

## Retrieving the Tradition

# The Holy Spirit as *Communio*: Concerning the Relationship of Pneumatology and Spirituality in Augustine

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Becoming a Christian means becoming *communio* and  
thereby entering into the mode of being of the Holy  
Spirit.

The words pneumatology and spirituality, which together constitute my topic, are closely tied to one another in a purely verbal sense. One is the translation of the other. This expresses a connection of fundamental significance. The Holy Spirit is recognizable in the way in which he forms human life. A life formed from faith is in turn a sign of the Holy Spirit. To speak of “Christian spirituality” means to speak about the Holy Spirit. He makes himself recognizable by gaining a new center for human life. Speaking about the Holy Spirit includes looking at him in man, to whom he has given himself.

There is a certain difficulty in speaking about the Holy Spirit, even a certain danger. He withdraws from us into mystery even more than Christ. It is quite possible that this topic has sparked only idle speculation

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and that human life is being based upon self-made fantasies rather than reality. This is why I hesitated to offer just my own reflections. It seems to me that three conditions must be fulfilled to speak meaningfully, reliably, and defensibly about the Holy Spirit. First it cannot be talk based upon pure theory but must touch an experienced reality that has been interpreted and communicated in thought. But experience alone does not suffice. It must be tested and tried experience so that “one’s own spirit” does not take the place of the Holy Spirit. Third: in consequence, suspicion will always arise when someone speaks on his own account, “from within.” Such speech contradicts the Holy Spirit’s mode of being, for he is characterized precisely “by not speaking on his own” (Jn 16:13). In this respect, originality and truth can easily lead to a paradox.<sup>1</sup> But that means that trust is only appropriate when one does not speak on a purely private account, but from an experience of the Spirit tested in front of and standing in the context of the whole, i.e. when one submits the experience of “spirit” to the entirety of the Church. This presupposes as an axiom of Christian faith that the Church herself—when she truly exists as Church—is a creation of the Spirit.

Thus a proper treatment of my topic consists in condensing the great witnesses to the Spirit in the history of the Church into directions for life in the Spirit. Since I lack the preparatory work for this, I have settled for making comments on Augustine’s doctrine of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> This has the disadvantage of less relevance, but the advantage that a great witness of the tradition is speaking to us. Another advantage is its objectivity. What has survived the sieve of fifteen hundred years of history as an expression of common faith and become the starting point for life lived in the Spirit can claim a certain level of legitimacy.

Augustine himself is quite conscious of the difficulty of the matter. He also struggles with objectivity. He questions originality and trusts whatever can be objectively found in the common faith of the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. E.M. Heufelder, *Neues Pfingsten*, 2d ed. (Meitingen-Freising, 1970), especially 51; J. Pieper, *Ueberlieferung* (Munich, 1970) 38ff; 97–108. My original topic was simply “Pneumatology and Spirituality.” The reason for restricting the topic in this way is given in the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> This limitation is not for historical purposes but only with a view to the theological question of what can be learned from Augustine today. I have consciously avoided entering into the historical discussion of Augustine’s doctrine of the Trinity. On this question, see the bibliography in C. Andresen, *Bibliographia Augustiniana* (Darmstadt, 1962), 78–80 and the on-going bibliographies of the *Revue des Études Augustiniennes*. One could also mention in this regard M. Schmaus, *Die psychologische Trinitätslehre des heiligen Augustinus*, 2d ed. (1967); A. Dahl, *Augustin und Plotin* (Lund, 1945); O. du Roy, *L’intelligence de la foi en la trinité selon St. Augustin. Genèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu’en* (Paris, 1966), 391; as well as the edition with commentary of *De Trinitate* in the *Bibliothèque Augustinienne, Oeuvres de St. Augustin*, vol. 15 (M. Mellet, Th. Camelot, E. Hendrikx) and vol. 16 (P. Agaesse, J. Moingt), to be cited as *Oeuvres* vol. 15 and vol. 16.

Church. He proceeds to try to grasp the essence of the Holy Spirit by interpreting his customary names. He does not probe the topic “Pneumatology and Spirituality.” For him pneumatological questioning is intrinsically spiritual questioning. His questions are not about things but about what is defined as light and love and therefore can only be seen by entering into their holiness and warmth.

