The Holy Spirit, Affectivity, and the Experience of Grace

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My paper today is on the theological relationship between salvation and religious experience, especially emotional experience. My overarching question is whether the work of the Spirit in bringing about salvation for human beings can be described as an 'experience' or sequence of experiences. Can we be 'saved' – reconciled with God in Christ in some sense – without somehow experiencing that salvation? In other words, what if any are the subjective correlates of reconciliation with God? What does salvation feel like?

In asking these questions, I am following a path blazed in part by Karl Rahner. In two significant essays on religious experience, Rahner observed that in neo-scholastic theology it was far easier to talk about the salvific effects of grace from the perspective of what he called the realm of 'purely ontological reality' than it was to talk about the experience of grace in the more concrete and historical 'realm of human consciousness'.[1] He observed that we seem to know a great deal about what grace 'does' to the soul and before God, but very little about what it does to the embodied human being in time, and argued that this gap represents a significant problem. Rahner summarized his point with a question: 'Have we ever actually experienced grace?'[2]

Several quick caveats before I proceed. First, one important way of addressing these sorts of questions would be to start with a kind of phenomenology of the varieties of conversion experience – varieties both dramatic and mundane, sudden and slow-

[1] Rahner, 'Religious Enthusiasm and the Experience of Grace' in *Theological Investigations* XVI, p. 37, pp. 35-51.
[2] Rahner, 'Reflections on the Experience of Grace' in *Theological Investigations* III, p. 86, pp. 86-90. I am grateful to Matt Ashley for pointing me to these two essays.

burning, with many contextual variations.[3] This is not what I am after today. My question today, rather, is the narrower and more fundamental one of whether there is any consistent connection between salvation and experience whatsoever. The second caveat is that I am well aware of the many complexities involved in the question of what 'experience' is. Given time constraints, my focus here will be on certain kinds of emotion that theologians often associate with the experience of salvation, rather than on experience more broadly. Finally, lurking behind the problem I am seeking to correct is a whole narrative of how the category of 'experience' has become problematic in contemporary theology; if you want to know how I would tell that particular story, you will have to wait for the book from which this paper is drawn.[4]

In what follows I will make three main arguments: first, that because salvation involves the work of the Holy Spirit, it is therefore something that we might expect to correlate with subjective experience or experiences in some way; second, that, as in Rahner's day, many contemporary soteriologies follow a problematic strategy of avoiding the question of 'experience' by relying instead on primarily ontological ways of describing the effects of salvation on human beings; and third, that attention to certain pre-modern and early-modern sources indicates that one useful way of integrating ontological and experiential dimensions of salvation is through attentiveness to the affective effects associated with particular soteriologies.

The Spirit, the Presence of God

To a significant degree, the question of Christian experience of God is the question of God's presence as it is perceived in human lives in various forms and under various conditions and with various effects. In an influential 1927 essay, Adolf von Harnack observed that Jesus' statement, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matt. 28:20), raises with some urgency the question of *how* exactly Christ is 'with' us. In von Harnack's account, the early church's initial answer to this question was to identify its own experiences of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost as in some sense experiences of the presence of the risen Christ. As von Harnack put it, after Pentecost, 'the activity of God Himself and the activity of Christ were experienced as strictly coinciding' in the form of powerful new experiences of the Spirit.'[5]

The essential accuracy of von Harnack's observation has been borne out by more recent biblical scholarship on the pneumatology of the New Testament, where a series of parallels between the ongoing presence and activity of Christ in the church and experiences of the Holy Spirit have been identified, above all in the thought of St Paul and in the Johannine literature. Jörg Frey, for example, observes a gradual movement

[3] For one useful example of this sort of approach, see Mark Wynn, 'Renewing the Senses: Conversion Experience and the Phenomenology of the Spiritual Life', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 72/3 (2012), pp. 211-26.
[4] Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, in preparation.
[5] Adolf von Harnack, 'Christus praesens - Vicarius Christi,' in *Kleine Schriften zur Alten Kirche: Berliner Akademieschriften 1908-1930* (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1980), p. 772.

in Paul's thought towards the view that 'Christ himself is present and effective in the Spirit and through the Spirit,'[6] and Michael Wolter asserts that 'God's Spirit [for Paul] is the manner and method of the presence of the transcendent God in the world and among human beings.'[7]

