

# **The Holy Spirit in the Thought of the English Reformers**

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It has frequently been observed that the Reformation in England, both in its origin and in its subsequent course, bears a very different aspect from the similar movement on the Continent. There was no creative religious leader whose spiritual experience became archetypal for subsequent theological reflection and church proclamation, nor was there a dogmatic theologian to provide a close-knit structure of thought which should give systematic and coherent form to Christian thought and life. Yet it would be a mistake to exaggerate the distinctiveness of the English Reformation. There was a good deal of communication between participants in the continental reform movements and the protagonists of a new theology in England. Moreover, the principal factors in the general movement towards reform in the early sixteenth century were operative in England as elsewhere. The corruption and oppressiveness of the ecclesiastical machine and the startling comparisons to be drawn between the theology and church life of the primitive age of Christianity, now at length revealed to public gaze through the widespread use of vernacular versions of the Bible, and the contemporary Church with its semi-political order characteristic of later medieval developments, were as noticeable in England as in any other part of Christendom.

It was no accident that the Reformation witnessed a renewed interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and a quickened perception of its central significance for faith and experience. Dissatisfaction with the highly centralized and gravely secularized machinery of the Church had found expression in various ways for several generations, so that any widespread knowledge of the Bible could only serve to stimulate this critical attitude. Towards the end of the thirteenth century, when the medieval Church under the leadership of a resurgent papacy reached the climax of its long sustained effort to grasp within one whole the thought, culture and political activity of all Europe, to bring it into obedience to the law of Christ, there appeared a significant figure in the European scene whose prophetic eccentricities were a solemn protest against the secular destiny which its hierarchical leaders appeared to have chosen for the Church. The speculations of Joachim of Fiore and the spiritual Franciscans were doubtless extravagant and impossible of concrete achievement, yet their dream of a new age of the Spirit testified to a profound and widespread conviction that the essential nature of the Church as the community of the Spirit was being perverted through the vagaries of papal policy. Throughout the two centuries that were still to divide Joachim and his immediate followers from the spiritual upheaval of the Reformation, this spiritual criticism of official theology and hierarchical practice persisted in every part of Christendom. Those who despaired of an effective reformation of the Church in head and members withdrew into quiet places or formed little communities apart from the main stream of ecclesiastical activity. The period was marked by the appearance of a widespread mysticism and the emergence of many lay groups whose members endeavoured to take the ethical implications of the Gospel with the utmost seriousness. Even to enumerate some of the better known pioneers of the mystic way in those centuries, Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, Henry Suso, John Ruysbroek, Henry of Nordlingen, Gerard Groot and Thomas à Kempis, is to realise how important was this development for the subsequent history of the Church.

In England a notable company of mystics brought a fertilising stream into the desert of fourteenth century Church life. Margery Kempe, Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton and Mother Julian of Norwich are names fit to rank with the great figures of the continent, while the Lollards, “the secret multitude of true professors”, taking their origin from the Wyclifite movement in the later fourteenth century, kept alive until the Reformation a simple, biblical, lay religion, which was critical of the hierarchy and their policy. Those various currents of thought flowed on in their separate courses, largely underground, until their confluence brought them clearly into sight and changed the subsequent course of Christian history in ways beyond all imagining at the time. The concern which had thus been manifested for the spiritual life of the Church and for a simple biblical manner of life in its individual members, implied a practical concentration upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which would demand a clearer articulation at some subsequent moment.

Ecclesiastical authority in its preoccupation with the manifold problems of a *Respublica Christiana* had been driven to concentrate upon the problem of authority and to claim for itself in the Church a final authority which almost appeared to eliminate the necessity for the continuing activity of the Holy Spirit. The traditional formulations of the faith, which had been handed down from the classical ages of Christian thinking were accepted without question by the medieval scholastics, but little attention was paid to the elucidation of the work of the Spirit and the manner of His operation. It is significant that Aquinas, the greatest of all the schoolmen, treated “the whole subject of revelation without referring to the Spirit”.<sup>1</sup> Close attention to Christian experience of the work of the Spirit was thus left to individual thinkers, whose efforts were frequently disowned by authority as heretical or dangerously individualist.

