

# **The Experience of Christ's Real Presence in Faith as a Goal for Lutheran Charismatic Renewal**

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by

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The Charismatic Renewal has already found its place in most of the mainline Churches. As it has spread, it has brought out both enthusiasm and doubt. The evident advantages of non-Christian people linking into Christianity by a charismatic experience have been forgotten while the Charismatic Renewal is under suspicion of being a crypto-Pentecostal movement amongst the mainline Churches. In the beginning of the Charismatic Renewal, only in the Catholic Church did theologians take the responsibility seriously of asking about the theological connotations of the charismatic experience as a natural dimension of Christianity.

In the Lutheran Churches the Charismatic Renewal has been accused of not being Lutheran by origin. The critics have forgotten that the charismatic experience is not an invention of the Pentecostal or Charismatic Renewal, but has its roots both in the New Testament and early Christian tradition. Also, in the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, healing, prophecy and visions were practiced inside monasteries. The Orthodox Church has always focused on the mystical dimension of Christianity, which is perhaps the reason why the Charismatic Renewal has not greatly affected it. The people in the revivalist movements after the Reformation usually experienced some of the phenomena that are recognized today in the Charismatic Renewal. My impression is that the Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewals should be examined more in terms of a continuity of a certain tradition in Church history and not as a newborn in the bosom of 19th century Christianity.

In this presentation I will limit myself only to the Charismatic Renewal in the Lutheran Churches. In my dissertation, I analyzed the Experience of Christ's Presence in Faith in the theology of the Charismatic Renewal<sup>(1)</sup>. My main source was the result of the International Lutheran Charismatic Renewal Leader's consultation from the years 1981-1985, published as *Welcome, Holy Spirit* (WHS)<sup>(2)</sup>. The editor of this document was Larry Christenson and it was published in the year 1987. It contains the 31 Lutheran Charismatic Leader's signatures who took part in these theological consultations. The experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit proved to be a central theme in these texts. It led me to ask about the presence of Christ. My hypothesis was that if the idea of Christ's presence in faith could be found as a key in the theology of this consultation, the theology of the Lutheran Charismatic Leaders' could be argued to be genuinely Lutheran in nature. The theological concept of the Christ-Presence-Motif was chosen as the theme because it has been pointed out to be the core of Luther's theology in the late Finnish Luther Scholars' research.<sup>(3)</sup> The method of research was systematic analysis.

## **1. The charismatic Experience as "an Awareness of God's Presence" or "a union with Christ"**

The experiential element of the Christian faith was focused on throughout the document. The charismatic experience was defined as "an awareness of God's Presence" or "a union with Christ". WHS used both the forensic understanding of the doctrine of righteousness in connection to Formula Concordiae, and Luther's effective interpretation of the doctrine of righteousness to support its own understanding. This means the WHS did not make a difference between the two understandings of righteousness: the forensic declaration of righteousness, as God's favor (favor Dei), and the Christ living in the believer through faith, as God's gift (donum Dei). These two dimensions of the doctrine of righteousness have been eagerly discussed in Lutheran systematic theology. What WHS seems to focus on more is the effective side of the doctrine of righteousness. About justification, WHS states that Christ is already present in justification by faith because the Holy Spirit does not bring him in only for a short visit. In spite of the fact that WHS uses both FC and Luther, which have different perspectives, to justify its Lutheran interpretation, the concept of effective righteousness remains the main interpretation in WHS.

## **2. Cooperation in salvation**

About the concept of cooperation of salvation, WHS proved to accept the idea of cooperation in a Christian's life. This did not mean that salvation would take place by God and humankind working together to reach it. The use of this concept was limited to the stage when the justification by faith had happened already, and was understood as an opportunity to work for neighbors in love. The concept of cooperation presupposes Christ's living presence in the believer, which means that Christ, in fact, is the subject of good works made possible by the Holy Spirit.