*1. The Name Holy Spirit as an Indication  
of the Unique Character of the Third Person of the Trinity*

As already stated, Augustine attempts to grasp the particular physiognomy of the Holy Spirit by investigating his traditional names, first, the designation “Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> But this presents him with an aporia. While the names “Father” and “Son” bring to light what is characteristic of the first and second Persons of the Trinity, the name “Holy Spirit” does not support the presentation of the the particularity of the third Person as giving and receiving, i.e., being as gift and being as reception, as word and response—characteristics which are so completely one that unity not subordination arises within them. On the contrary, each of the two other Persons of the Trinity could be named in this way. Above all, God himself and as such could be named this way since John 4:24 also states: “God is spirit.” Being spirit and being holy is the essential description of God. That is what identifies him as God.

Thus the attempt to gain some kind of concrete understanding of the Holy Spirit in this way only makes him completely unrecognizable. Augustine sees the particularity of the Holy Spirit expressed precisely in this dilemma. When he is named by that which is the divinity of God, by what the Father and Son have in common, then his essence is just that, the *communio* of Father and Son. The particularity of the Holy Spirit is evidently that he is what the Father and Son have in common. His particularity is being unity. The general name “Holy Spirit” is the most appropriate way to express him in the paradox characteristic of him—mutuality itself.

I think that we learn something very important here. The mediation of Father and Son comes to full unity not when it is seen in a universal, ontic *consubstantialitas* but as *communio*. In other words, it is not derived from a universally metaphysical substance but from the person. According to the nature of God, it is intrinsically personal. The dyad returns into unity in the Trinity without breaking up the dialogue. Dialogue is actually confirmed in just this way. A mediation back into unity which was not another Person would break up the dialogue as dialogue. The Spirit is Person as unity, unity as Person.

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<sup>3</sup>St. Augustine, *De Trinitate* 5.11.12-12.13. Cf. the excursus of J. Moingt, “Les Noms du Saint-Esprit” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 16, 651–54.

From the phrase “Holy Spirit,” Augustine takes the definition of Spirit as *communio*. This already has a fundamentally ecclesiological meaning for him, as will be confirmed in the other names of the Holy Spirit. It opens pneumatology up into ecclesiology, and reverse connection of ecclesiology into the-ology. Becoming a Christian means becoming *communio* and thereby entering into the mode of being of the Holy Spirit. But it can also only happen through the Holy Spirit, who is the power of communication, mediating it, making it possible and is himself a Person.

Spirit is the unity which God gives himself. In this unity, he himself gives himself. In this unity, the Father and the Son give themselves back to one another. The Spirit’s own paradoxical and unique property is being *communio*, having his highest selfness precisely in being fully the movement of *communio*. Being “spirit-ual” would thus essentially always have to do with unifying, communicating.

That means that Augustine has secretly also effected an important revision of the notion of spirit as such. A bit of metaphysics of spirit has occurred at the same time. He allows the Johannine sentence “God is spirit” to stand in a purely ontological sense. Spirit for him means, first of all, not being matter. On the other hand, one could immediately object that in John it does not have to do with this at all. There the word spirit expresses the otherness of God in opposition to worldly matters. The opposite of spirit is not matter but rather “the world.”<sup>4</sup> He is not ontological in the Greek sense but axiological, aiming at the specifically religious quality of the wholly Other and in that sense referring to the Holy Spirit as an expression of God’s self-determining character, to “the holiness” which expresses this “Other.” In many regards, this is an incomparably more radical opposition than the contrast of spirit and matter, since spirit ultimately can also be worldly and does not have to include going beyond the entirety of the innerworldly. Looking at the whole of Augustine’s interpretation, one can say that he embraces this view completely, abandoning the ancient metaphysics of spirit precisely because he has to explain Spirit not universally and metaphysically but on the basis of the dynamic between Father and Son. *Communio* thereby becomes an essential element of the notion of the Spirit, thus truly giving it content and thoroughly personalizing it. Only one who knows what “Holy Spirit” is, can know what spirit means. And only one who begins to know what God is, can know what Holy Spirit is. Furthermore, only one who begins to have an idea of what Holy Spirit is, can begin to know who God is.

