiritual gifts” are those gifts that have been “sanctified” by the Holy Spirit. In other words, these are the gifts that have been purified by the Spirit, stripped of the encumbrance of sin, and are now restored for their proper use. The Spirit purifies and sanctifies not only our persons, but also our works (so that every work in the Spirit is a spiritual work) and our tasks (so that our gifts of creation become gifts of the Spirit). As the Spirit sanctifies us and sets us apart for God’s purposes, so also the Spirit sanctifies all we have and all we do. The impact of sanctification on our creaturely gifts may be viewed from at least three perspectives.

First, it would be expected that as a person is brought to faith, he or she does not leave behind the creaturely gifts and set them outside the door of the church. Instead, individuals bring with them into the church all of the gifts and talents that God gave them at their creation so that they might place these gifts into the service of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit “works *through* persons, not instead of them.”¹³¹ We use the same voice, hands, and mind in the service of the Gospel that we use in our vocations. Many who enter the church now use within the church those talents that they use elsewhere in the service of creation and community. A person who works as an accountant during the week may well use the gifts that accompany this role by serving as the business manager of a congregation. A person who sings professionally may well serve as a choir director or soloist within the church. Those who are leaders within the various professions or within the community are likely candidates for congregational leadership positions. In each of these cases, there is a certain degree of continuity between serving God’s community in society and serving the redeemed community of the saints. The gifts used in our occupations (God’s creation) are now also used within the body of Christ (God’s new creation)

¹³⁰ Hunt, 51.

¹³¹ Ibid.

without leaving the other behind. Instead of being pressed into the service of Satan, these gifts are now placed into the service of God.

Second, it may well happen that prior to becoming a Christian and being brought into the church, an individual's creaturely gifts have been latent or lying dormant for any number of reasons. Perhaps some Christians have never had the opportunity to exercise these gifts or have lacked the courage and confidence to embark upon certain tasks out of a fear of failure. This, of course, pleases Satan, who seeks to suppress and inhibit creation from working as God intended it to work, thereby thwarting the generous giving of God through creation.

When people become members of the body of Christ, which has been recreated for good works, they should not be surprised that gifts that have lain dormant now blossom or "catch fire" by the power of the Spirit as confessed in the third Article. Baptism commits the person to a daily drowning and rising through confession and absolution, so that the old covetous self is killed and the new Adam comes forth to use God's gifts for the purpose that he gave them. It will happen, then, that "the congregation's life will reflect the flowering of the individual originality of its members because what was one's own and private is being subdued and put to death."¹³²

The gifts of a Christian may blossom in a number of ways. Gifts of which that person was unaware may come alive and be discovered. "Without question, since believers are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17), the Spirit often releases abilities and graces that surprise even the persons themselves."¹³³ Or, a Christian may suddenly find opportunity to use gifts where opportunity was lacking before. "In service we now become what in our innermost being we already are. Apart from the body of Christ our gifts would lie unused and would have no meaning."¹³⁴ And, to his or her delight, a Christian may even use such gifts and talents with a new Spirit-empowered motivation and desire.

The value of this perspective is its recognition that God ordinarily works through means. The gifts that each person possesses were given by God through the agency of others. They were discovered and developed through the assistance of parents, teachers, and schools. This highlights the continuity of God's work in creation and sanctification, with the former finding fulfillment in the latter. God restores, reclaims, and recreates that which he has already given. And he does so through creaturely means.

Finally, what is said above is not intended to suggest that God could not or has not given exceptional and supernatural gifts to his servants as needed for special tasks. The New Testament explicitly mentions miraculous powers, gifts of healings, and tongues. It seems clear, however, that these are extraordinary gifts, perhaps given for extraordinary circumstances. Unequivocal statements about when they are given and how they are given or discovered cannot be made with any degree of confidence. It seems that such gifts are given according to the needs of God's people. As a result, it may well be that they are neither given nor discovered until one is in such a situation as to require the aid of a particular gift. This would apply especially to such gifts as a courageous faith, martyrdom, and an unwavering hope in a time of severe testing (1 Cor. 12:11). Other gifts (such as the gift of apostles) may well cease to exist after they have fulfilled their purpose.

