

# The Holy Spirit and the Church's Social Responsibility

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## Abstract

This article responds to criticisms regarding pneumatology and the church's social responsibility that are often joined and directed at Reformed tradition and theology. We will argue that, as reflected by its confessional standards, the Reformed tradition inherits a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it also provides rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. Therefore, if local churches neglect their social responsibility, it must not be because of the lack of the church's teaching on its social responsibility; rather, the cause of this neglect has to be sought elsewhere.

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**T**his article deals with two frequently voiced criticisms. The first concerns the neglect of the Holy Spirit, while the second addresses the church's social responsibility. These two issues might seem to be quite unrelated, but in Reformed tradition and theology, as this article seeks to show, they are closely knitted together.

Before discussing this relationship further, we present the two questions.

With the rise of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit has received more attention than before. At the same time, there have arisen criticisms of the treatment of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in church history, including in the Reformed tradition, for

having neglected the Holy Spirit in both theology and in the life of the church. These criticisms have encouraged careful explorations of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit within diverse Christian traditions, resulting in a more balanced evaluation of the Christian tradition's treatment of the Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Although many great Reformed theologians—John Calvin, Gisbertus Voetius, Samuel Maresius, Campegius Vitringa Jr., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Stephen Charnock, and Abraham Kuyper, to name a few—have devoted works to discussing the Holy Spirit, not much work has been done to study the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Reformed orthodoxy, including in its confessional documents.<sup>2</sup>

In the meanwhile, criticisms and reflections on the church's social responsibility are also of increasing interest worldwide. Amid social crises, political turmoil, economic decline, and civil unrest nowadays in almost all parts of the world, questions are raised about the role of the church in society. What role does the church play? Is she part of the problem, part of the solution, or both? What are the real contributions of the church in the life of society? Does the Bible provide guidance regarding how the church may express social responsibility? What roles do the theology and praxis of the church play in this matter? In the past few years various responses have been offered.<sup>3</sup>

Criticisms of Reformed pneumatology are often joined with criticisms of its theology of the church's social responsibility. Myung Yong Kim, for example, claims that “the eclipse of pneumatology in Reformed doctrine leads Reformed churches to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit,” which results in “the danger of a rigid church, with no mission and no diakonia.”<sup>4</sup> He adds that in Reformed pneumatology, “the Holy Spirit is conceived of as the Spirit of salvation of individuals,” and for that reason “liberation from political oppression and freedom from economic poverty are seen as having no relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. The pneumatology in the Reformed tradition has no social, political dimension of liberation.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For bibliographies and historiographies on this topic, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 11; Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 48–50; Michael Welker, ed., *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), vii–xvii; F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–2.

<sup>2</sup> For a complete discussion, see Yuzo Adhinarta, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Major Reformed Confessions and Catechisms of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Carlisle: Langham Monographs, 2012), 7–16.

<sup>3</sup> I recommend here the following recent book; Jordan J. Ballor and Robert Joustra, eds., *The Church's Social Responsibility: Reflections on Evangelicalism and Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> MyungYong Kim, “Reformed Pneumatology and Pentecostal Pneumatology,” in *Reformed Theology: Ecumenicity and Identity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 174.

<sup>5</sup> Kim, “Reformed Pneumatology and Pentecostal Pneumatology,” 175.

In this article, I will attempt to respond to both of Kim's criticisms from a confessional Reformed perspective.<sup>6</sup> I will argue that as reflected in its confessional standards, the Reformed tradition inherits a comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, it also provides rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. Therefore, if local churches neglect their social responsibility, it is not because of the lack of teaching on this subject. The cause of this neglect has to be sought elsewhere.

I propose therefore to systematically expound what the Reformed confessional documents<sup>7</sup> teach regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church's social responsibility.<sup>8</sup>

### ***I. The Holy Spirit as the Cause of Good Works***

The Reformed confessions teach that the Holy Spirit does not cease to work at the conversion or profession of faith of individual believers. The Spirit continues to renew the lives of believers in the image of God, to sanctify them and lead them to obey God's law. As a result, believers produce good works throughout their lives. The Reformed confessions also teach in unison and maintain that true faith does not mitigate the significance of good works in the Christian life. Rather, through true faith, the Holy Spirit works to produce good works.