## 2. *The Holy Spirit as Love*

The analysis of biblical pneumatology leads Augustine to the thesis that alongside the word “Holy Spirit,” the words “love” (*caritas*) and “gift”

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. R. Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium* I (Freiburg 1965), 474.

(*donum*) are also, strictly speaking, names of the Holy Spirit. Let us begin with the analysis of the word love, which led Augustine to this idea.<sup>5</sup>

a) The central text from which Augustine develops his thesis is found in the first letter of John: “God is love” (4:16). Augustine determines that, first of all and fundamentally, this statement pertains completely to God as the undivided Trinity but still expresses the unique property of the Holy Spirit. The case is similar to the words “wisdom” and “word,” which express qualities of God in a general sense, but also refer in the Bible to the Son in a specific sense. Augustine finds proof for the meaning of *caritas* in the context of 1 John 4:7–16.<sup>6</sup> The textual comparison of verse 12 and 16b with verse 13 is decisive for him:

Verse 12: If we love one another, God abides in us. . .

Verse 16b: God is love, and he who abides in love, God abides in him.

Verse 13: We recognize that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

In the first instance, love gives abiding; in the second instance, the Holy Spirit. In the above verses, *pneuma* takes the place of love and vice versa. Or literally: “The Holy Spirit, of whom he has given us, causes us to abide in God, and God in us. But love does this. He is, therefore, the God who is love.” To clarify, Augustine adds that Romans 5:5 states that the love of God is poured out through the Holy Spirit who is given to us. It appears to me that these observations are correct in principle. The gift of God is the Holy Spirit. The gift of God is love. God communicates himself in the Holy Spirit as love. For Augustine this reveals a number of very important, meaningful conclusions. First of all, the presence of the Holy Spirit is essentially proclaimed in the manner of love. *That* is the criterion of the Holy Spirit as opposed to the unholy spirit. In fact, that is the presence of the Holy Spirit himself and, in that sense, the presence of God. The basic and central meaning of what the Holy Spirit is and what he effects is ultimately not “knowledge” but love. This makes the expanded notion of spirit, the explanation of which is the Christian understanding of the wholly otherness of God, even more concrete than previously imagined. Admittedly, the full clarity of this statement first comes to light in ecclesiology, where Augustine is forced to address the practical question: “What does love mean as a criterion of the Holy Spirit and therefore also as a criterion of being Christian and of the Church?”

One important clarification immediately results from the analysis of the text of John: the basic criterion of love—its characteristic activity and therefore the characteristic activity of the Holy Spirit—is that it creates abiding. Love proves itself in constancy. Love is not recognizable right at any given moment, or in just one moment; instead, love abides,

<sup>5</sup> *De Trin.* 15.17.27–18.32.

<sup>6</sup> *De Trin.* 15.17.31.

overcomes vacillation, and bears eternity within itself, which also shows, in my opinion, the connection between love and truth. Love in the full sense can only exist where constancy exists. Where abiding exists. Because love has to do with abiding, it cannot take place anywhere except where there is eternity.

From this there emerges the basic framework for a doctrine of the discernment of spirits and a directive for the spiritual life. Clearly anyone who looks for *pneuma* only on the outside, in the always unexpected, is on the wrong path. He or she fails to appreciate the basic activity of the Holy Spirit: unifying love entering into abiding. This gives rise to a decision of great significance: “Is *pneuma* only to be sought in the discontinuous or does it dwell precisely in ‘abiding,’ in the constancy of creative fidelity?” If the latter, then it also means that spirit is not present where one speaks “in one’s own name” or “seeks one’s own fame,” thus creating a faction. *Pneuma* is present precisely in remembering (Jn 14:26) and unifying. We will come back to these statements, in which pneumatology, according to Augustine, became a concrete directive for action. But let us first continue with our analysis.

