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## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIBLE

CHRISTIANS are agreed that the Bible is the Word of God. They vary in their definition of these terms; nevertheless, they are unanimous that in some sense the Bible is of intrinsic worth.

We shall find a similar agreement in our belief that the Bible is the Word of God because it is the product of the Holy Spirit's influence on the minds of men. Dr. Swete writes, "No work of the Holy Spirit was more constantly present to the mind of the early post-apostolic Church than His inspiration of the Old Testament . . ." And to this he adds that not only the Old Testament but also the New Testament came to be recognised as inspired of the Holy Spirit: "When the Gospels and other Apostolic writings began to be recognised as forming a second or Christian Canon, they were welcomed as a further instalment of the Holy Spirit's work." Nor did they respond to those who, like Marcion, desired to separate the Testaments. "On the contrary, Marcionism seems to have stiffened the resolution of the Church to regard the Jewish and Christian canons as two parts of the same revelation". That, Dr. Swete shows, was the considered opinion of the early Church. It would make a good standard for our own day, especially as he can add: "The Holy Scriptures were regarded as the writings of the Holy Spirit; and anyone who did not believe that they were spoken by the Holy Spirit was counted as an unbeliever."<sup>1</sup>

Since the Bible is the Word of God because it is the product of the influence of the Holy Spirit on men we may say that the Holy Spirit is the Author of the Bible and is also its interpreter in the minds of men, while, at the same time, since it was written by men for men, it is an ideal revelation for man who is spiritual because made in the image of God.

We propose to deal with the implications of this thesis in what follows. These implications are far-reaching and of fundamental importance for us.

Socrates tells us that if God would speak there would no longer be need to be in doubt about spiritual issues or any other issues. God has spoken in the Bible.

<sup>1</sup>H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, pp. 382 f.

But of course that raises the inevitable and much vexed question as to *how* God is able to make Himself known to us. How can God speak to man? God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. Barthians are strongly emphasising this, indeed are strongly over-emphasising it. Those who understand Barth best show how obvious it is that he deprives us of the objective value of the Bible as the Word of God. Yet we appreciate the fact that his message is peculiarly appropriate to an age that has made God in its own image—an age that has reduced God to its own low level. To such an age this emphasis on the transcendence of God is a necessary emphasis.

Yet it must not rob us of the equally important fact that God can and does make Himself known to man. Jesus said, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. . . ." That is essentially what the Incarnation means. In Christ we know God. Christ is the Word of God; through Christ God may be understood by human beings.

And in further elucidating this important truth we remember that Christ was born of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1. 35). He was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His Baptism. Christ indicates the necessity for His departure as being closely associated with the coming of the Holy Spirit in a new relationship with mankind and also shows that that new relationship involves a teaching ministry connected with Himself (John xv. 26; xvi. 7-14). So also in many other places we discover a closeness of function between the Incarnate Lord and the Holy Spirit.

All of this is vital to our problem, namely, *how* can God reveal Himself to man?—for there are obvious connections to be seen as we observe that Christ is the Word of God: He is God's self-revelation, and the Holy Spirit inspires the written Word in the Bible and furthermore reveals the Incarnate Word in the inner life of the believer. In one term we may say the Holy Spirit operates in man to interpret the Word.

And we proceed to the fact that the Holy Spirit is able to do this for a number of reasons, but especially and initially, because of the spiritual basis of man's nature. Man is made in the image of God. No more magnificent or illuminating words about man have ever been written than the majestic words of Genesis, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul". No doubt this requires careful interpretation in the light of the

Fall of man and the necessity of regeneration as a result of the depravity of man. Nevertheless we insist with John Calvin that man is naturally religious and has a spiritual basis to his nature. Note how Calvin heads Chapter 3, Volume I, of the *Institutes*, "The Knowledge of God Naturally Implanted in the Human Mind" and read on where he writes: "That there exists in the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute. . . . All men of sound judgment will therefore hold, that a sense of Deity is indelibly graven on the human heart." Now it is not our purpose to express views on this matter at present but to point to it as a Scriptural doctrine and add that the spiritual nature of man is a basis on which the Holy Spirit can operate. He has worked in creation in man. He works in man still. That work is a work of revelation of the Divine intention.

