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elect people was constantly beamed on the Harringay Arena, and it availed mightily".<sup>1</sup>

No one was more conscious than Billy Graham that the power in the meetings was not of himself. He declared more than once that he often felt as though he were a mere spectator, standing on one side and watching God at work. The power was that of the Holy Spirit; and such power is generated by prayer alone. This is not a matter which one can "explain" by some logical process. It is a simple fact of spiritual experience. And there is no secret about it. Or at least the secret is an open one. To quote Hugh Redwood again: "The Church of Christ has it *now* in its power to call into play vast spiritual forces. What prayer accomplished at Harringay is only a pointer".

<sup>1</sup> *Bible Speaks to Britain*, July 1954

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## The Person of the Holy Spirit

BY THE REV. E. HIRST, M.A., Dip. Th., A.R.C.M.

**I**N the innermost recesses of his spirit man bows before One whom he knows to be the supreme Spirit and Sovereign over all. This has been the case throughout human history. His finite spirit has ever soared upward in the hope that he might have communion with the Infinite Spirit whom he knows as God. In his efforts to attain his end, he has called his various faculties to his aid. Reason has been able to lead him so far, but has stopped short of the final goal. Experience has convinced him of the fact of God's Being and has shown him something of His character. In our own day, science has revealed much of the working of God's mind. Yet even with these, man has not been satisfied. His heart has yearned for love, and is ever craving for that love. So when man has gone as far as he can in his search for God, he has had to turn for that which he lacks to the truths which God has revealed about Himself to men. It is as the hymn says:

" It was the Voice of Revelation  
That met my utmost need "

When He was on earth, our Lord said, "God is Spirit"; and Temple says that this is "the most fundamental proposition in theology"<sup>1</sup>. He also says: "God is not the totality of things—the All; nor is He an immanent principle to which all things conform; He is Spirit—active energy, alive and purposive, but free from the temporal and spatial limitations which are characteristic of matter". It is from that point that we Christians are able to go onward in our search for a fuller knowledge of God. With the Bible in our hands, we are able to compare our own experiences of God with those of others, and above all else, with the facts of Revelation. Then, out of these experiences of God in prayer, and in study of the books of Nature,

experience, history, and Revelation, we are able to meet with Him and He with us. It is then that we realize that we experience God under different terms, even while we are in touch with Him as the One, Supreme, Holy Spirit, who in holy love creates, orders, and sustains all things. We experience Him as Father-Creator. He is also known to us as Jesus, the incarnate, only-begotten Son of the Father, who claimed that His death on the Cross was a sacrifice for sin. We also experience Him as a personal, indwelling Power who inspires, instructs, guides, and prompts the soul in holy ways and in Divine truth. In this way, we find that there are distinctions within the Godhead. We also find that these distinctions are more clearly connected with the Divine activity than with the truths of the Divine nature.

The New Testament is full of references to the Divine, indwelling Spirit of God. He is spoken of as the Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit. His activities are Divine activities and of such a character that none other than God Himself could perform them. They are also the acts of Personality, and not those of an impersonal force. At the same time, they are acts of love, and we are told that God is Love. Another fact emerges, that the Holy Spirit's activities are wider in scope and fuller in content since Pentecost than they were before. Of this feature it has been said that our Lord "made it clear that the function of the Spirit was distinct from His own, so distinct that the Spirit's mission could not begin until Jesus had left the world".<sup>2</sup> Under the Old Dispensation, the Spirit's work was spasmodic, and often of limited duration. Certain individuals were selected for His tasks, and were specially equipped for them. Moreover, not all of these people were what we would now call truly holy men. Even so, the Old Dispensation looked forward to a fuller field for the Spirit's activity. This is plain from Joel's prophecy, which St. Peter claimed to have been fulfilled on the first Whit-Sunday when the Spirit was outpoured upon the Church. Later, as the Church grew and the scope of its activity was expanded, He was given to others as they were joined to the Lord and became members of His mystical Body, the Church.

It would seem that there are two possible ways in which to approach the truths of the Holy Spirit's Being and work. We may begin with the facts of Revelation and interpret experience in that particular light. On the other hand, we can begin with experience and seek to confirm our conclusions from the facts of Revelation. In the first case, we begin with the Bible; and in the second, with the statements of the historic Creeds as an outline of the Church's corporate experience of the Divine activity.