The translation, printing and circulation of the Bible during the closing decades of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century, directed the attention of men to the real nature of biblical religion and to the direct confrontation of God and man which was therein set forth. It was not that the Bible had been disused in the medieval Church, but that it had been used in a different way and interpreted in the narrow categories of a rigid ecclesiastical tradition. The structure of Christian doctrine had been erected from the materials afforded by the Bible and philosophical tradition, but the effective seat of authority had been regarded as the Church itself in the persons of its lawfully appointed officers. The Church had guaranteed the authority of the Bible and as a consequence asserted the right to decide the content of interpretation. The simple believer who pondered over the text of the New Testament, freshly placed in his hands, found in it something so different from current Christianity and yet so attractive in its freshness and spiritual power that he was led to challenge, first implicitly and then openly, the prevailing doctrine of the authority of the Church, and to replace it by a doctrine of the supreme authority of scripture as the Word of God. Yet the reformers were not unaware of the dangers of such a doctrine unless it was closely linked with an understanding of the work of the Spirit. They repaired what E. I. Watkin has called “the long neglect into which the genuine catholic doctrine of inspiration . . . had been suffered to fall”<sup>2</sup> by an insistence on the activity of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the writers of scripture.

Dr William Whitaker, sometime Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, after a critical survey of the character and experience of those who were believed to be the writers of the several books of the New Testament, acknowledged their intellectual and spiritual deficiencies, but added, “How could such men have written so divinely without the divine inspiration of the Holy Ghost?”<sup>3</sup> This doctrine of inspiration was common ground to all

controversialists, however it might appear to be overthrown by the way in which the authority of the Church was conceived, and it generally carried with it the corollary of the infallibility of the Scriptures. Nevertheless, there remained obscurities and difficulties in the text of the Bible, as well as striking divergences amongst its expositors, which seemed to justify the Roman insistence on hierarchical authority as the one safe method of interpreting the inspiration of the Spirit in the scriptures. Dr Whitaker set himself in his *First Controversy* to attempt an answer to those difficulties by elaborating a doctrine of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believing reader as a necessary counterpart of belief in the inspiration of the Spirit in the original writing. He quoted with approval the saying of Luther that God “hath left many obscurities in Scripture as if on purpose to keep us constantly scholars in the school of the Holy Spirit”, and argued that differences of interpretation commonly covered a fundamental agreement about the essentials of the faith, so that there was no need of precise agreement at every point. Indeed, different ages or different parts of the world would not be in error when they interpreted some parts of Scripture differently. It was always possible that some interpreters might be insufficiently obedient to the control of the Holy Spirit. “The reason why all who have the Holy Spirit do not think exactly alike in all things is because there is not precisely the same equal measure of the Holy Spirit in all, otherwise there would be the fullest agreement in all points.”<sup>4</sup>

The bare word, the mere letter of Scripture, cannot of itself save men or elicit saving faith in the reader, and it is this truth which was believed to distinguish authentic knowledge of God from all-other human disciplines. “It is only the external light of nature that is required to learn thoroughly the art of philosophy . . . we may in a certain manner be acquainted with the doctrines of Scripture and obtain an historical faith by the ministry of the word, so as to know all the articles of faith . . . and all without the inward light of the Spirit . . . but we cannot have the  $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\phi\omicron\rho\tau\alpha$ , that is, a certain, solid and saving knowledge without the Holy Spirit internally illuminating our minds.”<sup>5</sup> This insistence on the internal work of the Spirit emerged from an understanding of the Spirit (and not the Pope) as the true Vicar of Christ in His Church, continuing the work of governing and guiding His people, bringing to each generation the authentic significance of the written word. It followed that no individual or group of men could claim exclusive authority in the exposition of Scripture, since the Spirit who inspired its writing and chose whom He would for that purpose also informed the mind and illuminated the understanding of any reader who humbly believed in Him and relied on His activity. “The apostles,” wrote Hooper, “took not upon them to be Christ’s vicar”,<sup>6</sup> with the inference that no group of men could in any distinctive way claim to be the successors of the apostles, nor presume to demand unquestioning acceptance of their interpretation of Scripture. The whole Church at all times must be subject to the authority of the Spirit, exercised through the use of the Scriptures. “In the absence of his body, he (Christ) hath commanded the protection and governance of his church unto the Holy Ghost, the same God and one God with the Father and His divine nature: whose divine puissance and power overmatcheth the force of the devil.”<sup>7</sup>

