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## *Spirit and Life: A Charismatic Theology*

CARLISLE G. DAVIDSON

In the Hymn of Creation, the prologue of the book of Genesis, we first encounter the word Spirit, derived from the Hebrew expression for a zephyr or a breath. In Genesis this word denotes an aspect of the divine nature — that elemental force which proceeds from God, partakes of his essence, and creates, sustains, and orders life. In Hellenistic thought the essence of life is equated with breath, *pneuma*. The expression *anima* in Latin refers to the life-force in matter which gives breath and vitality to all that lives. In both Hebrew and Hellenistic Christian theology the Spirit is a creating and animating force through which the sentient order is sustained and evolved and directed toward perfection.

The Genesis creation hymn clarifies both the difference and the relationship between man and God. God is unknowable to man except in his self-disclosures through the operation of the Spirit. In Hebrew thought God is one absolute, self-sustained Being beyond the time-space-matter continuum in which he expresses himself and in which he is participating. Man is composed of the dust; his flesh is matter, yet that which gives him life and identity is immaterial, the breath of God. Of all living things that have existed, apparently man alone has the capacity for self-contemplation and the faculties of thought and reason, capable of participating in the life of God: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' . . . So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him" (Gen. 1:26-27 RSV).

The Spirit is that *persona* or manifestation of divine Being which participated in the dialogue of creation that brought the material order into existence and indelibly impressed the image of the divine nature upon matter in the form of human con-

sciousness. Whether human consciousness came about through spontaneous generation or evolutionary process is relatively unimportant. What is important is that rational consciousness — thought-processes capable of intuiting the nature of the universe — exists as a distinct entity in the cosmos. The Spirit of God is the dynamic energy-force that informs human consciousness but remains grounded in the essence, fullness, and mind of God. In post-biblical and Hellenistic philosophy the Spirit is identified with the divine Word or *logos*, the rational principle of all-creating wisdom and love at the core of the cosmos.

Judaism is a religion of historical process and revelation. Central to Judaism is the concept of direct communication between the deity and a chosen individual. The encounter is initiated by the deity; the revelation is not the result of philosophical reflection or desire for illumination. Revelations in the Bible are covenantal; in them God calls individuals and families to a relationship of trust, obedience, and righteousness and a communitarian peoplehood. Biblical revelations disclose very little about the abstract nature of divine truth, but stress the importance of a divine desire for moral perfection and holy fellowship and union with the Godhead through obedience and dependence upon the Spirit. Revelations in the Bible are spontaneous, miraculous in-breakings of the divine into the human order. Such covenant-creating and covenant-sustaining revelations are somewhat alien to Mediterranean thought-forms and peculiar to Judaism.

In post-biblical Judaism, particular, revealed truth is harmonized with truth perceived through philosophic speculation and observations of the natural law. Philo of Alexandria, a rabbinic scholar influenced by Platonism, notes the similarity between the Hebrew concept of Spirit and the Greek principle of *logos*. The Hellenistic rabbis are persuaded that, just as there were in-breakings of God's Spirit in their Hebrew faith-history, so there had been different in-breakings in other cultures where a matured capacity for heightened intellectual and spiritual insight was present. Many rabbis and later fathers of

the church affirm that there was a natural ethical law implanted in the nature of things, which if rightly perceived and followed would call men to righteousness even in an uncovenanted dispensation. This realization of the universality of spiritual laws is a major insight of the Hellenistic period in Judeo-Christian tradition. With the emphasis on the particularity of God's historic revelation of himself in a specific time and place goes a complementary realization that this does not preclude the possibility of the Spirit's imparting the Word of Truth in other contexts. To postulate a limitation upon the freedom of the deity's will in revelatory action is tantamount to denying the sovereignty of God.