2. Unity in Diversity: One Body

¹³² Gustaf Wingren, *Credo: The Christian View of Faith and Life*, trans. Edgar M. Carlson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 152.

¹³³ Hunt, 51.

¹³⁴ Wingren, *Credo*, 153.

In addition to recognizing their individuality and the distinctiveness of their gifts according to the First and Third Articles, the many members of the church—with their diverse gifts and talents—must also function together as one body for the sake of one another within the body. Apart from the body the individual members are useless and the community becomes dysfunctional. What good is a hand cut off from the body or an eye plucked out? Even society in general suffers greatly when it fails to recognize the need for individuals to work together for the “common good.” Instead of using creation’s good for the benefit of all, people hoard and covet—with the result that the community itself is seriously fractured and dislocated. The body of Christ, as his new creation, is to manifest itself before the world as the human community that God intended it to be and to work together as it was intended to do (see Eph. 3:10). Instead of being used for selfish purposes, God’s gifts are now used for the benefit of the community, that is, the church.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul stresses: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (v. 13). He accents the theme of unity twice: “By one Spirit . . . into one body.” There is one Baptism, one Lord, one church. What had been pulled apart by sin is pulled together by Christ. We were *all* made *one* body. As we enter the one body, we enter it with all that we are and all that makes us the unique persons we are. All that we possess—our talents, our bodies, our skills, our interests, our differences—enter into the service of the one body. All individuals and all gifts are now used for the purpose and benefit of that body. Here we discover who we are and what we were created to be.

The biblical image of the church as a body has always been a crucial one for Lutheran theology. Nowhere is its nature and importance better expressed than in the Large Catechism.

I believe that there is on earth a little holy flock or community of pure saints under one head, Christ. It is called together by the Holy Spirit in one faith, mind, and understanding. It possesses a variety of gifts, yet is united in love without sect or schism. Of this community I also am a part and member, a participant and co-partner in all the blessings it possesses.¹³⁵

As Paul Althaus has noted, “Luther never thinks of the gathering together of the many in the unity of the community without understanding the unity in terms of membership in the body and thus as sharing with one another.”¹³⁶ For a number of reasons, Luther’s statement is important for what it says about the nature of the church and the way in which the two aspects of fellowship correspond to faith and love.¹³⁷

First, Luther affirms here that every Christian possesses in common with others all the benefits and blessings of Christ. There is one Baptism, one Lord, and one Spirit. All have equally placed their sins on Christ and all alike have received his blessings and benefits. Although the Small Catechism highlights individuality when it stresses that the Spirit has “called me . . . enlightened me . . . sanctified and preserved me,” it immediately goes on to emphasize that what took place with respect to each Christian is not unique to any of them. The very gifts that are given to each as a result of Christ’s work apply to everyone within the church. And thus we have the crucial transition, “just as” he has called, gathered, enlightened, and kept the whole

¹³⁵ LC II, 51-52.

¹³⁶ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 297.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 294-97.

Christian church on earth in Jesus Christ. The Spirit has worked in me in the same way that he has worked in the whole Christian church in all places and at all times. This common activity, together with the common gifts, brings us together in one church, one body. These gifts and activities are what we hold “in common”—the very meaning of *koinonia* (fellowship) in the New Testament. Each has been called by the same Gospel and enlightened with the same gifts. Each has richly and daily received the same forgiveness of sins. The gift of forgiveness, rather than distinguishing us from one another, places us on equal footing in God’s sight. Paul’s message to the Corinthians is that in spite of our possessing different gifts, we receive them all from one and the same giver.

Second, Luther’s words teach us that all Christians not only share the common confession of Christ, but each person shares all that he or she has with the other members of the body. The church manifests what we were created to be even now while we await its final fulfillment:

I believe that in this congregation, or Church, all things are common, that everyone’s possessions belong to the others and that no one has anything of his own; therefore, all the prayers and good works of the whole congregation must help, assist and strengthen me and every believer at all times, in life and death, and thus each bear the other’s burden, as St. Paul teaches.¹³⁸

Luther understands *communio* (congregation, community) “as the sharing of goods among the believers, the giving and receiving of the members to and from each other, the becoming one with all others, and working for one another.”¹³⁹ “Every gift, every power, all health, peace, and purity belong to love and to the brethren.”¹⁴⁰ In this way the church begins to embody the re-creation of humankind before God.