It is by the virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit alone that the “catholic Church is preserved from all errors and false doctrines” and not by any claim to strict historical succession or by any alleged prerogatives once bestowed upon Peter. Popes and bishops have frequently shown themselves such erroneous interpreters of Scripture that the only possible conclusion to be drawn is that they have never received the gift of the Spirit. Mere learning, theological skill or ecclesiastical experience, still less high office, were insufficient titles to justify a claim to hold and publish the one true faith. In the words of Bishop Pilkington, commenting on a passage in Nehemiah, “though we study and pray never so much, yet we shall

understand nothing until he give us his Holy Spirit, the schoolmaster of all truth, to lighten our minds and give understanding of his holy will".<sup>8</sup> The interpretation of Scripture is the supreme office of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of His continuing presence in the Church and the way in which He exercises His governing and directing power. The author of Scripture, as all the disputants in the sixteenth century were in the end agreed, was ultimately the Holy Spirit, whatever divergent explanations were offered of the place of the human agents in the writing of the books of the Bible. The reformers drew the logical inference that the authoritative interpreter of the text could be no other person than its real author. "We determine," wrote Dr Whitaker in discussing the interpretation of Scripture, "that the supreme right, authority and judgment of interpreting the Scriptures is lodged with the Holy Ghost and the Scripture itself; for these two are not mutually repugnant. We say that the Holy Ghost is the supreme interpreter of Scripture because we must be illuminated by the Holy Ghost to be certainly persuaded of the true sense of Scripture: otherwise, although we use all means, we can never attain to that full assurance which resides in the minds of the faithful."<sup>9</sup>

The concluding sentences of this passage proclaim a doctrine of the work and authority of the Spirit in the obedient use of the Scriptures which occurs frequently in these sixteenth century writers. They were aware that their theological opponents were not ignorant of the text and contents of the Bible and taught a doctrine of the original inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit; and yet these opponents appeared to lack the characteristic marks of New Testament faith. This deficiency could only be explained as due to an intellectual acquaintance with the Bible, apart from that penetrating insight into the truth of the Bible which the indwelling Spirit alone could accomplish in the mind of the believer.

"He that heareth the word," wrote Tyndale, "and doeth it not, buildeth on the sand of his own imagination, and every tempest overthroweth his building. The cause is, he hath not God's Spirit in him and therefore understandeth it not aright neither worketh aright . . . so then, if the Spirit be not in a man, he worketh not the will of God, neither understandeth it though he babble never so much of the Scriptures".<sup>10</sup>

Dr Whitaker in the passage cited above drew attention to the fact that assurance of the truth of Scripture and its importance for life could only be the present possession of the Christian as a result of the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit. It is only through the operation of the Spirit that the reader can be assured of the final authority of the books of the Bible and be inwardly persuaded of the truth of the doctrines of Christian faith.

"When this (the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit) is added, it fills our minds with a wonderful plenitude of assurance, confirms them and causes us most gladly to embrace the Scriptures, giving force to the preceding arguments. Those previous arguments may indeed urge and constrain us, but this (I mean the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit) is the only argument which can persuade us."

Neither the authority of the Church nor the intrinsic worth and importance of the writings could, apart from the witness given by the Holy Spirit to the reader, have given to men "the persuasion that these books are sacred and canonical".<sup>11</sup> Thus the reformers in many passages confessed the ambiguous character of Scripture, as both the Word of God and the product of human activity which cannot of itself compel faith in the reader or hearer. Considered merely as a unique collection of religious documents the books of Scripture are possessed of many limitations, but they form the chief instrument whereby the Spirit of God works in the world to convict, convert and edify.

