

## EXPERIENCING THE HOLY SPIRIT

At His last supper, the Lord said to His disciples, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Counselor, that it may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees it nor knows it; but you know it, for it dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-17)

The Counselor is the Holy Spirit. This is plain from what the Lord said of it: “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, it will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all the things I have said to you.” (John 14:25,26)

This being the case, the question is: Have you ever experienced the Holy Spirit? Have you been moved by the Holy Spirit?

In considering the answer, we must first distinguish between the Holy Spirit prior to the Lord’s advent and the Holy Spirit following the Lord’s advent. This distinction accords both with Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit and to a statement earlier in the Gospel of John, that the Holy Spirit did not yet exist because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:39) It accords also with what is said about the Holy Spirit in the Heavenly Doctrines. There we find Old Testament references to the Holy Spirit called the Spirit of Holiness, reflecting the literal construction of the Hebrew (TCR 158). The Doctrines do this in order to distinguish that Holy Spirit from the Holy Spirit spoken of in the New Testament.

So, let us first consider then the Holy Spirit, or Spirit of Holiness, mentioned in the Old Testament. What can we say of it?

In Psalms 51, David pleads to his God, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.” This, together with a later mention in the book of Isaiah, makes plain that this Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Holiness, is something that can be experienced. Moreover, as an inspiration prior to the Lord’s advent it may be experienced by anyone, including by non-Christians. Indeed, this inspiration of the Holy Spirit is possible to us all through our spiritual association with spirits and angels (AE 183:10, AC 3704e, 9818:14, Inv. 23,50, DLW 149, 150).

In one sense, it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to think and will (Inv. 23,50), but more specifically it is a sense of reverence and humility with which people are affected, a sense often triggered by certain external phenomena when contemplating the wonders and phenomena of the natural world.

Consider the experience of a person standing out in the open at night, perhaps on a hillside or mountaintop, and gazing at the starry heavens in all their vastness and multitude. It is not uncommon for that person to be struck with awe at the majesty and grandeur of it all, and that awe may then invite a reverent reflection on the existence of the power that created it. Attendant, too, may be a sense of one’s own comparative

insignificance in respect to it.

Marveling at the complexity and greatness of the created universe may be occasioned by other experiences as well, from reflection on the macrocosm to inquiry into the microcosm. What biologist is not struck at times by the marvels he or she finds in the flora and fauna of nature, or the biochemist by the marvels seen in microscopic worlds?

“Fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” This is a phrase found in Psalm 110. It would be better translated to say, “Awe of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” It is the beginning of wisdom because it introduces into the fundamental truth that creation is the work of a Creator, and fosters a sense of humility in those who acknowledge it.

Humility is an important virtue because it entails a just perspective as regards our relations with other people. It is a just perspective for a husband to acknowledge that he is not more important than his wife, and for a wife to acknowledge that she is not more important than her husband. For a governor to acknowledge that he is not in himself more important than those he governs. For a politician to acknowledge that he is not more important than those whom he represents and serves. For a doctor to acknowledge that he is not more important than the patients he treats. For a priest to acknowledge that he is not more important than his parishioners. In sum, for people in power to acknowledge that the power rests in the office or function and not in those who hold the office or perform the function.

Humility is an important virtue also because it opens us to accepting the Lord’s will as greater than our own. To the attitude, “not my will but Thy will be done.” It introduces to repentance and reformation.

This is, in fact, the point of worship. The Lord has no need in Himself to be worshiped. But it is of use to people to worship Him, because it maintains in them a just perspective of their place in the world, and indeed, in creation, and it opens the way to reformation and regeneration, to a rebirth of the spirit.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to foster this worship through the inspiration of reverence and humility, an inspiration owing to our spiritual association with angels and spirits and occasioned by experiences that open our minds to it.

Such is the nature of the Holy Spirit prior to the Lord’s advent and glorification, the Spirit of Holiness that continues even to this day and may be inspired in anyone with a mind and heart open to it.

Of another character is the Holy Spirit since the Lord’s ascension and glorification: the Counselor whom the Lord said the Father would send in His name (John 14:15-26). Whereas the Holy Spirit prior to the Lord’s glorification is inspired through spirits and angels, the Holy Spirit following the Lord’s glorification and ascension is inspired by the Word (TCR 139, AE 778:3, 1024:3, Canons, Holy Spirit V).