The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530) states clearly that the ability to do good works cannot be ascribed to human powers, but to the Holy Spirit. The children of God are "led by the Spirit of God, rather than that they act themselves (Rom 8:14)" in such a way that "whatsoever things [they] do well and holily are to be ascribed to none other than to this one only Spirit, the Giver of all virtues." All good things and works are, therefore, "the mere

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<sup>6</sup> I will use the confessional documents, especially the national confessions of faith and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as primary sources for the discussion.

<sup>7</sup> In this article, "confessional documents" and "the Reformed confessions" are used to refer to those Reformed historic documents that proclaim the faith and life of the confessing churches. Considering the historical importance and the faith of national churches represented, the Reformed confessions and catechisms of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may well serve as representatives to Reformed orthodoxy and even to Reformed churches today worldwide.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Barth and Jan Rohls have each written on the theology of the Reformed confessions. Karl Barth, *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrel L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998). However, they do not provide sufficient discussion regarding pneumatology or they only touch on the issue of the church's social responsibility.

gifts of God, who favors and loves us of his own accord, and not for any merit of ours” (TC 5).<sup>9</sup>

Other confessions echo the same teaching about good works and the role of the Holy Spirit in them. The First Helvetic Confession (1536) confesses that believers do not obtain God’s grace and the true sanctification of the Spirit through their “merits or powers but through faith which is a pure gift of God.” From this faith spring innumerable good works, which are duly called “fruits of faith.” Believers, therefore, ought not to ascribe “the piety and the salvation obtained to such works, but only to the grace of God. ... Such a faith is the true and proper service with which a man is pleasing to God” (FHC 13).<sup>10</sup>

In both his catechisms, Calvin points out that faith is the gift of God through the Holy Spirit and that through faith believers are justified and sanctified.<sup>11</sup> Being sanctified, the hearts of believers “are cleansed from their corruption and are softened to obey unto righteousness,” to observe the law, and to do good works (CC 17).<sup>12</sup> In other words, as Calvin clearly remarks, faith “not only does not make us careless of good works, but is the root from which they are produced” (CCG 127).<sup>13</sup> He also states, “Observance of the Law, therefore, is not a work that our power can accomplish, but it is a work of a spiritual power,” the power of the Spirit. Without being regenerated by the Holy Spirit, none can “begin to do the least of the commandments.” Commenting on the Apostles’ Creed concerning the Holy Spirit in his 1537 Catechism, Calvin aptly and passionately teaches that the Spirit “inflames our hearts with the fire and ardent love for God and for our neighbor. ... so that, if there are some good deeds in us, these are the fruits and the virtues of his grace” (CC 20: “I believe in the Holy Spirit”).<sup>14</sup>

The Scottish Confession of Faith (1560) confirms the Tetrapolitan Confession and maintains that by themselves humans “are not capable of thinking one good thought,” but God, who has begun the work in believers through his Spirit, continues to regenerate and sanctify them (SCF 12).<sup>15</sup> The cause

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 60.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin’s Catechism (1537), chs. 15–17; the Catechism of the Church of Geneva (CCG; 1545), 112, in James T. Dennison Jr., ed. *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 367–70 and 483.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 485. See also John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 2: (3.14.8).