Most of the English reformers composed their treatises with the challenge offered by Roman theologians in the forefront of their thinking, so that the greater part of their attention was devoted to a discussion of the meaning of authority and the mode of its exercise in the Church. They rejected the traditional modes of interpretation which lent support to the papal order in the Church and taught that Scripture was no mere compilation of texts to be employed in dogmatic discussions or an historical record of the past, but a means of grace. Through the work of the Spirit, the written Word became a means whereby the living God confronted the human soul as absolute demand and final succour. This was accomplished by the illumination of the mind of the reader to understand the text which he perused in its true light as God's Word to him and by the operation of the Spirit in his heart assuring him of the truth of this Word, "in face of all the assaults of the devil" which would lead him to doubt and despair. The objective guarantee of the authority of Scripture which had previously been offered by the ecclesiastical hierarchy was replaced by an existential concept of the authority of the Spirit of God manifested only in the actual expectant and obedient reading of the Word written. The ordinary believer was at no vital disadvantage compared with the theologian, the bishop or even the pope himself. It was possible that those who occupied high office in the Church had not received the gift of the Spirit, for "He will not give his grace, Spirit and knowledge to the idle, slothful and unthankful, neither to the proud",<sup>12</sup> and therefore could not justly be regarded as true interpreters of the Biblical message. Scripture was given for the well being of the whole Church so "that man thereby might be guided and led into salvation and most excellent felicity",<sup>13</sup> and this gift of the Spirit was offered to the humblest believer who could thus experience for himself the true authority of God in the Church mediated through Scripture.

This theological position was not without its vulnerable points, since there seemed to be something arbitrary about the limitation of the work of the Spirit within the narrow limits of Scripture. The Reformation leaders were obliged to conduct a difficult and confused battle on another front against the theological radicals, enthusiasts and fanatics, often indiscriminately known as anabaptists, who claimed the inspiration of the Spirit for many of their wildest notions and relied on the unchecked authority of the 'inner light'. The records of English Christianity through the sixteenth century witness to a steady determination on the part of authority both civil and ecclesiastical to avoid the embarrassment of such dangerous heresies by suppressing their authors. But there is often insufficient evidence to show what the accused really believed about the work of the Holy Spirit and how far it was separated from the Word in Scripture. There were some prepared to assert that the operation of the Holy Spirit in saving faith was limited to the elect, in whose company hierarchs and other prominent Church members would not normally be counted.

The renewed emphasis upon the work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer which had been an important part of the teaching of the leading continental reformers had stimulated in certain quarters a type of mystical teaching with roots in an earlier medieval tradition, which so emphasised the sovereignty of the Spirit in His personal working as to minimise the importance of Scripture. One of the more sober 'spiritual' teachers set out his convictions in these terms: "I believe and trust that the Holy Ghost has come in me and the power of the most high God has (as with Mary the Virgin) over-shadowed my soul to conceive in me the new man, so that in the living, indestructible Word and in the Spirit, I might be born again and see the Kingdom of God".<sup>14</sup> To attach such importance to experience was without doubt part of the inevitable reaction against the formalized structure of Church life which had prevailed too long in Western Christendom; but it involved the danger of supposing a contradiction between the work of the Spirit and the significance of Christian ordinances and

institutions. As early as 1527 one John Pybus was arrested in Oxford and arraigned before the courts on the charge, among other things, of repudiating baptism “and saying that there was no baptism but of the Holy Ghost”.<sup>15</sup> After the settlement of religion made by the Elizabethan government there were many who chafed at what seemed to them the narrow constraints of such a legal ordering of Church life and strove to find opportunities for the expression of spiritual realities. The prophesyings which were developed after 1570, usually in opposition to the admonitions of authority, were based upon the practice of Biblical exegesis but also gave great place to personal witness and the inspiration of the Spirit. The fact that these meetings were held in defiance of official disapproval tended to accentuate the contrast between the representatives of official institutional Christianity and the spiritual leaders. Certain Brownists were believed to lay such emphasis upon the inner light and spiritual experience as to make the Holy Spirit the one Reality, illuminating and drawing mankind up to Himself. In 1588 Francis Ket was burned to death at Norwich for “impugning the deity of the Holy Ghost” and teaching that the title was rightly to be understood as signifying an inspiration coming from God.

