

HABITS OF THE SPIRIT: REFLECTIONS ON A PRAGMATIC PNEUMATOLOGY

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The question of the relationship between the Spirit and the practices that are a constitutive part of the church is especially pressing today. The reason for this urgency is that in the wake of the so-called linguistic turn in both philosophy and theology, it has become customary to conceive religion primarily in terms of participation in specific practices. Being a Christian is defined in terms of becoming skilled in certain practices. One's being a Christian is no longer so much a matter of having a certain sort of relationship to God, a certain ontological status deriving by being regarded as justified by God. Rather, it has become a matter of socializing oneself into a habit of life.

One might be forgiven for suspecting that this is the return—with a vengeance—of an institutional and formalized model of religion, a final victory over the Reformation. However, despite its “tilt” towards Rome, postliberal theology also cherishes a post-Constantinian ideal of Christianity. It tends to define the church not so much in terms of a formal acknowledgment of belonging to this and that visible community, but rather in terms of authentic participation in Spirit-inspired practices. Nonetheless, it is still “visibility” that matters, albeit not the formal visibility associated with institutionalized religion, but the *practical* visibility which is also translatable as the fruits of the Spirit.

To be sure, Reinhard Hütter deplores the damaging effect the distinction between the external, formal, and the internal, informal church has had on ecclesiology. It is only possible to erect a disjunction in this way if we construe externality as the sphere of human activity, while restricting divine action to the realm of the internal, of the soul. This privatization of religion that may have been partly encouraged by the Reformation is now viewed with reservation. Once we understand that the external must be construed as necessarily pneumatological, it becomes clear that only faith can discern the externality of the Holy Spirit's activities.

This description of the “core practices” of the church as belonging to the agency of the Holy Spirit nonetheless assumes an important theological position, that is, that the activity of the Holy Spirit *must* proceed along the lines of these core practices into which the church has already been habituated. The activity of the Spirit—his presence in the church—is overlapping

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with the practices in which the church engages under his guidance. The assumption that pneumatic presence and activity necessarily presuppose the context of certain social practices and conventions is becoming a sort of theological rule in some contexts.

This essay will attempt to throw some light on this assumption and on what it involves. The first section will introduce a Wittgensteinian constraint upon pneumatology that makes it at once problematic to assign the work of the spirit to the subjectivity of the individual believer. Attempting to find a proper locus for the Spirit's activity, theologians like Hütter and Rogers conceive it in terms of church practices. Section two argues that this fails to provide the desired concreteness for the object of theology. I then suggest that the NT witness does not square with a philosophical deconstruction of interiority. Finally, I ask whether this retention of interiority is not reactionary.

I. A WITTGENSTEINIAN CONSTRAINT ON PNEUMATOLOGY

Recent philosophy renders discussions of interiority, inwardness, and the inner self problematic. This modern suspicion stems in part from Wittgenstein's probing critique of the metaphysical imagination of what it means to be oneself. Territorial metaphors such as "inside" and "outside" tempt us, so we are told, into thinking of the human being as being divided into an inner and outer self. Interiority is the space where beliefs are entertained, where the will is born, the mirror into which we introspectively gaze, or the realm where we are alone with ourselves. Our private sensations are transparent to us inwardly. Outside these confines of the soul, on the other hand, lies the public space ruled by language, a space demarcated by relations and exchange. That is the space where my subjectivity is labored. It is labored both in the sense of "shaped" as well as in the sense of "impoverished," "at risk." Only in the safety and privacy of self-inspection do I really feel at home, at peace with myself. It is there where I plan who I want to be, there that I decide in what way I possess myself, or express myself.

Wittgenstein has reputedly shown how pathological this view of the self is.¹ It is only by assuming such a notion that I can entertain questions such as, "Are there really other minds?" "Could that man *really* be in pain?" "What does he actually mean by such and such?" Conceiving of human identity in such a territorial fashion leads (naturally) toward further alienation among ourselves, as we keep thinking of ourselves as fenced by our (social and linguistic) bodies.

Rather than think of our behavior and actions as being in need of a deep analysis and as providing mere "clues" to our real selves, we ought to think of these as giving a full description of who we are. Conceptually, it becomes incoherent to think of the meaning of our words as resting upon some private sensations or states of mind that we might have in the intimacy of our mental realm. If things were like this, that is, if we could entertain such private

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (London: Prentice Hall, 1999) §§ 244–271.

processes, we would have no way of grasping their meaning, for that would require knowing right from wrong use.² But such discrimination can only be public and social. We get at meaning by paying attention to the variety of public activities in which people are engaged. Kerr summarizes the point from Wittgenstein: "Faith, like hope and much else, is embedded in human life, 'in all of the situations and reactions which constitute human life'. . . . But instead of simply saying what anyone knows and must admit, we find ourselves overcome by a myth of mental processes: . . . faith becomes something so inward and spiritual that it can never be exhibited to anyone else, and the believer soon finds that he too does not know whether he has it."³ This amounts to a radical revision of our notion of self as energized from within.