<sup>14</sup> Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 375–76; see also Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.2, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 172.

of good works, therefore, is not our free will; instead, “the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwells in our hearts by true faith, brings forth such works as God has prepared for us to walk in” (SCF 13).<sup>16</sup>

The Belgic Confession similarly attributes faith and the good works it produces to the hearing of God’s Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. The confession links the inseparability of justification and sanctification to the Holy Spirit working in both. The Spirit who produces in a believer justifying faith by the hearing of God’s Word is the same Spirit who “regenerates him and makes him a ‘new man,’ causing him to live the ‘new life’ and freeing him from the slavery of sin.” The confession contends that “far from making people cold toward living in a pious and holy way, this justifying faith, quite to the contrary, so works within them” that “it is impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being” (BC 24).<sup>17</sup> As certain as good fruits come from good trees, loving the true God and neighbors should be among the distinguishing marks of Christians. The confession confesses that true Christians are distinguished by the work of the Holy Spirit manifest in their lives, namely by their “faith, and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness.” So believers actively “love the true God and their neighbors, without turning to the right or left, and they crucify the flesh and its works,” and incessantly fight by the Spirit against great weakness that remains in them (BC 29).<sup>18</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism fully agrees with the Belgic Confession and maintains that believers do good works because “Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us” (HC 86).<sup>19</sup> The Catechism defines good works as those which arise out of true faith, conform to God’s law, and are done for his glory. A work may be good and pleasing in the sight of God only if those three conditions are met. Therefore, good works are not those “based on what we

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Christian Reformed Church, *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 101.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 53. Zacharias Ursinus, the main author of the Heidelberg Catechism, states that good works are “the fruits of our regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which are always connected with our free justification” (Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 6:11). Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 465, 480. Caspar Olevianus, another major author of the Heidelberg Catechism, also sees good works as “fruits worthy of repentance.” Caspar Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles’ Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 129.

think is right or on established human tradition” (HC 91).<sup>20</sup> Good works are caused by the Holy Spirit, not by human thought or tradition. Therefore, the Catechism teaches that believers ought to pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit and “never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection” (HC 115).<sup>21</sup>

A similar definition of good works can be found in Heinrich Bullinger’s Second Helvetic Confession (1566). Having affirmed faith as “a pure gift of God,” given to the elect “by the Holy Spirit by means of the preaching of the gospel and steadfast prayer,” the confession asserts that this faith is “efficacious and active through love (Gal 5:6)” (SHC 16).<sup>22</sup> The same faith “keeps us in the service we owe to God and our neighbor ... brings forth good fruit of all kinds, and good works” (SHC 16).<sup>23</sup> The elect are “not created or regenerated through faith in order to be idle, but rather that without ceasing” they “should do those things which are good and useful,” as “a good tree brings forth good fruit” (SHC 16).<sup>24</sup> True “good works grow out of a living faith by the Holy Spirit and are done by the faithful according to the will or rule of God’s Word” (SHC 16).<sup>25</sup> Insofar as the good works are done by faith and approved by God, they are “done from God’s grace through the Holy Spirit” and are “pleasing to God” (SHC 16).<sup>26</sup>

The Westminster Confession of Faith similarly proposes that the Holy Spirit is the root or the cause of good works, without whom none is able to do any good work (WCF 16.5).<sup>27</sup> As in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession, the Confession gives three criteria of good works, that is, proceeding from a “purified” heart, “done in the right manner” according to the Word of God, and done “to a right end, the glory of God.” Therefore, all works done by the unregenerate are “sinful, and cannot please God, or make a man meet to receive grace from God” (WCF 16.7).<sup>28</sup> It teaches that “good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith,” that is, the same Spirit-given faith by which the elect believe to be true whatever is revealed in the

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<sup>20</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 54; see also Ursinus, *Commentary*, 476–78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 67; see also Ursinus, *Commentary*, 479.

<sup>22</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 257–58.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>27</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646; repr., Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1990), 70–71.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

Word and accept Christ for justification (WCF 16.2).<sup>29</sup> It even explicitly states that the Holy Spirit subdues and enables the human will to “freely and cheerfully” do “the will of God,” which is “revealed in the law” and required to be done by all true believers (WCF 19.7).<sup>30</sup> All saints “have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man” (WCF 26.1).<sup>31</sup>

We see clearly that the Reformed confessions attribute good works to the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the cause, initiator, and even the root from which good works spring. These good works are the results of a living faith graciously given and worked by the Holy Spirit. Since they are not caused by human abilities or wisdom, good works can only be defined by the work of the Holy Spirit. The confessional texts explicitly state the three criteria of good works, that is: out of true faith / proceeding from a purified heart, according to the law / the Word of God, and solely for the glory of God. Since the Holy Spirit is the sole cause of good works, the Reformed confessions bluntly reject all notions of a passive Christian life and of faith that does not actively produce good works. The Holy Spirit not only enables believers to do good works but also subdues and moves the will of believers to love the true God and their neighbors, and to undertake social and private responsibilities for the common good.