b) I would like briefly to mention a second passage in which Augustine found his view confirmed, i.e. that the word “love” in Holy Scripture is intended to refer specifically to the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Augustine contrasts the seventh and sixteenth verses of 1 John 4 and finds in the reciprocal interpretation of the two texts further confirmation of the contrast between verses 12/16 and verse 13. Verse 16 states that God is love. Verse 7 reads: “Love is from God.” Love is on the one hand “God,” on the other hand “from God.” If you put the two together, love is equally “God” and “from God”; in other words, love is “God from God.” Together with the previous passage, it seems to explain once again that this “God from God”—God as the power to emerge and become near, as the power of new birth, of a new whither for men and women—is the Holy Spirit and that we may receive in what is said about *agape* as an equivalent elucidation of what the Holy Spirit is.

### 3. The Holy Spirit as Gift

a) John 4:7–14, i.e., Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman, is Augustine’s central text for representing the word gift (*donum*) as an essential designation of the Holy Spirit. Jesus asks her for the “gift” of water in order to reveal himself as the giver of better water.<sup>8</sup> “If you only recognized God’s *gift*, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him instead and he would have *given* you living

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *De Trin.* 15.19.33; cf. 5.14.15–15.16.

water.” For Augustine, the inner logic of this text is supported by Jesus’ promise of water at the Feast of the Tabernacles: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. As Scripture states, from his body a stream of living waters will flow” (Jn 7:37). The evangelist adds to this passage: “He says this about the Spirit, whom those who came to believe in him were to receive” (7:39). Augustine finds the same pneumatological exegesis of the gift of living water in 1 Corinthians 12:13: “All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.” This affirmation of the Spirit in the image of water, as formulated in John 4 and John 7, provides Augustine with the connection between Christology and pneumatology. Christ is the well of living water. That means that the crucified Lord is the generative source of life for the world. The well of the Spirit is the crucified Christ. From him each Christian becomes the well of the Spirit.

It is also important to understand that all the power of the image is joined to pneumatology. Man’s ultimate thirst cries out for the Holy Spirit. He and he alone is the fresh water without which there is no life. The mystery of the Spirit becomes visible in the image of the well and of water in a way that is ineffable and cannot be retrieved through reflection, for the water waters and transforms a desert and encounters man as a mysterious promise. Man’s thirst becomes an infinite, radical thirst, a thirst which is not quenched by any other water than that water’s refreshment. In this context, Augustine admittedly did not pursue the connection between a theology of the cross and a theology of history, which is suggested especially by John 19 and whose wide influence in patristic theology has been successfully demonstrated by Hugo Rahner.<sup>9</sup>

According to Augustine, the second important result of the connection between John 4 and John 7 is the certainty that the name gift is a name of the Holy Spirit so as to make a theology (or more correctly, a pneumatology) of giving and of gift possible. Conversely, the essence of God as the Holy Spirit is also explained by the idea of gift. On this basis, Augustine can now elucidate the difference between Son and *pneuma*. In other words, he can answer the question about why the Spirit, who also is truly “God from God,” is not also “Son.” What is different here? Augustine’s answer: “He comes from God not as born but as given (*non quomodo natus, sed quomodo datus*). Therefore he is not called son because he is neither ‘born’ like the ‘first-born’ nor ‘created’ as we are (*neque natus . . . eque factus*).”<sup>10</sup> He distinguishes three modes of origin from God: being born, being given, and being created (*natus, datus, factus*). If one can best describe the essence of the Son, his own status with regard to the Father, with the concept of generation, then that of the Spirit is “giving.” The movement of giving is the specifically holy, spiritual movement.

This “being given” (*datus*) is not intended to be a middle position between being born and being created (*natus* and *factus*). It does not at all

<sup>9</sup> H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche* (Salzburg, 1964), 175–235.