One of the areas affected by this rethinking of interiority is the way in which one might describe the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and the believer. If knowledge is socially constructed and if meaning is manifestation in performance, then in what sense can we still talk about the *in-dwelling* of the Spirit? Furthermore, what sense can be made of that activity of the Spirit which is "too deep for words?" Is there a way of acknowledging this social mediation while at the same time preserving the truth of these biblical ideas?

Reinhard Hütter gives voice to an epistemic concern about the work of the Spirit in a discussion of Barth's actualism. Contrary to the latter's insistence on the freedom of God to make himself present in various forms of human responses to revelation such as praise, proclamation, the sacraments and so on, Hütter claims that the being and work of the Spirit must issue in some *concrete* forms. One might call this an epistemic concern, because "[w]ithout concrete mediation through the core practices of the church, including church doctrine, the activity of the Holy Spirit becomes questionable."⁴ Hütter merely translates a principle that is dominating post-Wittgensteinian thought, namely that for something to be accessible to knowledge, that is, in order for us to be able to form justified beliefs about some thing, it must be in some sense present in what Sellars has called "the space of concepts." For Wittgenstein, to be sure, this space of concepts gets a pragmatic twist, with more emphasis being placed on the practical activities through which we encounter that object. Yet the effect has been the same: for something to be known to human beings, it must already have become internal to some human praxis.

It is not difficult to see where Barth might object. For this constraint placed on human knowledge should not be taken to apply to either God or theological knowledge of revelation. God does not need any *Anknüpfungspunkt* in order to make his entry into the human conceptual realm. There can be no adequate human *preparatio*, either in terms of available conceptuality, ethical dispositions, or some other kind, in order to receive God's

² Ibid. § 261.

³ Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (London: SPCK, 1997) 150.

⁴ Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 127.

grace. Rather, God in his freedom chooses to use whatever *mediate forms* there are, not because of some inherent quality that these might possess, but entirely in virtue of his free grace. His actualism translates into a principled refusal of a necessary connection between human practice and divine presence within those practical forms.

One should value Barth's insistence on divine prevenience. Yet the question remains that if we conceive God's actions and presence to be mediated in such a free and ad hoc fashion, does theology still have an object to speak about? The arguments against interiority briefly mentioned above apply here with particular force: if the activity of the Holy Spirit is exclusively described in terms of internal testimony, not necessarily manifested in a set of practices, on what basis can we determine whether we really speak about the Holy Spirit? The question can be put in a meaning-theoretical key as well. What is the meaning of the word "Holy Spirit" if his work is interior, rather than exterior, public, visible? How might we be able to tell when we use "Spirit" language correctly or incorrectly? Are there any publicly available criteria that regulate its usage? According to Hütter's interpretation of Barth, at least, God's freedom thus conceived robs us of adequate ways of speaking about God.

II. HOLY SPIRIT AND CORE PRACTICES

It is necessary, Hütter writes, to find an internal relation between the salvific-economic work of the Spirit and the being of the church, with its church practices, in order to find that place where the work of the Spirit is fully and adequately manifested. He locates that space in the "core practices" of the church. These are *poiēmata* of the Spirit; they are creations of the Spirit, creations in which we participate. The challenge is to find a space where God's being and presence is fully manifested, while preserving his priority and freedom at the same time. In being primarily creations of the Spirit, the core practices of the church are the locus of God's continued and *promised* presence for the church. It is this notion of promise which radically qualifies God's freedom for Hütter.

To be sure, Hütter's turn to practices is much more theologically discerning than some other recent such orientations. By speaking of "core" practices, in contradistinction from other practices, he insists on their radical nature as the Spirit's *poiēmata*. They are thus only analogically to be correlated with, e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of practice as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."⁵ The distinctive quality of these practices is not their form. In respect of their form they might be indeed analysed in terms of

⁵ *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (2d ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 89.

MacIntyre's definition. Yet the latter's is an anthropologically oriented notion of practice and it is precisely the mode of God's presence in these that distinguished them from other practices.

