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### Holy Spirit

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## Introduction

The Radical Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century form part of the great Protestant Reformation but would be described as “the unwanted, unloved step-child of the mainline reformers, all of whom disavowed responsibility for their unruly offspring’s.”<sup>1</sup> Their radicalism in both doctrines and practices were repudiated by the magisterial reformers like Luther, Zwingli and Calvin and of course the Catholics. They experienced persecution from both Protestants and Catholics alike. The Radicals were perceived as a threat to the established order and while grudging concessions were made to the magisterial reformers by the Catholic establishment, no such concessions were ever extended to the Radicals, not even in places where the mainline reformers were in control. Most of the places, the Radicals lived in Europe, they were treated as unwanted and unwelcome guests.

Their most radical view was concerning the nature of the church. They repudiated the territorial church undergirded by infant baptism, accepted by both Protestant and Catholics. They advocated believer’s church, where adults are converted, instructed and freely join in its membership. The Radicals called for a restitution or reconstitution of the church, which greatly surpassed the magisterial reformers’ call for reformation. The radicals envisaged a return to the primitive godliness of the apostolic church, not just a renovation of the existing order.

The Radical Reformers were not a unified entity, but consisted of many disparate voices, so their theology reflected these differences. The purpose of this paper is to explore their views concerning the Holy Spirit. But even among the differences on this subject, they did shared more things in common than differences. They all agreed on the basic teaching of the nature, personality and role of the Holy Spirit, and the indispensable role of the Spirit in all areas of the Christian life. Their differences perhaps lie in the degree to which believers must be reliant on the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold C. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1995), 1

The Radical Reformers were divided into three major groups. Evangelical Anabaptists, Spiritualists and Evangelical Reformists. Of course these categories are simply an attempt to describe similar traits among a very heterogeneous group of Christians “Despite their many differences, they all wanted to cut back through the accretions of ecclesiastic tradition, through what Balthazar Hubmaier called the mud holes and cesspools of human rogues to the authentic proof of faith and order. Each branch of the Radical Reformation attached itself to be distinctive root.”<sup>2</sup>

The Anabaptists focused on the Bible especially, the New Testament and argued that the church needed more than reformation. It needed restoration to the pristine purity of the apostolic church. The Spiritualists emphasized in the inner work of the Spirit at the expense of external rituals like Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Rationalists appealed to reason as their major criteria, a reason illuminated by the Spirit and confirmed by the Bible.<sup>3</sup>

While the radicals placed more emphasis than Luther on “Scripture Alone”, they went beyond Luther by focusing on reading the letter of the Scripture in the power of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis on the necessity of the Spirit made their movement a more egalitarian movement, because now anyone graced with Holy Spirit would be able to interpret the scripture correctly. “Conversely anyone who lacks the Holy Spirit simply is not fitted to interpret the scriptures correctly”.<sup>4</sup> This insistence on the marriage of the Spirit and the letter “had radical consequences that drove the thin edge of the wedge between the radical and the mainline evangelical reformers,” anti-clerical critique, which was a feature of the mainline reform against the Catholics, would now be used by the radicals<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*. Broadman and Holman Pub, 1988), 254

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 255

<sup>4</sup> Arnold C. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1995), 37.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

Walter Klassen is right when he says “when we speak about the Holy Spirit we deal with something that was at the very heart of their theology. Without their strong belief in the reality of the Holy spirit and his work, their whole position would have been a lifeless legalism and their claim to be a restitution New Testament Christianity would have lacked justification”<sup>6</sup>

The main focus of my discussion will center on the teachings of the Anabaptists on the Holy Spirit since they shared more in common with the magisterial reformers. The centrality of the Holy Spirit in Anabaptist thought is most clearly seen in their covenant theology. This new theology in contrast to the old theology is marked by the gift of the Holy Spirit who now writes the law on the fleshy tables of the believer’s heart.” Riederman comparing the old and new covenant writes that the “old covenant was given to Israel without pouring of the Spirit of grace.” But now he describes the new covenant with “a covenant of grace, the revelation and knowledge of God. This knowledge however, cometh alone from the receiving of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> Hans Denck declares that wherever this covenant is, “the Spirit of Christ comes and ignites the fire of love, which quite consumes and completes the work of Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

#### The Holy Spirit as a Distinct Person and Part of the Triune God

The Anabaptists strongly affirmed the personhood of the Holy Spirit, but their main concern was not the systematic analysis of the nature of the Spirit. They were not interested in formulating a concise theological statement about the Spirit. Conviction was more important than the formulation of correct theological dogma about the Spirit. They were more concerned about the practical workings of the Spirit in the lives of the believer. However, when they did formulate propositional truths about the Spirit it was usually in harmony with classic Christian definition. Although, this was regularly subordinated to the

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Klaassen, Some Anabaptist Views on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35 (1963).130