So the late Archbishop Temple is interpreted by Dr. Matthews as emphasising (not over-emphasising) the opposite truth to Karl Barth, namely the Immanence of God. "Dr. Temple," he writes, "does not hesitate to draw this conclusion. Unless all existence is a medium of Revelation no particular revelation is possible. Dr. Temple held that the essence of Revelation is the self-disclosure of God in human experience, and that Revelation is apprehended by faith, which is not the assent to correct doctrines but personal fellowship with the living God."

But even if we accept the viewpoint expressed by the Archbishop and grant existence as a medium of Revelation, are we not still under the necessity of enquiring how existence can be a medium of Revelation?

We assuredly are!

Pursuing the question in Scripture we discover the Holy Spirit as the Divine Agent of God's revelation both in the individual and in the "stars in their courses" as they sing His praise.

We live in a spiritual universe. We are spiritual creatures however far we may have wandered in the far country. The position is that there is always the possibility of a Divine operation within us, and indeed all history, which is really the story of man's spiritual striving, is actually the record of this very thing!

Such a consideration might have saved us from much of the controversy that has raged over this question of inspiration and revelation. This itself would have saved us from mechanical

views of inspiration which have only served to bring the Scriptures into disrepute. Dr. Davis in his excellent Bible Dictionary, lately revised by Dr. Gehman, insists that God used natural means to interpret Himself to man. By means of natural phenomena such as dreams and visions and through the medium of humble things like language and literature God has spoken to us. "The Prophets were taught of the Spirit of God. . . . In this God worked in accordance with the psychological nature of man. An audible voice or an angelic messenger occasionally came. . . . But the instruction was ordinarily delivered by dreams, visions and inward suggestions recognised by the Prophets as not of themselves. . . . God in holding communion worked in accordance with the laws of man's mind."

Thus, these that we call natural means, may be the medium of a spiritual operation of God. When we grasp this we may be saved from the materialistic influence that has penetrated religion by means of our stress on scientific research. Dr. Swete writes, "It is possible that modern life, as it escapes from the control of a crude materialism, may be led to seek the solution in the Christian Doctrine of a Divine Spirit working in the world and in man."<sup>1</sup>

It is obvious, however, that in our considerations of the natural means through which God operated in order to make Himself known to man, including the written record in the Scriptures and the life of His Son Who became man and thus became a link between God and man, we must not be led to make the deplorable error of concluding that revelation is therefore merely natural or that this removes the other side of the question, namely that this revelation is a supernatural one.

Even though man is capable of being touched by the Holy Spirit because he was made in the image of God, in this very act itself there is a Divine and therefore (in the proper sense of the term) supernatural operation. But, what is even more important than this, there is also the implicit fact that in order properly to understand this revelation there must be a continuous operation of the Holy Spirit. Ye must be born again. Ye must be indwelt and taught of this Spirit. Only thus are we able to appreciate the spiritual things of God.

And this leads us to the fact that the Bible is essential as a channel through which God's revelation comes to us. The undoubted fact that man is a spiritual being and may be born

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 7.

again and the Holy Spirit may witness within does not necessarily imply that therefore we may dispense with the written record as for example mystics are inclined to assume.

It is only necessary to consider the reliance of our Lord and the early Christians on the Old Testament and of the early Church on the New Testament to realise this. But when we add to this the long record of unfortunate misadventures through the the ages, due to departures from the Scriptures, not in the mystics alone but in the Roman Catholic and other communions that go beyond the Bible, we have a strong case indeed.

Looking back over the country through which we have travelled we see that we are confronted by the fact that God has revealed Himself and that this is possible because of a number of things that involve creation, incarnation, regeneration in addition to other Scriptural doctrines. We have tried to deal with these as they relate to the important question, "*How* can God reveal Himself?"

We now emerge with a Book, namely the Bible, as the vehicle containing this Revelation.

There are certain issues raised by this and we shall proceed to consider them.

When we dissociate the Bible and the Holy Spirit as its Author and Interpreter, we fail to understand the Bible and certain errors arise. These errors have been conspicuous throughout the history of Scriptural interpretation.