In their efforts to repudiate the authoritative claims of Rome the majority of the English reformers assumed the closest conjunction between the operation of the Spirit and the Word written, and devoted little attention to the challenge to their position offered by the new race of spiritual democrats. It was not until the seventeenth century that the prophets of the inner light became so influential that reformed theologians found themselves obliged to expound the doctrine of the person of the Spirit afresh and to discover how it was possible to discern the presence and working of the Spirit from the fancies and conceits of even honest men. It will have been apparent already that the testimony of the primitive Church to the deity of the Spirit was accepted by most English writers of the sixteenth century. This cardinal doctrine of traditional Christianity was hardly questioned in England until the seventeenth century, when some Independents came under Socinian influence, and the Church of England in adopting the catholic creeds “which may be proved by most certain warrants of Scripture”, committed itself to the orthodox doctrine of the Spirit. The fifth of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion approved in 1563 declared in brief but unmistakable terms, “The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God”. Such a doctrine was the presupposition of those assertions of the work of the Spirit in bringing to men the assurance of the truth of the Gospel and the trustworthiness of the Scriptures, which have already been considered.

Roger Hutchinson, a fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge, and subsequently of Eton, composed about 1550 a *Layman’s Book*, which was intended to be a manual of religious instruction for the laity based upon “the only touchstone to examine and try all doctrine”, the holy Scriptures. He thought it necessary, among other things, to controvert the errors of anabaptists and other sectaries whom he designated as “our English Sadducees and outlandish Libertines”. He did not mention any of these teachers by name, nor did he give in any detail the substance of their teaching beyond the generalisation that they proclaimed the Holy Ghost to “be only an influence coming from God” and not a substance. Hutchinson then devoted a good deal of his space to the Scriptural proofs for the godhead of the Holy Ghost. The argument would strike most modern readers as naive, but it serves to demonstrate the willingness of most English reformers to accept the traditional formulation of the doctrine as a faithful interpretation of the witness of Scripture.

“If he (the Holy Ghost) were nothing but a godly motion, a good affection and inspiration: he would not, nor could have showed himself in the likeness of a dove and in the similitude of

fiery tongues. He is the finger of God. He is fire, oil, anointing, water, an advocate, a coal: for all these the Scripture giveth him. Wherefore he is a substance; forasmuch as all these be substances, not inspirations: for the Scripture doth not liken substances to things that be no substances. He is also to be prayed unto, to be called upon: for what is baptism but an invocation of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? and therefore a substance. No man prayeth unto an inspiration; no man crieth to an affection. Our praying unto him proveth him to hear us, to be Almighty God, to be everywhere, to know the thoughts of all men. But nothing heareth, nothing searcheth thoughts but a substance. Then he cannot be a thought, a motion, a coming from God. Yea, rather these properties prove him to be the third person in the ever-glorious Deity.”<sup>16</sup>

Cranmer, in his discussion of the eucharistic presence of Christ, draws the contrast between spirit which is ubiquitous and body which cannot be in more than one place at any one time and then quotes approvingly from Basil and Didymus the saying “forasmuch as the Holy Ghost is in many men at one time, the Holy Ghost must needs be God”.<sup>17</sup>