<sup>7</sup> John Friesen, Ed. Peter Riedeman Hutterite Confession of Faith.(Herald Press, Waterloo Ontario, 1999) 98, 99

<sup>8</sup> Walter Klaassen Some Anabaptist Views on the Doctrine of the Holy spirit, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35.(1963) 135

existential expression.<sup>9</sup> Menno Simons who is credited with reuniting the scattered remnants of the Anabaptists after the disaster at Munster<sup>10</sup>, Germany in 1535 and considered the founder of the Mennonites and one of their notable theologians affirmed the Personhood of the Holy Spirit within the Triune God in the following:

We believe and confess the Holy Ghost to be a true, real, and personal Holy Ghost, as the Fathers called him; and that in a divine fashion, even as the Father is a true Father and the Son a true Son. Which Holy Ghost is a mystery to all mankind, incomprehensible, ineffable, and indescribable (as we have shown above of the Father and the Son); divine with his divine attributes, proceeding from then has Father through the Son, although he ever remains with God and in God and is never separated from the being of the Father and the Son.

And the reason that we confess him to be such a true and real Holy Spirit is because we are brought to this by the Scriptures, for he descended upon Christ at the baptism in the bodily shape of a dove, and appeared unto the apostles as cloven tongues like as of fire; because we are baptized in his name as well as in the name of the Father and of the Son; because the prophets have prophesied through him, performed miracles, had dreams and saw visions; because he is a dispenser of the gifts of God, and that (take note) according to his own will. He moved Zacharias, the son of Barachiah; He moved John the Baptist while yet in his mother's womb, and He said to Simeon, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. The Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Paul. And to Peter, Behold, three men seek thee, He guides us into all truth; he justifies us. He cleanses, sanctifies, reconciles, comforts, reproves, cheers, and assures us. He testifies with our spirit that we are the children of God. This Spirit all they receive who believe on Christ. Paul admonishes us not to grieve him. Whosoever sins against the Spirit, says Christ, unto him it shall not be forgiven. David desired that God might not take from him this Spirit, for all that have not this Spirit are not of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

Further on, Simons reaffirms the work of the Spirit on our behalf and the equality existing within the Trinity: "We believe the Holy Spirit to be the true essential Holy spirit of God, who adorns us with heavenly and divine gifts and through his influence according to the good pleasure of the Father frees us from sin, give boldness, and makes us cheerful, peaceful, pious and holy. And so we believe and confess before God, before his angels, before our brethren and before all the world that there are three names, activities and powers, namely the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (which the fathers called three

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<sup>9</sup> Peter J. Klassen, *The Anabaptist View of the Holy Spirit*. *Mennonite Life* 23, no.1 (January, 1968 ) 27

<sup>10</sup> In 1535, Radicals took over the city of Munster, Germany and attempted to establish their version of the kingdom of God. They were thoroughly defeated and most were massacred. Their dreams of an earthly utopia was mercilessly crushed.

<sup>11</sup> Menno Simons, *The Complete Works of Menno Simons. C1496-1561* Translated from the Dutch by Leonard Verdun and edited by J.C Wenger with a biography by Harold Bender, (Mennonite Printing Press, Scottsdale Penn, 1956. 1983), 495, 496

persons, by which they meant the three, true divine beings) are one incomprehensible, indescribable Almighty, holy, only, Eternal and sovereign God.<sup>12</sup>

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Dirk Philips another noted Anabaptist adds support to the Personhood of the Spirit:

The Holy Ghost is the third name, person, power, and activity in Godhead, of one divine essence with the Father and the Son (Mt. 28:19). He proceeds from the Father through the Son and acted with them in the creation. He is the Spirit of truth, a Comforter of the conscience (1 n. 5:8; Jn. 16:13), and a Dispenser of all spiritual gifts which are poured by God the Father through Jesus Christ into the hearts of believers (1 Cor. 12:11). By him they are enlightened, renewed and sanctified (Tit. 3:6; 1 Cor. 3:11), and become a possession of God (Eph. 1:14) and new creatures in Christ. By him they are kept to everlasting life, and without him no one knows God or believes in Jesus Christ. All good gifts come from the eternal Father through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:16, 17; Jas. 1:17; 1 Cor. 4:7), and are divided to us by the Holy Spirit (Mt. 7:11).<sup>14</sup>

Balthasar Hubmaier, perhaps their most eminent theologian, joins with his contemporaries in his unequivocal support of the Personhood, divinity and equality of the Spirit.

I believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and yet is one with them, very God. He hallows all things and without him nothing is holy. In him I place all my trust that he will teach me all truth, increase my faith, and kindle the fire of love in my heart by his holy inspiration that my heart may burn with true, unfeigned and Christian love toward God and my neighbors. This I beg of you with all my soul, my God, my Lord, my-Comforter.<sup>15</sup>

Pilgram Marpeck another important Anabaptist theologian lends his voice with the others in his strong Trinitarian concept of God. William R. Estep in his notable work on the Anabaptists, points out that Marpeck placed more emphasis in the person and work of the Holy Spirit than Hubmaier. Quoting Marpeck, he writes of the Spirit: "We believe there is one God and one divine essence, but in the same divine Essence three independent (separate) Persons, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit; that all three are one God and each person possesses in Himself, undivided, the fullness of divine Essence, which is also common to all three. It is our Christian faith that there are not three Gods, but only one God in three

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid 496

<sup>13</sup> William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story: An Introduction to Sixteen-Century Anabaptism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 187.

<sup>14</sup> Editor, Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline-Selected Primary Sources*, (Herald Press, Kitchner, Ont; Scottsdale, PA. 1981) 82

<sup>15</sup> William R. Estep 184

Persons and that each Holy Person in the Godhead, the Son as well as the Father, and the Holy Spirit as well as the Son is God in Essence of like power, might, glory and splendor”<sup>16</sup>

Marpeck supports the Personhood of the Holy Spirit whom he calls the Third Person of the Godhead sent by the Father in the name of Christ. “He is the comforter and we are not the Lord’s unless we have the Holy Spirit.”<sup>17</sup> Marpeck also advocated baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity describing the Three Persons as one God while affirming their unity.

Peter Riederman, another noted theologian joined his contemporaries in affirming the Holy Spirit within the Triune God. He uses an illustration from nature to explore the relationship among them, while affirming their distinct persons, equality and mutuality within the Godhead. There is no hierarchy, each carries a different function but all equally important. In this illustration Riederman describes the intimate working relationship and interconnectedness between the three beings of the godhead. Three beings yes, but one God.

Thus we acknowledge the Holy Spirit who, with the Father and the Son, is God. The names are three, but there is only one God, bounteous to all who call to him in trust. Just as fire, heat, and light are three names and yet one substance, one nature, one essence; so are God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three names and yet only one being. As fire, heat, and light do not separate from each other (for where one is, there are all three; and where one is lacking, none is present), so it is with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Where one of them is, there all three; but whoever lacks one, lacks all three. One cannot take heat and light away from fire and still have fire. Much less can one take the Son and the Holy Spirit from the Father. Just as breath lends voice to the word and gives it shape and sound, so also breath, wind, and Spirit of God make the Word alive and active within us and lead us into all truth. This is the power of God, doing, working, and perfecting everything; establishing it all; uniting, comforting, teaching, and instructing. All of the Spirit's work in us assures us that we are God's children.<sup>18</sup>

Although Anabaptists were in general agreement with the orthodox views on the Trinity, some of them disagreed on the filioque clause in the Western version of the Nicene Creed, which teaches that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Menno Simons describes Him as “incomprehensible, ineffable, and indescribable” like the Father and the Son, “divine with his divine attributes proceeding

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<sup>16</sup> Willaim R. Estep 185

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Wenger. “The Theology of Marpeck”. *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 12(October 1938). 217

<sup>18</sup> John J. Friesen, ed., *Peter Riedemann's Hutterite Confession of Faith* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1999), 77.

from the Father through the Son, although he ever remains with God and in God, and is never separated from the being of the Father and the Son.”<sup>19</sup> The Nicene Creed indirectly diminishes the Holy Spirit relative to the Father and the Son. Simons avoids that possible misunderstanding by strongly affirming the complete, equality and divinity of the Holy Spirit.

#### The Holy Spirit as Agent of Conversion and Discipleship

The Anabaptists repudiated both the Catholic and Protestants’ concept of the church where individuals were simply born into the church. They insisted that the church consisted only of converted, instructed adult believers. Conviction and conversion were the work of the Holy Spirit. In a real sense the Holy Spirit was the spiritual mother of the church. “It was the Spirit who convicted man of his need of salvation and who then worked the miraculous transformation of the new birth, not simply declaring man righteous, as in forensic justification, but rather bringing about an actual ontological change within man, so that the regenerated person became a participant in the divine nature itself.”<sup>20</sup> The Anabaptists considered forensic justification only the beginning of the salvation process, which must be followed by the critical work of the Spirit in transforming the believer. Marpeck makes this point by asserting “The [Holy Spirit] is the One who applies redemption to the individual soul, accomplishing the new birth. In the Holy Spirit, we have forgiveness of sins. He is active in the Christian consciousness, purifying the heart. He strengthens God’s people. He is the comforter. He is “the one who guides unto all truth.” He is the Spirit of love and patience. He personally dwells in the believer.”<sup>21</sup>

Dirk Philips describes the Spirit’s vital role as an agent of regeneration. “The Holy Spirit writes the new covenant in the hearts of believers and enables them to participate in the divine nature. The Holy Spirit is the earthly presence of Jesus, empowering members called by God and helping believers