Influenced by von Harnack's essay – and perhaps by the New Testament – it has likewise been common in theology in recent decades to understand the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of the mediation of divine 'presence'. Gerhard Sauter, for example, has described the Holy Spirit as 'the bridge-principle of the distant God, the medium of his becoming present'.[8] In a major recent work on Nicene theology, Khaled Anatolios has made a similar argument from an explicitly trinitarian direction: 'The distinct role of the Spirit [is as] the one in whom the outward manifestation of the activity of the Father and the Son *is actualized in relation to us*… [The Spirit is] the point of contact between God and Creation.'[9]

Theologians from a variety of confessional traditions have gone a step further than this by expressing the point about the Spirit's mediation of God's presence in specifically Christological terms. Yves Congar speaks for very many when he states

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[6] Jörg Frey, 'How did the Spirit become a Person?,' in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Jörg Frey and John R. Levison (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 359. Frey cites a variety of evidence. Perhaps most important in Frey's view are the series of 'passages in which the work of the Spirit is set in an analogy with the work of the exalted Christ: God has sent the Spirit (Gal 4:6) as he also sent his Son (Gal 4:4). The Spirit indwells believers (Rom 8:9, 11) as does Christ (Rom 8:10; Gal 2:22). The Spirit intercedes for those who believe and pray in God's realm, as does the exalted Christ (Rom 8:34; cf. 1 John 2:1). It is striking that Paul articulates these parallels in relatively narrow textual units (esp. Gal 4 and Rom 8). This means that the correspondences are not accidental but programmatic.' (p. 359; see also pp. 360-61)

James Dunn, likewise, writes that passages like these in Romans and Galatians show that 'Paul intended to represent the risen Christ as in some sense… becoming identified with the life-giving Spirit of God.' Indeed, in Dunn's view this 'redefinition, or tighter definition, of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ… constitutes one of Paul's most important contributions to biblical theology' (James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (London: T&T Clark, 1998), pp. 262, 433).

[7] Michael Wolter, 'Der heilige Geist bei Paulus,' *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 24(2009), p. 95. See also Eduard Schweizer, '*pneuma, pneumatikos*,' in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. 6*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 433-34, and C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 38-39.

[8] Gerhard Sauter, 'Geist und Freiheit. Geistvorstellungen und die Erwartung des Geistes,' *Evangelische Theologie* 41(1981), p. 215. Following this, Sauter calls the Spirit 'God's becoming present' [*Das Gegenwärtig-Werden Gottes*]. The conception here is influenced by Ernst Käsemann's claim that, especially in the triadic formulas in the New Testament (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Peter 1:2), the Spirit is understood not yet in terms of 'a personality in the sense of the doctrine of the Trinity' but rather as 'the medium of divine activities' [*Medium göttlichen Handelns*] (Ernst Käsemann, 'Geist und Geistesgaben im NT,' in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3. auflage, Band 2*, ed. Kurt Galling (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1958), p. 1272).

[9] Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea*, p. 142. For further claims along these lines, see Pannenberg: 'The Holy Spirit is the medium of the immediacy of individual Christians to God' (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology,* trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), p. 134); Kraus: the Holy Spirit is 'the confronting event of the efficacious presence of God' (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Systematische Theologie im Kontext biblischer Geschichte und Eschatologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983), p. 449); Wiles: 'God as Spirit is God as present' (Maurice Wiles, *Faith and the Mystery of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), p. 123), and Moltmann: the Spirit is 'a mode of [God's] presence in his creation and in human history' (Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation,* trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SMC Press, 1992), p. 11).

that, 'The Spirit makes it possible for us to know, recognize and experience Christ.' Congar continues: 'This is not simply a doctrinal statement. It is an existential reality which comes as a gift and involves us in our lives.'[10] Similar claims can be found in Juengel, in Pannenberg, in Käsemann, in George Hendry, in Geoffrey Lampe, and many others.[11]

There seems, then, to be something of an ecumenical consensus that 'the Spirit' has come to be understood in theology as the best word for the divine agency that mediates the presence of God to human beings by establishing a connection between the risen Christ and the faith and experience of individual Christians. Of course, this is not all can or should be said about the Holy Spirit, but clearly it is a major theme, and on its own terms it is not a particularly controversial one.

