

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD

(His Role as Witness, Speaker and Agent)



THE HOLY SPIRIT proceeds or emanates from the Father. In this emanation, the Holy Spirit carries energy and movement to the entire creation. His course through the world is characterized by precision and order. He brings to man in particular a spiritual creative power derived from man's being created in the image of God. This power consists of freedom, understanding and wisdom. It is conveyed to man in various ways. First, it is conveyed directly in a mystical manner. Here, the essence of the power is not apprehended by the recipient, but received as a gift from God. Secondly, it is conveyed through the sacraments of the church and the intermediary of the priest, through prayer and faith. This is also rightly considered a mystical conveyance of the power, however, it is not conveyed directly as in the first case. Finally, this power may be conveyed through the word as we assimilate the acts of the Spirit through the mind, the will and faith.

It is through the Holy Spirit which we receive all the gifts of God. Without his mediation, we could receive nothing from God. It is also through the Holy Spirit that we present our acts of worship to God. Without the Spirit's effusion of grace upon us, all our works would be worthless: "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty' " (Lk 17:10). The Holy Spirit sanctifies our works, purifying them from the element of the flesh, as we call upon him to complete these works by his grace. It is in this way that man finds grace from God: "God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24).

The Holy Spirit carries the word from God to the spirit of man: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak...he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (Jn 16:13-14).

The Holy Spirit also gives to man the special grace of revelation and inspiration. He is enabled to directly pronounce the word of God which the Spirit of God has spoken to him silently. This revelation can be one of joy and happiness as is the case in many of the Psalms

which are poetic verse and hymns of praise: “David himself, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declared...” (Mk 12:36). The revelation may also be born out of sorrow and difficulty as is the case with Jeremiah: “O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived; thou art stronger than I, and thou hast prevailed... For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer 20:7-9).

It is also possible for the Holy Spirit to speak the word of God directly through the tongue of men: “And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (Mk 13:11).

The Spirit is also able to speak the word of God through man in a language that is not understood by the speaker. The inspiration which the apostles received at Pentecost reached this level. Each one was speaking in a strange language—a language which he had not studied previously. Miraculously, the Spirit became the carrier of the word as well as the speaker of it.

These are some of the means by which man has received and recorded the word of God. It is apparent that the Holy Spirit is an essential element whenever the word of God is received by men.

Man’s position in dealing with the written word of God is distinct from what has been discussed previously. Man stands before the word incapable of understanding its message. The enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is necessary to make the message of the word clear. The human mind is unable to penetrate the mystery of the word by its own faculties. The word of God is a printed message carrying within it the incomparable truth which is exalted high above the mind of man. It expresses the inscrutable will of God.

The Holy Spirit grants to mankind the grace of enlightenment: “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (Lk 24:45). When the human mind enters the realm of grace in the Holy Spirit, he discovers divine truth. This truth is found in the word and in mystical communication with its source—God. This trajectory is the opposite of that which is taken by the word of God in its coming to us. The word proceeds from God, borne by the Holy Spirit who speaks it mystically by inspiring the spirit of a prophet or an apostle. Concerning our approach to the written word of God, the Holy Spirit takes the initiative to open our minds to understand the word. The reader accepts the mystery contained in God’s word and thus extends his spirit to commune with the Spirit of God—the source of the word.

Hence, it is evident that the Holy Spirit never forsakes the word. He bears it from God to us just as he enlightens our mind to understand it in order that we may commune with God.

The Holy Spirit liberates man's works from the element of self and makes them acceptable and pleasing to God. Thus man obtains grace from God through these works: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little..." (Mt 25:21). The Holy Spirit also works within man as he studies the word of God in submission and intercession. The mind is liberated from the flesh such that the word becomes the domain of liberty. The mind of man is enabled to launch out, carried by the grace of the Holy Spirit—to apprehend "even the depths of God" (1 Cor 2:10).

Without this grace from the Holy Spirit, it would be impossible for the mysteries of the word to be revealed to the mind of man. Without it, man is a self-contained entity. He is bound by his own opinion—prisoner to preset intellectual boundaries and self-fabricated barricades.

"The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (Jn 6:63). Notice that Christ places "spirit" before "life." This is not done incidentally. The "word" is a foundational spiritual truth. It is the expression of the perfect and infinite will—the will of God. For this reason it is rightly called "spirit," because it is the agent which carries out the will of God. This efficacious will of God is an inner reality of the soul and the only means of communicating this inner reality is through the spirit.