Hütter could not be content with insisting, as Lindbeck does, that these practices are simply adequate to knowing God. On the one hand Lindbeck fails to distinguish between the different types of practices that make up the religious "vocabulary." On the other hand, his model is theologically underdeveloped. One cannot but admire Hütter's intentions. If this works then the epistemic problem is solved. For what we are promised is a model in which God, while remaining ontologically distinct from humanity, is nonetheless epistemically accessible to human knowledge through his creation of distinct practices that provide the necessary pragmatic context within which such knowledge can occur. One should note at this point that although much theological sensitivity goes into constructing this model, a significant concession to philosophy is made. This consists in granting philosophy the notion that there is a necessary pragmatic mediation of knowledge. One might therefore be forgiven for not giving up the suspicion that God's freedom is still compromised by him being "forced," as it were, to create these practices through which we might know him.

However, I must immediately admit that this suspicion can only be persuasive on the basis of an assumption that I am indeed not willing to entertain. That is, that God has created those practices precisely in order to conform himself to this constraint. It is, however, a little presumptuous to assume that God had an exclusively epistemic purpose in mind for creating those practices. It is quite intelligible to assume that the point of those practices is not primarily epistemic, even though they *happen* to satisfy (felicitously enough) this epistemic constraint as well. God's freedom is not jeopardized in this respect if we grant that his primary interest was not epistemic, but salvific or ethical-transformational.

Yet it is precisely in this insistence on the divine mode of presence in these practices that problems appear for Hütter. His theological insistence on the divine origin of these practices, which helps him evade a purely anthropological construction of divine knowledge, only amounts to a transfer of the philosophical (epistemic) worry to another level. By insisting that these practices are ruled by the Spirit the question that we must ask is, "How do we know this?" Again, one must be careful not to ask the wrong type of question. Hütter is adamant that this is not an apologetic theology. The point is not that of convincing unbelievers about the truth of the Gospel or that of providing a pragmatic proof for the existence of God. On the contrary, this is an explication of the logic of Christian faith. It would therefore be a mistake to ask: "How can we *prove* that the Spirit is the author of the core practices?" This would be the sort of external question that according to Hütter would simply not make sense. For questions about God only make sense from within the practical context, ruled by the Spirit. Precisely this is the point of the insistence on core practices.

However, Hütter cannot get away with it that easily. For this question about the origin of the practices makes sense, perhaps even more urgently, as an internal question. It is not simply a question that those outside the

church, that is, not practicing the practices and beliefs of the church, might ask. But it is a *prophetic* question that the church is bound to ask about the authenticity of its practices.⁶ The church must continually analyze its own performance and its faithfulness to God.⁷ Even granted that these core practices are the *poiemata* of the Spirit, it is still the case that human agents perform them. One cannot avoid questions possibly raised by a thick analysis and description of these practices, questions such as, “What ulterior or subterranean purposes do the human agents intend?” Indeed, if Hütter’s insistence on their divine origin is intended to forestall ideological criticism, this is a dangerous move. His insistence that these practices are what they are exclusively because of the Spirit’s work is at best simplistic, both sociologically and psychologically. According to Joseph Mangina, this conception seems to “undercut a sense of the church’s natural or creaturely existence.”⁸ Furthermore, Mangina continues, if the church is to be thought of as a holy Christian people, “[I]t would seem natural to think of this people itself as being, in some straightforward sense, the agents of those practices that constitute them as church.”⁹

If human agency is denied we run against at least two problems. On the one hand, we cannot account for the fact that, as Hütter himself recognizes, “[E]ach of these core practices can be distorted and misused.”¹⁰ On the other hand, the epistemic question reappears: Why should we ascribe these (particular instances of) practices to the Holy Spirit? It is not immediately assured that a description of how human agency cooperates rather than is simply absorbed into the divine will to relieve the skeptical anxiety. But it is surely the case that failing to do so will only encourage anxiety. It does indeed seem that while his program aims at making the Spirit epistemically available, this availability is simply postponed while a host of other epistemic barriers appears. It is when we recognize that these practices cannot be explained without recourse to human agency that the epistemic worry reappears. If we also understand that we cannot dismiss such worries as being merely confused, external questions, when we understand that theology also serves a prophetic role, calling the church and its practices into question, that we realize there is an element of unintentional triumphalism in Hütter’s theological program.

⁶ See Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) for a critique of ecclesiology from the standpoint of its prophetic character.

⁷ I say “God” rather than Scriptures, the Gospel, etc., in order to signal that this is partly a question of precisely what they should be faithful to. It is a formulation intentionally left open-ended, for while we know the church should be obedient to God and responsive to his actions, the present question is precisely about where his Being is manifest, whether in Scripture, practices, tradition, and so on. My view on this clings closely to the objectivity of God’s self-revelation in Scripture (following Barth), while also making minor qualifications.