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<sup>19</sup> Menno Simons Complete Writings. 496

<sup>20</sup> Klassen, Peter. The Anabaptist View of the Holy Spirit. 27

<sup>21</sup> J.C.Wenger, Theology of Marpeck 214



interpret the scriptures. He equated “Baptism in the Spirit” with conversation grace—inner light that directed life of righteousness<sup>22</sup>

Phillips further writes, that the Holy Spirit infuses in man “decisive power giving him faith, love, hope and all divine virtues.”<sup>23</sup> He continues, “The newness of life which the believer experiences and shares with fellow believers and his call to discipleship is a direct result of the work by the Holy Spirit. Humans of themselves are powerless to free themselves from the bondage of sin. Human reason is wholly inadequate to remove our spiritual blindness”.<sup>24</sup>

Menno Simons argues vigorously on the necessity of the new birth and its consequences as the work of the Holy Spirit. “This regeneration of which we write from which comes the penitent, pious life that has the promise can only originate in the word of that bind rightly taught and rightly understood and received in the heart. Faith through the Holy Ghost.”<sup>25</sup> Simons describes baptism as a burial of sins in the Lord’s death and a resurrection to a new life in him. He says, “They are baptized with the Holy Ghost into the spotless holy body of Christ as obedient members of his church, according to the true ordinance and word of the Lord. They put on Christ and manifest His Spirit, nature and power in all their conduct.... They see righteousness with all their might. In fact, they are so assured by their faith through the Spirit and the Word of God that they are victorious by virtue of their faith.”<sup>26</sup> He further describes, “These regenerated people have a spiritual king over them who rules them by the unbroken scepter of his mouth, namely with his Holy Spirit and Word. He clothes with the garment of righteousness of pure white silk. He refreshes them with the living water of his Holy Spirit and leads them with the bread of

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<sup>22</sup> <http://holyspiritactivism.com/2013/07/21/charismatictheologyamontearlyanabaptists>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Klassen, Peter. 98

<sup>25</sup> Works of Menno 92

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 93

life. His name is Christ Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> He asserts that sinners are called by the preaching of the word and the power of his Holy Spirit.

Hans Hut, another of the noted Anabaptist theologian placed great emphasis on baptism—need for inner baptism which begins with knowledge of God, and deepens into a process of suffering and doubt fulfilled through the work of the Spirit.<sup>28</sup> This inner baptism that Hut describes is the baptism of the Spirit. German Anabaptists such as Hans and Thomas Munster strong mystics, all emphasized the inner work of the Holy Spirit in believers.<sup>29</sup> There is a strong focus on the work of the Spirit in the heart of believers in order to initiate and sustain life of faith.<sup>30</sup> There is an Inner illumination of the heart by the Spirit.

Anabaptist Biblicism mediated the necessity of illumination by the Spirit for a proper understanding of the scripture. It is Scripture and Spirit together, rather than scripture alone. God draws in two ways, outward by public proclamation of the gospel and inward by illumination thru the Spirit to understand accept God’s word.<sup>31</sup> No one may be saved unless the same the Holy Spirit assures him of his salvation<sup>32</sup> For the Anabaptists, both the word and the Spirit are indispensable in the process of conversion.

Riederman argues that, “This Spirit of Christ, promised and gave to all believers, makes them free from the law and the power of sin and grafts these into Christ. He makes them one with him in mind, in his very character and nature, so they become one plant and organism with him.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 94

<sup>28</sup> Arnold C. Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1995), 63.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 69

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 75

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Baylor *The Radical Reformation.* (Cambridge University Press, England, 1991) 14

<sup>33</sup> John J. Friesen, ed., *Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1999), 97.

Following Christ is the central motif of the Anabaptist tradition and this was only possible through the Spirit. Hans Denck argues that: “no one can know Christ unless he follows after him in life.”<sup>34</sup> Scholars pointed out that the life of the Anabaptists was marked by a high degree of virtue and godliness noticed even by their persecutors. “As concerns their outward public life, they are irreproachable. No lying, deception, swearing, strife, harsh language, no intemperate eating and drinking, no outward public display, is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance, straight forwardness in such measure that one would support that they had the Spirit of God.”<sup>35</sup> It is remarkable that a Catholic persecutor of these Anabaptists would credit their godly lifestyle to the Holy Spirit. The Anabaptists would agree with this assessment because they placed great emphasis on the Holy Spirit that enabled them to be true disciples of Jesus. For them, only the Holy Spirit makes that possible.