We are to accept the word, first of all, as "spirit" expressing the efficacious will of God. Then, we receive it as "life." That is to say, we take it with us into the sphere of our everyday lives. We apply the word to our own behavior since the word as spirit is the expression of the living and active will of God.

So then, the word, as Christ stated, is spirit and life. In reality, it is the union of spirit and flesh or the joining of the will of God with the reality of human life. The necessary result of such a union is that man is raised from beneath the yoke of the world and transformed into a spiritual man. He becomes the spiritual creation of God, liberated from the dominion of the physical and material realm.

The objective of the Holy Spirit, to which end he labors tirelessly, is to replace our fleshly concerns with spiritual concerns. This work is carried out by means of the word. Its ultimate objective is to glorify God in us through the word and the continual witness of the Holy Spirit.

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit acts within the conscience, where he puts his liberating power to work to free man's spirit from all that hinders his progress or obscures his vision. As the effective will of God, the word gives man a liberating power which is both active and capable of conquering. By means of the word and through the aid of the Spirit man is able to break the shackles of lust, habit, environment, personal gain and reputation as well as all the fetters of false gods!

The Holy Spirit bears continual witness against the world in the heart of man. He points out the deceptions that the world has bound around man's neck making him its prisoner. When man grasps this truth he embarks upon a bitter struggle with the world using all his energies to break its stranglehold on him.

One of the most important roles of the Holy Spirit is to "convince the world concerning sin" (Jn 16:8). He brings about this conviction through godly believers who cling to the word of God despite the world's allurements: "They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11). As the world is convicted of its own evil through the testimony of this man, he, himself, becomes prey to demonic resistance and the threat of death.

The testimony of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful has put them at war with the world. It is an eternal confrontation: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex 17:16). However, victory belongs to the Holy Spirit as he liberates man from the world: "for they loved not their lives even unto death." This is the miracle of Christ: "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

By means of the word, the Holy Spirit establishes in man (the man who sincerely seeks through the word) a new level of spiritual awareness which is far beyond the principles of the world. It is superior to these principles, not because it disdains them proudly or refuses to acknowledge them. Rather, it raises them up to an eternal plane in a glorious transformation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1).

The ultimate objective of the Holy Spirit is not simply to give us knowledge of "the whole truth" (Jn 16:13). Rather, he seeks to lead us into the freedom of sons which is the final result of the truth: "And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). The freedom spoken of here is freedom from slavery to the flesh and the world.

The Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 16:13). He is the essence and power of true freedom: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). He is establishing a coming kingdom built by truth and freedom, not as intellectual propositions, but as life and action in the real world. Through his work, the soul receives its final preparation for its being joined to God in eternity.

The Holy Spirit continually struggles to accomplish man's emancipation from the world system. He stands against the world's lethal methods of enslaving mankind in the slavery of death. This emancipation—man's spiritual freedom—is not accomplished by isolation from the world. Nor is it accomplished by feelings of hatred towards the world: "I do not pray that thou should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil one" (Jn

17:15). The real emancipation from the world comes through our **victory** over it. Our life continues to be in the world, but not of it: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (Jn 17:16). We are not implying that we should deny our bodily presence in the world or disdain our duties to the world. However, we are to derive our power and inspiration from God, not the world. Our knowledge of the truth comes through the divine word such that we rise above the world’s surface without drowning in its currents. We need not surrender to its delusive demands. By knowledge of the truth, we are enabled to serve without being defeated. By the Spirit, we live in the midst of the world while remaining liberated from it.

When the Spirit brings about this liberation, it changes man’s entire being. The spirit is not separated from the body. Man is not isolated from life or life from the world. He lives as one entity, entirely liberated. Though he lives in the flesh, he lives victoriously over the flesh. He performs the duties of life while being victorious over this life. Though he lives in the world he conquers the world: “I stood on the pinnacle of the world when I sensed within myself that I feared nothing and desired nothing” (St Gregory the Great).

If one has attained to this kind of freedom he is living to God. It matters not whether he be in the midst of the clamor of the city market place or the tranquility of a mountain retreat or a monastery.

(An extract from the Book: *The Word of God—A Testimony, Ministry and Life*, first published in Arabic in 1965, 3rd ed. 1985, pp. 58-64).

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