⁸ Joseph Mangina, “Review Article of *Suffering Divine Things*,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2 (2000) 340.

⁹ *Ibid.* 340.

¹⁰ Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things* 133.

To sum up my argument to this point: Hütter's emphasis on the divinely created core practices fails to make the Spirit epistemically accessible. Thus theology does not have a concrete object under this regime any more than under Barth's actualism. Unless, that is, theology is prepared to frankly admit that it has no other object than church practices. Yet this would effectively make God's being epistemically inaccessible for human knowledge. But, if epistemic availability is certain to be lost, what is gained in this model?

Insisting on practices is certainly helpful for theology, just as insistence on the manifestation of meaning in use is beneficial for philosophy. However, I would like to point out that we cannot simply give up interiority. The NT story of the Spirit's work cannot be reduced to a presence of the spirit in the public practices. There is an irreducibly interior element to the Spirit's activity. One must probe into describing that component without lapsing into the really questionable aspects of interiority that Wittgenstein has aptly debunked. Being Christian, I shall argue, is not exclusively, not even primarily, a matter of being trained in practices. Rather, it has everything to do with an ontological, ongoing transformation which cannot be rendered exclusively in terms of practical ability, although it remains impossible to articulate without it. What I shall try to convey is a sense in which theology needs both interiority and practices and behavior. Not only must interiority be preserved, but also the Barthian insight that God does not need any pre-existing conceptual scheme or practical ability to make himself known or to be active.

III. INTERIORITY AND MANIFESTATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The predicament could be stated thus: insofar as we seek a primarily theological vision of practices, we end up reviving the skeptical question, while if we develop a merely horizontal account, theology is redirected away from God and toward this-worldly objects. The difficulty, *in nuce*, is that of ensuring that God is ontologically distinct yet epistemologically available. I suggested that it is a mistake to apply certain restrictions to the divine freedom to manifest and reveal itself. This freedom does not need any prior human determination or disposition, for this would render it meaningless. God is free to reveal himself to us *over against*, rather than *through*, human practices and conceptual schemes. In this sense the Spirit will no longer be collapsed into the practices, but will be seen as "hovering" over them.

Now the theological—as opposed to the skeptical—worry can be reconceived in a different key. Hütter points out that Jesus promises to send his Spirit. This promise effectively qualifies his freedom. Unless we conceive of the Spirit as being fully manifested in the core practices of the church, we will not have a concrete object. It is still an open question whether this drive for concreteness is an example of an "anxiety of constraint"¹¹ or whether it is actually a theological imperative deriving from what the Spirit is supposed

¹¹ See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

to do, namely to guide us, teach us, illuminate us, and so on. These are all *didactic* activities. Hütter seems to think that unless he is concretely available in the guise of practices, this didactic activity cannot be carried out. Barth's actualism leaves theology in the dark insofar as God cannot be localized in any space, remaining the one that vacates the now empty place. The mediate forms must concretely embody the presence of the Spirit, giving the church a visible manifestation of God's presence and work. It is this manifestation that *constrains* the church, as Hütter continues his argument, through *dogma*, as the *assertiones* of the Spirit.¹² Theology is not about a dialectical approximation of divine absence. The empty place of which Barth speaks has in fact been filled, according to the promise of Christ, since Pentecost. Although Barth is to be congratulated for bringing pneumatology to bear on questions of theological method and knowledge, its subjectivist confinement to internal testimony leaves it inadequate for a theological method in need of constraint.

At work in this argument is an assumption that must be revealed before we can proceed. Let me restate the argument schematically: (1) Jesus promises to send his Spirit as that which will teach us, guide us, etc.; (2) Jesus keeps his promises; (3) it follows that, if this didactic activity is real, the Spirit must be epistemically accessible in visible and concrete manifestations. What this argument assumes is that a didactic promise like that is kept only if we have manageable ways of *knowing that* we have been taught by the Holy Spirit. The visibility which Hütter is after is meant to provide us with ways of being able to justify that we have so been taught and guided by the Spirit. He does not envision the possibility that the Spirit's guidance and teaching can take place without our being able to verify and know (technically speaking) that it was effective. Hütter collates holding to a promise with our ability to verify that the promise was kept. Why else is concreteness and visibility so important for his program?