Not everyone agreed with that assessment, for Agricola (one of their fierce critics) dismissed the idea that the Anabaptists had the Holy Spirit, because he believed that heretics could not have the Holy Spirit in this way. But the Anabaptists placed a much greater emphasis than their contemporaries on the work of the Holy Spirit, bringing about their “new birth” and their experience of the transformation power of God’s grace. Lives of faithful discipleship were not the result of trying to earn salvation, not a cause for pride, but evidence that God was truly at work in them.”<sup>36</sup> This statement repudiates the views of some who accuse the Anabaptism of legalism. The Anabaptists were adamant about the importance of the transformed life wrought through the Spirit. For them, one cannot speak of church membership without discipleship. This was not legalism, but the necessary work of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

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<sup>34</sup> Stuart Murray, *The Naked Anabaptist: The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 2010), 58.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 58

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 58

Simons describes “the Holy Spirit as one who guides us into truth, he justifies us, he cleanses, sanctifies, reconciles, comforts, reproves, cheers and assures us. He testifies with our Spirit that we are children of God. Frees us from sin, gives us boldness and makes us cheerful, pious and holy.”<sup>37</sup> Marpeck describes the Holy Spirit as the one who applies redemption to each and accomplish the new birth. He pardons and forgives sins. He is active in the believer’s conscience, “purifying the heart,” strengthening God’s people, comforting and guiding them into all truth.”<sup>38</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit and the Church—Ethic of love and Sense of Brotherhood**

The Anabaptists placed great emphasis on the formation and visible presence of “the church in the world. Riederman calls it the foundation and basis of truth, it is a lamp, a star bright and a lantern of righteousness.”<sup>39</sup> Unlike Catholic or Protestant ecclesiology based on tradition, hierarchy or orthodoxy, Anabaptists were quite clear about what their community was based on. “Such a community is brought and held together by the Holy Spirit, who orders and controls everything within the church. It is the Holy Spirit that leads and bind believers into one mind and one aim . .... Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God’. Riederman continues, that the children of God became children through the unifying Spirit. “Thus it is evident that the church is gathered through the Holy Spirit; church has its being and continues to exist through the Spirit. There are no churches apart from those which the Spirit gathers and builds.”<sup>40</sup>

The Anabaptists believe that their goal in establishing a community of believers was to fashion one that model the early church. This could be done only by the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit, this new community would exhibit many of the characteristics of the Apostolic church. There would be a true

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<sup>37</sup> Menno Simons Completed Work. 496

<sup>38</sup> J.C. Wenger, The Theology of Marpeck. 214

<sup>39</sup> John J. Friesen, ed., *Peter Riedemann’s Hutterite Confession of Faith* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1999), 77.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 71

sense of unity and brotherhood, sharing of resources, servant leadership and a New Testament ethic based on love and separation from the world.

The Anabaptists view of the church differed greatly from both the Protestant and Catholic models. The Spirit created, directed and sustained this community and would have no affiliation with the state. Membership into it would not be obligatory, but based on voluntary consent, conviction, and conversion. Violence and coercion to force membership was completely ruled out. The Anabaptists laid the foundation for religious liberty and freedom of conscience that is so intrinsic to modern western democracies. These ideas of the sixteenth century however were centuries ahead of their times and were not well received and made the Anabaptists the object of a fierce and relentless persecution from both Protestants and Catholics.

Anabaptists taught that in this community of believers led by the Holy Spirit, each member was responsible for the wellbeing of the other. They did not believe that selfishness which distorted the message of the Spirit would die out in the hearts of believers, but that such impulse would be held in check by fellow believers.<sup>41</sup> Along with that, the united witness of fellow believers would protect the believer from “excess of subjective inspirationisms, while the Spirit within the believer freed him from bondage to a wooden literalism of the written word.” At the same time the scripture remained the norm by which the individual and collective spiritual experience could be measured. . .<sup>42</sup> in other words the community acted as a check against a subjective spiritual individualism.

This Spirit led community were to live lives separate from the corruption around them. For Anabaptists, God’s kingdom on earth-the church would be characterized by virtues like peace, forgiveness, non-violence, patience, etc. In contrast, the kingdom of Satan exhibited strife, vengeance,

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<sup>41</sup> Peter, Klassen. 30

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 30

anger and violence. True believers cannot participate in the civil government because they would be operating on principles that are contrary to the principles of Christ's kingdom.

The community of believers led by the Spirit hold all things in common, no one having anything for oneself, but each sharing all things with the others. This kind of sharing is reminiscent of that sharing that exist among the Trinity.<sup>43</sup> They "all who have fellowship with him and with each other have likewise nothing for themselves, but they have all things with their master and with those who have fellowship with them."<sup>44</sup> This sharing of resources was a practical outworking of their ethic of love which should characterize the lives of the followers of Jesus.

