

The Personality of the Holy Spirit

By F. T. Wright.

Originally published in *The Messenger and News Review*, September 30, 1976.

This article is expressly and specifically written in compliance with a direct request by one of the folk who stand with us in the message of living righteousness. It is to answer the question as to how we can prove to people outside our faith that the Holy Spirit is a Person and not some indefinite power emanating from God.

Naturally, the evidence which must be presented to prove this point has to come from the Bible and the Bible only for this is the only evidence acceptable to those who are not acquainted with the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy.

For those of us who have accepted it, the Spirit of Prophecy is designed to lead to a better and clearer understanding of the Scriptures. Therefore we would do well to consider certain statements in the Spirit of Prophecy which most certainly state that the Holy Spirit is an intelligent Person.

This done we will then turn to the Bible and the Bible only, for the evidences which will help us to establish this in the minds of those who are our missionary contacts. We cannot use the Spirit of Prophecy statements to the outside world but they will give us confidence in the use of the Scriptures.

The Spirit of Prophecy Evidence

Here then is a small compilation of Spirit of Prophecy statements on the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelism, p. 616-617:

We need to realize that the Holy Spirit, Who is as much a person as God is a person, is walking through these grounds.

The Holy Spirit is a Person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When this witness is borne, it carries with it its own evidence. At such times we believe and are sure that we are the children of God...The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God. "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

We are to co-operate with the three highest powers in heaven,—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,—and these powers will work through us, making us workers together with God.

Counsels on Health, p. 222:

The Godhead was stirred with pity for the race, and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit gave Themselves to the working out of the plan of redemption.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1074:

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, man is laid in his watery grave, buried with Christ in baptism, and raised from the water to live the new life of loyalty to God. The three great powers in heaven are witnesses; they are invisible but present.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 1110:

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the three holy dignitaries of heaven, have declared that they will strengthen men to overcome the powers of darkness.

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1053:

Christ determined that when He ascended from this earth. He would bestow a gift on those who had believed on Him, and those who should believe on Him. What gift could He bestow rich enough to signalize and grace His ascension to the mediatorial throne? It must be worthy of His greatness and His royalty. He determined to give His representative, the third person of the God. head. This gift could not be excelled. He would give all gifts in one, and therefore the divine Spirit, that converting, enlightening, and sanctifying power,

would be His donation.

There are those who would argue that the above statements are not valid because they come from compilations such as the book *Evangelism*, which quotes as its sources unpublished manuscripts. Those who have no faith in the integrity of the Ellen G. White trustees, believe that these are not true statements from the pen of inspiration but are clever counterfeits designed to introduce false theories into the teaching of Adventism.

We publish them here because we *do* believe that they are authentic statements and because they express the truth which we will see verified from the Bible itself whereby all truth is to be tested.

Now we append a statement from *The Desire of Ages*. This statement simply says what all the others have been saying but it comes from a volume which we know to be a truly authentic writing of inspiration.

The Desire of Ages, p. 671:

Sin could be resisted and overcome only through the mighty agency of the Third Person of the Godhead, who would come with no modified energy but in the fullness of divine power. It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world's Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.

These statements then can leave no doubt about the teaching of the Spirit of Prophecy on the question of the personality of the Holy Spirit. The statements are quite clear that the Holy Spirit is not merely the mighty power of God emanating from Him, but a distinct and separate personality just as Christ is Himself.

Of all the powers of the Godhead, the least has been re-

vealed about the Third Person, the Holy Spirit. Therefore care must be taken not to attempt to probe into areas of His nature which have not been revealed to us. This solemn warning is given to safeguard us from such a possibility.

The Acts of the Apostles, p. 52:

The nature of the Holy Spirit is a mystery. Men cannot explain it, because the Lord has not revealed it to them. Men having fanciful views may bring together passages of Scripture and put a human construction on them; but the acceptance of these views will not strengthen the church. Regarding such mysteries, which are too deep for human understanding, silence is golden.

Therefore, in this study we shall keep well within the limits set down by the revelations of God as to the nature of the Holy Spirit. One thing we do know is that the Lord has clearly stated in the Spirit of Prophecy that the Holy Spirit is a Person with all the powers and abilities of a person such as intelligence, the power to speak, to hear, to do, and so on.