In fact, this *requirement of manifestation* is part and parcel of a generalized suspicion of interiority. If the Spirit does indeed teach us, so the assumption goes, his teaching can in no way happen subconsciously, to take but one example. It is not possible that the Spirit moves us in such a way that we are not even aware of it. Now my argument is not that the Spirit only moves in such non-epistemic ways, nor even that he primarily moves in these ways. I am not even arguing that he ever does teach (here "guides" might be more appropriate) in such non-epistemic ways. I am simply pointing out a conceptual possibility. Once we envision this possibility we can see why the transition from holding God to his promises to our ability to concretely know when those promises have been kept is fallacious. It can be the case (theoretically) that God's promises have been kept without our being aware of this. Furthermore, God's promises are not that we shall have reliable ways of doing theology (indeed, Hütter resembles a closet foundationalist), but an interpretable, open-ended promise that the Spirit will be with us and guide us.

In what follows I would like to suggest that this promise is indeed kept, as the NT teaches, and that interiority is partly where it is kept. Once the

¹² Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things* 150ff.

Wittgensteinian constraint is removed, it becomes possible to conceive of the activity of the Spirit in ways that are (a) *partly* unmanifested in epistemically accessible patterns; and (b) *partly* incommunicable because non-(humanly) linguistic. I do not propose to remove this constraint by a philosophical argument, but merely to show that Scripture paints a different picture, at least in some respects. If I may anticipate the argument, revisionist interpretations of scriptural texts which deconstruct the notion of interiority and incommunicability do violence to the text. There is no way around the fact that the NT writers imagined an interiority, now indwelt by the Spirit. Furthermore, they imagined a work of the Spirit which escapes from human linguistic and social patterns.

In his brilliant essay, "The Eclipse of the Spirit in Thomas Aquinas," Eugene F. Rogers, Jr. writes: "For Aquinas, as for Wittgenstein and for Vic[tor Preller], the work of the Spirit is to be sought in the practices of the community, not because the Spirit is *reduced* to matter or community, but because the Spirit could not be received by human beings, for whom nothing can be in the mind not first in the senses, except in matter."¹³ This introduces an additional, Aristotelian constraint, which bears further discussion on the work of the Spirit. However, what I have said about the freedom of the Spirit equally applies in this case. Unless we are ready to give up divine freedom, we should accept that God can act upon the human being without the help of any prior disposition. Rogers seems unwilling to accept this. In fact, he tries to recast the whole activity of the Spirit in wholly legal terms. He points out that the activity of the Holy Spirit is described in terms of a New Law, the law of the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ. This implies that even those experiences that are *apparently* non-linguistic, or "too deep for words" only make sense in a legal context, constituted by "by rules and forms of life in which alone such an experience can come about."¹⁴ He further comments on this legal description of the activity of the Spirit: "far from an antinomian opposition to structure, the Spirit, one might say, is the Rule."¹⁵ Even the "too deep for words" intercession that the Spirit does on our behalf "is still a *learned, communal, linguistic* prayer that the Spirit prays for us; the Spirit does not enrapture us, but it is a human thing that the Spirit does for us."¹⁶ This is evidently a naturalistic reading of both Aquinas, and perhaps most disturbingly, of these scriptural texts.

It is true that what the Spirit inscribes is still another Law, a new law. It is also undeniable that Paul does not encourage antinomianism but a life that is ruled by the Spirit. It is just as clear that there are differences between the character of the Old Covenant and the nature of the new law. The Law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2), written on the "tablets of human

¹³ Eugene F. Rogers, Jr., "The Eclipse of the Spirit in Thomas Aquinas," in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain; London: SCM, 2004) 138.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 148–49.

hearts" (2 Cor 3:3) creates an internal disposition towards doing what is pleasing before God. Whereas the old law was only able to serve as an external standard, lacking a means of motivation, while constantly being a cold reminder of human inability to live up to it, the new law also moves to action (Phil 2:13). Yet if one describes the activity of the Spirit exclusively in legal terms, something essential to the character of this activity is lost. When Paul rejects antinomianism he does so on the basis of the fact that we are "temples of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 6:19). The ethical practices (which are indeed ruled and law-like) in which we should engage are but a *consequence* of an ontological state of affairs that obtains between the believer and Holy Spirit. Paul not only thinks that the fruit of the Spirit should flow *out* of this ontological state of affairs, but that believers should *strive* to bear this fruit. The transition from indwelling to manifestation and practice is anything but automatic. Human agency is actively engaged at this level; otherwise Paul's effort would be pointless.

Rogers's exaggerated insistence on the rules and forms of life forgets the fact that these do not make sense (in the new covenant) except as consequences of our being indwelt by the Spirit. It is precisely this indwelling which gives the Christian her freedom, thus prompting Paul to warn against antinomianism (Rom 6:1ff). Paul's injunctions make no sense if the Spirit's activity is reduced to the creation of a practical and ruled life. Rogers's interpretation of Paul misses the strength and compelling nature of the position the apostle attacks. Paul would not have considered it necessary to go to such length only to state the obvious.