<sup>10</sup> *De Trin.* 5.14.15.

eradicate the boundary separating creature and God but remains within the divinity. Nevertheless, it still represents an opening to history and to man. Augustine asks whether the Holy Spirit alone has his own gift-being or has his being entirely from the fact that he is “given.” Does he have a being independently of being gift and before he turns into gift, or does his being consist precisely of being God’s gift? The doctor of the Church from Hippo responds that the Holy Spirit always is in his essence the gift of God, God as the self-donating, God as the self-distributing, as gift.<sup>11</sup> The inner ground for creation and salvation history already lies in this mode of being of the Holy Spirit, being *donum* and *datum*, in fact beginning with salvation history, with God’s full self-giving, which appears for its part as the inner ground of creation. On the one hand, the “immanent” doctrine of the Trinity is opened wholly to the “economic.” On the other hand, salvation history is referred back to theo-logy. The *gift* of God is God himself. He is the content of Christian prayer. He is the only gift adequate to the divinity. God gives as God nothing other than God, giving himself and with himself everything. Proper Christian prayer does not plead for something or other but for the gift of God which God is, for him. Augustine expresses this beautifully by interpreting as a matter of course the plea of the “Our Father,” “Give us our daily bread,” in terms of the Holy Spirit. *He* is “our bread,” ours as one who is not ours, as something completely given. “Our” spirit is not our spirit . . .<sup>12</sup>

Thus, what really matters is that God as gift is actually God; in other words, that the Holy Spirit is divine. The classical precision of Augustine’s formulation can barely be translated into either our own words or our ideas: “There is there (i.e., with God) not a subordinate position of being given nor a lordship of the giver but the harmony (*concordia*) of the one given and the giver.” Moreover, this point confirms what Augustine previously took from the name “Holy Spirit”: “Because he is the one common to both, his own name is what they have in common.” This statement also establishes the inner unity of the designations “love” and “gift” with the main designation “Holy Spirit.” In this manner, he shows the legitimacy of this unity and integrates the whole into a mutually interpreting unity.

#### 4. The Opening to Salvation History

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<sup>11</sup> *De Trin.* 5.15.16.

<sup>12</sup>“*Spiritus ergo et Dei est qui dedit, et noster qui accipimus. Non ille spiritus noster quo sumus, quia ipse spiritus est hominis qui in ipso est: sed alio modo iste noster est, quo dicimus et: ‘Panem nostrum da nobis’ (Mt 6:11). Quanquam et illum spiritum qui hominis dicitur, utique accepimus. ‘Quid enim habes,’ inquit ‘quod non accepisti’ (1 Cor 4:7)? Sed aliud est quod accepimus ut essemus, aliud quod accepimus ut sancti essemus.*” (*De Trin.* 5.14.15).



As already noted, the opening to salvation history results equally from the concepts of love and gift. Two texts shed light and even more clarity on the meaning of the connections.

a) In *De Trinitate* 15.18.32, Augustine develops the eschatological significance of *pneuma* from the eschatological function of love as judge. *Caritas* is not opposed to justice but is itself the judgment. Love and love alone is the judgment of God. Love separates the left from the right (Mt 25!). The one who loves stands “on his right hand,” and the one who does not is directed to the left side. Without love none of “the Good” is good. Augustine buttresses his argument by turning to the seemingly conflicting preachers of the Gospel, Paul and James, the letter to the Galatians and the letter of James, respectively. According to Gal 5:6, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, only faith working through love. Paul repeats in condensed version what he said dramatically in 1 Cor 13:1–3: “Without *caritas* everything else, faith, works, is nothing, absolutely nothing.” Paul and James meet at this point because by referring to faith working through love, the apostle separates saving faith, pneumatically inspired faith, from the unsaving faith which the demons also possess (Jas 2:19). Without love, Augustine says, faith can “exist but not save,” *esse non prod-esse*, in the inimitable Latin of the bishop of Hippo.