## **3. Baptism and Spirit baptism**

A crucial theme to Lutheran charismatic theology was to discuss the rite of Baptism. WHS contained a lot of material about

Baptism. Water baptism was interpreted by the concept of union with Christ as an indispensable part of salvation. The question about receiving the Holy Spirit was answered ambiguously: he is received in baptism, which in itself mediates salvation. But he is also part of the Spirit's strategy to develop a conscious experience about Christ's presence in faith. WHS's Spirit-baptism interpretation proved to be somewhat inconsistent.<sup>(4)</sup> This is due to the fact that the representatives of Lutheran Charismatic Leaders proved to support different Spirit-baptism interpretations. Partly due to this background, WHS uses both concepts of Spirit-Baptism and filling with the Spirit. I was unable to find significant differences between the uses of these concepts; they were used interchangeably. The pneumatological content of the Spirit-baptism proved to be Christological by nature, which connected Spirit-baptism to the Christ-Presence-Motif.

The concept of indwelling of the Spirit proved to be important. WHS describes the concept as follows: "The whole redemptive plan of God comes to reality when the Holy Spirit brings the living, redeeming presence of Christ to indwell the life of the believer". Thus the indwelling of the Spirit is defined christologically as Christ's presence in the believer. The other term used with this, to describe a different type of the Spirit's work, was the outpouring of the Spirit. WHS describes the outpouring of the Spirit as something that prepares believer to witness and serve other people. The use of these two concepts solves the dilemma between the Spirit's two kinds of "comings". The first one takes places in the rite of baptism, and the latter repetitive outpourings may happen whenever the Spirit grants it. The outpouring of the Spirit is needed to reach the goal of Christ's presence in the believer.

#### **4. The Use of Bible**

In this connection I will mention three things. Firstly, the concept of Biblical faith, largely discussed in WHS, proved to be analogical to Luther's sacramentalistic interpretation of the Bible. In Luther's theology, sacramentalistic means that the Word is able to create the reality it talks about. WHS's interpretation of the concept of Biblical faith contains the same. That is confirmed by the fact that WHS always justifies its theology with the Bible. The amount of Bible references in WHS is vast. The goal for this is clear: biblical faith gives birth and preserves the living union with Christ. The union is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, and manifested in personal experience.

WHS also uses the term biblical world view in close connection with biblical faith. It is used for arguing against the naturalistic, positivist and purely immanent interpretation of the world. The possible existence of supernatural realm as part of the natural world is included in this concept. The goal for this view is to realize God's sovereignty and immanent transcendence. This is understandable from the point of view that WHS defends the use of charisms, some of which presuppose the acceptance of a supernatural dimension. The interpretation of the Bible in itself proved to be inconsistent. On one hand, it is traditional; if the doctrine of Word inspiration was not directly promoted, it is not an excluded alternative; it appeared in one direct quotation. On the other hand, the historical-critical approach was considered essential to understand the Bible in the way it was understood by those who wrote it. The literally interpreted miracles in the Bible were underlined. The interpretation of the Bible paves the way for the use of charisms, some of which require belief in signs and wonders.

It was natural to discuss the relationship between the Word and the Spirit. Traditionally, the Lutheran Church has focused on the Spirit in the Word. The Holy Spirit is bound to the Word to promote Christ as the Savior of the World. WHS seems to focus on the sovereignty of the Word and stress the fact that the Spirit never works against the Word. In WHS, the Spirit's sovereignty is limited by the strategy of the Spirit. WHS clarifies this possible contradiction by explaining that

The Spirit is sovereign: he moves when and where he pleases (Joh.3:8). Whether the Word precedes, coincides with, or occurs subsequent to an action of the Spirit is a matter of his particular determination. Yet it is his settled strategy to act in concert with the Word.