Any such dissociation results in literalism and is merely an emphasis on "the letter that killeth".

Every sect claims to be established on the Bible. Satan quotes the Bible. We have a sterile but extremely learned ministry of criticism that is as far from the true meaning of the Scriptures as were the Pharisees of old.

Therefore we draw attention to Professor Cunliffe-Jones' excellent work on the Holy Spirit where he solemnly warns against this approach.<sup>1</sup> "When we reflect upon the history of the Christian Church we cannot but be struck by the dangers of separating the Spirit from the Word—on the one hand a hard orthodoxy, on the other hand a nebulous fluidity." Professor Cunliffe-Jones goes on to examine the work of his great predecessor Dr. P. T. Forsyth, who so ably defended the Anabaptists from the common charges against them and who at the

<sup>1</sup> H. Cunliffe-Jones, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 23-5.

same time demonstrated that the Anabaptists and the Reformers had something that each needed. "The Reformers lived with the note of revelation, on a theology of facts; the Anabaptists with the note of inspiration on a theology of consciousness. The one set were Apostles, the other Prophets. . . . Each note is invaluable in its own place and power."

Because we have separated these and tried to have one without the other we have drifted into common errors resulting on one hand in barren intellectualism and on the other into solemn interpretation of every whim of the vagrant spirit of man. Our whims have been solemnly declared as doctrines to be defended as of God. Our puerile reasonings have been set down as dogma.

Therefore, says Professor Cunliffe-Jones, "we must learn from Dr. Forsyth the evils of separating the Spirit from the Word".

Older theologians were nearer the truth than most theologians today because they maintained the balance better than we do. They preserved this unity. They recognised the spiritual nature of the Bible and were not, as we are, bound by intellectual considerations to take a one-sided view of the Scriptures. We do not lack knowledge but we do lack divine wisdom—knowledge tempered with spiritual character. On the other hand we have sects like the Pentecostalists who run to the other extreme. Each of these, as we have already stated, is dangerous. The danger is not avoided by stringently separating the two and by stress on the intellect on one hand or intuition (immediacy of contact) on the other but by an observance of the necessary synthesis involved.

Dr. Andrew Murray, of saintly memory, blended these two, for he was a scholar and also a man of the Spirit. He distinguishes, in the manner of the older theologians, the necessity for the Holy Spirit's teaching in order to understand the Word of God and also the allied necessity of applying ourselves diligently to a study of the Word of God in order to give the Holy Spirit materials with which to work. He writes, "What is needed is very simple: the determined refusal to attempt to deal with the written word without the quickening Spirit. Let us never take Scripture into our hand or mind or mouth without realising the need and promise of the Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

And a modern theologian applies the same thought in another way, "It is important that every Christian should clearly

<sup>1</sup> Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ*, pp. 42-9.

realise that to derive knowledge from a supernatural revelation is the reverse of gaining it by scientific research and philosophical speculation. There is no compromise possible for the Christian in some matters, between irreverent philosophical speculation and Divine Revelation through the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore I could insist that the outstanding success of such expositors as Calvin, Owen and Goodwin is due to their dependence on the Holy Spirit allied to diligent scholarship.

This may be stated differently by an examination of our modern worship of reason. Since the Renaissance we have been haunted by the illusion that we can find God by our own unaided efforts. We believe we shall rise on our dead selves to future greatness in religion as in other things. So we have restricted even religion to naturalism. We have failed to think deeply enough about the saving principles we profess to find in nature. If there are saving principles in nature; if the whole trend of nature is toward salvation—as indeed it may be—we have failed to recognise that this is only because God is above, behind and in nature. Our thinking has been too shallow. We have been content with the effects, such as they are, and have not considered the Divine Cause of these effects, nor recognised that these effects are possible only because of the Grace of God. The Holy Spirit of God is the healing principle at work in nature. We have explained nothing by confining our thinking to the effects, in fact we have merely robbed ourselves of the Truth we profess to seek!

