

CHARACTERISATION OF JESUS AS A CHARISMATIC FIGURE IN THE GOSPELS

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Dedication

To my lovely wife and life companion Anna, for standing with me, giving me all the support that I needed when I spent long hours of day and night in order to piece together this work.

Also, to my dearly beloved young sisters Patricia Eunice and Magadalena (Magada for short) respectively; my loving and lovely mother-in-law Mrs. C. Lungu Tembo, all now at God's side where there are greener pastures because of Jesus their Shepherd.

Lastly, to my loving and lovely sister-in-law Mrs. Mary Tembo Zulu, in God's presence; my father and mother Mr. Anderson Tembo and Mrs. Tiweleko Nyirenda Tembo (both went to glory in October of 2015 and 1999, respectively); my beloved son Dalitso Tembo, now in the presence of Jesus whom he loved and served in an exemplary way (the first fruit of my young brother and my sister-in-law Peter Tembo and Theresa Luakuti Tembo).

With a lot of love and precious memories.

PREFACE

It is with the Church, built by Jesus Christ, that this work is consciously written. Originally inspired by questions raised in my academic studies, this work was substantially submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Greenwich School of Theology UK, for the degree of Master of Theology awarded by the Greenwich University of Hawaii, USA in July of 1995.

The characterisation of Jesus Christ as a "Charismatic" is vitally interesting when discussing the originality of the New Testament and its community. I have made a detailed search in order to try and clarify the issues that concern anyone who has interest in Biblical and Theological study, so as to gain the knowledge and understanding of the subject of this undertaking.

I have suggested a working definition of this characterisation of Jesus Christ and discussed the background to his Charismatic status. This background should enable us to place Jesus in the tradition and culture in which he was born, lived, grew up, worked and died by crucifixion on the cross. The works of Jesus lend themselves to us as an aid or basis of understanding his Charismatic nature. Among his works are the therapeutic activities, his exorcisms, and his words in didactic situations and the pronouncements he made.

His works are miraculous; and naturally, I have been led to look at the range of his miracles. In addition to miracles, it has been necessary to look at the relationship between miracles and faith. The relationship of Jesus to the Holy Spirit is the key that unlocks the subject at hand. It is the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost that is seen as the originator of the modern-day Charismatic movements. By this we should be able to judge as to whether or not our Lord Jesus has any relationship to the Charismatic world. Is he also the head of the Charismatic world?

My aim is to make the point that our Lord Jesus Christ is a Charismatic and that therefore he is the Charismatic Leader, and that as a consequence, there is an undeniable continuity between Jesus and his Church. Finally, the scriptures tell us that Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit and that he did his work in the 'power of the Spirit.' (Luke 4.14)

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I am greatly indebted to you all.

<u>Note:</u> All Biblical references in this work are drawn from the New International Version of the Holy Bible unless otherwise stated.

BOOK TWO

THE CHARISMATIC FIGURE

THE SPIRIT AND THE CHARISMATIC CHRIST

1. CONCEPTION

The Gospels present us with the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus the Charismatic. It is a clear fact, that in the Gospels, Jesus was very conscious of the Spirit in all of his work. He clearly expresses this in his defence of exorcisms.

This relationship between the Spirit and Jesus is mainly about the divine origin of Mary's first-born Son. There are various positions on this very fundamental, and yet profound doctrine of the Christian faith which are not discussed in this work. The relationship between the Spirit and Jesus is very important for coming to a convincing understanding of the Charismatic nature of Jesus. This can be summed up by saying that the relationship is from the very beginning of the incarnation, or better still, the very cause of it. And what is more? a detailed study of the virgin birth of our Lord Jesus Christ will reveal that the relationship transcends time itself (past and present); it is eternal.