## **II. *Acts of Good Works as the Manifestation of Social Concern***

Having defined good works and affirmed the Holy Spirit as the cause, some Reformed confessions go on to describe good works profitable to neighbors, believers and unbelievers alike. Moreover, the confessions regard good works toward neighbors—namely, familial duty and care for the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed—as Christian duties not only for individuals, but also for the church and civil magistracy as institutions.

One can find discussions of good works in the exposition of the Decalogue in the Reformed catechisms.<sup>32</sup> In the Reformed catechisms, the teaching of the Decalogue, mainly the second table, exemplifies the concern for social issues of the Reformed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 68; see also WCF 14.1–2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 110–11.

<sup>32</sup> In general, historic catechisms (including the Roman Catholic and Lutheran catechisms) written in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries consist of four main parts: the expositions of the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Sacraments.

catechisms do not perceive the commandments as containing prohibitions of certain acts that might violate the interests of others or be detrimental to them. Rather, they teach that inherent in the negative commandments are positive moral obligations and duties toward others. Since the treatment of the fourth and seventh commandments in the Reformed catechisms often contains explicit references to the Holy Spirit, we will mention them first.

### **1. Keeping the Sabbath and Marriage Holy**

Discussions concerning other aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit are present in the treatment of the fourth and seventh commandments in the Reformed catechisms, a case in point being Calvin's catechisms and the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>33</sup> While the fourth commandment pertains to the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to keeping the Sabbath holy, the seventh pertains to holiness in matrimony.

Reformed catechisms teach that the main reason for the giving of the command to observe the Sabbath is that the people of God may increasingly submit their lives to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Inherent in the same commandment is concern for others, namely rest for servants. Even though the fourth commandment falls into the category of the first table of the Decalogue, which deals mainly with duty toward God, the Reformed catechisms acknowledge that concern for others is also present. That is, the catechisms simply follow and explain what Scripture itself teaches in Exodus 20:8–11 concerning the prohibition of labor for servants on the Sabbath.

In his catechisms Calvin states that the giving of the fourth commandment had three purposes: "To represent spiritual rest, in aid of ecclesiastical polity, and for the relief of servants."<sup>34</sup> While admitting that the Sabbath as "a shadow of a reality yet to be" has ceased in Christ, and therefore "superstitious observance of days must remain far from Christians," by spiritual rest Calvin means that "we meditate all our life on a perpetual sabbath from our works so that the Lord may operate in us by his spirit."<sup>35</sup> It is "to cease from our own works, that the Lord may work in us," to put "ourselves under His government."<sup>36</sup> "How is that done?" Calvin asks. It is by "mortifying our flesh, that is renouncing our own nature, so that God may govern us by

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<sup>33</sup> Neither the Westminster Larger Catechism nor the Westminster Shorter Catechism give explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in their expositions of the fourth and seventh commandments; see WLC 115–21, 137–39 and WSC 57–62, 70–72, in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 204–9, 222–25, and 303–5, 306–7.

<sup>34</sup> CCG 171; see also CC 8.4.

<sup>35</sup> CC 8.4; see also Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.8.34.

<sup>36</sup> CCG 172, 184.



