

## FOX'S TEACHING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT

There are two compelling reasons for devoting a whole session in this series to Fox's teaching about the Holy Spirit. The first is that Quakerism is now being categorized as belonging among the many Christian movements that make the Holy Spirit central to faith and experience. The other reason is that those who are now being called to re-proclaim the everlasting gospel will encounter many Quakers, and many Christians in all denominations, who make the Holy Spirit central. I have found in my own experience that where the charismatic or Pentecostal movements have established themselves there is a built-in resistance to the gospel that Fox preached. Therefore we have to study these movements and be prepared to respond when they say there is nothing in Fox's understanding of the gospel that they do not already have.

In this age of ecumenicity, the dreamers of the ecumenical dream have felt the need to assign descriptive categories to each of the denominations. This has been fairly easy with the larger denominations that are clearly Catholic or Protestant. But what about those groups which do not identify themselves as either one? These were largely ignored in the early stages of the ecumenical movement, but this is no longer possible because they have been growing and expanding rapidly in recent years. So a third category has been devised which is composed of Christian groups that make the Holy Spirit central to their faith and experience and in their witness to the world. Leslie Newbigin's book *The Household of God* gave a name to this third category and since 1953 his designation, Pentecostal, has been widely accepted.

The question we must raise here is whether the genius of the early Quaker movement can be attributed to a special emphasis on the Holy Spirit and to a penchant for making the Holy Spirit the central feature of its witness. We must also ask whether the charismatic and Pentecostal movements of today are preaching the same gospel message that Fox and the early Quakers were preaching in the Seventeenth century. Most important of all, we must ask whether the type of Christianity that makes the Holy Spirit central leads men and women to the new worship, new ministry, new righteousness, and new church order that have been discussed in this series. It is my position that Quakerism, when rightly understood, is *not* to be classified as a representative type of those churches which center their belief and worship on the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit does not occupy the central place in George Fox's teaching and preaching, though he has much to say about it, and what he says is an essential part of his understanding of the Christian revelation.

Let us begin by looking at the words of Fox when he says, "When all my hopes ... in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition' ... Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition,

namely, that I might give him all the glory; for all are concluded under sin, and shut up in unbelief as I had been, that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence ... I read the Scriptures that spoke of Christ and of God, yet I knew him not but by revelation, as he who hath the key did open, and as the Father of life drew me to his Son by his spirit" (Ni:11). These words, "The Father of life drew me to his Son by his spirit" are a summary of Fox's teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. He amplified these few words in some of his later writings, and some of these later passages have helped me to a better understanding of his teaching.

Three years before he died (1687), Fox wrote a short paper entitled, "The right way and means, whereby people might come unto Christ, and so be made like unto God," and in this paper he says:

Christ saith, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me," (John 14:6). And again, "No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him," (John 6:44). Now, what is the means by which God doth draw people to his Son, but by his Holy Spirit ... By this Holy Spirit, the holy and righteous God doth draw people from their unrighteousness and unholiness, to Christ, the righteous and holy One, the great Prophet in his New Covenant and New Testament, whom Moses in the Old Covenant and Testament said, God would raise up, like unto him, and whom people should "hear in all things ..."

They that do not hear the Son of God, the great Prophet, do not mind the drawing of the Father by his Holy Spirit to his Son, but to them that mind the drawings of the good Spirit of the Father to his Son, the Spirit giveth understanding to know God and Jesus Christ, which is eternal life. Then they know that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and that none can come unto God but by and through his Son, who is their Shepherd to feed them in his pastures and springs of life ...

They know that Christ is the Bishop of their souls, to see that they do not go astray from God ... They know that Christ is their mediator, and makes their peace with God; and they know that Christ is their High priest, made higher than the heavens ... and is able to the utmost to save all that come to God by him (BII:458-459).