#### The Relationship between the Word and the Spirit

The relationship between the Word and Spirit was a major point of contention between the magisterial reformers and the Anabaptists. It was also contentious within the ranks of the Anabaptists.<sup>45</sup> Although some of the more spiritualistic Anabaptists appealed to Luther as their source and inspiration, Luther rigorously opposed them, accusing them of kicking away the means by which the Holy Spirit comes, namely the sign of baptism and the preached word of God.<sup>46</sup> Luther's opposition seemed to be directed against Anabaptists like Karlstadt, Muntzer, and Schwanakfeld. An example of the difference between Muntzer and Luther is revealed in the following quote from Muntzer: "as far as I am concerned, I do not need the outward witness. I have the testimony of the Spirit within me, as it was promised by Christ. . . this is the way it was with the Apostles, who afterward preached Christ outwardly and reinforced it by writing that Christ had to suffer for us."<sup>47</sup> It is perhaps this kind of assertion that Luther was most opposed to, where Muntzer seems to imply that he doesn't need the external witness

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<sup>43</sup> p. John Friesen, 80

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> George Hunston Williams *The Radical Reformation* third edition, Volume XV *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies*. ( Edward Brothers, Ann Arbor, MI. 1992) 1248

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 1249

<sup>47</sup> Ibid..1249

of the word. Other Anabaptists, more rational spiritualists like Sabastian Franck, Clement Ziegler and Caspar Schwenckfeld contended that “the written word with all its paradoxes; and seeming contradictions could not be grasped without the Holy Spirit, virtually identical with the inner word.” This arose from the fear that people would revere the letter of the Bible and neglect “the living God who gave it” . . . For them scripture “was a witness to faith in a means of nourishing and already formed faith.”<sup>48</sup> (Sebastian French) “Scripture and [another] person can only give to a person and a believing brother some testimony, but cannot teach what is divine [directly]. However, holy they may be, they are nevertheless not teachers, only witnesses and testimonies. Faith is not learned out of books nor from a person, however saintly is he may be, but rather learned and poured in by God in the same love of the Lord that is under the cross”.<sup>49</sup>

Caspar Schwenckfeld also warned against elevating the outer word of scripture above the living word (inner Word) that is Christ written. He argues that the written word points out who and what the word is but does not pass itself off as that Word. It points beyond itself to Christ (the living Word) in the believer’s heart “through the Holy Spirit, and who alone is the Word, power and wisdom of God.”<sup>50</sup> The Bible must be understood Christo-centrally and its meaning is revealed by the divine word as a witness to the Christian faith and the historic word

The Anabaptists were sometimes accused by some of the magisterial reformers of putting too much emphasis on the Holy Spirit at the detriment of the scriptures. It is true that some among the Anabaptists placed great emphasis on the Holy Spirit and the inner light to the detriment of the word. The Anabaptist tradition was very heterogeneous and it did include some known as “spiritualists.” whose focus was on the inner revelation of the Holy Spirit, rather than the word of God. Justus Menus charged that for the Anabaptists, “no scripture are of any consequences, but alone divine dreams visions

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 1250

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

and the heavenly revelations, through which the glory of God speaks to and deals with these saints teaching them far higher, holier, more spiritual and more ineffable than are to be found in the scripture.”<sup>51</sup> But is this a true characterization of their views of the relationship of the Spirit to the bible? This does describes an element among them, namely, the spiritualists. In Menno’s defense against false accusation, he appeals to the scriptures. He asked them where does the scripture teaches the power of the state of coercion to force a man’s conscience.<sup>52</sup> Menno Simons however continues to connect the word and the Spirit. He argues that the church in Christ is to rightly teach Christ unadulterated word in the power of the Spirit.<sup>53</sup> Simons further declares that it is the meditation of God’s word and Spirit that enables one to have Spiritual discernment of one’s own sinful condition.<sup>54</sup> The word and the Spirit belong together and contributes to an indissoluble unity.

Because of the heterogeneous nature of the movement, positions on the continuum of relationship between Word and Spirit varied from the “the rigid literalistic Biblicism to the highly individualistic inspirationist spiritualism”.<sup>55</sup> In spite of this however, the majority of the notable Anabaptist thinkers had a high view of scripture. They took the Reformers’ teachings of Sola Scriptura more seriously than the reformers themselves, but they never separate the witness of the scriptures from the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that inspired the writers, and provided illumination to the readers. There can be no true interpretation of the scriptures without the Holy Spirit. These two are inseparable bonded together. Time and time again Menno Simons connects the Word and the Holy Spirit together. Simons writes “In short, they are so assured in their faith through the Spirit and the Word of God that they are victorious by virtue of their faith.”<sup>56</sup> They circumcise their sins in the Lord’s

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Klassen. 29

<sup>52</sup> Menno Simons. 357

<sup>53</sup>Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Menno Simons. 358

<sup>55</sup> Peter Klassen. 29

<sup>56</sup> Menno Simon. 53



death with the Word of the Lord, they are baptized with the Holy Ghost in the spotless holy body of Christ.”<sup>57</sup> Simons constantly shows the necessity of the Word of God working with the Spirit.