His Spirit.” And this is to be done continually, and certainly every day for the rest of believers’ lives.<sup>37</sup> One day, that is, the seventh day, is specially appointed because of human weakness, so that the people of God are reminded to meditate continually on the works of God, to listen to the Word of God preached and taught, to participate in the sacraments, to engage in public prayers, and to bear witness to their faith and religion, activities which are instituted or commanded by God for the church, his people, in which God himself works through his Spirit.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, this commandment is also given “to provide for the relief of servants,” namely, to give a day for rest to those who are under the authority of others (CCG 180).<sup>39</sup> In other words, believers are commanded to avoid any form of oppression of others by imposing work when due rest is to be given them (CC 8.4).<sup>40</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism follows Calvin in explaining the meaning and application of the fourth commandment, although with a different arrangement. The fourth commandment is given to God’s people for two reasons. First, God wills that “the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained” so that believers may attend the assembly of God’s people. Second, God also wills them to cease their evil ways by letting God work in them “through his Spirit.” Implied in the first reason are opportunities “to learn what God’s Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor” (HC 103).<sup>41</sup> The Catechism also affirms, as Calvin does, that the commandment primarily directs believers’ thoughts to the eternal Sabbath, which begins in this life.

If in the treatment of the fourth commandment the Reformed catechisms testify to the governing and leading of believers by the Holy Spirit, the treatment of the seventh commandment reveals another aspect of the work of the Spirit, namely, the indwelling of the Spirit. In their explication of the commandment, the catechisms teach that what underlies the command against all sort of unchastity and adultery is the view of a Christian, body and soul, as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

In his 1537 Catechism, Calvin discusses the seventh commandment exclusively in the context of marriage. Any kind of lewdness or immodesty or unfaithfulness within the bond of marriage violates the sacredness of holy matrimony instituted by God, violates the union between man and

<sup>37</sup> CCG 173–74, 178.

<sup>38</sup> CC 8.4; CCG 178–79, 183.

<sup>39</sup> Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 492.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>41</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 61; see also, Ursinus, *The Commentary*, 557, 566; WCF 21.8.

woman that God himself binds by his authority, and thus is cursed.<sup>42</sup> However, in his 1545 Catechism, Calvin discusses the commandment from its wider scope, applying it to both married and single. He teaches that from the commandment can be inferred that all fornication is cursed by God, assuming that the commandment applies to all, both married and single. The command to abstain from any form of unchastity rests on the fact that “our bodies and souls are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:15; 2 Cor. 6:16)” (CCG 203).<sup>43</sup> The command, however, does not “halt at the outward act,” namely physically or sexually abstaining from unchastity, but “requires the pure affection of the heart” (CCG 202).<sup>44</sup> Looking at individual believers holistically as temples of the Holy Spirit, Calvin asserts that believers ought to strive to live in holiness, to embody holiness in their everyday life, so as to “preserve [their bodies and souls] in uprightness,” not only “in deed, but also in desire, word and gesture” (CCG 203).<sup>45</sup>

The explanation of the seventh commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism bears much resemblance to that in Calvin’s 1545 Catechism. “God condemns all unchastity”; therefore, all believers, married or single, should “thoroughly detest it” and “live decent and chaste lives” (HC 108).<sup>46</sup> God “forbids everything which incites unchastity, whether it be actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,” because “we are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy” (HC 109).<sup>47</sup>

Although not explicitly mentioned here, social concerns are presupposed by the Reformed confessions. One ought to remember the overarching theological framework of the exposition of the seventh commandment, that is, the doctrine of good works. The Heidelberg Catechism might serve as an example here. Opening its third part on “Gratitude,” the Catechism contends that believers do good works *not* in order to earn salvation, which they already have by the merit of Christ, but primarily because God through his Spirit is working in them, renewing them. The Catechism then provides some arguments that further develop the significance of good works in the Christian life. With respect to God, good works are believers’ sincere expressions of gratitude to God for all that he has done for them, so that in all things, praises are due to God. With respect to themselves, good works may be fruits that assure believers of their faith. With respect to others, good

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<sup>42</sup> CC 8.7.