As surely as this is the truth revealed in the Spirit of Prophecy, so surely will the same truth be in the Bible. We cannot use the Spirit of Prophecy to convince those who have no faith in it as yet so we need to understand the truth from the Bible. The remainder of this study will now be devoted to the evidences contained in the Bible to the effect that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Godhead.

An Invalidated Scripture

There is one Scripture which plainly states that there are three Persons in heaven Who are One.

1 John 5

⁷ For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.

While in the light of the words already quoted from the Spirit of Prophecy, these are words of truth, but, they were not written by the Apostle John. There is much evidence to

show that this verse was added later by a scribe as the following comment shows (Please note that while practically every quotation made by us from *The SDA Bible Commentary* is from the pen of Ellen White, this one is not, but is a direct comment by other theologians on the particular verse. Furthermore, Sister White made no comment on *1 John 5:7* even though she many times expressed the same truth as written in the verse. This omission on her part shows that the Holy Spirit who guided her knew of the spurious nature, of this reference.):

The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 675:

In heaven. Textual evidence attests (cf. p. 10) the omission of the passage “in heaven, the Father, The Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth.” The resultant reading of vs. 7, 8 is as follows:

“For there are three that bear record, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

The passage as given in the KJV is in no Greek MS earlier than the 15th and 16th centuries. The disputed words found their way into the KJV by way of the Greek text of Erasmus (see Vol. V, p. 141). It is said that Erasmus offered to include the disputed words in his Greek Testament if he were shown even one Greek MS that contained them. A library in Dublin produced such a MS (known as 34), and Erasmus included the passage in his text.

It is now believed that the later editions of the Vulgate acquired the passage by the mistake of a scribe who included an exegetical marginal comment in the Bible text that he was copying.

The disputed words have been widely used in support of the doctrine of the Trinity, but, in view of such overwhelming evidence against their authenticity, their support is valueless and should not be used.

In spite of their appearance in the Vulgate, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* freely admits regarding these words: “It is now generally held that this passage, called the *Comma Johanneum*, is a gloss that crept into the text of the Old Latin and Vulgate at an early date, but found its way into the Greek text only in the 15th and 16th centuries.”

(Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951, p. 1186).

Without any further words then we dispense with this verse as proof that the Holy Spirit is a Person and turn to other evidence instead.

The Bible Evidence

Unlike the Spirit of Prophecy, the Bible does not give any verse in which it is directly stated that the Holy Spirit is a Person. But this does not mean that we are left without evidence to reveal this fact. The method whereby the Bible provides the information is to attribute to the Holy Spirit faculties and abilities which can only be possessed by a person.

The alternative to believing that the Holy Spirit is a Person is to believe that He is only a powerful force emanating from God which reaches out to influence, convict or change the subject of the ministry of that power. In other words, He is either a depersonalized power or He is a powerful personality.

There are very definite distinctions between these two. These differences make it possible to readily identify as to whether a power is the power of a person or merely a power without a person.

All power as such, is unintelligent and has no capacity to think, to search out, to direct, to hear, to speak, to teach, to convict, to be grieved, to be filled with happiness and satisfaction and so on. Think of the following mighty powers—the sun, electricity, gunpowder, the internal combustion engine, the wind, gravity, muscles, light, sound, and so on—and then ask if any of them can do any of the things listed above. The answer is that they cannot.

It may be argued that through electricity used in radios, gramophones and tape recorders, this power can speak and sing. But this is only unintelligent feed back of what an intelligence has already fed into it. It is not speaking its own mind and thoughts. This is the capacity of which we are speaking

which distinguishes power alone, from a person of power.

On the other hand, think of any person who is still a person. Exclude those whose minds have become deranged or damaged so that they can no longer function as a person. Then ask whether they can do the things listed above and it will be found that they can do every one of them and more. Because they can do all of these they are immediately distinguished as a person as distinct from a power without personality.