These statements, which interpret *caritas*, i.e., *pneuma*, as the eschatological judgment and thus as the decisive sign of Christian faith, serve as the foundation for the entire sacramental theology and ecclesiology of Augustine, which at this point are reunited with pneumatology. With this conviction, Augustine took on the Donatists. The Donatists had the same sacraments as the Catholic Church, so wherein lies the difference? What is wrong with the Donatists? Taking into account the prehistory of the division, as well as their contemporary form, Augustine responds that they have broken love. They have departed from the true faith because they have placed their own idea of perfection above unity. They have held on to everything that is part of the Catholic Church except that they gave up love when they gave up unity. Without love everything else is empty. The word *caritas* receives here a very concrete, ecclesiological meaning, and in fact, in Augustine’s language it completely penetrates the concepts, for he says that the Church is love. This, in a sense, is a dogmatic thesis for him. As a creation of the Spirit, the Church is the body of the Lord built up by the *pneuma*, and thus also becomes the body of Christ when the *pneuma* forms men and women for “*communio*.” This creation, this Church, is God’s “gift” in the world, and this “gift” is love. But Augustine sees in this dogmatic thesis a concrete character as well. We cannot build up our Christian identity in sects, in isolation from others. Should this happen, the very soul of the whole would be missing even if one had all the individual parts. Accepting the entire community of believers belongs to Christian identity, i.e. humility, love (*caritas*), and bearing with one another, for otherwise the Holy Spirit, the one who unifies, would be missing. The dogmatic statement “The Church is love”

is not merely a dogmatic statement for the manuals, but refers to the dynamism that forms unity, a dynamism that is the force holding the Church together. Thus, Augustine thinks of schism as a pneumatological heresy which takes root concretely in the act of living. To remove oneself from the abiding, which is the spirit, from the patience of love, is to revoke love by revoking abiding and thereby denying the Holy Spirit, who is the patience of abiding, of reconciling. Augustine does not assert that whoever remains in the Church automatically has *caritas*, but rather, that whoever does not willingly remain leaves *caritas* behind. Therefore his proposition: one possesses the Holy Spirit to the degree that one loves the Church. Trinitarian theology is the real standard of ecclesiology. The name love as given to the Holy Spirit is the key to Christian existence and at the same time interprets love concretely as ecclesial patience.<sup>13</sup>

To understand more clearly this summation of an ecclesiological dispute and the pneumatological ecclesiology of Augustine, we should add that the pride of an even greater perfection existed not just at the beginning. The symptoms of this division were stamped with such hate that its diagnosis was obvious. The seed of the separation was the departure from the community of love. A few sentences from F. van der Meer, who vividly depicts the experience of Donatism as it appeared to Augustine, will shed some light on this:

It was reported that they (the Donatists) destroyed the place where a Catholic had been. And what was worse, they provided angry mobs, bands of embittered workers who perhaps dreamed of an earthly kingdom of God and who attacked over and over again the *cellae* (granaries or storehouses) or solitary farms, the country houses, churches, and castles of the Catholics. They plundered the supplies wherever they were not provided, “stealing the dry goods and emptying the liquids,” setting fire to the basilicas with books and everything. They mishandled the clerics and later, as their cause declined, threw lime and vinegar in the eyes of the Catholics in order to blind them, “something that did not even happen with the barbarians.” They also did not forget to demand letters of debt back, break contracts, extort the liberation of the most terrible good-for-nothings among the slaves, and, when necessary, hitch a resisting lord up to the treadmills.<sup>14</sup>

Thus we have to concede that the identification of Church and love also has its dangers, no matter how grounded in the deepest reasoning and no matter how intelligibly brought forward. There is no doubt that the resultant ecclesial transformation of spirit and love addresses one side of the issue. But it can also lead to dangerous and restrictive consequences. These dangers arise when the designation of the Church as love no longer

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. the presentation of these ideas in my book, *Volk und Haus Gottes in Augustins Lehre von der Kirche* (Munich, 1954), 136–58.

<sup>14</sup> F. van der Meer, *Augustinus der Seelsorger* (Cologne, 1951), 113. See the entire section, “Die pars Donati und die Ketzer,” 109–63. On the historical context of Donatism: H.I. Mattou in *Geschichte der Kirche*, vol. 1, ed. J. Daniélou and H.I. Marrou (Einsiedeln, 1953), 256–60; W.H.C. Frend, “Donatismus” in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 4, ed. Th. Klauser, 128–47.

allows its connection with the Spirit to be the actual standard of the Church (as a practical requirement) but appears instead as the self-evident content of the institution. In this case, rigidity sets in, a problem which the later Augustine suggested and which subsequently led to the dangerous hardening of positions in the Church during the Middle Ages and modernity.