And part of that Truth is that evil hinders God’s healing process; therefore, if the hurt of man is to be healed, it can only be by an operation of the creative, regenerative Spirit of God. Also God Who is active in nature must be obeyed. He must be invoked. His expression of His will must be listened to as the one Voice that speaks authoritatively of the redemption after which man and the whole creation strives in vain without Him—without His son, the Incarnate Word, and the Holy Spirit.

This was the message of Paul. In treating of Paul’s teaching of this matter Professor W. P. Paterson shows that in the main it may be summarised under the fact of the Incarnation in order to redemption and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He writes, “But chiefly was the power of God made manifest in the spiritual realm in the Person and Work of Christ—‘to them that are

<sup>1</sup> T. C. Hammond, *In Understanding Be Men*, p. 20.



called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the Wisdom of God' (1 Cor. i. 23, 24). And he (Paul) found the same power revealed in extraordinary impressiveness in the dispensation of the Spirit in which it is granted to the believer to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inward man (Eph. iii. 16)."<sup>1</sup>

On a totally different level, though perhaps more closely related than is generally recognised, one of Kant's commentators, Professor Benda, contributes to our subject: "What seems to me, on the other hand, of major importance is Kant's work in pointing out that the concepts of our minds, having been moulded within the limits set by experience, are illegitimately used when we apply them, as has the generality of philosophers, to objects which are essentially outside these limits: the existence of God, the reality of a spiritual substance, the beginning of the world, freedom of the will, immortality."<sup>2</sup> No doubt this is not the place to enter into the implications and meanings of the Kantian philosophy. But assuredly there is truth in the Kantian contention about the limitation of knowledge. Even if we interpret this in a different manner to Kant, we are starting from the same general proposition when we assert that human reason is just not capable of knowing God. In order to do this there is the necessity of a divine illumination. We would suggest also that Kant may not have been so far wrong or unscriptural when he conceived of this as being the result of a moral life. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God."

But apart from the Kantian or any other philosophy it is a wise man who accepts the obvious truth that our limitations of mind and will and emotion, of faith and hope also, are such that without a divine creative operation we cannot see God!

Therefore if we are to know Him we require what He has given, namely, a Divine Self-Revelation. We require with this a creative, regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. These two we find in the Holy Spirit and the Word.

This, however, we hasten to assert, raises tremendous questions, such as the fact that the Holy Spirit revealing God through the Word is a sentence that involves the Trinity. The Word of God is the Son of God and He cannot be separated from His Father. Nor can He be separated from His Divine mission to

<sup>1</sup> W. P. Paterson, *The Nature of Religion*, pp. 449-52.

<sup>2</sup> J. Benda, *Kant*, p. 10.

reveal God and to redeem mankind. And so in reality we are thinking in terms of the Trinity when we think of the Spirit and the Word. We are, as we have been showing all along, also thinking in terms of man as a potentially regenerated creature to whom God has revealed Himself. We are also thinking of a revelation that is objective as well as subjective, for we are not only thinking of the Holy Spirit's witness and work within man but of the fact that we have an objective revelation in a Book, the Bible. And we are thinking about the harm caused by dissociating the Holy Spirit and the Word, for He is its Author and Interpreter. Yet it is in and through man that He interprets and writes it.

It is an interesting fact that the best works on the Holy Spirit and the Word have been written by men of spiritual character allied to diligent scholarship. We call attention to Tauler, Calvin, Luther, Owen, Arthur, Moule, Murray and Campbell Morgan.

Let me conclude by quoting Bishop Moule in his fine work on the Holy Spirit: "It appears to me that many widely prevalent present views of the nature and function of the written Word, however much truth of detail may enter into their formation, err in their ensemble by their deeply humanitarian, naturalistic character. Taking up the perfectly true position that human agencies and natural processes are largely present as factors in the production of Scriptures, many an able theorist declines, or however, fails to see that nevertheless the resultant of the factors of production is not humanitarian nor naturalistic, but the Divine Word, the Supernatural Oracle."<sup>1</sup>

The Spirit breathes upon the Word,  
And brings the Truth to sight;  
Precepts and promises afford  
A sanctifying light.

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<sup>1</sup> H. C. G. Moule, *Veni Creator*, pp. 48 ff.