But what does all this mean more specifically? What are the particular ways that the Spirit actualizes and communicates God's presence to believers? In search of specificity, one obvious area to explore is that of soteriology.

There is no question that there is a close connection in the New Testament between salvific Christian initiation and experiences of a particular kind of activity of the Spirit. It is clear, for example, in how Peter and the church at Jerusalem interpreted the descent of the Spirit on the Gentiles as proof of their salvation, and in the way that that to be saved in the New Testament is, among other things, to 'receive the Spirit' (John 7:39, 20:22; Acts 2:38, 8:15, 8:17, 8:19, 10:47; Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12; 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 3:2, 14), to be 'born again of water and Spirit' (John 3:5), to become a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19), and to be adopted as God's children through the sending of 'the Spirit of his Son into our hearts' (Gal. 4:4-7; Rom. 8:15-16). For most of the New Testament writers, then, one of the most natural and fundamental ways of talking about Christian salvation is to speak about it in terms of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Given this, it would seem that one area where the presence and work of the Spirit should be made subjectively present to human beings is in salvation. In other words, if, as most pneumatologists affirm, the Spirit brings about subjective experiences of God's presence, and if the Spirit is in a key sense the agent of salvation, then it

[10] Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), p. 37.

[11] Jüngel: 'In the Holy Spirit the absent Christ is present' (Eberhard Jüngel, 'Zur Lehre vom heiligen Geist: Thesen,' in *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments: Einheit und Vielfalt neutestamentlicher Theologie*, ed. Ulrich Luz and Hans Weder (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), p. 108). Pannenberg: 'it is always by the Spirit alone that the spiritual reality of the risen Lord is present to believers' (Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology III*, p. 321). Käsemann: 'Jesus must always become newly present. This happens in the coming of the Paraclete' (Käsemann, 'Geist und Geistesgaben im NT', *RGG3*, p. 1278. Hendry: 'In the experience of the Church the presence of the Holy Spirit was known, not as an alternative to, but as a mode of, the presence of the living Christ' (George S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 41). Lampe: the Spirit is 'the mode in which Christ becomes present to believers' (Lampe, *God as Spirit*, p. 145). Moule: '"Spirit' seems to be by far the most appropriate term for God's presence, through Christ, in the believer' (C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 90).

follows that the Spirit should bring about subjective experiences of salvation. Otherwise we are only talking about the *idea* of God's presence rather than its reality.

The Ontological 'Swerve'

But it is at this point that theologians often seem to lose their nerve. The more widely you read in modern soteriology, the more you notice that it is at this point that theologians either go silent, or else make a kind of strange swerve into non-experiential, usually metaphysical language to describe what the Spirit does in salvation. Just where you expect theologians to talk about what salvation feels like, they revert instead to ontological language about union with Christ, about salvific participation in the Godhead, or about deification and theosis. *Through these strategies, the concrete historical experience of the Christian in the world quietly slides out of view*. Such experience remains present in these cases only implicitly, in that presumably these concepts and images do at some point acquire existential purchase, but how exactly this happens the theologian doesn't say. At best, the 'concrete' side of salvific experience gets swallowed up in the sheer bald fact of participation in Baptism and the Eucharist, regardless of how such participation 'feels'.

A classic instance of what I mean about theologians losing their experiential nerve and making a swerve towards abstract ontological categories can be found in T.F. Torrance's book *The Trinitarian Faith*. In answer to the question, what does the Spirit do in salvation, Torrance makes the following assertion:

> [W]e must regard the activity of the Holy Spirit as actualising our union and communion with God through Christ in the actual structure of our human, personal and social being.[12]

On its own terms, there is little to object to in this claim. Torrance is expressing a theologically traditional, scripturally-warranted view of the Spirit's salvific work in unifying believers with Christ, and then asserting that this union will have concrete implications in their lives. The problem, rather, is the fact that Torrance then stops short of specifying what such changes to the 'actual structure of our human, personal and social being' might look like *in practice*. Taken in isolation, language about the 'actualising' of changes in the 'structure' of our 'being' is so vague that it could signify virtually anything: what is being changed could be our affections and desires, our ethical conceptions, habits and virtues, a general sense of existential telos, deep psychological structures that affect how we engage in relationships with others – the possibilities are almost endless.