There is no single treatise in sixteenth century England devoted to an exposition of this part of Christian faith, expounding systematically the person and work of the Spirit, but several writers—among whom may be included the martyr Bradford, Thomas Becon, chaplain to Archbishop Cranmer, Bishop Hooper, Dean Nowell and Thomas Rogers, chaplain to Archbishop Bancroft—composed short expositions of the creed as a whole, collecting the Scriptural evidence and defining the distinctive office of the Holy Spirit. The theologians of English protestantism devoted most of their attention to what seemed to them the far more important topic of the manner of the working of the Spirit in the believing community and its results in the lives of faithful men. Thomas Becon after presenting the Biblical evidence for the godhead of the Spirit, proceeded to the question, “What doth it profit thee that the Holy Ghost is God?” and returns the answer, “so greatly that otherwise I cannot be saved”.<sup>18</sup> It is the Spirit who in the exercise of His sovereign love leads men to repentance and bestows faith upon them, so that they are regenerated with the very life of God. “He with his godly breath quickeneth and maketh alive and conserveth all things.”<sup>19</sup> In the work of justification it is the Spirit who seals to the believer the saving work of Christ, imputing to him through faith a righteousness which is not his own. The very faith which enables a man to possess genuine spiritual life is not his own but is wrought in him by the Spirit. The beginning and the maintenance of spiritual life is the distinctive function of the Spirit, who both justifies and sanctifies believers. To deny or neglect this truth is to dishonour the Spirit of God. “Such a new heart and lusty courage,” wrote Tyndale in his prologue to the Epistle to the Romans,

“canst thou not come by of thine own strength and enforcement but by the operation and working of the Spirit . . . for the Spirit of God only maketh a man spiritual . . . now is the Spirit none otherwise given than by faith only, in that we believe the promises of God . . . right faith is a thing wrought by the Holy Ghost in us which changeth us, turneth us unto a new nature and begetteth us anew in God.”<sup>20</sup>

The passages in Galatians and Romans describing the results in the life of the believer which followed from a receiving of the gift of the Spirit, were frequently expounded by these writers in impressive words, as when Thomas Becon observed that “the Holy Ghost altereth the whole man, making of the bondslave of Satan, the free servant of God, of the child of wrath, the dearly beloved son of God: of the firebrand of hell, the inheritor of everlasting glory. He garnishes us with many glorious and heavenly gifts which we cannot have of ourselves, faith, hope, love, patience and long suffering.”<sup>21</sup> Only by the inward strengthening of the Holy Spirit is it possible for man to resist the assaults of the devil, to overcome

temptation and to show forth the fruits of Christian living. It is not possible for man to be over curious about the mode of the Spirit's activity, for though it is the office of the Spirit to sanctify the members of Christ, nevertheless "the more it is hid from our understanding, the more it ought to move all men to wonder at the secret and mighty workings of God's Holy Spirit which is within us".<sup>22</sup> This emphasis upon the possession of the Spirit evidenced by the fruit He brings forth in human life is balanced by warnings against presumption and the need to recall such apostolic injunctions as "Quench not the Spirit", "Grieve not the Spirit". Nor, although the Spirit works mightily in any life which is yielded to His presence, is it forgotten that this work is but "a pledge and earnest of our heavenly heritage by which we are assured and certainly persuaded in our consciences that we be children of God, brethren and debtors to Jesus Christ and co-heirs of eternal life".

The personal work and indwelling of the Spirit did raise the question of how He was to be received, whether directly by the exercise of faith or only through the appointed means of sacraments, and how men may know without doubt that they have received this gift. Tyndale, the most radical thinker of the group, when discussing Confirmation in *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, denied what he understood to be the prevailing doctrine that the Holy Spirit was given to men through this ordinance.

"If God had so promised, so should it be; but Paul saith (Gal. iii.) that the Spirit is received through preaching of the faith. And while Peter (Acts x.) preached the faith, the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius and on his household. How shall we say then to that which they will lay against us, in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter and John put their hands on the Samaritans and the Holy Ghost came? . . . Nevertheless, the putting on of the hands did neither help nor hinder: for the text saith, 'They prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost'. God had made the apostles a promise, that He would with such miracles confirm their preaching and move others to the faith . . . The apostles believed and prayed God to fulfil His promise; and God, for His truth's sake, even so did. So it was the prayer of faith that brought the Holy Ghost."<sup>23</sup>

A similar statement can be found in the writings of Coverdale where he asserted, "God granteth not the presence of his Spirit to anything but unto prayer".