This tension between the Spirit who indwells us, on the one hand, and the rule-like, legal manifestation of that indwelling must be kept rather than resolved in either direction. The tendency of theologians writing in the wake of Wittgenstein is to stand on one side of the divide and to reduce the other side. Concretely, they assume the position from which all that we have is the manifestation of this new life in the communal and linguistic practices and then reduce interiority to irrelevance, or to the status of an epiphenomenal object. As things stand, exegetically, the debate only makes sense when equal force is granted to both sides, rather than attempting to reduce one to the other.

Understanding this particular character of the practices as flowing out of an ontological transformation within the human being makes it easier to reconcile human and divine agency within these practices. There is not enough space to go into that here. The discussion is necessarily complex, but I will simply point out that whereas Hütter's problem was his neglect of human agency, this problem disappears when practices are no longer thought to be bedrock. Human agency is eclipsed precisely because what was sought is a locus of divine presence. We can acknowledge the vital part played by human agency, since this will not compromise divine presence, being as it is partly interior.

The Spirit creates not only practices (the church, and we can frankly grant this to Hütter), but also a new heart (1 Cor 12:13). Redeemed human beings are new creations. These twin creations of the Spirit must not be

reduced one to the other, as it has sometimes happened in recent theological anthropology or ecclesiology. The presence of the Spirit in his temple has as a consequence the fact that the Christian bears the fruit of the Spirit. However, a thick description of what Christianity is about must include in a description of its practices the internal motivation and disposition which is worked out by the Spirit of life who dwells within. A number of biblical interpreters, in speaking about Paul's ethical teaching and ethical arguments, mention the tension between the indicative and the imperative.¹⁷ The Christian should live ethically because of what she or he *already is*. It is difficult to convey this realization if we translate interiority in terms of manifestation. Manifestation should be what it is precisely in light of a state of affairs which characterizes interiority. As Ben Witherington III put it, "There is a new perspective because there is a new person. There is a transformed outlook because the person has been spiritually transformed."¹⁸ He then goes on to underline the sudden ontological transformation that took place: the old is not simply passing away, but has passed away. Only this tension between the new beings that we are, "being born of God," to follow John's language, and our still sinful behavior can explain why sin should be so repulsive: "The horror of sin in a believer is that, although a new creature with the old self crucified, he or she sometimes wilfully chooses to act against both what he or she knows and what he or she is. It is as a new person that believers sin—a new person who is no longer bound to sin as its slave."¹⁹

If it is so difficult to separate exegetically interiority from manifestation, the heart from the law, one should not be overzealous to do so on the basis of philosophical considerations, Wittgensteinian or otherwise. That is, if we are willing to allow the Scriptures to narrate the world, rather than to read the Scriptures in light of the world, we must at once envisage the possibility of an interiority which is neither *fully* manifested, nor *fully* epistemic, and finally not *fully* linguistic. Being Christian is not simply, not exclusively, not even primarily a matter of being trained into the practices of a given community, but a matter of an ontological transformation which is more or less manifested in one's ruled life. We have to give up this strict interpretation of the manifestation requirement if we are to be true to the biblical witness, which holds that salvation obtains quite independently of our being able to manifest it fully.

The Spirit does not depend on the existence of a communal and linguistic *preparatio* for his activity. Not only does this rub against the notion of divine freedom. Indeed, Hütter's characterization of divine freedom in terms of freedom to make and abide by his promises is much more theologically nuanced and careful, although eventually unsatisfactory, than that of Rogers. But this dependence claim also advances a dubious interpretation

¹⁷ See George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1974) 524ff.

¹⁸ Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World: The Tapestry of Tragedy and Triumph* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 274.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 280.

of Rom 8:26. The whole point of Paul's encouragement was that, in spite of human limitations (which may be read "linguistic limitations"), the Spirit intercedes for us over against these limits. It is precisely human language which is inadequate for this prayer. If we interpret the Spirit to be praying a human, linguistic prayer, why still call it "too deep for words"? The inadequacy of human response to God is set within the context of a fallen creation that awaits to be liberated. The hope of the individual and the hope of creation are oriented toward a divine redemptive action. The presence of the Spirit and the bearing of his fruit happen before the actual eschatological fulfillment. Paul's words anticipate our discussion: "hope that is seen is no hope at all" (Rom 8:24). Although we are saved, the inescapable tension in our Christian life between doing God's will or willingly disobeying it will only be resolved eschatologically. That is why Hütter's emphasis on the manifestation of the Spirit in outward living risks turning triumphalistic, given that it tolerates an over-realized eschatology.