Not all Anabaptists held this creative tension between the Word and the Spirit. Karlstadt, Thomas Munster, and Zwickian prophets argued that the Spirit worked independently of the Word to reveal truth. But this emphasis was not widespread among them. While Luther emphasized that the Bible was clear and easily understood and needed no interpretation of church authorities. The Anabaptists emphasized the necessity of the Spirit working together with the written word to arrive at full truth. “The Spirit is given to all who seek Him not only to priests and bishops, but rather every believer is himself a priest and able to understand the Word through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. The understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in every believer made him spiritually of age, and this maturity is the condition for Christian freedom.”<sup>58</sup>

The early Anabaptists in Zurich in 1525 stated forcefully in their common confession document that “authority of the church tradition and worldly authorities must give way to the authority of the Spirit who enlightens every believer to understand the scripture for himself.”<sup>59</sup> This document warns believers that, “the inner witness of the Spirit alone requires total obedience; secular authority can be obeyed as long as no conflict arises with the Word of God. Word and Spirit thus shapes the Christian life and the essence of the congregation including the relationship to worldly authorities.”<sup>60</sup>

Conrad Grebel one of the earliest leaders of Anabaptism believed that understanding of the scripture came only through the enlightening of the Spirit rather than reliance on reason or hermeneutic training,<sup>61</sup> and the Spirit working together to bring about conversion. For Simons, only the Holy Spirit

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 53

<sup>58</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, Ed. *The Witness the Holy Spirit*. Proceedings of the Eight Mennonite World Conference. Amsterdam, The Netherlands. July 23-30, 1967. (Mennonite World Conference Evangel Press Elkhart, IN) 13

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 14

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 14

can give faithful understanding,” the eternal, powerful, saving Word of God must be taught, interpreted, understood, according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>62</sup>

According to Klassen, the Anabaptists were not so concerned about viewing the scriptures as “an objective deposit of truth,” but more as God’s revelation to his people. The scriptures were seen as the channel of God’s Word, but that word needed to be interpreted and this is where the role of the Holy Spirit become crucial. “Only the Spirit,” the teacher of a true understanding and apprehension of blessedness could interpret the written book. Without the divine interpreter, the scripture must remain a barren book. Failure to let the Spirit illuminate his Word would lead to heresy and unbelief.”<sup>63</sup> “Against the evangelical scribes who appealed to the letter of the law but lacked the Spirit.”<sup>64</sup> The egalitarian nature of an appeal to scripture and Spirit meant that scriptural questions were not to be decided automatically by the scholar- theologian preacher in the employ of a prince or a city council who would make definitive reference to the Hebrew and Greek texts. It is the Holy Spirit who was the ultimate authority by which scripture questions were to be decided, the result was an interpretative anarchy which the 16<sup>th</sup> century authorities were convinced (not without reason) was politically dangerous. The Radicals insistence on scripture and Spirit contained the seeds of believer’s church thinking and threatened the church state monopoly of state interpretation. <sup>65</sup>

According to Karlstad, the external Word whether read or heard could only be properly interpreted through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>66</sup> This active role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the Holy Spirit would become a feature of the Anabaptist movement. Munster emphasized the hermeneutical role of the Holy Spirit more emphatically than Karlstad, more mystically spiritual than exegetical. He emphasized the inner Word, the direct teaching of the Spirit. Work of Spirit in

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 15

<sup>63</sup> Peter, Klassen, 29

<sup>64</sup> Snyder. 37

<sup>65</sup> Snyder. 38

<sup>66</sup> Snyder. 22

interpretation more focus on spiritualism than Karlstad, thus opening up the possibility of non-scriptural revelation.<sup>67</sup> Schwenckfeld is described as a spiritualist because of his constant and continuing emphasis on the interior notion of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. He emphasized the inner word. True exposition of the word could only be done by and taught by the Spirit.

Hans Denck has often been accused of placing undue emphasis upon the Holy Spirit independent from the Word. Others disagree with this characterization and felt that Denck intended that the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit was necessary for faithful understanding of the Word. He saw contradictions in the Bible that only the Holy Spirit would sort out."<sup>68</sup>

The Word and Spirit are two channels through which God reveals himself and establishes relationship with man. To understand the pulse and heartbeat of Anabaptist theology we must see their pneumatological emphasis, its relation to biblical and Christological concerns. Anabaptists rejected clericalism and any ecclesial authority over the Spirit. They did not succumb to the slavish obedience to the letter of the law, while also avoiding the danger of fanatical spiritualism present among the Munster and Zwickan prophets. "True Anabaptists refused to separate the Spirit from the written Word of scripture. In this they achieved a balanced Trinitarian theology which did justice to the freedom and the independence of the Spirit in a way in which Roman Catholic and Lutheran-Calvinist theology did not. It was precisely through their emphasis upon the Spirit, following the emphasis upon the letter of the scriptures that they were able to do justice to the equilibrium of the new Trinitarian faith. The Christo-centric character of their theology never became Christo-monism; the pneuma-centric character of their theology never became an abstract spiritualism. Word and Spirit were both central, they were vital elements of their faith. The freedom of the Spirit and the teaching of the scriptures were the two parts of their faith and therefore the foundation for their congregational structure."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Snyder. 25

