

Foreword

Christians are united when saying *that* the Christian life is a life in the Spirit. But the unity breaks down when explaining *how* the Christian life is a life in the Spirit. A stereotype of one extreme comes from my own Lutheran tradition. It can leave the impression that the Spirit's work in the Christian life consists entirely in bringing sinners to faith, doing nothing to transform believers and bring them to new life. This can happen when Lutherans explain good works by quoting Isaiah—"as filthy rags"—and when they regard the righteousness God conveys in justification as a fiction—"just as if I'd never sinned." A stereotype of another extreme comes from the Pentecostal tradition of author Andréa Snavelly. It can leave the impression that life in the Spirit is all about special gifts like speaking in tongues and healing the sick.

These stereotypes may suggest that an appropriate explanation lies somewhere in the middle (unless, perhaps, you are a Lutheran or a Pentecostal). But this approach is reactive, not proactive. It assumes too much and questions too little.

For Snavelly, this approach risks too much, even though he is a Pentecostal who appreciates the Lutheran tradition and who thinks the stereotypes are uncomfortably close to the truth. So the explanation he offers in this book is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the ministry of the Apostles whom Christ sent into the world.

This explanation comes in four parts.

The first part considers the theology of the Christian life itself. Here Snavelly follows the lead of John Howard Yoder. In *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder showed how modern theology usually ignored or even denied Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the norm in its accounts of the

Christian life.¹ Some had historical reasons, others dogmatic, but all regarded Jesus as irrelevant for ethics and politics. Yoder outflanked all of them by pointing that they ignored or even denied the doctrine of the Incarnation. “What becomes of the meaning of the incarnation if Jesus is not normative man? If he is a man but not normative, is this not the ancient ebionite heresy? If he be somehow authoritative but not in his humanness, is this not a new gnosticism?”² Accordingly he proposed an account of the Christian life that presupposed the incarnation and therefore looked to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as normative.

Snavely agrees with Yoder’s post-Constantinian criticism and its dogmatic premise. He recognizes, however, that the two-natures Christology that Yoder’s constructive proposal relied upon offers no help in giving an account of life in the Spirit. This takes us to the second part of his explanation: the pursuit of a different kind of Christology, namely, a Spirit Christology—an account of Jesus Christ and his life in which the Spirit’s presence and power are essential.

Long neglected, the topic of Spirit Christology recently has drawn renewed attention. But not every proposal for a Spirit Christology is suitable. The requirements of an account of the Christian life as life in the Spirit comprise a strict and theologically valuable test. This account requires that a Spirit Christology make sense of Christ’s life and mission, his crucifixion and his resurrection, and the mission he conferred upon the Church.

Snavely finds such a Spirit Christology in the proposal of Leo Sánchez.³ This proposal is thoroughly Trinitarian. It takes seriously Karl Rahner’s point that the Trinity “is a mystery of *salvation*” and follows his axiom that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.⁴ The story of God’s plan and work of salvation reveals not only that Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God and that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*), but also that Jesus’ person and life always were constituted by the presence and power of the Spirit. From his conception to his baptism, throughout his ministry all the way to his death, in his resurrection and exaltation, Jesus’ identity and life were always from God “in the Spirit.” Sánchez referred to this understanding of Christ as

1. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 1–21.

2. *Ibid.*, 10.

3. Sánchez M., *Receiver, Bearer, and Giver of God’s Spirit*.

4. Rahner, *More Recent Writings*. 87. Emphasis original.

an “*in Spiritu* model.” This account of Christ is ideal for Snavelly’s purpose because it pays close attention both to the work of the Spirit and to the actual contours of his life leading to death and resurrection.

But any account of the Christian life also should explain how this life comes about. If the Christian life is life in the Spirit, then the life of Christ cannot be simply an example for Christians to follow. This life must come from the gift of the Spirit. How does this happen? Answering this is the third part of the explanation.

Snavelly takes a typically Pentecostal approach by drawing an account from the book of Acts. But rather than focusing on what the new life consists of, he attends closely to the ministry of the Apostles by considering how their preaching and baptizing brought about new life in the Spirit. And to describe what he finds in the work of the Apostles, he draws on the typically Lutheran concepts of the “alien and proper works of God,” or “killing and making alive.”

The fourth part of the explanation draws out some contours of the life in the Spirit. You could say that Snavelly returns here to post-Constantinian themes. Like Yoder, he portrays the Christian life as a cruciform life, which means non-violence, contentment, and harmony with all sisters and brothers in Christ. Borrowing from Yoder, we might say that what emerges here is “the politics of the Son of God” or “the politics of the Anointed One.” Such labels highlight the Christian life grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, not as the Incarnate One, but as the One Who Is the Son of God in the Spirit. But, as Snavelly shows, it is equally true that these themes are genuinely Pentecostal. In fact, his choice of themes is decided even more by the life of Pentecostals than by the post-Constantinian theologians from whom he has learned.

If we want a label, however, that fits best not only with these choices but also for the entire book, then I would suggest that it is “catholic.” This is the label that Yoder himself adopted for *The Politics of Jesus*: “[T]he view of Jesus claimed to be ‘more radically Nicene and Chalcedonian than other views.’ . . . the convictions argued here do not admit to being categorized as a sectarian oddity or a prophetic exception. Their appeal is to classical catholic Christian convictions properly understood.”⁵ Snavelly also appealed to the classical catholic Christian convictions, and he justified his position by appealing to canonical Christian texts. There is nothing

5. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom*, 8, 9; quoting *The Politics of Jesus*, 102.

ing sectarian or denominational here. The Pentecostalism he portrays claims to be nothing less than a right way of being Christian.

This does not exempt his claims from argument or correction, addition or criticism. As one who subscribes wholeheartedly to the Lutheran Confessions, I have things to say about civil government and the use of force. And Snively himself does not raise the Pentecostal position on spiritual gifts. These are important points to pursue. But they do not detract from or discredit what he has accomplished. Anyone who would assess, argue with, criticize, or even endorse his views must do so in this catholic way: grounded in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, drawn from the canonical New Testament, and consistent with the dogmas of the Christian Church.

Which also means that this is the “spirit” by which I encourage you to read and reflect upon this book.

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