<sup>43</sup> Dennison, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 494.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 64.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

works, or believers' "godly living," are a living testimony of the gospel by which "neighbors may be won over to Christ" (HC 86).<sup>48</sup> Therefore, we conclude that by keeping the Sabbath and marriage holy by the help and grace of the Holy Spirit, believers have positive social influence and even proclaim the gospel of Christ to those around them.

## **2. Care for the Common Good, the Poor, and the Afflicted**

Although the Reformed confessions do not often give explicit references to the Holy Spirit when discussing the other commandments, especially those of the second table of the Decalogue, the Spirit is already presupposed to be the cause of good works by virtue of what has been laid out in general. The confessions teach that the church as the people of God is called to demonstrate love toward neighbors through the observance of the law.

In the Reformed confessions and catechisms, the manifestation of good works is discussed in different places. The catechisms generally discuss good works in their exposition of the Decalogue, which all confessing believers are obliged to follow. However, in some Reformed confessions, good works are also discussed in relation to the church and civil magistracy as institutions. This obligation duly rests on the shoulders of those who assume ecclesiastical functions or who undertake the role of magistrate in society.

In his catechisms, Calvin teaches that believers ought to have concern for the welfare of others indiscriminately, from parents and magistrates to the weak, poor, and afflicted. Believers are commanded to owe all reverence, obedience, and gratitude, and to render all possible services to fathers and mothers, and also to those who are above them, such as princes and magistrates, insofar as not transgressing the law of the Lord is concerned.<sup>49</sup> Believers also ought to see their neighbors as fellow human beings who are created in the image of God, "holy and sacred," so that any violation against them is a violation against the image of God in them.<sup>50</sup> For Calvin, God requires believers to "love their neighbours and seek their salvation, with true affection and without simulation" (CCG 199).<sup>51</sup> Robberies, frauds, and false witness, by which the weak and the innocent are oppressed, deceived, and wounded, should be "very far from [God's] people."<sup>52</sup>

The Heidelberg Catechism follows Calvin in displaying concrete love and concern for others in its teaching of the law of God. Individual believers

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>49</sup> CC 8.5; CCG 186, 194.

<sup>50</sup> CC 8.6.

<sup>51</sup> Dennison, ed. *Reformed Confessions*, 494.

<sup>52</sup> CC 8.8–9; CCG 205–12.

ought to “honor, love, and be loyal” to parents and all those in authority over them, as is proper (HC 104).<sup>53</sup> “God tells us to love our neighbors as ourselves ... to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies” (HC 107).<sup>54</sup> Believers ought to do whatever they can for their neighbor’s good and to work faithfully so that they “may share with those in need” (HC 111).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, believers are obliged to do what they “can to guard and advance” their “neighbor’s good name” (HC 112).<sup>56</sup>

The Westminster Larger Catechism starts its discussion of the second tablet of Decalogue with an affirmation of the sum of the six commandments as the overarching moral principle toward fellow human beings. The Catechism clearly states that “our duty to man, is, to love our neighbour, and to do to others what we would have them do to us” (WLC 122; Matt 22:39; 7:12).<sup>57</sup> In this spirit the Catechism proceeds to explain the six commandments of the second tablet. Regarding the fifth commandment, the Catechism follows Calvin’s catechisms and the Heidelberg Catechism in affirming that it pertains not only to familial relationship between parents and children but also to relationships that involve others who are superior in age and gifts, and “especially such as, by God’s ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church or commonwealth” (WLC 124; cf. WSC 64).<sup>58</sup> It then asserts that mutual love ought to inspire and mark believers’ “performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals” (WLC 126).<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the sixth commandment consists of duties to “preserve the life of ourselves, and others,” to comfort and succor “the distressed,” and to protect and defend “the innocent” (WLC 135).<sup>60</sup> Among the duties required in the eighth commandment is “an endeavour by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own” (WLC 141).<sup>61</sup> The duties required in the ninth commandment include “the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbour,” as well as “a charitable esteem of our neighbours; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name;

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<sup>53</sup> *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, 62.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>57</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 209.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 210, 305.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 217, 220; cf. WSC 68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 225, 227; cf. WSC 74.

sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities ... defending their innocence” (WLC 144).<sup>62</sup> As for the tenth commandment, believers are required to have “such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbour, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him tend unto, and further all that good which is his” (WLC 147).<sup>63</sup>

Whereas the Reformed catechisms address the acts of good works in their exposition of the Decalogue, some Reformed confessions discuss it in other places, such as the doctrine of good works and sanctification. The confessions also frame their discussions in relation not only to individual believers but also to ecclesiastical functions and the magistrates.