Perhaps it is also because in the heretical movements of the Middle Ages and Reformation, the Spirit is considered almost in contrast to the established Church. The opposition that has reemerged in our day between *pneuma* and institution expresses a romanticism that is no longer relevant even in the profane realm. (Germany has dramatically experienced, in this century alone, the power of romantic movements which destroy spirit and body.) This false alternative is all the more incapable of coping with the problem of Church and Spirit. Today the “official Church,” or the “empirical Catholic Church,” is looked upon as the antithesis of “spirit.” Augustine would have denied this and refuted it as a misunderstanding of the Church, which may be forgivable in the pagan, but should be impossible in the believer. The Church that dispenses the sacraments and explains the word of God by listening is not only the “empirical Catholic Church.” She cannot be divided up into “spirit” and “institution.” The Church is the house of the Spirit, visible and “empirical,” in the sacraments and in the word. The Spirit is given precisely in the concrete community of those who derive from Christ their support and bear with one another. The idea that the Spirit only appears in discontinuous and occasional eruptions of self-educated groups would be unthinkable to Augustine. Whoever looks for the Spirit only externally, Augustine would say, misunderstands the fundamental activity of *pneuma*: unifying love entering into abiding. But this opens up an alternative of decisive significance: “Is *pneuma* only in the discontinuous, or precisely in the gift that has been given?”

b) In this context, Augustine’s interpretation of the pneumatology of Eph 4:7–12 is important.<sup>15</sup> Here he discovers the notion of Spirit as liberation and the development of “the gift” in the gifts which Paul, among other things, called “charisms”—in other words, the questions that play a decisive role in the contemporary view of *pneuma* as the antithesis of “institution.”

Augustine starts with the words from the letter to the Ephesians: “Each of us has received grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Thus you find the Scripture saying: ‘When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men’” (Eph 4:7–8 in connection with Ps 67:18). For Augustine the keyword “gift” identifies the text as pneumatological. It also offers him a dramatic teaching opportunity for the connection between Christ and the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit, in which

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<sup>15</sup> *De Trin.* 15.19.34.

the Spirit himself is finally the gift, are the gifts of the victorious Christ, the fruit of his victory, of his ascension to the Father. Two apparently contradictory ways of reading the passage in which the Vulgate paraphrases Psalm 67 are important to Augustine. The first reads: “You receive gifts in men,” and the second (which the New Testament follows): “He gave gifts to men.” For Augustine the contrast here represents the ambiguity of the christological mystery itself. Christ, the one who ascended, also remains the one who descended. He stands both on the side of the God who gives and the men and women who receive. He is head and body, giving from the side of God and receiving from the side of humanity. Once again, this is what joins ecclesiology and Christology. In the Church he remains the one who descends. The Church is Christ as the one who descended, a continuation of the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Accordingly, Augustine concentrates here predominantly on the connection between Christ, Spirit, and Church as represented in this text. He concentrates not so much on the individual gifts mentioned in the New Testament as such, but rather on the fact that in all those gifts, the *gift*—the Holy Spirit—is given. Moreover, Augustine remains faithful to the text and correctly cites 1 Cor 12:11 as a parallel to support his view: “But it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts, distributing them to each as he wills.” But if the gifts are ultimately *one* gift in many forms, namely the Spirit of God, and if the Spirit is the gift of Jesus Christ (which he gives and receives in men and women), then the innermost finality of all gifts is unity. Thus quite reasonably the related passage from the letter to the Ephesians concludes by setting as the final goal that all of this is “for the sake of building up the body of Christ.”

This brings Augustine back to his favorite ecclesiological and pneumatological idea, the idea of building, of abiding, of unity, of love. He finds here a possibility of using it in a new way, which he elucidates by adding Psalm 126:1: “If the Lord does not build the house . . .” He localizes the Psalm in post-exilic prophecy, which is concerned with building a house “after the captivity.” The keyword, “captivity,” connects Ps 67 and Eph 4: the Lord imprisoned captivity and gave gifts. His gift is the Spirit, and the Spirit is the building that can finally take place after the captivity. This indirectly touches upon the issue of freedom. The imprisoning captivity, which previously impeded building, is the devil. Conversely, the devil is captivity, man’s bondage, exile, a luring away from self. The anthropological analysis of *The Confessions* can also be heard in the background. If a man is tempted away from himself, he wanders aimlessly into emptiness. Precisely in this appearance of freedom, he is the exile, the prisoner, the criminal.<sup>16</sup> Once again, Augustine is not just speaking on the