It was not that Tyndale and Coverdale were concerned to deny, any more than other Anglican writers of the sixteenth century, that ordinances might be used by the Spirit to bring life to men and women; but they faced a situation in which so many had come to trust in the ordinance itself as effecting what it signified without the active participation, through repentance and faith, of those who experienced it. They had witnessed the degradation of the apostolic practice of confirmation and wished to restore it to its primitive importance by insisting on the necessity of instruction leading to repentance and faith. Moreover, in accordance with the testimony of the Bible they felt obliged to insist that this very repentance and faith was the work of the Spirit and that without His working men could neither truly repent nor exercise saving faith. Their pastoral concern for a people misguided by ecclesiastical tradition led them to exaggerate the neglected aspect of truth, that men are moved to repentance and faith by the power of the Spirit working through faithful preaching.

"When a true preacher preacheth, the Spirit entereth the hearts of the elect, and maketh them feel the righteousness of the law of God . . . and thence leadeth them through repentance unto the mercy that is in Christ's blood . . . The Spirit . . . healeth the soul and maketh her love the law of God . . . but outward oil can neither heal the soul . . . Let us therefore follow the teaching

of the Spirit; which we have received as an earnest, to certify our hearts and to make us feel the things of God and not cleave unto the traditions of men.”<sup>24</sup>

The Spirit is only given in response to faith and can only be received by faith as men come to believe the promises of God, for “even as we believe the glad tidings preached to us, the Holy Ghost entereth into our hearts and looseth the bonds of the devil, which before possessed our hearts in captivity and held them”.<sup>25</sup> Thus the emphasis is shifted away from sacramental life to preaching, and there is a certain tendency to contrast the two features of Church life to the disadvantage of the sacraments. Tyndale appears to think that it is normally through response to faithful preaching that the work of the Spirit is inaugurated in the heart of man.<sup>26</sup>

There would, however, speedily become apparent a similar danger in any recovery of the importance of preaching in the life of the Church. Unregenerate human nature is ever the same and ready to trust for salvation in ordinances and institutions in place of being committed only to the living God. The whole institutional life of the Church, unless it be informed by the Spirit, is a menacing danger alike to its members and to the world. It is as necessary to emphasise this cardinal truth in preaching as in the administration of the sacraments, lest a lifeless orthodoxy becomes the chief content of the sermon and the preacher be esteemed in proportion to his acceptance of the orthodoxy of the hearers. Preaching the Gospel may be as dangerous a phrase as attendance at Mass for hiding from people the stern reality of the summons of God to the human soul. “Without the presence of God’s Spirit,” declared Coverdale, “unprofitable is the word preached, unprofitable are the sacraments ministered, unprofitable shall all things be unto us”.<sup>27</sup>

This truth was emphasised by Cranmer in the first English liturgy of 1549, where the opening collect was a prayer for the cleansing, inspiring work of the Spirit, without which no true worship could be offered. In the prayer of consecration the priest was directed to say, “with thy holy spirit and worde, vouchsafe to bless and sanctify these thy gyftes, and creatures of bread and wyne, that they maie be unto us the body and bloude of thy most derely beloved sonne Jesus Christe”; after which there followed the recitation of the narrative of institution. Thus the prayers of the eucharist emphasised the twofold truth, of an objective work in the rite (here specifically in the bread and wine) and of a parallel work in the hearts of the worshippers as alone forming the true substance of worship. There is very little extended discussion in the sixteenth century writers designed to set forth the marks of true possession of the Spirit as distinct from mere human enthusiasm. Most commentators were content to state the argument of Galatians that the presence of the Spirit could be known by the qualities of love, truth, justice, etc., manifested in individual lives. It was not until a later period that the doctrine of the inner light compelled closer attention to the question of how the presence of the Spirit might be certainly known and a man delivered from illusions.