This means that even if the Spirit might be sovereign to exceed the revelation of the Bible, he will not do it, because he is committed to the Word. In principle, this definition differs from, for example, CA's definition "Nam per verbum et sacramenta tamquam per instrumenta donatur spiritus sanctus, qui fidem efficit, ubi et quando visum est Deo, in his qui audiunt evangelium". CA defines the Word and the sacraments as the vehicles of the Spirit who, then, whenever and wherever he pleases, causes faith in those who hear the Word. In a way, WHS focuses on the role of the Spirit as not only the vivifier of the Word and sacrament, but as the one who has been formatting the Scriptures, and leading and guiding the Church when the sacraments become the vehicle of the Spirit. It seems to me that WHS tries to give a wider role to the sovereignty of the Spirit than CA by focusing on the hypothetical possibility of the Spirit affecting "over the Word". However, there are no presented cases of how this would happen. On the contrary, the strategy of the Spirit is to lead people into the understanding of Christ's centrality in salvation, and to reveal and promote faith in Christ. This happens where and whenever the Spirit grants it.

#### **5. Examples of Charisms**

WHS made a distinction between "natural" and "charismatic" gifts. The former applied to an ability to serve the congregation with a gift received by creation. The second were gifts that are received to fill the need of the congregation after the charismatic experience. This distinction is, however, not always clear-cut. We will ask whether the charisms contain the experience of presence of Christ. WHS dealt mostly with three charisms, and I limited my investigation to these three: prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing ministry. I will discuss the Christ-presence-motif connected to the practice of these three charisms separately.

##### **5.1. Prophecy**

Prophecy was defined initially as the heightened awareness of God's presence. It is, thus, defined as personal experience about the transcendent God's presence in a Christian's life. This means that the contents of prophecy are not the primary goal for

prophecy, the relationship between man and God is. In this connection, WHS does not speak directly about Christ's presence. However, through the Trinitarian understanding of God, this cannot be considered to oppose the hypothesis about Christ's presence.

WHS connects prophecy to scripture: "Scripture is the norm for testing all prophecy. The words of prophets are tested in the light of the final revelation in Christ (1 Cor. 12:3; Matt. 7: 15-20; 1 Thess. 5: 20-21; 1 John 4: 1-2)". In this way, prophecy is bound to christological revelation. Prophecy is thus connected to the Christ-Presence-Motif.

Christ was the prophet himself. Christ's person can, thus, be seen as the center of all prophecy. Since Christ is the head of the "body of Christ", the "prophets are a communication link between the head and the members". This argumentation allows no room for prophecy that would be disconnected from Christ-centeredness. Actually, according to WHS, there is no prophecy without Christ's person at the core of it.<sup>(5)</sup>

## 5.2. Speaking in tongues

WHS does not consider tongues to be initial evidence of Spirit-baptism; that would be the traditional Pentecostal interpretation. However, WHS sticks close to Pentecostal interpretation by arguing strongly for xenoglossia [xenolalia], speaking an actual, existing language. WHS also did not accept the idea that the gift of tongues is a general human phenomenon, but believed it to be a specifically unique, Christian one. In these respects, WHS's views are closer to traditional Pentecostal views than to those of, for example, the Catholic charismatic renewal.

WHS considers speaking in tongues as a central part of the Spirit's strategy to unite the believer with Christ. The gift of tongues allows a person to experience Christ's presence. The process of becoming aware of God's presence happens in the glossolalist's consciousness when a person speaks in tongues. The understanding of Christ's presence speaks for an essential unity between God and man. WHS also speaks about "singing in tongues" as a special form of tongues. In it, the individuals of the congregation praise God with improvised singing, which may create a rich harmony. This in itself speaks for the hypothesis of my research: why would Christians praise God, if he was not assumed to be present?

## 5.3. Healing

Healing the sick has to do with the following of Jesus' example. He asked his disciples to join the mission of the gospel both by proclaiming it and healing the sick. Healing is defined in WHS as recovery without natural or medical help. The principle of biblical faith is forwarded again by justifying the need for healing ministry with Jesus's example. WHS makes a distinction between two types of healings: healing connected to salvation, making people whole, and the healing of specific physical and emotional sicknesses. Health is not only considered to be an absence of sickness, but a holistic balance and vital energy for life. That is also connected to Christian salvation in Jesus Christ. He binds the whole charism of healing to the ultimate goal of healing: to experience Christ's healing presence.