In the Johannine literature of the New Testament the thought-forms of Hellenistic Judaism are employed in narratives of Jesus' divine ministry and in outlining the uniqueness of his *persona*. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is perceived as being totally identified with the *logos*-principle — the all-creating, loving wisdom proceeding from and co-eternally living in God. In the Christ-dispensation the Word of God is uniquely incarnated in the flesh, the *persona* of Jesus. In the Old Testament the Word of Truth is either directly revealed to prophets such as Moses or is mediated by the Spirit to visionary prophets such as Isaiah in dreams, trances, or contemplative in-breakings. There is a radicality in the manifestation of the Spirit in the New Testament that is at variance with traditional Hebrew experience. Incarnationalism, familiar in other Semitic and oriental religions, is alien to Jewish thought. In this regard Judaism is a religion of abstract spirituality, whereas Christianity is a religion of incarnational revelation in which there is a total divinization of humanity in the person of Jesus, God-made-flesh. The continuing theological motifs that unify the Hebrew covenant literature with the Christic-covenant literature are the conceptions of Word and Spirit.

The Johannine literature focuses upon Jesus as one who was constantly in touch with the Father, whose total life was immersed in prayer, and whose personality was radiant with

the beauty of perfect holiness. In the Johannine narrative the Spirit of the deity was a quickening force in the life of Jesus and later of the apostles. When Jesus grew tired among the multitudes, he was seen going up into the mountains and deserts away from the people to receive the ministrations of the Father through prayer in the Holy Spirit. The infilling of the Spirit constantly restored the weary Jesus and quickened the indwelling Word, enabling the bearer to proclaim it and the receiver to appropriate it to himself. When the apostles grasped the import of one of Jesus' teachings, it is recorded that "he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 10:21 RSV).

In the synoptic Gospels one realizes the importance of the Holy Spirit in the messiahship of Jesus. As in the creation of the first Adam (Adam in Hebrew simply means man) so in the creation of the second Adam (the perfected spiritual man, the express image of the Godhead) the Holy Spirit is the generative principle or agent. The first Adam was created a living soul with the breath-Spirit of God in a divine rational conscious image. The second Adam, the prototype of the perfected man, was uniquely conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The incarnation is in one respect like the in-breakings found in Hebraic faith-history. The incarnation is a radical event — a miraculous surprise. Mary, according to Luke, was troubled at the angelic greeting, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Lk. 1:28 RSV). She was doubtful and skeptical about the message given in the angelic visitation or vision: "How can this be?" (Lk. 1:34 RSV). Through her freely willed consent she became an obedient instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. And because she was filled with the Holy Spirit in total submission, the child she would bear would be holy, the son of man and, in a unique fashion, the son of God. At the visitation of Mary with Elizabeth it is recorded that when Mary spoke to Elizabeth, "the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk. 1:41 RSV). Jesus from his conception radiated the *dynamis*, the infilling

power of God's Spirit, and was a singular vessel of holiness, a cause of great joy.

The Gospels record that the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism by John in the River Jordan and that this event was of supreme importance in the initiation of his ministry. The descent of the Spirit upon Jesus as a sign of divine favor and empowering unction occurred during a water-purification rite practiced among the Essenes. Although there was a simultaneity between the two events in the life of Jesus, one cannot necessarily conclude that participation in a water-purification rite is a condition for being baptized in the Holy Spirit. John seemed to reinforce the distinction between the Essene rite and the new anointing or chrismation of the Christ-dispensation: "I baptize you with water; but . . . he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Lk. 3:16 RSV). Clearly the entrance rite or experience of new birth in the messianic order, the kingdom of God, is to be a unique baptism with the Holy Spirit and with fire — a metaphor for consuming transformatory power, mediated or released by an encounter with Jesus.

What was the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus? In the synoptic Gospels, immediately after the baptism in the Jordan, Jesus became fully aware of the nature of the ministry which he was to fulfill and totally gave himself up to it. He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness silences to be tempted to choose various kinds of messiahship offered by the Deceiver or Accuser. The humanity of Jesus is underscored in the Luke narrative, where one reads that "when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk. 4:13 RSV). Clearly Jesus was to be tempted often to choose a ministry not in accord with the perfect will of his Father. In the wilderness or garden silences Jesus was to retreat in communion to discern not his human carnal will but the perfect will of the Father that was ruling his life through the Spirit.