<sup>68</sup> Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *The Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Evangel Press), 14-15.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*16

Melchoir Hoffman emphasized the heightened activity of the Holy Spirit in the last days.<sup>70</sup> Events of last days heralded in prophetic scriptures and waiting to be uncovered by those pressed by the Spirit. Spirit led believers are true interpreters of the Word.<sup>71</sup> The Holy Spirit never closed the cannon.<sup>72</sup> The same Spirit which coded Spirit now was decoding accurately and decisively for those in possession of the interpretation key, “Key of David”<sup>73</sup>

### **The Holy Spirit as Gift and Fruits**

The Holy Spirit is described in the Bible as a gift to the church and also produces fruits of the Spirit in the lives of the believers. Because the Anabaptist placed such a great emphasis on conversion, the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit as an evidence of this conversion was critical. The gifts of the Spirit was also important for a community life. They believed they were formed and joined together not so much by doctrinal orthodoxy but by the Holy Spirit. Marpeck writes, “For the gifts of the Spirit are weighty. He moves us, when and where he wills, giving them to whomever he desires, through scriptures, speech, discipline, fear, tribulation and judgement as he desires and pleases. He gives us profound and mediocre understanding; in length and breath, in height and depth. Everything is His. He is Lord and Sovereign over all, over written and spoken scriptures which men test, learn, experience, writes to, and judge to the praise of God and their salvation and from them to judge themselves and others.”<sup>74</sup>

The Holy Spirit also manifests his fruits in the lives of the believer. Riederman writes: we believe that in the Holy Spirit we have all comfort, delight and fruitfulness and that He confirms, brings to pass, carries out, and perfects all things; that he also teaches, directs and instructs us, assures us that we are children of God and makes us one with God, so that through His working we have become incorporated

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<sup>70</sup> Snyder. 135

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* 137

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* 140

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline*, 80-81

into and partakers of the divine nature and character, and this His work God be praised! We experience written ourselves in truth and power in the receiving of our heart.”<sup>75</sup>

Charismatic manifestations was also observed among Anabaptists and it was not unusual for charismatic manifestation to appear such as dancing, falling under the power of the Holy Spirit “prophetic professions” at Zurich in 1525; at Munster in 1534 and at Amsterdam in 1535.<sup>76</sup> In Germany some Anabaptists “excited by mass hypnosis experienced healings, glossolalia, contortions and other manifestations at a camp meeting revival.”<sup>77</sup> “The Anabaptists insisted upon the free course of the Holy Spirit in worship, yet still maintained it all must be judged according to the scriptures.”<sup>78</sup> “One reason given for not attending state churches, their congregations forbade the exercise of spiritual gifts as taught by the Word of God. I Cor. 14.”<sup>79</sup> In his Prague Manifesto Munster describes the bestowal of the seven fold gift of the Spirit as the goal of redemption.<sup>80</sup> “Among the gifts is the reception of the Spirit of direct instruction from the Holy Spirit in the form of visions, dreams, ecstatic utterances or inspired exegesis”. Only the elect receives this visitation.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

The role of this Holy Spirit is critical in the life and doctrine of the radical reformers. There is no church without the Spirit. There is no understanding of truth without the Spirit. There is no conversion, conviction or transformation of believers without the Spirit. The radicals were not as interested in formulating an orthodox view of the Holy Spirit as they were concerned about his workings in the life of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 78

<sup>76</sup> Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptist: Neither Catholics or Protestants*, (Conrad Press, Columbia IL. 1973), 63

<sup>77</sup> George Huntston Williams. 667

<sup>78</sup> John Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers Against Anabaptists: Luther, Melanchthon, and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany*, 1964) 86

<sup>79</sup> Peachey Paul, Peachey Shem eds. 1971. Answer of some who are called (Ana)Baptists-“Why they do not attend the churches”-*Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45(1):10, 11.

<sup>80</sup> George Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1992), 49

<sup>81</sup> Ibid 49

the church and the believer. They were far more concerned about the practical evidence of the Spirit than about the theological accuracy of the doctrine about the Spirit. Because of the heterogeneous nature of this movement, there is no one view of the spirit, although one identify common features them. The work of the Holy Spirit was the center of the Christian experience. Since for the Anabaptists, Discipleship is the chief mark of a Christian and discipleship is the work of the Spirit, then there can be no true Christianity without the creative activity and presence of the Holy Spirit.

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