In presenting the conception of Jesus, Strauss having made a detailed consideration of the comparison and contrast of the canonical and apocryphal accounts has this to say:

The conception of Jesus through the power of the Holy Ghost ought not to be grounded upon a mere uncertain suspicion; it must have been clearly and positively asserted; and to this end a messenger from heaven was required, since theocratic decorum seemed to demand it far more in relation to the birth of the Messiah, than of a Samson or of a John.¹

There is an amount of truth in what Strauss is saying in the above quotation, nevertheless, he seems to go into unnecessary labours: for he seems to imply that divine decency was exercised in the case of the incarnation and not in the case of either Samson or John the Fore-runner of our Lord. It is very clear that in both cases of Samson and John, Yahweh did send a messenger

from heaven; and that the only striking and meaningful difference worth highlighting is the agent by whom Yahweh brought the conceptions about. In the case of the two, it was their fathers by divine intervention, namely, correcting the infertility condition of their mothers; so that they were enabled to conceive while on the other hand, in the conception of the Christ the Holy Spirit was the agent.

To illustrate this, it might be helpful to look at one Biblical reference found in Judges where a record of Samson's conception and birth is found. This then is what we read:

Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD, so the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years. A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." Then the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death." Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. The woman hurried to tell her husband, "He's here! The man who appeared to me the other day!" Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. So

Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her. She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her." Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD." (Manoah did not realise that it was the angel of the LORD.) Then Manoah enquired of the angel of the LORD, "What is your name, so that we may honour you when your word comes true?" He replied, "Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding." Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: As the flame blazed up from the altar towards heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground. When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realised that it was the angel of the LORD. "We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!" But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this." The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson. He grew and the LORD blessed him, and the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him while he was in Mahaneh Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol.²

Reading the account of the annunciation regarding John's birth would be similar to the text above in that it was the $\alpha\gamma\gamma\epsilon\lambda o\zeta \kappa\nu\rho\iota o\nu$ (an angel of the Lord) that $\omega\phi\theta\eta$ (appeared) to Zacharias; with the only difference being in the fact that in this instance the one approached by the angel was Zacharias rather than Elizabeth.³

The absence of Joseph's or indeed of any other man's participation in the

conception of Jesus is sufficiently supplied by the divine creative energy.⁴ It is most certainly enough to rest in the Apostles' Creed: 'Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary.' And Louis Berkhof says in his work:

Of even greater importance is the work of the Holy Spirit in the sphere of redemption. Here the following points may be mentioned: (1) *The preparation and qualification of Christ for His mediatorial work*. He prepared Christ a body and thus enabled Him to become a sacrifice for sin, Luke 1:35; Heb. 10:5-7.⁵

The Hebrews 10 reference above is obviously connected to the incarnation of the Christ as it means: "You have made me able to become a real sacrifice by means of preparing me a holy body", cf. Heb. 10.10. Indeed, the incarnation or the virgin conception of Jesus the Messiah by the Holy Spirit - the third Person of the divine Trinity is necessary in every regard. Without the incarnation, the Charismatic status of Jesus would not be any more significantly different from that of other charismatic figures such as Honi, Hanina, Elijah-Elisha, or even John the Baptist who were also empowered and moved by the Holy Ghost into doing and saying great things.

This is therefore a vital relationship as it distinguishes Jesus from the rest of the charismatics as we shall see later on in this work. And although it is true that Jesus was very man, yet it is also true that he was God of very God. It is paradoxical. Nevertheless, it is factual.

SUMMARY

An analysis of the Lucan narrative reveals that this portion is permeated with a supernatural tone: the presence and the address of an angel, the activity of God, and clearly, the overshadowing instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. The extraordinary or the supernatural factors in Luke's account are not an interpolation, they are an innate part of the actual event that he is reporting to his inquisitive reader. The Holy Spirit was the controlling factor (I say this with all reverence) from the production of the egg out of Mary's ovary to the birth itself. The fertilisation in Mary's womb was entirely controlled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. And this birth viewed in salvation history; the divine superintendency worked as a safeguard against both threats that face prospective mothers, i.e., miscarriage and natural birth defects. We see the Holy Spirit continually involved with the events of this

conception period. When Mary visited Elizabeth, we read:

And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For he that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation. He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; As he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house. (AV).⁶

It can be noted that:

- 1. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit (V. 41).
- 2. She blessed Mary by the Holy Spirit as the utterance shows that she was inspired by the Spirit (V. 42).
- 3. By the revelation of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth instantly knew that the One in Mary's womb, her foetal child was her Lord *Kvpiov* (V. 43) cf. 2.11; Ps. 110.1. This title of Jesus is the same referred to in Philippians 2.5-11 "The name", "the name of Jesus", and 'Jesus is Lord.'
- 4. The babe (John) leaped in her womb for joy, i.e., the baby was joyful (VV. 41,44).
- 5. And Elizabeth was also certain that the things told Mary by the angel

were 'from the Lord.' (V. 45).

And finally, of the Matthean testimony, it must be sufficient to see that the heart of Matthew's story is that in Jesus' birth the Holy Spirit was operative as never before in the world. The activity of the Spirit was essential to the conception, but it was the Charismatic figure who was central to all the happenings in this account.

2. JORDAN EXPERIENCE

Having looked at the first aspect of the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus, we should now turn our attention to the second facet of this relationship, namely, the Jordan Experience. The main concern of this point is Jesus' experience at the river Jordan where he underwent the waters of baptism at the hand of John the Baptist. It was John who confessed to his audience that he only baptised with water; but that coming after him was one superior to him who would baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire.⁷

The Jordan experience of Jesus that concerns this part of the work is not the baptism of Jesus in water, but his experience of the Spirit. All the four Gospel witnesses together provide us a fourfold witness of the one and same event. There is such a unity of testimony on Jesus' experience of the Holy Spirit. Whereas the experience of other charismatics shows that the Spirit of God came upon them invisibly, save for the accompanying effects of the infilling or the "coming upon" of the Spirit of God, in Jesus' case there was a visible descent and resting of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus. And as per the Lucan witness, '...in a bodily shape like a dove...'

Later Jesus could say:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.⁹

It is evident in the above quotation that there is a continuity between the earlier charismatics - the priests, kings and indeed the prophet Elisha and Jesus himself as he later stated to the senior minister of the synagogue and those present at the Nazareth synagogue fellowship. Jesus was the very one that the prophets were pointing to, as in the prophecy that Jesus here applies to himself. He was that eschatological charismatic. The application was in no uncertain terms, and all bore witness to him and wondered. He was not being arrogant nor was he mistaken, his words were gracious. ¹⁰ John would say as he did in the prologue, '...we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.' ¹¹

To the Baptist, it was a great thrill to see the Holy Spirit physically rest upon Jesus because at some point prior to this event, the Father had told him that something observable would take place; thereby enabling him to recognise the one for whom he came as a forerunner. Whether it was while he was still in his mother's womb or when he was born that the Father had said this to him, we do not know. However it is possible that God could have said this to him at the point of being filled with the Holy Spirit. ¹² In our own finite experience and understanding it is impossible for one to be filled with the Holy Spirit, let alone for a person to receive information from God prior to being born; but it was not so for John seeing he was filled from his mother's womb.

Therefore, John could say:

I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptise with the Holy Spirit." ¹³

This is an important, obvious and an undeniable experience of Jesus. A key relationship between the Holy Spirit and himself; key for his future experiences and functions. In as much as it was an evidence to John of Jesus' unique Son-ship to the Father, it is also a clear message to us of perfect humanity and of the righteous servant of Jehovah. The Holy Spirit has been the missing or the neglected link to effective service for God, and for life as God intends for us, '...life more abundantly.' (John 10.10. AV). He was the agent of the Old Creation as he is of the New Creation. In Jesus we see perfect humanity and perfect obedience of a servant. And after him, the Church is a continuation of perfect humanity and the obedient service of Jesus to the Father.¹⁴