After the temptation, "Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee" (Lk. 4:14 RSV). In Nazareth he went to

the synagogue where he had attended worship according to his custom in his own community, and there he confirmed in the presence of those who had known him from childhood that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19 RSV). His ministry, anointed by the Spirit, was to be one of liberation, healing, and jubilee. It was the ministry to which he had submitted himself in the wilderness, the ministry that would initiate a universal dispensation of the Holy Spirit through his passion, death, and entrance into eternity.

The Holy Spirit of which Jesus spoke was both a power within him and a *persona* or force that was apart from him as a human being. The Holy Spirit facilitated the beautiful interpenetration of the divine and human described in the Gospel of John: "The Father . . . dwells in me. . . . I am in the Father and the Father in me" (Jn. 14:10-11 RSV).

In the Scriptures, the passion, death, and ascension of Jesus are instrumental in the release of a new chrismation or baptism-identity for all who would accept his way, his truth, his life-style. The Holy Spirit will be released in the lives of all who would claim a new birth in the acceptance of his person and teaching. The potentialities of ordinary men and women will be released in extraordinary ways, for he said that although he had wrought many miracles of healing, "greater things" would his followers do in the magnifying power of the Spirit that dwelled with him and would be imparted to them.

Chapters 14 through 17 of the fourth Gospel are explicit, sublime characterizations of the interpenetration of the divine and human elements in the ministry of Jesus. The salient point in regard to the dispensation of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the church is that after the ascension of Jesus the Holy Spirit, the advocate and comforter, would be released in a miraculous in-breaking upon the lives of the apostles and of all who were to associate themselves with the messianic kingdom. The Spirit would lead them into all Truth and empower them to be witnesses to the Truth universally, just

as Jesus himself had been a witness of the Truth before mankind and in the court of Pontius Pilate.

What shall be said of the ministry of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? The dispensation of a transformatory *dynamis* changed a frightened, dispirited, tattered band of fishermen and peasants into a company of men and women who irreversibly altered the course of human destiny. Indeed they became new men and new women at Pentecost. Each had had a redemptive encounter with Jesus, but they had remained in many cases dull-witted, cowardly, and unfaithful. It was at Pentecost that they received the infilling of the Spirit that enhanced and catalyzed their potentialities and brought them to the perfection of sanctity as martyr-witnesses in the world.

Several analogies are employed by Luke to describe the intensity of the power that invaded and transformed every aspect of the lives of those gathered in the upper room. Again it was unanticipated and surprising — a rush of sound like that of a great wind, an apparition of fire. In the synoptic Gospels there is no account of Jesus ever baptizing the apostles, yet John had declared he would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. In his resurrected life-presence Jesus was in their midst, and at the moment of seeming despair they turned to him in one accord and unity and he released among them the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Through them the Spirit would be vouchsafed to the mystical body of Christ, the church. The ministry of the Spirit at Pentecost was attended by gifts of great joy, ecstasy, and communication. The restoration of free communication among diverse peoples who are of one accord is contrasted by the church fathers with the confusion of speech of those who vainly sought to enter heaven at Babel by human striving and design. The gift of life in the Spirit is an unmerited act of divine favor and, like the Hebraic in-breaking revelations, comes largely as an unsought surprise.

Numbers 11 contains an interesting account of a "pentecost" that followed the initiation of the Sinai covenant. Both Hebrew and Christian theologians tend to overlook the significance of this event. The same Spirit that had descended upon

Moses as teacher and prophet unexpectedly fell upon seventy elders. Apparently they had not sought the gift of prophecy. Even two men who were outside the assembly received the unction of the Spirit and began prophesying in the midst of the people. And Moses declared to those who were vexed by this dispensation: "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29 RSV).