Two years earlier, in an epistle to Friends "to caution all to keep out of the spirit of the world," he wrote,

In this Holy Ghost, in which is your holy communion, that proceeds from the Father and the Son, you have fellowship in the Father and the Son, and one with another. This it is which links and joins Christ's church ... to Him the heavenly and spiritual head, and in unity in his Spirit ... who are gathered in the name of Jesus, who is your prophet, whom God hath raised up in the New

Testament, to be heard in all things; ... who is your Priest, made higher than the heavens ... by whom you are made a royal priesthood, to offer up to God spiritual sacrifice; who is the Bishop of your souls, to oversee you, ... who is the good Shepherd, that hath laid down his life for his sheep (BII:410-411).

And again in his *Journal* he reminded Friends that

Christ hath called you by his grace into one body, to him the holy Head ... for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, and have been made all to drink into one Spirit, in which Spirit the body and all its members have fellowship with Christ, the Head, and one with another. The unity of this Holy Spirit is the bond of peace of all the living members of Christ Jesus, of which he is the spiritual Head, Rock, and Foundation. In the midst of his church of living members, Christ exercises his spiritual prophetic office, to open to them the mysteries of his kingdom. He is a spiritual Bishop to oversee them, that they do not go astray from the living God that made them; a Shepherd that feeds them with bread and water of life from heaven; ... a Priest that ... sanctifies them ... and ruleth in their hearts by the divine faith, which he is the author and finisher of (BII:433).

Finally, in the last annual epistle he wrote for distribution with the London Yearly Meeting epistle, in 1690, Fox said,

All Friends everywhere, that are alive to God through Jesus Christ, and are living members of Christ, the holy Head ...

The Lord God ... hath settled all his people upon the living, holy rock and foundation, that stands sure; whom he hath drawn by his Spirit to his Son, and gathered into the name of Jesus Christ ... He is their living head, is felt in the midst of them ... who is his people's prophet, that God hath raised up in his New Testament and Covenant, to open to them; and their living Shepherd ...

Christ feeds his living sheep in his pastures of life ... with his living bread and water ... Christ's living children likewise know him, the bishop of their souls, to oversee them with his heavenly and spiritual eye ... They also know Christ, their holy priest ... who ... is not made a priest after the order of Aaron, with his tithes, offerings, etc., but makes an end of all those things, having abolished them; and ... [Christ] ever liveth to make intercession for his people: and is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him. He is the one holy Mediator between God and man; who sanctifies his people, his church, that he is the head of ... a holy and heavenly King, who hath all power in heaven and earth given to him; and rules in the hearts of his sheep and lambs ... Christ is the minister of the sanctuary ... Therefore all the lambs and sheep of Christ must feel this holy Minister ... who ministers spiritual, holy, and heavenly things to them (BII:498-499).

In these passages Fox is telling us that he came to know Christ in all his offices through the instruction of the Holy Spirit, that was sent by God and Christ for that very purpose. He states further that “the Holy Ghost [was] a sufficient rule, that led the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ ... [to] see the fulfilling of the law and [the] prophets in Christ,” and he asks, “is not the same Holy Ghost a sufficient rule for all Christians now to know God, and Christ, and the scriptures, ... seeing no man knows the things of God without the spirit of God.” (5:250) “It was the spirit of God [that] led the apostles to see Christ Jesus, who fulfills the Scriptures ... It is the same Holy Ghost now ... by which ... Christ Jesus is known and seen ... By that Holy Ghost they see him and call him Lord.”<sup>45</sup>

He exhorts Friends, “Mind the good spirit of God, the Holy Ghost, to lead you and guide you [for] ... by it ... you will know Christ ... who ... is your way to God,”<sup>46</sup> and “by which spirit the believers are brought to the one head, which is Christ Jesus ... by which spirit they are ... instructed ... by which spirit they have an understanding, the spirit of wisdom and knowledge, which is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent” (8:10-11).

