

Easter Unfolding. A Gift from Amy C. Schifrin. Part 2

Colleagues,

Easter themes continue to unfold in this second half of a paper that Amy Schifrin presented at last January's Crossings conference. As she swivels into a discussion of the Eucharistic gifts we enjoy today, you'll want to notice how Luke 24:31-32, 35 is lurking in the background. So is John 20:22. That neither is mentioned, or needs to be, serves only to underscore how our Lord's resurrection is the essential precondition of everything we get to confess, celebrate, and thank God for on Christ's account, beginning with the gift of the Spirit. Dr. Schifrin will make that point better than I can.

For what it's worth, having heard and read this paper I'm paying closer attention to liturgical language than I had been of late. There is always more power in the words we use than we sinners tend to assume. For good words packed with the Gospel's punch, thanks be to God.

Peace and Joy,

Jerry Burce

"Fill us with your Spirit to establish our faith in truth"
(continued)

Dr. Amy C. Schifrin

January 26, 2016

Left to ourselves, we surely stray;

*Oh, lead us on the narrow way,
With wisest counsel guide us;
And give us steadfastness, that we
May follow you forever free,
No matter who derides us.
Gently heal those hearts now broken;
Give some token You are near us,
Whom we trust to light and cheer us.[i]*

What does it mean for the baptized to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for a congregation, called gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover the shape of a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, that we and all who share in this bread and cup may be united in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, may enter the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and may receive our inheritance with all your saints in light.[ii] What does this mean? The Eucharistic epiclesis points us in the right direction.

Now there is a long and rugged history of the role and placement of the epiclesis within the Eucharistic Rite. Sometime the Spirit was called upon the material gifts of bread and wine, sometimes the Spirit was called upon the persons in the assembly, and sometimes the Spirit was ambiguously called upon both. Sometimes the epiclesis preceded the verba, sometimes it followed, and sometime there were both.[iii] Sometimes the Spirit was simply understood to be present when the verba flowed from the Proper Preface in the act of proclamation.[iv] Yet in

each case God is still understood as the giver so that the Holy Spirit would establish our faith in truth: the truth about who God is, from the beginning, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and how he acts; the truth about who we are and how we are called to live; and the truth about this world and the world to come, the truth about eternity, that is, the truth about the resurrection of the dead unto eternal life, that we may enter it.

So really, what does it mean for each of you here to live filled with the Spirit of truth whom the world neither sees nor recognizes? What does it mean for your congregation, called, gathered, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit to discover a joyful obedience empowered by the Spirit? What does it mean for you to receive and to live out the Truth that is known by the Spirit, by the water and by the blood?

Every Lord's Day the baptized come to table and are joined in prayer for the Spirit to come upon these gifts of bread and wine, and to come upon those who have been assembled by the Spirit's own power. Within a continuum of ritual variations our hearts and hands are made open so that we might receive that life that is the fullness of the kingdom of heaven, and...receive our inheritance with all [the] saints in light.[v] In some (often hidden) way the Holy Spirit is always directing our attention to Christ, and it is in and through Christ that we are taken to the Father's heart.

The Eucharistic epiclesis is among the most paradigmatic expressions of the life and faith of the baptized. For as Christ himself is hidden in bread and wine, word and water, so the Spirit fills the assembly with the presence of the Triune God wherever that community is gathered: the living room in a house church, a stone and stained glass cathedral, on under-heated city basement, or at the end of a gravel road in a white walled church on the open prairie.

The Eucharistic epiclesis, however, does not come without a larger ritual framework. In the liturgical setting of the full Eucharistic Rites of the Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW), where the Institution Narrative follows the praise of the Father for creation, salvation history, and for Christ himself, which has already followed the Sanctus, the proper preface and sursum corda in which the assembly was called forth to, Lift up your hearts, and our very bodies responded, We lift them up to the Lord, we come to the remembrance (the Anamnesis) that recalls the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, and the hope of Christ's return, Amen, Come, Lord Jesus. And so at last we pray, Send your Holy Spirit, crying out in faith for what our Lord as already promised, I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you...Amen, Come, Holy Spirit. And with arms upheld by the Spirit we pray beyond our own needs, beyond our own tribe, beyond our own borders, beyond our own fragmentary existences, and especially beyond our own fears—especially our fear of death by abandonment, to Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen.[vi] The Holy Spirit has directed our full attention to Christ, who is, who was, and who is to come, and when our attention is taken into to the future which he is preparing for us, then, and only then, that future, that eternal love, happens now.

For just as the Spirit descended upon Jesus as he came up from the River Jordan, and just as Jesus unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and proclaimed "The Spirit of the Lord is upon

me,” and just as Jesus breathed peace into the disciples who shivered behind a locked door, and just as you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever, so now week after week, Sunday after Sunday, the Holy Spirit, whom you cannot see, but whose works you believe in—the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting—the Holy Spirit, is directing you to a Eucharistic life, a life in which we receive every breath with Thanksgiving. Our Lord Jesus says to us, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And he has commanded you to Do this in remembrance of me.

