

The Holy Spirit.

I. BIBLICAL DATA.

THE doctrine of the Holy Spirit is one on which the classical Creeds give us little if any guidance. Those Creeds deal with the nature of God and the Person of Christ and were the result of years of strenuous thinking by the early Church, faced as it was by opponents without and by heretics within. It is one of the curiosities of the history of Christian Doctrine that the one doctrine on which so much if not everything rests, appears to have been relegated to the appendix, and stranger still that this appendix, however much inflamed, was never thought worthy of theological surgery. It was perhaps only natural that the great doctrinal controversies of the early Church should be concerned with the nature of God and the Person of Christ. Thus the Creed of the Council of Nicaea was content merely to affirm a belief in the Holy Spirit. Only when the Arian Controversy was drawing to its long drawn-out conclusion did the question of the Spirit arise, and the solution then arrived at owes much to the Cappadocian Fathers, Basil and Gregory, who taught that the Spirit, like the Son, is of one substance with the Father and is to be accorded the same worship. This conclusion finds expression in the so-called Nicene Creed of common use, which affirms that the Spirit is the Lord, the life-giver, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified. In the West the Three Persons were regarded with complete equality and the Holy Spirit was accorded that double procession which was the avowed cause of the split between East and West. We are all aware of how the word "Person" has hampered development along this line of thought, and the difficulty has always been to safeguard the personality of the Spirit and at the same time avoid any monarchian heresy. Hence, we in our day, whose work it is to proclaim a full and adequate Gospel, are called upon to rectify this omission on the part of classical Christianity.

A further and even more important consideration can be added to these two earlier considerations—whether in theological study, or in the preaching of the Word, or in pastoral duties we are all the time dependent, and entirely dependent, upon the Holy

Spirit. Never a day passes but we are under obligation to the power of the Spirit. Therefore any reverent attempt to come to some understanding of the nature and work of the Holy Spirit cannot but be good for ourselves and of value to the Church which we love and serve. The work of the ministry is threefold, like the Doctrine of the Trinity itself; it is a work of meditation, of pastoral care and of prophetic-priestly operation within the Church and all three activities are dependent upon that life-giving Spirit which Jesus incarnated and which is continued in the work of the Holy Spirit in the mind and heart of the believer.

In the realm of Biblical scholarship we have passed through a very difficult and dreary period, when the results of scholarship appeared to be so dry and negative and when, as Dr. Hodgson pointed out, the devout believer had to choose between scholarly commentaries which provided no nourishment for his soul and devotional commentaries which rode roughshod over his doubts and questionings. Those were days of mental agony for thinking Christians, and we owe a debt of gratitude to our fathers whose perseverance in honesty has brought us through those times to the firm ground on which we stand today. Scholarship and piety can today unite in expounding God's Word as addressed to us for our salvation and one of the assured results of those difficult times is the conviction reached today by all Biblical scholars that God's revelation is given not so much in words as in deeds. The Bible is the inspired record of the deeds of God. God has always been active in history, and we recognise this more clearly today than at any previous stage in the history of the Church. The emphasis today as we study the Bible falls on what God has done and is doing in the world. Behind the words of the prophets are the deeds of God. In spite of the Fourth Gospel's wonderful description of our Lord as God's Word we must insist that our Lord was God's Word written in flesh and blood, and that Christ saves by what he does more than by what He says. In fact, what He says is based on what He does. Hence, if the major contention of the Bible is the deeds of God in human history then the medium through which God works is of major importance for us, and that medium is the Spirit. Our concern today is with God's action in history in general and in the experience of the believer in particular. Materialistic Communism and other such attempts to interpret history must be met by the Christian with the contention that history is the arena of God's saving activity. But we cannot make that affirmation with any sense of conviction until we ourselves have come to some understanding as to how God has worked and still does work in history, and that obviously involves us in the formulation of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Our own beloved Wheeler Robinson wrote: "Why is it that there are so many books about the Holy Spirit and so few that help us towards a real understanding of the Doctrine?"* He then proceeded to give us one of the best books on the subject in our language. To his book may be added that of a scholar who does not always agree with Wheeler Robinson, viz. Dr. Leonard Hodgson, of Oxford. Meanwhile, we have to examine the Biblical data. We begin with the Old Testament which by being part of our Bible is a constant reminder that the Spirit of God cannot be confined to the Christian Church. Let us grasp that truth very firmly. The Holy Spirit was not born on that memorable Day of Pentecost. So many preachers on Whit Sunday speak as if Pentecost was the very birth of the Spirit, forgetting that if that were true we cannot make sense of God's deeds in the older days of the Old Testament. Beyond doubt the events of that great day were unique in character and lasting in influence. So much is not in dispute. What is disputed is the easy assumption that on that day the world for the first time experienced the Spirit of God. God's Spirit was active in creation, brooding over the chaos and, out of that chaos, producing order. Any doctrine of the Holy Spirit must therefore begin, not with Pentecost, but with the Creation. Christianity is a particular revelation of the Spirit of God and hence our enquiry begins, not with the New Testament, but with the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament two words are used, both of which are translated Spirit in our English versions; the words *ruach* and *nephesh*. Of *ruach* it can be definitely asserted that it was originally used to describe a non-moral energy, which could be both good and evil. For instance, the author of *Judges ix. 23*, says: "And God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech." *Numbers v. 30* speaks of a "spirit of jealousy which cometh upon a man," and even Hosea can speak of "the spirit of whoredom which hath caused them to err." In only one instance is this *ruach* definitely personalised, and that is in *1 Kings xxii. 21*: "And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord." Here, too, it is a lying *ruach* employed by Yahweh to inspire the optimistic prophets. It can be said generally that in the Old Testament, when God is active this activity is nearly always described by the word *ruach*. Wheeler Robinson's conclusion here cannot now be doubted: "The careful study of the Old Testament in its true chronological order will reveal that as wind became Spirit in relation to God, so Spirit became Spirit in man." The term *ruach* appears to have developed along the lines of first being wind, either natural or figurative, then some supernatural influence acting on man for