Furthermore, Richardson says:

The symbolism of the dove in the narrative of the baptism (Mark 1.10; Matt. 3.16; Luke 3.22) is not immediately apparent, since there seem to be no very close analogies in rabbinic writings. 2. The most probable explanation is that which connects the dove with Gen. 1.2, where the Spirit 'broods' over the old creation: so here, at the New Creation, on its 'first day', so to speak, the Spirit again broods over the waters (of Jordan). Jesus is made 'the Lord's Anointed', the first-born of those 'many brethren' who shall through their baptism in Holy Spirit themselves become cristoi, anointed, and shall be made corporately into the new Adam,

the New Creation. But, as is so often the case in biblical symbolism, a symbol may have a double reference, and we must always refuse to accept an either-or: possibly there is some reference to Gen. 8.8-12 (Noah's dove), since the early Church thought of the deliverance of Noah in his ark as a baptism of the human race (I Pet 3.20f.). Other biblical references to doves shed no light on the matter. The doves which so often appear on or over the fonts of Christian churches remind us that our baptism is efficacious only because Christ was baptized and that in our baptism, as in his, the inward reality of the action is the descent of the Holy Spirit. 15

And in addition, Joachim Jeremias shows unequivocally that there is no reason for doubting the historicity of the baptism of Jesus. He furthermore supports the fact that Jesus had an experience which was determinative for the career ahead of him. He says that probability was on its side. Observing the closeness between John and Jesus, and indeed the different position of Jesus, it becomes evident that a marked event created a gulf between the two. Jeremias rightly concludes that the accounts of the baptism indicate that this event transpired at the baptism of Jesus. ¹⁶

Going further than that he says:

If we attempt to make more precise what it was that Jesus experienced at his baptism, we might say that from that time he knew that he was in the grasp of the Spirit. God was taking him into his service, equipping him and authorizing him to be his messenger and the inaugurator of the time of salvation. At his baptism, Jesus experienced his call. According to Isa. 42.I, the Spirit was to be given to God's elect, his servant. There is nothing to exclude the possibility that the thought of this passage, as it is expressed in the proclamation, occurred to Jesus and that from the time of the baptism he was conscious of being God's servant promised by Isaiah. ... Be that as it may, it is clear that Jesus attached supreme importance to the moment of his baptism. The puzzling and, by that token, early pericope Mark II.27-33 par. is evidence of that. Jesus is asked about the basis of his authority. His counterquestion, whether the baptism of John was or was not from God (v. 30) is hardly an evasion, a move by which Jesus seeks to avoid a direct answer. Now if his counter question is meant seriously,1 it means: 'My authority rests on John's baptism', and that again will mean in concrete terms: 'My authority rests on what happened when I was baptized by John'.¹⁷

SUMMARY

As a concluding remark, further support can be drawn from Richardson when he says about the Jesus' Jordan experience:

In their eyes the significance of the baptism is that it represents the anointing of Jesus with the Holy Spirit to the office and work of the Messianic Servant of the Lord. As the kings of Israel were anointed and so became *meshiah* Yahweh, the Lord's Anointed (e.g. I Sam. 16.13; Ps. 89.20; II Kings 9.3); as also at a later time priests were anointed for their sacred office (Ex. 29.7; 40.13-15; Lev. 8.12; Ps. 133.2, etc.); and, above all, as the figure of the Isaianic Prophet was anointed with the Spirit of the Lord (Isa. 11.2; 42.1; 44.3; 61.1), so Jesus, the Messianic Prophet, Priest and King, is anointed with the Spirit of the Lord. 1 Even the Fourth Evangelist, who omits all reference to the baptism of Jesus, nevertheless makes the Baptist bear testimony to the descent of the Spirit as a dove upon Jesus (John 1.32f.) and insists upon his abundant endowment with the Spirit (John 3.34). The Synoptic record of the baptism of Jesus uses the rabbinic device of the Bath-qol to express the divine significance of the event. The words uttered by 'the voice which came out of the heavens' (Mark 1.11) identify Jesus with the Servant of the Lord of the Isaianic Servant Songs: 'Thou art my Son, the Beloved; in thee I am well pleased' (Mark 1.11; cf. Matt.3.17; Luke 3.22). The reference is to Isa. 42.1, 'Behold, my servant whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my Spirit upon him.' In the non-LXX version of Isaiah read by Mark (cf. Matt. 12.18-21) $\upsilon \iota o \varsigma$ was used instead of $\pi \alpha \iota \varsigma$ and $\alpha \gamma \alpha \pi \eta \tau \sigma \zeta$ instead of $\varepsilon \kappa \lambda \varepsilon \kappa \tau \sigma \zeta$. The words spoken by the voice are also reminiscent of Ps. 2.7, 'The Lord said