The unity of the body embraces a sharing of much more than simply gifts defined as “abilities.” It encompasses all goods, possessions, burdens, works of the members. Althaus notes three elements: “First, the sacrifice of temporal possessions and physical service to men; second, service through doctrine, consolation, and intercession;” and third, “bearing the weakness of the brother and the sharing of those to whom God has been gracious and protected with sinners.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, Scripture’s emphasis on the use of gifts is not so much a call to “pull together” in a common direction or to strive toward a common goal (such as outreach).¹⁴² Rather, Scripture stresses the importance of using the gifts we have received for the benefit of other members within the body. Within the body there is a mutuality of sharing that does not exist between those who are in the body and those who are not. This means not only that we care for each other within the context of the church and its various activities, but that we continually show concern for each other wherever we find ourselves.

D. The Place of Spiritual Gift Inventories

¹³⁸ “A Brief Explanation of the Creed” (1520), *Works of Martin Luther*, vol. 2, trans. C. M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1916), 373.

¹³⁹ Althaus, 296. For a survey of the historical development in Luther’s terminology and understanding of the church, see Thomas M. Winger, “*Communio Sanctorum: Gemeine or Gemeinschaft?*” in *Concordia Student Journal* 15 (Easter 1992): 10-19.

¹⁴⁰ Althaus, 308.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 308-9.

¹⁴² This is not to suggest that these factors are excluded or unimportant, but simply that they are not mentioned or dealt with as the issue under discussion.

One of the questions raised by the use of spiritual gift inventories concerns the need for people to know how and where they fit within the life and activities of church. These tools are intended to assist people in discovering their gifts so that they might find where they may be of greatest service to the body of Christ. In undertaking this worthwhile endeavor, the application of the First and Third Articles of the Creed provides a framework for formulating an appropriate answer.

First of all, it would seem that spiritual gift inventories need not be totally rejected. They may well have a place and a role to play. We would, however, hesitate to call them “spiritual gift” inventories. They might be helpful in identifying and developing our creaturely gifts so that we may better serve God wherever we happen to find ourselves. The methods of identifying spiritual gifts in the inventories currently in use are really not developed out of any biblical principles or Bible passages. Although spiritual gift inventories purport to help a Christian discover his or her “spiritual gifts,” there would seem to be nothing particularly “spiritual” or distinctively Christian about the steps used to discover these gifts. If anything, they lie in the realm of what we usually call “common sense.”

Consider the steps that are often recommended to discover a Christian’s gifts: (1) explore the possibilities; (2) experiment with as many different gifts as possible; (3) examine your feelings; (4) evaluate its effectiveness, that is, look for things to happen; and (5) expect confirmation from others. These differ little from the considerations that many people, Christian and non-Christian, take into account in making all kinds of decisions in life (e.g., the type of exercise that may be best for them, which career they might like to enter, or the kind of community service they might like to be involved in). In each case people tend to explore the possibilities by seeing what the options are and what they might be good at or enjoy. Very often we do not know what is best for us or even what we like until we try a variety of activities. If we are interested in something, that often leads us to work harder at it and thus to become better at it. At the same time, we may also ask how many of us want to continue doing something if we are not good at it or if our work does not prove to be effective. In some instances, success and increased proficiency leads someone to enjoy what they are doing. Again, it is not distinctively Christian to look for “confirmation” of this. Throughout life our parents, pastors, teachers, and friends all help us to identify our place within the world by affirming those areas in which we excel. Often someone says, “You are really good at that. You should pursue it.” Conversely, these same people may also point out those areas where we lack talent or ability.