The Tetrapolitan Confession asserts that the duties to which a Christian should be chiefly devoted are those that profit one’s neighbors, with respect to both life eternal and the present life, that “they may want nothing required by bodily necessity” (TC 6).<sup>64</sup> For the confession, good works include acts that span across the boundaries of society, from the service of the family and the magistracy to ecclesiastical functions, to vocational callings of individuals (TC 6).<sup>65</sup> As far as human liberty is concerned, the confession urges every Christian to engage in vocational callings or professions “whereby he may confer the greatest advantage upon men” (TC 6).<sup>66</sup> In another place, the same confession also teaches that in discerning vocational calling, one should endeavor to “be of service to magistrate, parents, relatives and all others whom God has made nearest to him and brought to him for assistance, in what place, time or manner soever their profit demands,” according to ability and as God’s law requires (TC 12).<sup>67</sup>

Discussing good works, the Scottish Confession asserts two kinds: “The one is done to the honour of God, the other to the profit of our neighbour, and both have the revealed will of God as their assurance.” Regarding the second kind, the confession offers a similar list to that in the Tetrapolitan Confession but with explicit concern for social justice, “to save the lives of the innocent, to repress tyranny, to defend the oppressed” (SCF 14).<sup>68</sup> The list undoubtedly implies acts referring to the commandments in the second tablet of the Decalogue. It also exhorts believers to engage in social justice issues in concrete ways.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 230–31; cf. WSC 77.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 236; WSC 80.

<sup>64</sup> Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 61.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 173.

The French Confession of Faith (1559) does not list acts that can be reckoned as good works as does the Tetrapolitan Confession. However, it provides a description of good works in terms of ecclesiastical functions. It maintains that the true church, governed according to the order established by Christ, should have

pastors, overseers, and deacons, so that true doctrine may have its course, that errors may be corrected and suppressed, and the poor and all who are in affliction may be helped in their necessities; and that assemblies may be held in the name of God, so that great and small may be edified. (FCF 29)<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, in his confession, Bullinger does not give a list of acts when discussing faith and good works as in the Tetrapolitan and Scottish Confessions.<sup>70</sup> However, he shows explicit concerns for the sick, the poor, and the afflicted in various places, particularly in relation to the life of the church. Among the ecclesiastical offices, the office of bishop is dedicated primarily to the meeting of the needs of the church in the present life, to “administer the food and needs of the life of the Church” (SCF 18).<sup>71</sup> A pastor is also assigned to care for the needs of the church with regard to both the present life and eternal life, to catechize young people, and to visit the sick. Pastors ought “to watch more carefully for the welfare of their flocks” who are sick and weakened by diseases of both soul and body, “let them visit the sick soon, and let them be called in good time by the sick .... Let them comfort and confirm them in the true faith, and then arm them against the dangerous suggestions of Satan” (SHC 25).<sup>72</sup> Bullinger also teaches that the possessions of the church ought to be properly used for “the succor and relief of the poor.” “Schools and institutions which have been corrupted in doctrine, worship and morals must be reformed, and that the relief of the poor must be arranged dutifully, wisely, and in good faith” (SHC 28).<sup>73</sup>

In describing the duties of magistrates, the confessions point out that magistrates are called according to God’s law to preserve and care for the welfare

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>70</sup> In his *Decades*, however, Bullinger does provide a list of acts through which good works and the application of the law are manifested. The list includes “the protection of widows and orphans, the delivering of the oppressed and afflicted, well-doing to all men, and doing hurt to no man” and the promotion of “good affections, holy wishes, with all holy and honest thoughts.” Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, trans. H. I., ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849–1852), 3:354 (3.9).