Viewed from the perspective of subjective experience rather than theological 'correctness', the sum of Torrance's claim is the banal and almost contentless

[12] Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (London: T&T Clark, 1997), p. 9.

assertion that union with Christ will entail deep unspecified changes in our 'being'. In its lack of specificity, it risks giving theological cover to all sorts of projection – we can take anything we like and call it a form of 'actualising our union and communion with God'.

A second example of an ontological 'swerve' can be found in Kathryn Tanner's short systematics, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, where Tanner makes the following claim about the connection between soteriology and sacramental participation:

> Our union with Christ must be nurtured through the workings of the Spirit. Baptized… into Christ, a struggle to shore up our oneness with him ensues; the character and quality of our union with Christ must be bettered, heightened from weak union to strong, for example, through the repeated performance of the Eucharist in the power of the Spirit.[13]

As with Torrance, what we have here is a series of claims and concepts that on the face of it are difficult to argue with, but which in fact are so underspecified and abstracted from experience that they in no way answer the basic pneumatological question of how the Spirit makes salvation real to us other than through a blind assertion that 'somehow this happens in the sacraments'.

For example, what does it actually mean for 'the character and quality of our union with Christ' to 'be bettered, heightened from weak to strong'? Does this 'bettering' manifest primarily affectively, in our feelings, or cognitively, in the way we think, or relationally, in the character of our relationships to others, or what? How does participating in the Eucharist actually change us in ways that might be observable in the world over time? And if such changes are never in fact observable – if they only take place in what Rahner calls the 'realm of pure ontology' – then has any change actually taken place at all?

There may well be robust answers to these questions, but we look for them in vain either here or in Tanner's more extended discussion in *Christ the Key*. Tanner never draws any conclusions that could clearly map onto concrete experiences beyond general assertions about sacramental participation,[14] and in *Christ the Key* she expresses strong reservations about the value of thinking of the changes involved in sanctification in terms of what she calls its 'psychological character'.[15]

My point here is to draw attention to a widely used register of theological speech that relies on abstract ontological language that sounds theologically 'correct' but which

[13] Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 55-56.
[14] See Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 198-200.
[15] Tanner acknowledges that dispositions like faith and love do have, or at any rate can have, 'psychological' effects like 'gratitude for what God has done' and 'the desire to act in God's service', but immediately argues that their real significance lies not here but rather in their status as 'empty receptacles' for an ontological attachment to Christ that 'comes to them from without'. See Tanner, *Christ the Key*, pp. 94-95.

serves in practice to obfuscate the question of how doctrines actually come to have experiential impact in human lives. In my view, general statements about the Spirit 'bettering' our union with Christ through the Eucharist, or 'actualizing' changes in our 'being' through participation in the Godhead need to be supplemented with some kind of theological attempt to show how such abstraction actually relates to the lives of real people in time. Otherwise, the Holy Spirit – theoretically the agent of this saving and sanctifying union with Christ – is reduced to a generic divine power – banal, clinical, dehistoricized. And our ontological statements risk becoming mere theological words, a register of theological speech that gives the illusion of having said what needs to be said but is unable to address fundamental questions about the plausibility and practical meaning of theological claims, and which is seriously vulnerable to projection.

Salvation and Emotion

So what alternative do I propose? Well, theologians have not always been so worried about the dangers involved in identifying clear connections between salvation and certain kinds of experiences. We might start by taking our cue from older theological traditions from an age before Barth injected modern theology with intense anxiety about religious experience, and before worries about scientific reductionism made us so nervous about identifying the work of the Spirit with concrete events or experiences in the world.