If greater accuracy is desired for the discovery of talents and interests than is provided by these “common sense” steps, the development of some sort of inventory might well be helpful. Such an inventory, however, should adhere to the rigorous scientific standards to which other instruments of this type are subjected. In fact, there exists a special discipline for “creating and evaluating assessment devices, known as psychometrics.”¹⁴³ It tests for both “construct validity” and “criterion-related validity.” The former refers to “the extent to which a test measures some relatively abstract trait or ability.”¹⁴⁴ It looks for a demonstrable correlation between the questions asked and the ability they claim to measure. The latter measures “the extent to which scores predict the presence of the object of measurement.”¹⁴⁵ It explores the connection between the statements or questions in the inventory and ability of those statements to identify the gift in

¹⁴³ Schaibley, 434.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

question. Another requirement is reliability. This is the extent to which the test is consistent in measuring what it measures. Finally, such instruments should provide for “standardized scoring” in order to give meaningful results.¹⁴⁶

Second, to see these tools as inventories of the Spirit’s work within may also create unnecessary theological problems. Not the least of these is that it can lead to a confusion of the two realms in which God works. The questions in many inventories seem to make little if any provision for assessing the difference between natural gifts and spiritual gifts. Indeed, many of the questions could easily be answered by non-Christians in a way that would lead to the conclusion that they, too, possess *spiritual gifts*! For example:

I have received excellent grades in school.

I enjoy providing solutions to difficult problems in life.

It seems easy to learn difficult truths.

It seems that people generally follow my advice.

I have a strong sense of confidence in my solutions to problems.

While these statements are said to help identify “spiritual gifts” such as prophecy, knowledge, administration, and leadership, there seems to be no difference between these characteristics and those that would indicate the presence of “only” natural talents. In the case of the Personal Renewal Study, a person’s spiritual condition is not a factor in 27 out of 60 (45%) statements.¹⁴⁷

One of the dangers that results from confusing the two realms in the manner discussed above is that attention and focus may be transferred from the Spirit’s working through the means of grace to the Spirit’s working directly upon our hearts. Inventories then become tools by which we attempt to assess the effects, extent, and nature of the Spirit’s work.

The question might also be asked whether or not the inventories suggest a radically different conception of the Holy Spirit—one in which the Spirit is portrayed as the organizer of the church rather than the one who creates the church through the gifts of Word and sacrament. Does the use of inventories encourage people to look internally (to their own experience and feelings) for evidence of their gifts, rather than outside themselves to the external Word of God? This raises additional questions, such as the following: When are the gifts given? At conversion? At Baptism? By what means are the gifts given? With the forgiveness of sins? With the Sacrament of the Altar?

Finally, it appears that the use of spiritual gift inventories has grown out of a particular ecclesiology. This observation has several implications. First, the use of such inventories runs the risk of shifting the attention away from the means of grace to the particular gifts or abilities of people as the key to the growth of the church. Gifts are seen as the key to organizing people for the growth of the church. Not only is emphasis placed on the gifts and organization of the laity for the growth of the church, but the task of the office of the ministry (where it is mentioned) as equipping (i.e., mobilizing, organizing, administering) the laity is easily emphasized more than the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel and administering the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 435.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 433.

sacraments. In fact, the gift inventories as such do not require a pastor to proclaim the Gospel and administer the sacraments. All they require, according to Wagner, is a “bookkeeper.”¹⁴⁸

The interest in spiritual gifts and the development of spiritual gift inventories have brought much needed attention to neglected areas of the church’s life and theology. And yet the help that such inventories promise to provide often carries with it certain pastoral and theological dangers. Fortunately, the Lutheran heritage provides a number of rich theological resources that can be drawn upon not only to address the particular issues raised by spiritual gift inventories, but wider issues related to sanctification and Christian piety. These resources include the Lutheran teaching of vocation, which helps us to see how we can joyfully receive and fully use the gifts of both the First and Third Articles, and thus live in both articles simultaneously.

Conclusion

Christians live under the twofold rule of God as they carry out their lives in the First and Third Articles. As creatures who still live on earth awaiting the eschatological fulfillment of salvation, they live under God’s rule in creation. As those who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ, they live under God’s rule of grace and re-creation in the church. Although these two realms must be distinguished, they cannot be separated as if there were no relation or interaction between them. They cannot be compartmentalized, as if we live one way in the realm of creation and another way in the realm of grace, or as if one realm were of less value than the other. Nor can the gifts be separated as if the gifts of the realm of creation have no place or are unrelated to the gifts of the realm of grace.