WHS also deals with healing as a dimension of the Eucharist. It quotes both church fathers, who called the Eucharist the "medicine of immortality", and Luther, who called it a "medicine of both soul and body". It is astonishing that the theology of Eucharist comes forward in WHS only in this connection. According to WHS, healing ministry may come true in the Eucharist in both salvation and by mediating physical or emotional health.

The third type of healing in WHS is exorcism. It is considered a service of duty of the congregation in cases of satanic possession. It is not called a charism, but because of its use, I have dealt with exorcism in this connection. WHS connects being possessed by a demon to spiritual warfare. It does not build up any demonology or even suggest a certain procedure to perform exorcism. WHS is quite scanty in discussing exorcism. In this respect, WHS is closer to the perspectives of the Catholic charismatic renewal than traditional Pentecostalism. However, WHS wants to deal with demon possession as a factual reality, as it was in Jesus's times. Exorcism brings Christ present in a radically striking way as a result of spiritual warfare over a possessed person. The experience of Christ's presence can thus be considered the aim.

## 6. Conclusion

As we can note, the experience of Christ's presence in faith defines the content of the Lutheran charismatic theology in WHS. The hypothesis of my research about the centrality of the Experience of Christ's Real presence in Faith proves thus to be valid. In spite of its weaknesses and contradictions, WHS proves to be an important and successful piece of work. I will close by stating that the theological consultation of the Lutheran charismatic Leader's have succeeded in founding a credible basis for charismatic Lutheran theology.

### Endnotes

1. The Experience of Christ's Real Presence in Faith. An Analysis on the Christ-Presence-Motif in the Lutheran Charismatic Renewal. Markku Antola. Published in the series of Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 43. Helsinki 1998.

2. Welcome, Holy Spirit. A Study of Charismatic Renewal in the Lutheran Church. Ed. Larry Christenson, Augsburg Publishing House. Minneapolis 1987.

3. For example, Mannermaa, Tuomo: Der im Glauben Gegenwärtige Christus. Lutherisches Verlagshaus: Hannover 1989.

Peura: "Wort, Sakrament und Sein Gottes", in Luther und Ontologie. Das Sein Christi in Glauben als Strukturierendes Prinzip der Theologie Luthers. Hrsg. Von Anja Ghiselli, Kari Kopperi, Rainer Vinke. Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft, 31, pp. 35-69. Helsinki.

4. It was impossible to analyze the reasons for this and a couple of other inconsistencies of the document since I got hold on only one of the several earlier versions (The Strategy of the Spirit, 1985) of WHS. The question whether, for example, German perspective was under represented, remains open. Anyway it is interesting that, when WHS was translated into German, it was partly rewritten by Dieter Müllen. He justified the changes in the new edition by the fact that the situation of the charismatic renewal is totally different in Germany than in U.S.A. I would suggest that there are some theological reasons behind this decision as well. Komm, Heiliger Geist. Malch. Aus dem Amerikanischen übersetzt Von Tanja Demmler und Immanuel Michael. Ed Larry Christenson, Ernst Verlag; Metzinger 1989.

5. Apart from this Christ-centeredness, WHS avoids discussing the value and credibility of the content of prophecy in certain detailed cases. As a curiosity, in the process of writing WHS, Carter Lindberg was asked to contribute a chapter in theme of "The Charismatic Movement and Other Historical Movements". The consultation prayed for guidance from the Spirit to see whether CL's text should be accepted or rejected. Due to the "unclear answer from the Spirit" the text was modified and later excepted from the work. Learning about this I asked whether the consultation functioned according to the guidelines they set for prophecy. If the particular matter has no connection to the salvation in Christ, on what basis should its validity be judged? This example suggests that there is still work to be done in order to define prophecy's position.