This Holy Spirit is distinguished from the former by its being inspired primarily in Christians, in Christians who acknowledge the Lord as God or at least as the Son of God. In other words, in people who acknowledge the Lord as Divine.

Consequently, we may term the Holy Spirit prior to the Lord's advent and glorification as a universal one, capable of being received by anyone; but the Holy Spirit following the Lord's advent as a Christian one, being one that affects only people who believe in the Lord's Divinity (John 14:17).

Reception of this latter Holy Spirit is particularly in evidence at Christmastime, occasioned by the music, the creches, tableaux representing the Lord's birth, and the general festivity surrounding it, a festivity marked by an intensified love of one's fellow man. It is the second great commandment in living manifestation: the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. It is also the Christian commandment. "A new commandment I give to you," said the Lord, "that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). When is love for the neighbor more in evidence than in the celebration of Christmas? In the celebration of the Lord's birth into the world?

Reception of this latter Holy Spirit may also be occasioned at other times by some other religious service or pageant in celebration of the Lord's life in this world and His resurrection. It may be felt in partaking of the Lord's Holy Supper. Even sometimes in just the earnest saying of the Lord's prayer. Or in other, similar circumstances as well.

That feeling, that sense, which fills the heart, is an inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord also called the Holy Spirit the Spirit of truth (John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13). The question is, what truth? It is, in the first place, the truth about the Lord. "When the Counselor comes," said the Lord, "which I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father, it will testify of Me." (John 15:26) It is the truth about His Divine nature and identity, and the purpose for which He made His advent.

In a real sense, this prophesy was fulfilled in the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem, doctrines which were given for the establishment of a new Christian Church. But it is also a prophesy that is fulfilled again and again in the perceptions of Christians who acknowledge the Lord as the Word incarnate, who see in Him the very embodiment of the Divine.

Whereas reception of the prior Holy Spirit before the Lord's advent and glorification inspires a sense of the existence of a Creator and personal humility in the comparison to the grandeur, majesty and complexity of creation, reception of this latter Holy Spirit inspires worship of the Lord and a love of the neighbor.

In addition to religious services and pageants, reception of this Holy Spirit may also be occasioned by stories from the Word, particularly from the Gospels, first by reading them, but also through the words and actions of other people having those stories as their subject (Canons, Holy Spirit III, IV).

Teachers and preachers may be conduits, therefore, of this Holy Spirit. Not that they inspire it, but that their discourse provides an occasion for its reception. This is particularly true in the case of Christian clergymen, whose calling and task it is to preach the Word. If in their preaching and teaching they are able to convey a true idea of the

Lord and His purpose in His advent, their listeners may be moved by an inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In that moment they may be moved by a love for the Lord and by a renewed commitment to love and serve the neighbor in whatever way they can. It is they who are truly the Lord's disciples.

Because it is by Divine truth that the Lord teaches us and enlightens us so as to reform and regenerate us, therefore by the Holy Spirit is also meant the Divine operation, that is, everything that the Lord does for us by means of His truth, whether it flows immediately from His Word or indirectly through angels and spirits. That is accordingly how the Holy Spirit is treated in the book *True Christian Religion*.

Still, experience of the Holy Spirit— one's personal experience — is essentially, as we have described, a moment of clarity, of a sense of the sacred, of submission to the holy. In addition to the conditions we have already considered, this experience may be engendered as well simply by reading or hearing beloved verses of Scripture. For Jews, and also others, it may engendered by the great Shema:

Shema Yisrael, 'Adonai Elohenu 'Adonai 'echad.

“Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is alone LORD.” (Deut. 6:4)

Or by verses from the Psalms such as these:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help. (Ps. 121:1)

The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.... He makes me to lie down in green pastures.... He restores my soul. (Ps. 23:1-3)

Or for Christians, by verses from the New Testament:

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. (Matt 5:5)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matt. 5:4)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. (John 13:34)

He who has seen Me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM. (John 8:58)

In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. (John 14:2)

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:34)

And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven.... (Rev. 21:2)

Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them.... And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more

death, nor sorrow, nor crying..., for the former things have passed away.  
(Rev. 21:3,4)

Even so, Come, Lord Jesus. (Rev. 22:20)

Verses like these—verses long loved and remembered---may open the heart and mind to an inflowing spirit of holiness, to an inflowing holy spirit, to an inflowing of *the* Holy Spirit.

May you have the experience. May you have it again and again. May you feel the power and the warmth.

The blessing of the Lord be upon you. Amen.