unto me, Thou art my son; this day have I begotten thee.' Mark does not in fact add the second part of the quotation from the Psalm, and there is, of course, no suggestion here of an adoptionist Christology. The day of baptism, as Christians well knew, was a day of 'begetting anew', and Christ at his baptism was, as it were, sacramentally 'begotten' of the Father as his beloved or unique Son.¹⁸

3. WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

The Jordan experience naturally leads us to consider Jesus' wilderness experience. This aspect of Jesus' experiences is significant as it has evidently led to the rise of a rather lengthy discussion of whether Christ was peccable or impeccable in theological scholarship. Therefore, Louis Berkhof represents this in the following way:

The temptations of Christ formed an integral part of his sufferings. They are temptations that are encountered in the pathway of suffering, Matt. 4:1-11 (and parallels); Luke 22:28; John 12:27; Heb. 4:15; 5:7,8. His public ministry began with a period of temptation, and even after that time temptations were repeated at intervals right on into dark Gethsemane. It was only by entering into the very trials of men, into their temptations, that Jesus could become a truly sympathetic High Priest and attain to the heights of a proved and triumphant perfection, Heb. 4:15; 5:7-9. We may not detract from the reality of the temptations of Jesus as the last Adam, however difficult it may be to conceive of one who could not sin as being tempted. Various suggestions have been made to relieve the difficulty, as for instance, that in the human nature of Christ, as in that of the first Adam, there was the *nuda possibilitas peccandi*, the bare abstract possibility of sinning (Kuyper); that Jesus' holiness was an ethical holiness, which had to come to high development through, and maintain itself in, temptation (Bavinck); and that the things with which Christ was tempted were in themselves perfectly lawful, and appealed to perfectly natural instincts and appetites (Vos). But inspite of all this the problem remains, How was it possible that one who in *concreto*, that is, as He was actually constituted, could not sin nor even have an inclination to sin, nevertheless be subject to real temptation?¹⁹

The issue at hand is the temptation of Jesus Christ. Matthew tells us that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Most certainly, this is yet another aspect of the operations of the Spirit of God in the life and experience of Jesus Christ.²⁰ It must be sufficient for us to say that the significance of the temptation of Christ was to prepare him to become a sympathetic High Priest. This could only be achieved by

entering into the very trials of humankind. His temptations formed an essential part of his sufferings.²¹ Jesus as the Righteous Servant of Jehovah, as the Man of God, was led here even as other men of God were guided in the Old Testament by the Spirit of the Lord; of course, not in each detail. Spirit guidance is a significant and prominent feature in the life of a believer, let alone the devotional Charismatic. This is true whether it is guidance in spiritual or mundane matters. There is always prayer being made for the leading of the Lord by his Spirit. After all, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would lead the believers into all truth.²²

This reminds me about an experience of clear Holy Spirit guidance I had in 1982. I was walking to a weekly youth fellowship meeting at Northmead Assembly of God Church in Lusaka one Saturday afternoon. As I went, I came to Olympia Park, walking on a footpath through a field. And as I approached the Katimamuliro Road, I looked to the left, and at the top of the road was a T-Junction. At the T-Junction there were two drainage pillars, one on either side of the road joining Katimamuliro Road, and a young lady was sitting on one of them.