Fox teaches that the spirit that is sent by God and Christ leads to Christ, and enables us to know who Christ is and how he saves people. He says, “I directed them to the spirit of God in themselves ... that by the Spirit of God, they might know God, and Christ whom God hath sent.” (BII:390) And he taught that “with the holy ghost, and with the light and power of God, do you build upon Christ the foundation.” (8:20) “Christ is the author of our faith ... The spirit that gave forth the scriptures teacheth us to know who is the author of our faith.” (7:160) “The spirit doth instruct [us] to know [our] redeemer and [our] mediator.”<sup>47</sup>

So there is one foundation upon which to build, and this is Jesus Christ, and it is he who fulfills the law and the prophets and the promises. He ends the old Covenant and establishes the New Covenant, which is himself; he is the *substance* of all the types, figures, shadows, and signs in the Old Testament, and Old Covenant. Fox says, “As man comes through by the Spirit and power of God to Christ ... [he] is led by the Holy Ghost into the truth and substance of the Scriptures, sitting down in him who is the author and end of them.” (Ni:43)

What has been presented here containing Fox’s teaching about the Holy Spirit is at the same time his teaching concerning Christ. In Fox’s teaching, Christ is always central. He is present in the midst. He is in charge. He is Lord and head of his people. He is the orderer of his people, and he gives them an order that belongs to the gospel and the New Covenant. Fox knows nothing of an absentee Christ who is not available between the Ascension and Doomsday.

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<sup>45</sup> Cadbury, AC, Cat. 100E, pp. 110-111.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Cat. 40E, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Cat. 63E, p. 37.

The aim of Fox's gospel is to bring people to Christ. The church is a people gathered to Christ. "Your gathering together," Fox says, "hath been by the Lord, to Christ his Son." (BII:437)<sup>48</sup>

In my own work to promulgate the everlasting gospel that Fox preached, there is one outstanding thing I have learned: you cannot overestimate the convincing power of this gospel. But there are exceptions. In many places where I have traveled, people have come to me to say, "I am a Holy Spirit Christian. I find the Holy Spirit language is sufficient to express my faith, and I feel no need for the 'Christ-language' that you use and that Fox uses." And they go on to argue that it is "the gift of the spirit [that] is the one essential element and focal point in becoming a Christian."<sup>49</sup> The major assumption behind this kind of Christianity is that Jesus Christ has departed and that the Holy Spirit has taken his place. I have found that it is of no avail to testify to a personal experience of Christ as my living teacher, or as the Lord from heaven whom I have encountered as he is present in the midst of his people in all his offices, and who is the head of a community that bears a Quaker testimony for his righteousness and has fellowship with him in his suffering. Such testimony carries little or no weight with a Holy Spirit Christian. He or she is only interested in the answer to one question: "Have you had an experience with the Holy Spirit?"

Among the most extreme Pentecostal Christians, this question will be followed by another, whether you have received the gift of tongues, because this gift is considered certain proof that the Holy Spirit has been received. Of course there is a broad spectrum of beliefs and practices among the Holy Spirit Christians, and it is not possible to attribute a uniform belief and practice to all. It is only in recent years that able apologists for the charismatic and Pentecostal position have furnished systematic interpretations of their faith. It is also comparatively recently that Quakerism has been categorized as a type of Spirit-centered community."<sup>50</sup>

Those who are being called to preach again today the everlasting gospel that Fox preached must take into account that even in the Society of Friends there

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<sup>48</sup> Most of the passages from Fox quoted here are not accessible to the ordinary reader, because they are from manuscript sources or from parts of the *Journal* that are not included in any of the Twentieth Century editions. About 200 pages, covering the last fourteen years of Fox's life, are omitted from modern editions of the *Journal*. Editors have offered the explanation that they contain abstract, theological material in which no one today would be interested. I have not found this to be the case, in fact I have found more material on which to make notes in the last fourteen years than in all the rest of the *Journal*.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted from James D. G. Dunne, *Jesus and the Spirit*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946). Nuttall was the first to promote the Puritan theory of Quaker origins, and he held that the early Quaker understanding of the Holy Spirit was closely akin to that of the Puritans. His views have been largely accepted and are taught in Quaker institutions today all over the world.

are many who accept the theory that Quakers are a Christian group which makes the Holy Spirit central. It cannot be stated too strongly that there is much at stake here, because the true Holy Spirit-centered groups, the charismatic and the Pentecostals, are promoting a type of Christianity that is not concerned with Christ as the fulfiller of the types, figures, and shadows of the Old Covenant. Their faith does not lead to a new worship, new ministry, new church order, and newly restored church of the cross, and they feel they have no need of the everlasting gospel that Fox preached. So the "Valiant Sixty" of today must be prepared to face opposition of the strongest sort from this quarter. Since the charismatic and Pentecostals see themselves as called to proclaim a Christian message which has the Holy Spirit at its center, and since their evangelistic labors have met with considerable success, they are often ready to dismiss the revival that is beginning to appear among Friends as simply part of the old order of Christianity that they are being called to replace.