Let me sum up this section. I argued that a look at the NT witness establishes that we cannot simply do away with interiority. Both the interiority of the mystical presence of the Spirit within us, as well as the exteriority, the manifestation of this life that issues in linguistic and communal practices are important.²⁰ We cannot pull these two apart without risk of exegetical distortion. If the presence of the Spirit was simply the practices into which the Christian is habituated, rather than the already accomplished new status, sometimes described as "indwelling," as "new birth," as "union with God," as "transformation of the mind," and so on, where would the motivation come from? It is internal to the logic of Aristotle and Aquinas to argue that it comes from the very practice. Engaging in such practices, it is argued, creates a certain disposition in the human being; it trains human appetite such that one is gradually oriented towards good. It is doubtful, however, that Paul would be entirely sympathetic to this view. The old law fails precisely in creating this motivation. Repeated performance did not elicit in new motivation. Despite all the practice, appropriate intentions were missing, namely those of loving and obeying our heavenly Father (Matt 5:48; 22:34–40). These intentions, according to Paul, do not emerge out of repeated practice, but are, so to speak, infused. It is the Holy Spirit who places the believer in a position to fulfill "the righteous requirements of the law" (Rom 8:4).

Yet what about Wittgenstein's arguments against interiority? Should we simply return to a notion of the soul as indwelt by the Spirit, reimporting the spatial metaphors he found so misleading? Or is there another way of conceiving of this interiority? I turn to these final questions in the next and final section.

²⁰ To be sure, Rogers accepts that "infused grace" (a theological construct which he thinks is only meant to clear up a space for discussion, together with the more general notion of "grace") does not originate in a habit. Nevertheless, it issues in one (p. 138). Yet presumably the originating action is irrecoverable from beyond the habit it creates.

IV. A REACTIONARY INTERIORITY?

In this last section I would like to show that my retention of interiority is not simply a reactionary return. It is not enough simply to repeat scriptural claims in order to “defeat” a discourse perceived as contrary. That would be like hoping that one wins an argument by yelling louder. This scriptural theology of ontological, interior transformation should not be dismissed as an archaic metaphysic. The dialectic that emerges between the ontological transformation of the heart effected by the Spirit and the practical and ethical manifestation of this change in love, charity, justice, truthfulness, and so on, is real. If one tries to resolve this dialectic in one direction or another, the excitement is lost, together with the very point of Paul’s teaching. Barth’s actualism is one way of underscoring that the correlation between divine and human agency, between the presence of the Spirit in us and the outpouring of that presence in Christian practice can only be *ad hoc*. There is no necessary presence of God in what are irreducibly human practices, while they also participate in a larger *telos*, which effectively renders them divine as well. Hütter attempts to resolve the dialectic, to relieve the tension, to come up with manageable objects. He reduces interiority to exteriority. Yet this reduction threatens the biblical witness for which exteriority and manifestation are not fully understood unless in connection to a Spirit-inhabited interiority.

The question I must now ask is whether this affirmation of interiority is not reactionary. Are Wittgenstein’s arguments not sufficiently convincing to make us drop this notion? Or do they not bear directly on this issue? Part of the answer consists in understanding better to what Wittgenstein was really objecting. I suspect it has to do more with the distorting effect the spatial metaphors have on our self-understanding. The notion of an inner space, of private thoughts, sensations, and transactions is only problematic when it is further assumed that what goes on “in the head” or “in the heart” is utterly incommunicable and private. Wittgenstein’s private language argument is precisely an argument against meaning being built upon private sensations, a meaning that is incommunicable.

A further concern of this philosophical stance is to reject a notion of human selves as something primarily *hidden*. Similarly, according to Michael Dummett, a follower of Wittgenstein, meanings should not be construed as something we hypothesize about. Meaning must be public and selves must be public as well, rather than hidden beneath the skin.

What is right and compelling about these arguments is the dose of intelligibility they bring to the discussion of human selves. The question of meaning is entirely appropriate here. What sense does it make to speak of a hidden, inner self, when that self is not manifesting itself in anything exterior? However, it is just as problematic to reduce the human being merely to the sum of his or her actions. Who holds these actions together? This is a very pertinent question, having to do with the identity over time of the agent. More importantly, however, we cannot give thick descriptions of agents’ actions without appealing to notions such as intention, purpose, meanings,

and so on. For as McDowell shows, it is precisely the appeal to such notions that makes possible a description of these actions as actions of rational beings.²¹ The discussion is indeed wide-ranging and we cannot enter into it here.²² It comes down to the fact that meanings cannot be reduced to their practical manifestation. Meanings should not be necessarily manifested, but rather manifestable. Human selves are not always in the open. Manifestation is rather a matter of degree, and it makes sense to speak of degree when there are two sides that are held in tension.