As soon as I saw the lady, the Holy Spirit clearly ordered me and said, 'Go and speak to that person about Jesus.' I wrestled with the thought, gave an excuse and said that if I did, I would be late for the meeting. Therefore I determined not to go to the person, but as soon as one of my feet touched the Katimamuliro Road, I instantly turned left and went up to where this young lady was; on arriving there I greeted her and asked her, 'What are you doing here?' Her reply was, 'I met a young man who promised to meet me here so that he could speak to me about Jesus.' At hearing that, I was overjoyed, and said to her, 'I would like to speak to you about Jesus.'

There and then I led Maureen to the Lord Jesus Christ and brought her to the youth meeting with me. She began attending Church with us at Northmead Assembly. The Lord led me by the Holy Spirit to a person he had earlier prepared to hear and receive the gospel of salvation.

SUMMARY

As a conclusion, one of the well-known men, a father Pentecost Britain ever had in the 19th century, was a former Principal of the Assemblies of God Bible College. He had this to say about the leading of the Holy Spirit in the

fifth chapter of his work on guidance:

I SHALL never forget my first journey into a foreign country. How thankful I was that I had a guide in the person of the friend who took me as his companion. Incidentally he paid all expenses; but in addition to that he knew the language, had travelled there before, and could make my journey care-free, profitable and enjoyable. Crowning all was the delightful fellowship with himself as we enjoyed everything in each other's company.

How much better it all was in every way than if I had simply received a few instructions, and a guide-book, before I left home, and had then been left to manage as best I could.

THE PERSONAL GUIDE.

Now this is exactly what the Holy Spirit is intended to be in the life of the Christian. The love of Christ has planned that we should receive something far better than mere "guidance": He has provided a Personal Guide.

The theological doctrine of the Personality of the Third Person in the Godhead glows with life and beauty when we taste the personal guidance that He gives, and know the Comforter as a Friend to lead and direct all through life's pathway. And nothing less than this should be every believer's experience. The splendid Old Testament type is found in the pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night, that was upon the tabernacle in the sight of the Israelites throughout all their journeys, to guide them right home to the Promised Land. (Num. ix: 15-23).

Such an experience demands, however, an intimate and friendly relationship between the Guide and the guided. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii: 14), and they are so led just because they ARE sons. Moreover, to enjoy continual guidance by the Spirit the true attitude of a "son" must be maintained experimentally by a delight in the Father's will, as well as

by a fundamental spiritual relationship founded upon the new birth.

Enjoyment of the Holy Spirit as the Guide is based upon perfect mutual confidence and unbroken fellowship. The Spirit grieved (Eph. iv: 30), or the Spirit quenched (1 Thess. v:19), will quickly cloud guidance, and ultimately hinder it altogether.

But where the conditions are fulfilled, the personal guidance of the Holy Spirit can become wonderfully real. The New Testament uses some very simple and direct language to express it- "The Spirit SAID" (Acts viii: 29; x: 19; xiii: 2). The phrase reveals an intimacy and actuality of the Holy Spirit in the life of the early Christians that may well make our hearts hungry for a parallel experience today. We believe it is possible.

"THE HOLY SPIRIT SAID..."

There are at least four passages in the New Testament where the direct voice and guidance of the Holy Spirit are explicitly stated to have been given, viz., Acts viii: 29; x: 19-20; xiii: 2; and xvi: 6-7. We may safely presume that these instances stand out from a background of fairly common experience.

In analyzing the revelation which they contain we notice three things:-

(a) The Personal Background.