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. especially St. Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5.12–12.30; particularly 7.16: “. . . retorquebas me ad me ipsum, auferens me a dorso meo, ubi me posueram.” See the commentary of A. Soullignac in *Oeuvres*, vol. 14: 543 (“La psychologie augustinienne de la volonté”) and vol. 13: 689–93 (“Regio dissimilitudinis”).

basis of a dogmatic or philosophical theory but from the experience of his whole life. In indeterminacy, in the apparent freedom of an existence in which everything was possible but nothing was meaningful, he was enslaved. He was exiled from himself and captured by complete unconnectedness, which was based upon the absence of self and its detachment from its own truth. On the other hand, the gift of the victorious Christ is the homecoming and thereby makes possible the building of the house, and the house is called "Church."

Here the theme of spirit as freedom and liberation plainly comes into play. Although paradoxical to contemporary thought, freedom consists in becoming a part of the house, in being included in the building. This idea is not paradoxical from the perspective of the ancient concept of freedom. For the ancients, whoever belongs to the house is free, and freedom is finding a home.<sup>17</sup> Augustine presupposes this ancient social notion of freedom, but then decisively transcends it in accordance with Christian faith. Freedom stands in an insoluble relation to truth, which is man's authentic way of finding a home.<sup>18</sup> Man is only free if he is at home, i.e., if he is in the truth. A movement that distances man from the truth of himself, from truth itself, can never be freedom because such a movement destroys man, alienates him from himself, and thus takes from him his own realm of movement, in which he can become himself. That is why the devil is captivity, and that is why the risen Christ, who involved man and built him into the house, is liberation. Finally, that is why the individual gifts of the Spirit, the charisms, can converge in the idea of building.

In this passage, Augustine takes from the doctrine of charisms the keyword "building." As was said previously with the connection between Church and love, such a "narrowing of perspective" has its dangers. It can lead to overlooking the manifold activities of the Spirit in favor of a loyalty to given rules, rules which eventually can be identified with the Spirit. In this respect, these texts do not offer a universally valid pneumatology nor a completely balanced teaching on Christian spirituality. But they do make a contribution, and this application of the Bible was indeed quite appropriate in Augustine's time. An overabundance of charisms hardly existed in Augustine's diocese; therefore, the problem was different from that of St. Paul's Corinth. (Incidentally, Paul also concluded that building or love was the single most important charism and singly important for everyone,

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the thorough study of D. Nestle, *Eleutheria: Studien zum Wesen der Freiheit bei den Griechen und im Neuen Testament*, part 1, *Die Griechen* (Tübingen, 1967); E. Coreth, "Zur Problemgeschichte menschlicher Freiheit," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 94 (1972): 258–289; on this topic see 264–68.

<sup>18</sup> For the connection between freedom and truth, see E. Coreth, "Zur Problemgeschichte," 289.

followed by prophecy or comprehensible proclamation.<sup>19)</sup> That aside, Augustine justifiably calls for the charism which was necessary for a Church torn apart by hate and the formation of sects—the charism to work together to build up the unity of the Church. And he stands wholly on the side of the Apostle when he sees *pneuma* decisively in the affirmative—in the Yes that makes man into “a house” and ends “captivity.” The “house” is freedom, not dispersion. The activity of the Spirit is “the house,” the granting of the home. Unity. Because the Spirit is love.—*Translated by Peter Casarella.*

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. H. Schlier, “Ueber das Hauptanliegen des 1: Briefes an die Korinther,” in *Die Zeit der Kirche*, 2d ed. (Freiburg, 1958), 147–59; J. Ratzinger, “Bemerkungen zur Frage der Charismen in der Kirche,” in *Die Zeit Jesu: Festschrift für H. Schlier*, ed. G. Bornkamm and K. Rahner (Freiburg, 1970), 257–72.