All those multiple contexts in which we live and move, but in which we do not have our very being, all those divisions are to be overcome, and indeed are overcome as the Holy Spirit directs us to receive the life of the resurrected Christ into our lives. In the words of St. Leo the Great, The Spirit of truth breathes where he will, and each nation’s own language has become common property in the mouth of the church.[vii]

Hidden in the fragmentation of society and invading every sub-culture, the body of Christ sings his resurrection song. Whether we wear the faded scrubs of an orderly at the county nursing home or the sleek Armani pinstripe as CEO of a Fortune 500 company we are owned by neither one, but by Christ. Whether we are cooing homemade melodies of love in a baby’s tiny ear or singing lamentations as we caress the dying, it is the Spirit of truth witnessing to the eternal love of God for those whom he has made. Nothing can stop this love, neither heights nor depths nor angels nor principalities, nor powers. Nothing can stop this love because Christ has died. Christ is Risen, Christ will come again. We who once cried for his crucifixion, murderers all, have now met him at the cross, dragged by the Spirit of truth kicking and screaming in denial of our complicity of our sin, but in a breath—born up as on wings of an eagle by this same

Spirit whom the Father has sent to carry us to the empty tomb. As St. Paul writes to the Corinthians, we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be visible in our bodies. (2 Cor. 4:10)

There is however, one place where we all too often painfully see this life being made visible. It's not on the soil of the North American context but on the global horizon, and there we see in graphic and explicit scenes what truth looks like. For the Spirit of truth is made visible for all the world to see in martyrdom. 21 Copts beheaded, scores of Nigerian students mowed down, Iraqi Christians kidnapped and tortured, innocent young girls in nation after nation abducted and raped physically, emotionally, and spiritually, and then raped again and again and again: It is destruction and violation, defilement and desecration at every human level, and in this hell on earth these unsuspecting martyrs are speaking the truth, testifying with their whole body to the truth of who God is and whom he has made us to be, homo adorans, the worshipping human, trusting his promise, I am the Lord your God, obedient to his command, You shall have no other gods before me. Animated and empowered by the Spirit who is truth, martyrs incarnately speak his essence, which is truth, Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And speaking the truth about who God is, they simultaneously speak the truth about the world that he made, and the truth about those upon whom the Spirit rests, the truth that God's mercy is greater than our damnable ways, his forgiveness greater than any devil's temptation, and his love even deeper than any mass grave. Death has no hold upon those in whom the Spirit rests, for the Spirit is testifying to the truth in the lives of those who look to the Lord for every breath.

O mighty Rock, O Source of life,

Let your good Word in doubt and strife

*be in us strongly burning,
that we be faithful unto death
And live in love and holy faith,
From you true wisdom learning.*

Lord, your mercy

On us shower;

By your power

Christ confessing,

We will cherish all your blessings.[viii]

It is this vision that the Spirit breathes into the whole church, taking the resurrected life of Christ, and giving it to us so that we may live faithfully in any and every context. We cannot fully imagine it, just as a young soldier cannot imagine how he would feel or act when the Stryker in front of him hits an IED and he finds himself hemmed in by enemy fire. None can imagine this, and all of us in some way or another are afraid that our fear would be greater than our faith, that we would be paralyzed, that we would capitulate, that we would submit to the evil that surrounds us, that we would seek to cling to this life more than to the promise of life eternal. But from the testimony of the martyrs we see and hear the same fullness of the Spirit who came to us in the waters, the same fullness of the Spirit, who in the words of the epiclesis attributed to Hippolytus, blesses us [God's] servants and [his] own gifts of bread and wine, so that we and all who share in the body and blood of his Son may be filled with heavenly peace and joy, and receiving the forgiveness of sins, may be sanctified in soul and body, and have our portion with all God's saints.[ix]

God has breathed his Spirit on your hearts so that when faced with the fullness of the law, that is your death, you will be filled with the Spirit's gift of eternal truth, and you will yet proclaim, All honor and glory are yours, O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, now and forever. Amen.[x]

[i] LBW, Hymn 459. vs 2.

[ii] Eucharistic Prayer II, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minister's Desk Edition), 221.

[iii] For a concise history of the epiclesis in Lutheran Eucharistic praying see, Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Church in Act: Lutheran Liturgical Theology in an Ecumenical Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 33-66.

[iv] In Luther's revision of the Ordo Missae, the Formula Missae et Communionis of 1523, the verba is still within an Eucharistic prayer. Senn comments on the Formula Missae, "If this text of the institution narrative is compared with the text in the Roman canon, it will be seen that Luther has eliminated all extrabiblical words and phrases...It should be noted that this institution narrative is still included within a Eucharistic prayer, since it is introduced by a dependent Qui-clause. This Eucharistic prayer concluded with the singing of the Sanctus." Frank Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 278.

[v] Eucharistic Prayer II, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minister's Desk Edition), 221

[vi] Eucharistic Prayers I and II, Lutheran Book of Worship (Minister's Desk Edition), 223.

[vii] St Leo the Great, Sermons 75.1-3:CCSL 138A, 465-9 in Stephen Mark Holmes, *The Fathers on the Sunday Gospels*

(Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 166.

[viii] LBW, Hymn 459. vs 3.

[ix] Eucharistic Prayer IV, Lutheran Book of Worship (Ministers Desk Edition), 226.

[x] Ibid., 226.