For those who are convinced of the truth of the everlasting gospel there can be no compromise with this position. Once accepted, it weakens the faith in the everlasting gospel and robs the witness of its power and strength. It is an effective killer of the Quaker vision and the Quaker dream.

### Further Comments on Spirit-centered Religion

*(Editor's Note: In recent years use of the term "holy spirit" has become popular among some liberal Quakers and Unitarians, because it does not appear to commit them on the question of whether they and their denominations are Christian. While that usage is occasionally reflected in the preceding article, Lewis Benson's primary focus was on groups with a well-defined Christian theology of the Holy Spirit, such as the Pentecostal churches and portions of the charismatic movement.*

*This series of ten articles is prepared from the author's lecture notes, and from tape transcripts which frequently include valuable extemporaneous comments. Along with the notes for this ninth lecture I found the following brief statement, apparently written after the lecture had been delivered, in an effort to deal more completely with questions arising at that time. Because it is such a clear statement of some important differences between Christ-centered and Spirit-centered Christianity, it seems proper to include it here. [John McCandless, editor, New Foundation Papers])*

In George Fox's preaching the encounter with Christ does not simply stimulate the new convert to engage in church-building. The knowledge of Christ as present teacher, governor, and orderer actually creates a new covenant community, because when we know the living Christ in all his offices we know him as head (prophet, priest, king, etc.). Thus the preaching of the gospel and receiving of the gospel creates a new order for God's people which is distinct from the order given to God's people in the old covenant. The

experience of Christ creates the new community and its order. In this experience of Christ we know him in a functional way—by what he does. He governs, he rules, he oversees, he forgives and intercedes, he reveals the righteousness of God and supplies the power to obey, he teaches what is right and what is wrong, he counsels, he leads, he feeds and comforts and heals. *Because* Christ can be known by his church in all these offices *he* is the architect and builder of his church. *He* is truly the corner-stone—the rock and the foundation.

Where the Holy Spirit is understood as the divine personal being, and where the *sine qua non* of discipleship is acquaintance with this personal surrogate Christ, we do *not* experience Christ in such a way that a distinctive, ordered, disciplined community comes into existence through the experience of Christ alone.

If the Christian can only know the Holy Spirit in personal encounter and can *not* know Jesus Christ in personal encounter, then the fruits of knowing the living Christ are not attainable.

It will not be sufficient to attempt to solve this dilemma by asserting that the Holy Spirit, though distinct from Christ, is not different and that therefore everything that can be predicted of Christ can be predicted of the Holy Spirit.

It simply does not work that way. A Christianity that has relegated Christ's saving work to his earthly ministry, death and resurrection, and his function as judge and divider at the end of the world, and which is building on the Holy Spirit as Christ's official representative who is alone accessible to us in personal encounter, will simply *not* have the same characteristics as a church whose faith is toward the present, living, active, functioning Christ.

The differences are not small.

Holy Spirit-centered Christianity does *not* produce a new covenant gospel fellowship with a distinctive gospel order. Holy Spirit-centered Christianity has made a minimal contribution to our understanding of the nature of the church. It has produced no distinctive ecclesiology.

It can hardly be claimed that Holy Spirit Christianity has been lacking in interest in moral questions. But its emphasis on holiness is on individual holiness. Where it takes a corporate stand on questions of morality it tends to keep well within the limits of the conventional morality of the society in which it finds itself. The Spirit-centered Christian society does not give us the model for the church that learns together, obeys together, and suffers together. It has not been in the vanguard of Christian moral witness in matters that involve conflict with established laws and customs. It has not been noted for a corporate witness against bearing arms and fighting. It is not a church of the cross.

If the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ are simply two names for a single spiritual reality, then why do the societies that stress one name produce fruits that are different from the societies that stress the other name?