From the New Testament statements about the Holy Spirit, whether from our Lord's lips or those of His Apostles, we come to a threefold conclusion. First, that the Holy Spirit is God because His ministry is that of God in touch with the individual and the Church. Secondly, that He is our Lord's "other self" by whose activity Christ dwells in the hearts of His followers. Thirdly, that within the unity of the Godhead there are three centres of Divine activity which we know as Father, Son, and Spirit. These facts are clear from one quotation selected out of many on this subject: "I will pray the Father, and

He shall give you another Comforter, that He may be with you, for ever, even the Spirit of truth : whom the world cannot receive ; for it beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him ; ye know Him ; for He abideth with you, and shall be in you ”.<sup>3</sup>

The Holy Spirit is the Divine Spirit. His work is that of the Godhead. We realize that “ for the fulfilment of a Divine function only a Divine Being can be sent ”.<sup>4</sup> His activities are to be noted in the work of the Old Testament prophets and above all else in the earthly work of the Lord. The prophecy of Isaiah lxi that the Spirit of the Lord should rest upon the Messiah was amply fulfilled throughout our Lord’s earthly sojourn. For this, we have the evidence of the Spirit’s descent at His Baptism, His direction at the beginning of the wilderness temptation, and the events of His ministry. Jesus could claim in utter truth : “ The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me ”.<sup>5</sup> From the facts of the Lord’s life and the truths of His teaching, and from their own experience of the Spirit’s leading, the writers of the New Testament became aware of the Holy Spirit as both the personal life of God, and the Executive of the Godhead in relation to themselves and the Church. His is the work both of Divinity and of personality, so we can speak of Him as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, even though “ Person ” is not quite adequate as a term to signify the distinctions within the unity of the Godhead.

The New Testament writers were aware that the Spirit Who dwelt in Jesus throughout His incarnate life was making them what they were. After their experience on the first Whit-Sunday, when the Holy Spirit was outpoured upon them, they realized that the Lord’s parting promise of His abiding presence with them was being realized through this Divine gift. That personal, intimate, leading and constraining Power in their lives was the Spirit of God ; but they knew Him also as the Spirit of Jesus. The inspiration of their lives was the inspiration of the Lord’s Spirit. It clearly came from God the Father through Christ, just as He had promised them. In fact, they scarcely knew any difference between the two. Then, with the background of the Old Testament Scriptures to their lives, they knew that the gift of the Spirit had now been vitally amplified as a result of Christ’s Incarnation. As Quick says : “ In the New Testament . . . it is broadly true to say that there is no teaching about the Spirit of God except in direct communication with the life and work of the Messiah Jesus ”.<sup>6</sup> When we look into the matter, we find that on only three occasions is the Spirit mentioned in the Old Testament as the Holy Spirit. In fact, there is little stress upon the spiritual and moral effect of the impact of His personality upon men. The heightening of physical and mental powers is quite a common occurrence, but the transformation of character by His indwelling is rarely mentioned. Yet in the New Testament He is supremely the Holy Spirit, and the stress is laid primarily on His enduring ethical activities. In that particular capacity He continues the holy activities of the Lord in the human soul and in the Church. He is truly the Spirit of Jesus. As Griffith Thomas says : “ Christ and the Spirit are different, yet the same ; the same, yet different. Redemption comes from the Father, through the Son, by the Spirit. Christ is the Divine Saviour, and the Spirit is the Spirit

of Christ, and in this association we have the spiritual and experimental foundations of the Trinity".<sup>7</sup>

The New Testament writers were aware of a personal, guiding Power in their lives. Yet while they were conscious that He was the Spirit of Jesus, through Whom their Lord's promised abiding presence was realized, they could not identify Him utterly and entirely with their Master. Quick's description of St. Paul's outlook is most apt. "The Holy Spirit meant to him primarily the active principle and power of that supernatural order which will be fully revealed and expressed at the last day when all things will be transfigured into conformity with it in the world to come."<sup>8</sup> Even so, the Apostle could write that famous verse at the close of his second letter to the Corinthians which we know now as "The Grace". He seemed to be led to this because he found that the Holy Spirit was limitless in His range of activity, and was ever breaking out, as it were, in all kinds of unexpected places and forms. He saw that there were three centres of activity within the unity of the Godhead. These were experienced in personal influences from those who could only be called "Persons", so that nothing less than a belief in a trinity in unity could safeguard the fulness of the Christian revelation of the Godhead.

The essence of the Godhead, then, is personal, expressing itself in a life and activity through three eternal Entities which together constitute the Divine Being. This doctrine of a Trinity in unity has been summed up as follows: "One Eternal Father, Begetting One Eternal Son, in Whom His Wisdom Personally subsists; One Eternal Son, through Whom there ever proceeds from the Father One Eternal Spirit; in which Eternal Spirit there Personally subsists the mutual love of the Father and the Son".<sup>9</sup> We may say, then, that the Holy Spirit is that aspect of the Being and activity of the Godhead whose full nature and work is made possible through the Incarnate and Ascended Redeemer. Redemption and salvation in Jesus are now worked by the Holy Spirit in us who have given ourselves to the Lord; but this work is the work of Christ according to the will of the Father. So important is this work of the Holy Spirit that it may well be said that "in many respects the Holy Spirit is the ultimate fact in Christianity, for no other religious system has anything corresponding to this truth".<sup>10</sup>

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit may also be traced backward to its source from the corporate experience of the Church. This experience is stated in the Creeds, Articles, and Confessions of our Faith. This course is both valuable and helpful, because it is the expression of the experience of the Body of Christ in the "Koinonia" of the Spirit. Yet in following that course we may miss something of that personal touch of the former method, by feeling that we are, each one, simply an isolated unit in a great crowd. The two methods should be pursued side by side so that the individual and the corporate aspects of our holy Faith may be preserved in a true balance.