This distinction established, we have but to seek in the Scriptures to see whether the Holy Spirit is presented only as a power, or whether He can think, search out, direct, hear, speak, teach, convict, be grieved, filled with joy, and so on. The evidence is both abundant and clear. In reference after reference it is made clear that the Holy Spirit has all the faculties of a person.

Here are some clear examples and others can be added by personal study and research.

The Holy Spirit can be vexed.

Isaiah 63

¹⁰ But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.

To be vexed is an emotional response of which power as such is incapable. This is clearly a distinguishing mark of a person.

The Holy Spirit can be grieved.

Ephesians 4

³⁰ And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.

He can be pleased or experience pleasure.

Acts 15

²⁸ For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay

upon you no greater burden than these necessary things.

He is able to speak His own mind and to call to service.

Acts 13 [see also *1 Timothy* 4:1]

2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

He is able to guide, to hear, and to show.

John 16

¹³ Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come.

He has the ability and the power to convict.

John 16

⁸ And when He is come He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.

To be able to reprove successfully requires the intelligence which only a person could have. It necessitates the ability to recognize the need for reproof, the area in which it is needed and the way in which it must be given. No unintelligent power could ever have the capacity for doing such. But the Holy Spirit has and it is this which determines that He is indeed a Person and not just a power.

He is able to impart.

Romans 5

⁵ And hope makes not ashamed; because then love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

He is able to transform us into the very image of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3

¹⁸ But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

He is able to teach.

John 14

²⁶ But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

He is able to bring comfort and consolation.

Acts 9

³¹ Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

He is able to testify.

John 15

²⁶ But when the Comforter is come, Whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of Me.

To testify is to express a personal conviction. One must be a person to have this capacity.

He has a will of His own.

1 Corinthians 12

¹¹ But all these work that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will.

It is very clear that Jesus while upon this earth understood that the Holy Spirit was a real being Who conducted an active personal work of commissioning, anointing, directing and empowering. He spoke of this in His sermon in Nazareth:

Luke 4

¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

¹⁹ To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

The Argument Endorsed

There has been only one argument used in this article to establish from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a distinct Person and it is that He must be in order to do the things the Scriptures say that He does. Only a person can think, speak, reprove, be grieved and so on. No other argument is needed beyond this to prove the point.

The question is, Can we use the argument with confidence? Most certainly we can and to give added confidence to each of you as you go forth to use the argument, we point you to the endorsement of it as given in the Spirit of Prophecy. It is endorsed there by Sister White using the very same argument to prove the personality of the Holy Spirit.

Evangelism, p. 616-617:

The Holy Spirit is a Person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God...

This statement is divided into two parts. Firstly there is a statement of fact which is:

“The Holy Spirit is a person...”

This is immediately followed by the word, “for.” When this word is used to introduce a clause, then that clause contains the proof for the first statement. What is the offered proof? It is that

“He beareth witness...”

In other words the Holy Spirit is a person because he is able to and does bear witness to something. In this case it is that we are the children of God. Thus Sister White points to the fact that He can do this as proof that He is a Person because only a person can do such things. No unintelligent power can possibly bear witness to anything.

Now Sister White emphasizes the argument by saying that unless the Holy Spirit was a person, He could not do such

things.

The Holy Spirit has a personality, else He could not bear witness to our spirits and with our spirits that we are the children of God. He must also be a divine person, else He could not search out the secrets which lie hidden in the mind of God.

Thus then the very argument which Sister White uses to prove the personality of the Spirit is the one used in this article. What is more, the argument and the confidence to use it was derived from the Spirit of Prophecy. It is not original with this author.

Go in Confidence

Go then in confidence to do your missionary work among those who do not know the Bible to present the full personality of the Holy Spirit on the grounds that He has all the capacities which a person can and does have. Be assured that this line of argument is altogether sound not only because it is based on facts which are clearly understood and accepted, but are endorsed by the words of inspiration.

Go too in the certainty that the mighty Being who is our Guide, Comforter, Reprover, Teacher, Protector, and so on, is the Holy Spirit, who, being unencumbered as Christ is with humanity, is able to be with us at all times in all places and under all circumstances of need.

As we come to better understand, know and trust this mighty Helper, our work for the Lord will be much more successful and effective.