The course of the English reformation in its earliest period was marked by a revival of thinking about the Holy Spirit which took its start from the traditional positions of orthodoxy but advanced to a fuller understanding of the work of the Spirit in the fellowship of the Church, in worship, in Christian character and service and in the unique authority of the Scriptures. The principal concern manifested by the writers discussed in this paper was for the devotional and pastoral needs of the Church. Part of a poem adapted from one of the hymns of Luther and included by Coverdale<sup>28</sup> in his *Goostly Psalmes and Spiritual Songs* may be allowed to stand as a fitting conclusion to this discussion.

Come holy Spirite, most blessed Lorde,  
Fulfyl our hartes nowe with thy grace,  
And make our myndes of one accorde,  
Kyndle them with love in every place.

O holy lyght, most principall,  
The word of lyfe shewe unto us,  
And cause us to knowe God over all,  
For our own Father most gracious.

O holy fyre and comfort most swete,  
Fyll our hearts with fayth and boldnesse,  
To abyde by thee in colde and hete,  
Content to suffre for righteousnesse.

## F. J. TAYLOR

### Endnotes:

- 1) *The Holy Spirit in Thought and Experience*: T. Rees, p. 176.
- 2) *Great Catholics*: essay by E. I. Watkin, p. 235 (quoted in G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Practice*, p. 4).
- 3) *Disputation on Holy Scripture*: Dr W. Whitaker (Parker Soc.), p. 294.
- 4) *ibid.*, p. 296.
- 5) *ibid.*, p. 364.
- 6) *Early Writings*: Bishop John Hooper (P.S.), Vol. I, p. 21.
- 7) *ibid.*, p. 21.
- 8) *Works*: Bishop James Pilkington (P.S.), p. 329.
- 9) Whitaker, *op. cit.*, p. 415; *cf* Hooker, *Eccl. Pol.*, III., viii. 15: “even to our own selves it needeth caution and explication how the testimony of the Spirit may be discerned, by what means it may be known; lest men think that the Spirit of God doth testify those things which the spirit of error suggesteth.”
- 10) *Works*: William Tyndale (P.S.), Vol. I, p. 78 (The Parable of the Wicked Mammon).
- 11) Whitaker, *op. cit.*, p. 295.
- 12) *Writings*: Bishop Miles Coverdale (P.S.), Vol. I, p. 394.
- 13) *ibid.*
- 14) Hubmaier, quoted in *Studies in Mystical Religion*, Rufus Jones, p. 381.
- 15) *History of English Nonconformity*: H. W. Clark, Vol. I, pp. 94, 128.

- 16) *Works*: Roger Hutchinson (P.S.), pp. 134-136. For similar confessions of the full deity of the Spirit, see Bradford I, p. 145; Becon III, pp. 141-2; Hooper II, p. 39; T. Rogers, pp. 69-74; A. Nowell, p. 170.
- 17) *Works*: Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (P.S.), Vol. I, p. 17.
- 18) *Works*: Thomas Becon (P.S.), Vol. II, p. 40.
- 19) *ibid.*
- 20) Tyndale: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 77.
- 21) Becon: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 40.
- 22) Tyndale: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 213.
- 23) Tyndale: *op. cit.*, Vol. I., pp. 274-5; *cf.* Hooker VI., vi. 11: “in such sort as Thomas himself teacheth: that the Apostle’s imposition of hands caused not the coming of the Holy Ghost, which notwithstanding was bestowed together with the exercise of that ceremony; yea, by it (saith the evangelist), to wit, as by a mean which came between the true agent and the effect, but not otherwise”.
- 24) Coverdale, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 420.
- 25) Tyndale: *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 183-4.
- 26) Tyndale: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 488; *cf.* I, p. 417: “When this testament is preached and believed, the Spirit entereth the heart and quickeneth it, and giveth her life and justifieth her”.
- 27) Coverdale, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 420.
- 28) Coverdale: *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 541-548.