The impression that Wittgenstein himself cannot bear the tension is evident in his either/or arguments: either we conceive the self as being hidden underneath one's corporeality, or corporeality and behavior are all there is. He plays on the fear of radical uncertainty and skepticism about other people's minds and their feelings. If behavior does not give a complete manifestation of these notions, then we might never know what people *really* think, or what they *really* feel. However, why should we accept that this uncertainty is radical? The skeptical fear is relieved when one holds that people's minds and their feelings are most of the time manifested in their outward behavior. This allows us to hold onto the possibility that we might be surprised about someone, that we might realize we barely knew the person. The surprise, in this case, need not come from the fact that we have suddenly grasped an individual's essence *over against* his behavior. Kerr correctly points out that "[t]he voice that protests on behalf of the reality of the inner life is itself impelled to appeal to its *visibility*. When we think of someone as 'deep,' or as having 'inner strength' or 'inner resources,' we should automatically fill it with stories about that person's style of life, or remarks about the character in his or her face, and the like."²³ This is an epistemic point: we can only reconstruct the character of one's inner self from his public demeanor. Yet it is crucial to admit that this manifestation comes in degrees rather than being complete. God alone knows the heart.

It is a mistake to reduce interiority to manifestation just as (and partly because) it is a mistake to reduce meaning to public use. Interiority, moreover, cannot be reconstructed by drawing on the practices alone, just as meanings cannot be given a merely extensional description, that is, a description in terms of non-intensional descriptions of practice and behavior. To say that interiority must be presupposed is not to say that it bears no clarification. Part of the prophetic task that I have mentioned is precisely to look into the "hidden" motivation for certain actions, discerning whether they are borne out of human selfish ambition, or of the Holy Spirit. There is nothing to assure correctness in such judgments. They will always be precarious, yet necessary. We are to test the spirits, not simply to trust the appearances.

²¹ John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 112–13.

²² See my "Publicity and Spirit-Wrought Practices: Some Comments on Meaning and Use" (forthcoming).

²³ Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* 90.

Whether this interiority can be construed in non-spatial metaphors is still to be debated. However, what Wittgenstein certainly teaches us is that we should not fall prey to these metaphors, but understand their limits. Furthermore, we can only be confident of our grasp of this interiority by correlating it with its exterior manifestation, while refusing to reduce it to the latter. In Rowan Williams's words, if interiority is a construct, it does not mean that it is reducible, secondary, epiphenomenal. "Quite the contrary," writes Williams, "[W]hat is lost in this analysis is not the ideal of a truthful self-perception but the myth of a truthful perception that can be uncovered by the re-description of the self's linguistic and social performance as the swaddling-clothes of a hidden and given reality—which, of course, divorced from the reality of performance, becomes formal to the point of emptiness."²⁴

Let me conclude by restating the main points that I have argued. First, I pointed out that certain theologians operate under a certain Wittgensteinian constraint. As a result of his critique of subjectivity, the locus to which the Spirit's activity was thought to belong, namely interiority, is compromised. Theology does not have a stable enough or a concrete enough object if one conceives of the work of the Spirit as belonging there.

However, second, we must take the church's core practices as being creations, *poiēmata* of the Spirit, if we are to take seriously Jesus' promises. I have argued that, contrary to Hütter's desire to have a manageable object of theological reflection, an object that is epistemically accessible in the sense that we can make justified claims about it, this move only transfers the epistemic and skeptical worry to another level rather than relieving it. What is more, such a relocation of the Spirit's work, in failing to take seriously human agency, risks becoming triumphalist, undercutting the prophetic role of theology.

Third, the NT story of the work of the Spirit makes no sense if we domesticate interiority or if we reduce it to something else. While problems remain in defining it, it should not be simply abandoned. Christianity itself should not be reduced to competence in any practices. While it involves these, it does so only as an outgrowth of an ontological transformation that takes place mysteriously within us. If we manage to take seriously both the inner presupposition of Christian life, which is our indwelling by the Spirit which writes a new law upon our heart, as well as the necessary though incomplete manifestation of that interiority in virtuous habits, we will have a more comprehensive view of redeemed selves.

²⁴ Rowan Williams, "Interiority and Epiphany: A Reading in New Testament Ethics," in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000) 241.