One of the theological concerns that arises in connection with the use of spiritual gift inventories is the question of whether such use gives witness to a separation of the two realms, with the First Article being subordinated to the Third Article. In other words, the question might be asked, “Has a secularization taken place so that only one of the realms is recognized as divine while the other is seen as profane?” Both realms and both articles belong to God. Both are the work of God and are bound together through the person and work of Christ. They may not be separated from one another nor may one be subordinated to the other. Instead, a mutual interaction exists between them, so that each informs and shapes the other.

In a number of crucial respects, the First Article and the doctrine of creation are basic and foundational for the Second and Third Articles. The understanding of the church’s mission will no doubt be distorted apart from the universal perspective of God’s work that is provided by the doctrine of creation.¹⁴⁹ Where would our understanding of the incarnation and means of grace be apart from the First Article? At a time when many “think that God is only related to religion and spiritual life,”¹⁵⁰ the First Article bids us to broaden our perspective on God’s activity. It reminds us that God continues to carry out his creative activity through the structures and orders

¹⁴⁸ Wagner describes as “exceedingly effective” the evangelism method of a congregation which “believes so much in body life that they refuse to hire pastors for their churches. They believe that the Holy Spirit provides each church with all the gifts needed for healthy church life, and that when members are properly using their gifts, a professional minister is simply excess baggage. The elders and the deacons do the preaching. The only man the church hires is the bookkeeper; the rest of the work is done by the members themselves.” *What Are We Missing?* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Creation House, 1973), 81. Quoted in *Evangelism and Church Growth*, 43, fn. 86.

¹⁴⁹ Terence Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Interpretation* 45 (October 1991): 354-65.

¹⁵⁰ Marc Kolden, “Vocation, Work, and Identity and the Church’s Mission,” *Word and World* 9 (Fall 1989): 368.

of this world. In and through these structures—which include the needs of our neighbor—God calls us to serve him. Within these settings we each have a role and a place to live as a co-worker with God. Luther’s frequent exhortations to remain in our stations (whether they are high or low in power and prestige) and to continue in our individual vocations are less calls to maintain the *status quo* in our lives than they are reminders to continue to function as God’s instruments of creation. Into these situations of daily life the Gospel enters and is proclaimed. As Marc Kolden has observed, “A notion of vocation gives concreteness to our life of faith and anchors us in the work and will of God. And as it empties us through service to others we are opened to live by faith alone. Vocation thus makes room for Christ, so that he may be all in all.”¹⁵¹

If the First Article prepares the way by laying the necessary foundation and providing the context for the Second and Third Articles, the Third Article brings us to Christ and thus to the Father, who revealed the depth of his love for us in Christ. As a result the work of the Spirit as confessed in the Third Article ultimately leads us to recognize the Creator as our gracious heavenly Father and thus to receive all of creation as an unmerited gift from God (or as in the Small Catechism’s explanation to the First Article: “without any merit or worthiness in me”).¹⁵² This has at least three implications for the church.

First, regardless of the different gifts and varying degrees in which we have received them, the Spirit leads us to receive them all, great and small, spectacular and unspectacular, as gifts *from God*. Our different vocations, gifts, and talents all have a common source, the Creator of heaven and earth. This is the all-important recognition to which Paul tried to lead the Corinthians. When we recognize that all these gifts come from God, we also realize that God is not concerned about the differences between the gifts but only about the way we use them. In our eyes earthly actions and works vary in glory and importance. In God’s eyes the different works themselves are not what is important. Rather, he looks chiefly for our response to him in our works and vocations. As Luther says, “Therefore it is his will that we also have regard for his command and vocation.”¹⁵³ Luther goes on to say:

So St. Paul writes in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12: The body has many members, but not all members have the same work. So we are many members of one Christian congregation, but not all of us have the same work. Everyone ought to look after his own work, and not that of another; so we should live together in simple obedience, in a harmony of many missions and manifold works.¹⁵⁴

It is by paying attention to our vocations that we become useful members of the whole body of Christ.