<sup>71</sup> Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions*, 270.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 294.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 297–98.

of their subjects out of their love for neighbors. Christian magistrates or governments are what was in mind in the articles concerning magistracy.

The Tetrapolitan Confession teaches that next to ecclesiastical functions as the chief duty of a Christian is “the administration of the government,” because this vocation potentially confers the greatest advantage upon people (TC 6).<sup>74</sup> The First Helvetic Confession states that, receiving their powers “from God” alone, a government is not “to be tyrannical,” but “to protect and promote the true honor of God and the proper service of God.” A good government “should rule the people according to just, divine laws” (FHC 26).<sup>75</sup> The Scottish Confession similarly says that civil magistrates are “appointed and ordained by God” for the manifestation of God’s own glory and “the good and well being of all men.” It also states that magistrates are ordained to maintain justice and peace for the welfare of their subjects. They are “the judges and princes to whom God has given the sword for the praise and defence of good men and the punishment of all open evil doers” (SCF 24).<sup>76</sup>

Likewise, the Westminster Confession holds that “civil magistrates” are ordained by God “to be under him over the people, for his own glory and the publick good” and that God has “armed them with the power of the sword, for the defence and encouragement of them that are good, and for the punishment of evil-doers” (WCF 23.1).<sup>77</sup> This office gives opportunity to serve people for the advancement and preservation of their common good, by maintaining “piety, justice, and peace” (WCF 23.2).<sup>78</sup>

Thus the Reformed confessions regard the observance of the law of God as concrete acts of good works linked to the work of the Holy Spirit. They also see good works toward neighbors—namely, familial duty, care for the poor, afflicted, and the oppressed—as Christian duties not only for individual believers, but also for the church and civil magistracy.

## Conclusion

It may be concluded that as the Holy Spirit renews believers in the image of God, the same Spirit enables them to do good works, leading them to concrete acts toward their neighbors that fulfill the law of God and so display concern and love. The confessions teach that believers ought to be led by

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 110–11.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 182–83. See also SHC 30.3.

<sup>77</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 100.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 101.

the Holy Spirit to care for and engage actively in the preservation and furtherance of others' well-being. This active engagement manifests itself in ecclesiastical ministries, in the preservation of order in the family and society, in the protection of and care for the poor, in the defense of the oppressed and afflicted, in the upholding of the sacredness of marriage along with chastity, sobriety, and temperance, in the promotion of honesty and justice, and in the cultivation of good affections toward others. Believers ought to care for and actively promote the well-being of others. This duty rests on the shoulders of individuals, as well as of ecclesiastical officers and magistrates.

In the Reformed tradition, as presented by its confessional documents, the teaching of the church's social responsibility is formulated in a constellation of pivotal doctrines such as soteriology (including faith, repentance, justification, sanctification, and good works), social ethics, ecclesiology, and church-civil magistracy. As such, it provides not only a solid and comprehensive doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but also rich materials for Christian guidance and reflection on the church's social responsibility. The doctrines presented in the confessions reflect a genuine concern for both orthodoxy (right teaching) and orthopraxis (right practice). The nature of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the confessions is not only apologetic, but also pedagogical, confessional, and pastoral. It serves as a standard of orthodoxy, expressing what the Reformed church believes and teaches, as well as a standard of piety and teaching, urging believers to go beyond their profession of faith to concrete acts of faith in their daily walk.

If some local churches neglect social responsibility, this cannot simply be explained as a lack of inherited teaching on the Holy Spirit and the church's social responsibility. The cause has to be sought elsewhere. It may be the neglect of the Holy Spirit and his works, the lack of desire to study doctrine, the decline of interest of doing God's will, or a shift in the church's understanding of its *raison d'être* and mission in the world. Whatever the cause, studying the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the church's social responsibility in the Reformed confessions might serve as the first step to becoming a living, missional church.