good or ill; then as the very principle of life itself and then, finally, to describe that life in its psychological aspects. In no document which is pre-exilic is *ruach* ever used to describe the breath-soul in man. That was invariably described by the word *nephesh*. May we say, in an attempt to put into simple language this evidence, that *nephesh* is that which enables man to live and *ruach* is that through which God communicates with man? Which comes to mean that after the Exile the human *nephesh* becomes the divine *ruach*—God's spirit in man's consciousness. One realises that this is but a working simplification of the evidence, but it does, I think, provide an entrance into the teaching of the New Testament.

The point of stress for us must always be the prophetic consciousness as this is manifested in the pages of the Old Testament. The experience of the prophet was a real experience, however much we have to make allowance for the mode of its expression. The prophet was able to proclaim: "Thus saith the Lord" because he rightly believed that God was not merely speaking through him, but was actually using the whole of his personality, which for the Hebrew included his body, in order to perform His gracious acts in history and also His judgments in history too.

When we come to the New Testament we have to watch the further development of the doctrine until we arrive at that point where we realise that Agape is human life at its best when, that is to say, human life has been wholly transformed by the activity of the Spirit. Our evangelical belief in a new birth can only be explained when the vitality of that new birth is traced to the action of the Holy Spirit in the experience of men. The term Holy Spirit is the inclusive New Testament name for the activity of God in the soul and in tracing this activity to the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ the New Testament writers were on sure ground.

There must be some correspondence between God and man otherwise God could not as Spirit communicate Himself to man. How could God through the Spirit make Himself known unless in man there was something akin to spirit to which God could "tune in"?

But in dealing with the New Testament evidence there is one important observation which must be made, and that relates to the fundamental difference of approach between the Hebrew and the Greek ways of thinking. The Hebrew always thought of the Spirit of God in its relation to man by way of invasion. It was something which came from outside—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me"—whilst the Greek always tended to think in terms of Immanence. Gone are the days when the thought of the New Testament had to be interpreted in terms of Greek ideas. The

Greek of the New Testament led us astray, for although it is written in Greek the thought is Hebraistic throughout. The Baptism of our Lord, with its description of the descent of the Spirit, is an outstanding example of the Hebrew idea of invasion. The Spirit came upon Jesus, but here too we must not be led into any adoptionist theories in regard to the Person of Christ, and if we remember this fundamental concept of Hebrew thought that danger will never be too great to be overcome. The Gospels present us with a world in which spirits, both evil and good, are very real. Spirit and Power are ever closely related. Our Lord casts out evil spirits and He himself is the incarnation of the very Spirit of God.

We can divide the Gospel evidence into what might be called the four stages in discipleship. The first is that between the calling of the disciples to the Crucifixion of their Lord—a period when Jesus was present with them in the flesh and they were wholly dependent upon His physical presence. It was a period of fluctuations; at one time their faith would be strong and true and, at another time, it would be so weak as almost to be non-existent. The second period is that of the time between the crucifixion and the Ascension, a period during which the Resurrection was a fact for those disciples, but a fact which they could not comprehend, for they are still asking the same uninspired questions: "Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" The third period was that short time between the Ascension and Pentecost. During this period there seems to be no essential change in their outlook; they are sitting about waiting for something to happen, although even sitting about is sometimes, and certainly was then, an act of faith. Then came the Day of Pentecost and the ushering in of the fourth period of discipleship. Those men now have a Gospel to proclaim and a power with which to proclaim it and they set about turning the world upside down. That the disciples did not arrive there and then at a full and complete understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit is a fact clearly seen in the evidence supplied in the *Acts* and the *Epistles*. But this much can and must be claimed; they began at Pentecost a new experience of God's power, an experience which is continuous in Christ's followers today. This brings us to what is the characteristic work of the Holy Spirit, viz., the creation of fellowship. What is it which differentiates the Church from all other forms of human fellowship? Is it not that in the experience of the Church her members not only enjoy communion with each other, but also communion with the Risen Lord, and that this double communion is in the Spirit?