The Holy Spirit spoke to men of willing obedience (Philip): of prayerful character (Peter): and of devotion to the gospel (Paul). In the collective instance of the assembly (Antioch), He spoke during a time of waiting upon God in priestly service, and fasting. All of which teaches us that hearing the voice of the Spirit demands spiritual qualifications in both individuals and assemblies.

(b) The Method Employed.

It is a striking fact that this is never definitely stated. In the cases of Philip and Peter, those who heard the Spirit's voice were entirely alone at the time. In the case of Antioch, there is a probability that He spoke through one of the "certain prophets" (chap. xiii: 1), though this is not stated. There is some possibility that He may have spoken through Silas, a "prophet" (see chap. xv: 32), when "forbidding" Paul to preach in Asia. The subsequent vision of the man of Macedonia came directly to Paul personally however (chap. xvi: 10), and it is safer, and more in accord with New Testament principles, to believe that the previous hindrances from the Holy Spirit had also been conveyed to the leader of the missionary band directly and personally.

The question of the method which the Spirit used when speaking is intensely interesting, and not unimportant, though left open. There seems no reason for ruling out an audible voice as one possible method in the cases of Philip and Peter. Perhaps even more probable is the suggestion of a strong compelling inward urge and "witness" that became so unmistakable that it took on all the definite qualities of a "voice." This seems especially likely in the restraining authority of the Spirit which Paul knew when assaying to preach in Asia and Bithynia.

Multitudes of spiritual believers know something of this inward leading of the Holy Spirit to-day. It is accompanied by a deep peace in the soul when walking in obedience to the mind of the Spirit, and by a condition of spiritual restlessness when out of the will of God. With the Holy Spirit dwelling WITHIN the believer, it is logical to expect that His voice will be thus heard within rather than from without.

When speaking to the *assembly* at Antioch, the Holy Spirit very likely used prophetic utterances. We hope to make the subject of guidance through spiritual gifts a separate study.

(c) The Objective.

In every case this had something to do with the furtherance of the Gospel; Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch; Peter to Cornelius and the Gentiles; Antioch to send out the first missionaries; Paul to take the good news to Macedonia and Europe. The significance of this should be carefully noted. The Holy Spirit is one with the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit of the Father, and His voice will always speak in unison with the great purposes of Divine Love in the Godhead for the redemption of a world of sinners and their reconciliation to God. Presumed guidance from the Holy Spirit that is purely selfish or utterly trivial lacks the Calvary-mark of authenticity.

OUR SAFEGUARDS.

This brings us to consider safeguards; for, unhappily, there has been so much fanaticism cloaked under the phrase "The Lord told me," that sane believers everywhere are frankly suspicious of the whole subject of presumed guidance by the Holy Spirit, especially by His voice.

Our safeguards, gleaned from these four illuminating concrete instances in the book of Acts, are also threefold:-

(a) The Character of the Recipients.

They were believers of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, prayerful, obedient, and on fire with a sanctified zeal for the salvation of others. Also they were men of sound reputation among the churches.

We are always justified in examining the credentials of those who claim that the Spirit has spoken to them, or through them. Are they the type that the Scriptures lead us to expect the Spirit so to guide? It is wise to look with great suspicion on presumed guidance from the Holy Spirit if those who profess to have it do not fulfil the necessary qualifications as to Christian character and standing.

(b) The Agreement of the "Body."

The genuine guidance of the Holy Spirit will commend itself to all who are walking in the Spirit, and they will either share in its impartation, or find themselves heartily in agreement with it. This is strikingly evidenced at Antioch, where the whole assembly promptly and unanimously acted upon the words the Spirit had spoken in their midst (chap. xiii: 2). Paul's travelling companions also very clearly agreed with the guidance he received that culminated in them all crossing over into Macedonia (note-"WE endeavoured to go assuredly gathering that the Lord had called US"; Chap. xvi: 10).

Presumed guidance from the Spirit, which other believers who are walking in the Spirit find hard to believe and accept, should always be viewed with just suspicion.