In the Pauline literature one notes the emphasis upon the gift of prophecy flowing from the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Prophecy is the means of continuing revelation or enlightened teaching in the community of faith, the church. Paul urges two things primarily in regard to the gifts of the Spirit: "Follow, then, the way of love, while you set your heart on the gifts of the Spirit" (1 Cor. 14:1 Phillips), and secondly, "I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:5 RSV). In Paul's thinking, charity and lovingkindness are of the essence of the Christ-life. Yet he does not minimize the importance of ecstasy, of union with the triune God. Through love and praise the power of the Holy Spirit is released. Prophecy is the means of right counsel in directing and channeling power for the perfection of the individual and the edification of the faith-community. Paul asserts that all mankind can receive the Christ-life and become witnesses of Truth in the joy and peace that flows from the Spirit.

To modern seekers for meaning and purpose in life there is much in the Hebrew-Christian tradition that cannot be harmonized with the insights of twentieth-century science or the experience of life in this post-Christian era. But even the most skeptical can somehow marvel at the incomparable parable of love made visible in the life of the Nazarene master. In the pantheon of religions, ancient and modern, many messiahs and many kingdoms have been and will be offered. But it is doubtful that any philosophers could fashion a more compelling messianic figure than Jesus, the carpenter-rabbi, son of Mary. To countless millions, who have been drawn within the circle of his recollected presence, Jesus is the Messiah. Many desire

to be formed into his image, to experience the joy of ethical obedience and the perfected humanity of the new man which can be recognized in the paradigm of his life and death. Somehow, to be in touch with him is to be deeply in touch with ourselves — the whole, loving persons we want to be.

An impossibility? Yes and no. If one desires that Spirit which was in Christ Jesus, the mystics, saints, prophets, and martyrs of the Christian millennia answer, "Yes, that same Spirit that was in Christ can quicken your body." To recognize in Jesus a saving *persona* — one who desires to be a friend of all who would walk his way, witness for his truth, and participate in his life of servanthood — is the first step in entering the Christ-life. But it is through the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire that one can enter into the fullness of divine life, experience new dimensions of one's self, fulfill the potentiality of the gifts one possesses, and enter into the joy of the Master. Through participation in the ongoing Pentecost-event, individuals and communities are perpetually renewed in the covenant of liberated love.

Through its history the church has demonstrated an extraordinary capacity for self-transformation. In each generation there has been a need for a fresh response to the Spirit and a purifying renewal of the essentials of the new covenant. Despite the grossest of apostasies, a faithful remnant, often at variance with the values and program of the prevailing hierarchy and drawn from the ranks of humble laymen, has been called out to give a testimony to the simple things of the faith.

The Society of Friends, together with many similar faith-communities in the history of the church, was a disciplined community of laypersons who gave witness to the simple faith of the apostolic church. The motifs of the Johannine literature and the Pauline insistence upon life lived under the immediacy, authority, and baptizing power of the Holy Spirit are hallmarks of Friends' writings. Yet the Society of Friends today is no longer *the* saving remnant.

The charismatic renewal, which transcends all denominational barriers and includes Jews and other non-Christians, in

many ways resembles the saving remnants of the past and the early Society of Friends. Of course, it would be presumptuous to assert that the charismatic movement is the creation of the Holy Spirit to rekindle apostolic fervor in the twenty-first-century church. But it is clear that the movement underscores the simplicity of faith in Jesus and the warmth and love and light that radiate from an encounter with the Holy Spirit. No one seriously expects the Society of Friends to transform itself into a pentecostal sect, but there is a legitimate expectation that there can be a sharing of much of the authentic spirituality of the charismatic renewal that is consonant with Friends' principles. To some observers the charismatic movement is the last glowing coal among cold ashes on the ecclesiastical hearth. This may or may not be the case. In any event there are still other embers and much wood to ignite, both in the church and more importantly outside of it. We can all be part of an incendiary fellowship to cast divine fire on the earth.