Second, the church’s proclamation should “make us aware that each context in life is a means to serve God and is the means by which God calls us to concrete tasks.”¹⁵⁵ As Richard John Neuhaus puts it, “The vocation of the church is to sustain many vocations.”¹⁵⁶ The Third Article sends us back into our daily lives within the First Article so that we may begin to live our

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 371.

¹⁵² LC II, 63-66.

¹⁵³ Quoted in Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 178.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 178-79.

¹⁵⁵ Kolden, 368.

¹⁵⁶ Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992),

lives as God intended his creation to work. As we confess in the Small Catechism, “it is my duty to thank and praise, serve and obey” according to the Ten Commandments. We are free to confess God the Creator as our heavenly Father so that we can devote ourselves to God’s work in our stations and offices, even though these may not look particularly godly or spiritual in comparison with what others have been giving and are doing.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, in the Large Catechism the Creed and Lord’s Prayer are oriented to the Ten Commandments in such a way that the former are given to help us keep the latter.

Third, so final and definitive is the revelation of God’s love in Christ, and so overwhelming the forgiveness of sins, that we are led to confess the goodness of God’s creation and all of our creaturely gifts even when they are hidden from sight, and even when we experience events that would seem to contradict the truth of God’s goodness. Ultimately then, the First Article is as much a confession of faith as the Second and Third Articles. As Edmund Schlink has put it succinctly, it is not “easier to know God’s creation than his redemption. . . . To be asked to believe in the Creator is as offensive as to believe in the cross of Christ.”¹⁵⁸ This was a radical, counter-cultural confession even in the early church. The doctrine of the incarnation compelled the church to confess the goodness of creation. The Father of Jesus Christ proved to be the Creator of the world, with the result that creation was valued highly over against devaluations of it (e.g., Gnosticism). God created the world out of nothing and did not simply impose order on matter that was intrinsically chaotic (against various Greek philosophies such as Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Platonism).¹⁵⁹ This view of creation linked the Old and New Testaments together (against Marcionism) so that the Old Testament, not Greek philosophy, provided the theological framework for the New Testament.

The affirmation of the First Article as an article of faith manifests itself also in Luther’s theology of the cross, which entails trusting in God’s gracious promises even in the midst of human deprivation, suffering, and death. Luther asks, “If you do not have as much as the mayor, do you not rather have God the Creator of heaven and earth, Christ and prayer? Yes, the emperor does not have more.”¹⁶⁰ To confess that God is our good Creator “in the midst of our own death and corruption or in the midst of those who hate and abuse us is nothing other and different than to believe that in the crucified sinner God is creating *ex nihilo* [out of nothing] by giving life to the unworthy and those without merit.”¹⁶¹

We have the restoration of creation and consummation of salvation both now and not yet. They are ours even now by faith, even though we may not yet see them or experience them. We have these gifts in hope. This conviction is expressed well in the closing verses of Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like hinds’ feet, he makes me tread upon my high places (3:17-19).

¹⁵⁷ Kolden, 370.

¹⁵⁸ Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, trans. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J. A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 59.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London: SCM Press, 1991), 16-32 for a helpful account of the radical nature of the church’s confession of creation.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Wingren, *Luther on Vocation*, 130.

¹⁶¹ Weinrich, 14-15.

While this restoration and consummation of which the prophet speaks have not been fully realized in our lives, we will still rejoice. God is the God who clothes, feeds, and gives us able bodies, both now and not yet.¹⁶² All the benefits of the restored creation and of the consummated final salvation are to be found in Christ. These benefits are ours now through Baptism and in the holiness of faith, and they will be ours fully and for all to see in the resurrection of the body. Paul brings all of these themes together in his letter to the Colossians, and at the center is Jesus Christ:

For in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. . . . When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Col. 1:16-20; 3:4).

¹⁶² The hymn, “See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph” looks ahead with the same anticipation:

Thou hast raised our human nature On the clouds to God’s right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places, There with Thee in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne.
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension, We by faith behold our own.

(The Lutheran Hymnal 218:5)