We are accustomed to regard the Holy Spirit as a subjective experience of the individual member of the Church, but much

more than this is implied by the New Testament evidence. According to the New Testament the Holy Spirit is an objective experience of the whole Church. Whenever and wherever the Church is, there is also the Holy Spirit. Nor do we mean by this any idea of a group mind. It is only by a figure of speech that we can speak at all of a group mind. What we mean is that the Holy Spirit is really present in the experience of the Church. Here we are frankly at a loss to distinguish between Christ in the midst of His people and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. For all practical purposes the two are one. Wheeler Robinson writes: "The members do not so much join a Church which exists completely without them; they help to constitute it, in their own intrinsic degree, by awakening to their own share in the welfare of the Body," to which we must add, neither are they completely the Church. They do help to constitute it, but they are limbs of the Body of which the Head is Christ. It is in and through the Spirit that Christ exercises His Headship. We might say that the Holy Spirit is the cement which holds the Body together. The Holy Spirit guides the Church into truth i.e., into a deeper and richer experience of Christ. The authority of the Spirit is real whenever the members have patience and humility, both of which are necessary to reveal the Spirit's guidance. That the Church has not always accepted the Spirit's guidance gives rise to that Kenosis of the Spirit which is the natural outcome of the Self-emptying of Christ Himself.

In the Church the Scriptures have a very special place, and here too we must recognise the work of the Holy Spirit. The uniqueness of Scripture is seen in this experience of being led into truth by the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures do not appeal to all men, for the simple reason that the Scriptures of themselves are powerless to save. It is Scripture plus Holy Spirit which is the medium of saving truth. Now just as we have seen that there is a development of thought regarding the Spirit of God in the Old Testament so too there is a development of thought regarding the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. That development can be seen in three and very possibly four stages.

The first stage is that indicated by the account of Pentecost in the early chapters of *Acts*. It is clear that the author is describing events which were beyond him, and there is no surprise in this for something very wonderful had happened. Of its happening there could be no possible doubt. His emphasis, however, is as we should expect, on the outward effects of that experience, in the fire, wind and tongues, and he understood those tongues as the gift of languages. The second stage is that described in *1 Corinthians*. There the problem facing the Apostle is the misuse of what had begun as a real experience. Members

of the Church were abusing what had come to be regarded as proof of the Spirit's presence, the ability to speak in tongues. Paul warns them they are over-emphasising what is after all only a passing phase. So it was Paul who led the Church to that third stage, where the operation of the Holy Spirit is seen in the normal life of the Church and the individual Christian member of the Church.

"The harvest of the Spirit," he writes, "is love, joy, peace, good temper, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, self-control." Every one of those virtues named by Paul is social in character. Every one has direct reference to the communal life of the Church. Not everyone can speak with tongues, but everyone can love, have joy in fellowship, show good temper and that self-control without which fellowship life is not possible.

In regard to these three stages there will be no dispute. But what about the fourth stage? We are all aware of the emphasis which the Johannine Literature places upon the Holy Spirit. We also know that the Johannine Literature is the final flowering of canonical scripture. Can it be that here the Holy Spirit takes the place of what is usually called the Second Coming of Christ? There will, of course, be differences of opinion here. T. F. Glasson, in his book on the Second Advent (p. 211) writes, in relation to the Johannine teaching: "Its theme is the One whose glory has already dawned upon the world, who is even now the light and life of men. God's great help and deliverance for men is not something to be hoped for; it is offered now in Christ, and those who receive Him have eternal life as a present possession. The irruption of the divine order is inaugurated, not by the Parousia, but by the Incarnation. Through the cross, Christ will draw all men unto Himself. He died to gather into one the children of God that are scattered abroad (xi. 52) including other sheep "who are not of this fold" (x. 16). His finality is not static, for the Spirit will continually take off the things of Christ, unfolding new truth from this inexhaustible source as men are able to bear."¹

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¹ The above is the first of three articles on the Holy Spirit, based on Lectures given at a Ministers' Retreat. In our next issue Mr. Clarkson will deal with "The Holy Spirit and the Sacraments."