Take, for example St Paul's remarkable appeal to what we might call the phenomenology of the Galatians' initial experiences of the Spirit in support of his conclusion that salvation is through belief rather than through law observance: 'Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard?... Did you experience so much for nothing?' (Gal. 3:2, 4). Here the character of a specific historical experience or set of experiences provides direct evidence, in Paul's view, for how salvation *coram deo* actually functions; certainly for Paul, experiential and ontological realities have not yet become disentangled.[16]

An excellent further example is from a few centuries later, from Didymus the Blind's treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. Over the course of his famous proof of the divinity of the Spirit, Didymus argues that you cannot be saved unless you have received the Holy Spirit, and that this saving presence of the Spirit consists not least in new affective experiences: 'hope', 'joy and peace', 'undisturbed, peaceful thoughts', and 'minds joyful and calmed from every storm of the passions'.[17] According to Didymus' argument, this Christian joy and calm is not just some side-effect of salvation; rather,

[16] Many other examples could be given of Paul's willingness to describe apparently similar works of the Spirit sometimes in ontological terms and sometimes in affectives terms (see, e.g., 2 Cor. 3:18, 'And all of us… are being transformed into the same image [of the Lord] from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit' vs. Galatians 5:22, where the fruit of the Spirit include concrete affections like love, joy, and peace).
[17] Didymus, 'On the Holy Spirit' in *Works on the Spirit: Athanasius the Great and Didymus the Blind* (St Vladimir's Seminary Press), p. 157.

to experience such things is part of what actually constitutes salvific participation in the Godhead through the presence of the Spirit in us.

In a very different era, the 18th century revivalist preacher George Whitefield argued in a similar way that the nature of the saving presence of the Spirit is such that it is always *felt* or 'experienced' in a set of significant changes in our desires and affections. As he memorably put it, 'To Talk of… having the Spirit of God without feeling it, is really to deny the Thing'.[18] [section shortened for time]

To the modern reader, what is particularly striking in Didymus and Whitefield, and for that matter in Paul, is the easy passage between ontological and affective language. In these cases, the idea that ontological language about being a 'partaker of the divine nature' or about being 'adopted as Sons'[19] through the Spirit must somehow be kept pure and protected from the contamination of the psychological and the historical is completely absent. In all three figures, ontological realities and participations and concrete experiences of particular emotional states are cheerfully blended together into descriptions of a single salvific event.

My favorite example of this approach, however, is that of Lutheran Reformer Philipp Melanchthon, author of the *Augsburg Confession* and *Apology*, and the first theologian to articulate what is known as the forensic, or courtroom, model of the doctrine of justification in its precise and enduring form.

Forensic justification has something of a reputation for being 'cold' and 'abstract' and 'extrinsicist'. As I have argued elsewhere, in Melanchthon's hands this couldn't be further from the case.[20]

In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* Melanchthon describes the classic protestant picture of sinful human beings, coming to be saved through faith in the promise that their sins are remitted on account of Christ.[21] What is interesting for our purposes is the way that Melanchthon focuses so much attention on how this relatively abstract soteriological mechanism actually functions in practice and in experience, through the work of the Holy Spirit: 'in repentance, that is, in terrors, faith consoles and uplifts hearts, it… brings the Holy Spirit that we might then be able… to love God, truly to fear God'. In justification, Melanchthon continues, 'we are not talking about an idle knowledge, such as is also to be found in the devils, but

[18] George Whitefield, 'Is It a Crime for a Believer to Speak of His Having Communications Directly from the Spirit of God?,' in *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening*, ed. David S. Lovejoy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 106. For further references to salvation and sanctification as effecting affective change, see *Sermons of George Whitefield* (Hendrickson Publishers 2009), especially pp. 77, 123, 213, 224, 263, 215. Interestingly, Whitefield identifies the heresy of Antinomianism as precisely the belief that one can be justified without at the same time having these accompanying 'experimental' experiences of the Spirit. See Whitefield, *Sermons*, p. 225.
[19] For this language in Whitefield, see *Sermons*, pp. 261-71.
[20] See Simeon Zahl, 'On the affective salience of doctrines', *Modern Theology* 31/3 (2015).
[21] Book of Concord, ed. Kolb and Wengert (Fortress 2000), *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, p. 127.

about a faith that resists the terrors of conscience and which uplifts and consoles terrified hearts'; indeed, 'We insist that faith justifies and regenerates inasmuch as it frees us from our terrors and produces peace, joy, and new life in our hearts.'[22] Fear, terror, consolation, peace, joy: clearly the saving acquisition of faith for Melanchthon is a deeply experiential, emotional phenomenon.