It is true that salvation is received individually when the soul stands alone in the presence of the Holy God, humbly asking to be considered as standing before Him in the faith and power of the Redeeming Lord. Yet the soul finds sanctification in the companionship of others who share the same faith. This means that there can be no such thing as

an isolated Christian. In fact, the thought of an isolated Christian is a contradiction in terms. All believers share the same spiritual experience of the New Birth and the new life in Jesus. That life is mediated through the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of life". "And the nature of all life, and therefore of its giver, can only be learned by living. In its widest range the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is nothing else than the doctrine of the manner and method of the presence and activity of the living God in His created world".<sup>11</sup>

The belief in the Person, Godhead, and Divine activity of the Holy Spirit is enshrined in the historic Creeds. The Christian Church was led to this belief out of its experience of the Spirit's guidance, just as Christ had promised. It is through the Church, also, that the Holy Spirit works, even though He is not confined by it. In this way, as well as by other ways, God works out His universal purposes of grace and love throughout history. He does this through historical movements and events as well as by illuminating individual souls. And whilst there can be no question that the Church is the strongest moral force in the world, for her life and witness is a proof of God's activity in the world, there is another side. We find that at the centre of every great movement there is always an outstanding soul guiding and leading his fellows, be he a Paul, an Athanasius, or an Augustine.

The Church's corporate experience of the Spirit's indwelling and guidance, even though the Body is now sadly divided, goes back to the Upper Room in Jerusalem, where the Spirit was first outpoured. Perhaps the first signal corporate experience of His guiding was realized in the decisions of the so-called Council of Jerusalem, whose proceedings are reported in Acts xv. The letter from the Council to the distant members of the Church had these significant words: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us".<sup>12</sup> That experience of His leading is being constantly repeated in the life of the Body. After all, it was from the glorified manhood of our Lord that the Holy Spirit came to inspire that newly-formed society, the Church. He welded Christ's followers together as the new people of God on earth, whose task it was, and still is, to carry the news of the redeemed life of fellowship in Christ to all mankind. This is a fact which should be appreciated in these days when the feeling for a sense of "community" is so pronounced in the life and outlook of men. Here also we see that paradox of Christianity which Quick says "consists in the fact that, although when viewed from the outside it is one of the religions of the world, when it is known from within, it is not a religion at all, nor even the true *religion* only, but something inherently more than religion; it is a whole social life of communion in God with men, a communion which embraces both sacred and secular activities and is altogether transfigured by the pervading presence of God's love".<sup>13</sup>

We see how the early Church lived under the consciousness that the Holy Spirit had come to take the place of Christ in their midst. He also became the centre of their unity with one another in the Lord. Before Pentecost they were an aggregation of individuals liable to go off at a tangent, as the seven went out fishing at Peter's suggestion, or to give way to doubt, like Thomas. At that time, even at their best, they were only capable of meeting together to see what had turned up,

or might turn up, to help them to decide what should be their course. After the Spirit had been given to them, they realized that they were bound together in one great cause, were fired by one fine vision for the world, and inspired by one common Spirit of power. So clear was this sense of unity that a sin against the Body, like that of Ananias, was deemed to be a sin against the Holy Ghost.<sup>14</sup> St. Stephen also saw that the Jews' great refusal to hear and respond to the witness of the Church was resistance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>15</sup> As a company of people sharing in One Life from above, they were led to think of themselves as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> In this way the work of the Holy Spirit within them, binding them together as the people of God, became the life of their fellowship. His life was common to all, and was a life of holiness. The Spirit also united them with their Lord who had redeemed the world in its common humanity, and raised it up to the heavenly world. In that heavenly world is the Christian's true community, for it is the place where God reigns supreme, and His will is obeyed in the gladness of service.

We can be thankful for the love of God shown to us in the gift of the indwelling Spirit, whose office it is to make God real to the life of man. He does this through the Church and the individual by revealing Christ as Saviour, and by abiding in the soul as an indwelling life-power, blessing those who will receive Him.

#### References

- <sup>1</sup> Temple : *Readings in St. John's Gospel*, p. 64.
- <sup>2</sup> Macdonald : *The Holy Spirit*, p. 17.
- <sup>3</sup> St. John xiv. 16-17.
- <sup>4</sup> Macdonald, ut supra, p. 23.
- <sup>5</sup> St. Luke iv. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Quick : *Doctrines of the Creed*, p. 276.
- <sup>7</sup> Griffith Thomas : *Principles of Theology*, p. 97.
- <sup>8</sup> Quick, ut supra, p. 279.
- <sup>9</sup> Mylne : *The Holy Trinity*, p. 205.
- <sup>10</sup> Griffith Thomas, ut supra, p. 99.
- <sup>11</sup> Quick, ut supra, p. 271.
- <sup>12</sup> Acts xv. 28.
- <sup>13</sup> Quick, ut supra, p. 306.
- <sup>14</sup> Acts v. 1 ff.
- <sup>15</sup> Acts vii. 51.
- <sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 16.