(c) The Results of the "Guidance."

Where the genuine voice of the Spirit has been heard and obeyed we should look for definite results from the guidance, on the line of fruitfulness in the gospel. They occurred in all these instances-the Ethiopian was converted, the Gentiles received the Holy Ghost, Barnabas and Paul had a fruitful missionary tour, and Paul and his party successfully planted the church in Europe.

When presumed guidance has proved to be barren of good results, or of any definite fulfilment of predictions given, even after a considerable and reasonable time has elapsed, then we are justified in questioning if it ever came from the Holy Spirit. Where the results have been definitely injurious, we are doubly justified in doubting its authenticity. We shall also be wise in accepting any further presumed "guidance" through the same channel with extreme reserve.

OUR DEEP NEED TO-DAY.

With the above safeguards in view, we must have the moral and spiritual courage to seek to enter more fully into a vital experience of being truly led by the Spirit of God to-day. To hold back is to take exactly the same position as the ten spies. (Num. xiv).

In our personal lives nothing can be more precious, not to say necessary, than an experimental knowledge of the guidance of the Comforter. The occasions when we have definitely tasted something of this have become some of the most treasured possessions of the soul. They have made the Holy Spirit so very REAL. Their finest fruit has not only been in the helpfulness of the guidance given, or the results arising therefrom, but in that deepened fellowship with God which is the very heart and essence of Eternal Life.

In the collective life of the Church nothing is more desperately needed to-day than a revival of practical experience of the definite guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wasted resources of both men and money, foolish overlapping, failure to make speedier progress both on what we call the "Home" and the "Foreign" fields, all prove how destitute we are of the guidance of the great Divine Leader Whom Christ sent to take His place on earth."

Our modern Joshuas urgently need to meet once again that Divine Presence Who comes, not merely to be "for us," but as "Captain of the host of the Lord" (Josh. v: 13-15). For the Holy Spirit has not been given to help further OUR plans, but to command the whole plan of campaign.

Only as His leadership becomes real and active in the whole Church can we hope ever to successfully overtake our great task and heavenly commission of world-wide evangelization before Jesus comes.²³

This then too was another important aspect of the Greatest Charismatic figure we have ever met or heard of - that of being led by the Holy Ghost.

NOTES

- 1 Strauss. (1972:125).
- 2 Judges 13. (NIV).
- 3 Luke 1.11.
- 4 Strauss. (1972:130).
- 5 Berkhof. (1941:98).
- 6 Luke 1.41-56. (AV).
- 7 Matthew 3.11; Mark 1.8; Luke 3.16; John 1.33.
- 8 Luke 3.22.
- 9 Luke 4.18,19.
- 10 Luke 4.21,22.
- 11 John 1.14. (AV).
- 12 Luke 1.15.
- 13 John 1.33 cf 3.34.
- 14 Genesis 1.2; John 3.5,6,8; Romans 8.5,9,10,11,13,14-16; 1 Corinthians 12.13; Zechariah 4.6; Acts 1.8.
- 15 Richardson. (1958:181).
- 16 Jeremias. (1971:55).
- 17 Jeremias. (1971:55-56).
- 18 Richardson. (1958:178-179).
- 19 Berkhof. (1941:338).
- 20 Matthew 4.1. As a matter of fact, this work of the Holy Spirit, i.e., leading Jesus to be tempted by the devil is not widely dealt with in scholarship. Although Jesus seems to have gone on into the wilderness for the purpose of fasting as Moses the prophet did in the mount, yet Scripture tells us that the primary reason for going into the wilderness was firstly, because **he was led there by the Holy Spirit** that came upon him at his baptism according to the scriptures (Isaiah 61 cf. Luke 4.18ff.), and lastly **that he might be tempted by the devil.**
- 21 Hebrews 2.16-18 cf Luke 24.46-48.
- 22 John 16.13.
- 23 Gee. (1936:28-36).

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