Importantly – and here I am going beyond what I have said about Melanchthon elsewhere – the consolation provided by faith is not simply a side-effect of salvation for Melanchthon; rather, it is fundamentally interwoven with salvation itself. In Melanchthon's view, saving faith cannot come into existence at all outside of the context of an existential, affective experience of anxiety and fear before God: 'faith… is conceived in the terrors of the conscience that experiences the wrath of God against our sin'[23]; 'faith arises and consoles in the midst of those fears.'[24] In other words, faith represents a key moment, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in a concrete and subjectively recognizable affective sequence of moving from existential terror over sin and death to a new state of consolation, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And as a set of affective experiences, and therefore something irreducibly dependent on human embodiment, the sequence is not just conceptual or metaphorical: it is something that takes place in time, in the actual historical experience of a given individual.

Melanchthon's theology of justification constitutes a sustained attempt to articulate the fundamental unity, in the Spirit, of the saving work of Christ 'before God' and the experiential effects of salvation 'in the world'. To separate the two, in Melanchthon's view, is to turn salvation into an 'idle knowledge' rather than something that can actually happen to a person. In the Melanchthonian picture, the divine courtroom of forensic justification is not 'out there', in heaven, in the Eschaton, or in some other idealized space of the theologically 'real'. Rather, the Spirit's sphere of salvific operation is to be found precisely in the profound entanglement of concepts, desires, practices, and affective states that constitutes the experiences of the embodied Christian soul.

Conclusion

So then, what are we to conclude from all of this? A couple of things, I think.

First, the category of emotion is a very promising one for mediating between what are traditionally thought of as objective and subjective dimensions in soteriology. In particular, as I have begun to indicate here, there does seem to be a relatively durable description of an affective sequence, leading from fear and guilt before God to consolation, joy, peace, and love of God and neighbor, that recurs in the Christian

[22] *Ibid*., pp. 158, 197. See also pp. 137 ('faith… produces peace, joy, and eternal life in the heart') and 140 ('Therefore after we have been justified and reborn by faith, we begin to fear and love God… [and] to love our neighbor').
[23] *Ibid*., 142.
[24] *Ibid*., 130.

tradition and which might mark the basic parameters of affective experience of salvation. There are a lot of caveats here, but if we cannot say at least this much about the experience of salvation then I am not sure we can say anything at all.[25]

The second conclusion to draw is that the very widely held view in contemporary theology that we need a recovery of categories of participation, 'union with Christ', and/or deification as the primary language for understanding Christian salvation needs to be probed. Such language, which we have seen in Torrance and Tanner, tends towards a problematic abstraction and is prone to naïve projection. On its own, without further augmentation, it is unable to do much to bridge the divide between general soteriological claims and the way that doctrines actually function in the world. And if the Holy Spirit is indeed the bridger of such gaps, the actualizer of divine realities in the world, then as a profoundly pneumatological locus soteriology must engage with the question of experience. We cannot hide behind either Barthian anxieties or pious metaphysical generalities. To do so would be to eclipse the Spirit from our soteriology.

If this is right, then it means that we must avoid thinking of theological realities as occupying some idealized space 'out there' somewhere. To be saved 'in God's sight' or to participate salvifically in the Godhead are not finally different realities from the experience of being a Christian in time and of having to do with a living God in the world. In Didymus and Melanchthon's picture, for example, to experience consolation and affective change through the Spirit in our lives *is precisely how we participate in God through the Spirit*. Salvation is not hiding behind the surface, a secret truth of things of which we capture only occasional glimpses during our long slog through the mundane. And the Holy Spirit, who is salvation's power and agent, is either right here, in this world and in time, in all that we do and experience, or it is just another pious word.

[25] The most important caveat is that this point needs to be made in such a way that the fact of the affective sequence is not instrumentalized as a way of proving the validity or otherwise of faith in the case of a given person and thus determining who is a true member of the Church (as it often has been, historically, in Methodism and, in a parallel discussion of Spirit baptism, in many forms of Pentecostalism). In my view the connection between the affective sequence and salvation is a descriptive truth and not a prescriptive truth, and to claim otherwise would be a particular kind of violation of the freedom of the Spirit. But to explicate further what I mean by this requires a particular understanding and application of the Lutheran law-gospel distinction as well as of the freedom of the Spirit for which there is no space here. For a much more extended discussion of this point, see Chapter 6 ('Discernment of the Spirit') in the book from which this paper is drawn.