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Volume XIX
Issue 465

The Spirit of God

Part 1 of 2

by — A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

God is spirit. God is Light. God is Love. His power, His effulgence, and His affection are revealed in speech suited to an infant's lips, yet so deep is its significance that all of the sages cannot fathom it. Only to those whose hearts and heads bow before His illumined love does He reveal the simple secrets of His being. Only those who worship His Word and its microscopic perfections are initiated into the mysteries of the Deity. Love rejoices, light illumines, spirit vitalizes. Life, illumination and love are the heritage of all who have been vivified by His holy spirit.

GOD IS LITERALLY SPIRIT; FIGURATIVELY, LIGHT AND LOVE

The following accurate translations manifest a difference between these marvelous statements concerning God which it is impossible to reproduce in current English. When we say that God is Light, it is clear that we are speaking figuratively. The light by means of which these words are visible is not God, but it is like God. It is a figure of God. God is not some bright sun-star, shedding its rays through the universe. The light of the sun and the stars together illustrate the great truth that He is Light.

In like manner, we may not take the truth that God is Love literally, for He is more than an abstract quality, though it is the most precious of all. The figurative force of these two truths is effectually manifested in the original text by the presence of the substantive *is*. In Greek the verb *to be*, in its various forms, is



not usually necessary to state a fact, but it must be used to enforce a figure. Its omission tells us that we are to take the assertion literally.

In the original, these three statements appear as follows:

... *the God light is* (I John 1:5).

... *the God love is* (I John 4:16).

... *spirit the God* (John 4:24).

The last statement differs from the others in omitting *is*. It records a fact, not a figure. Hence we come to the definite conclusion that God is, literally, *Spirit*. He is not merely *like* spirit, but *is* spirit. When we reflect that this is probably the only actual definition of the Deity found in revelation, the momentous nature of this statement begins to be apparent. It is worthy of our highest efforts and most earnest endeavors to obtain some apprehension of its import.

We repeat, in order that we may enforce the statement, God is Spirit: This is the only actual assertion concerning His essence that we have. Light and love are figures; this is a fact.

In the original Greek this distinction is indicated by the *absence* of the verb "*is*." The substantive is not necessary in a literal statement. If it were a figure, the Greek would read as in the figurative assertions that "*God is Light*" (I John 1:5) and "*God is Love*" (I John

(see *SPiRiT*, page 4123) ↗

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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4:8). Not so with spirit. This is no figure. The Greek has it “*God spirit*.” It is not one of His “attributes.” It is not one of His assumptions. He is Spirit.

The absence of the substantive cannot be expressed in translation. This is a lamentable weakness in the English language, for it leads to seeming contradictions in some of the most fundamental truths. One example will suffice.

We are distinctly told that all *is* out of God (Romans 11:36). There is no verb here. Yet we are just as definitely told that everyone who is not doing righteousness and who is not loving his brother (I John 3:10) and those who are not hearing God's declarations are not out of God (John 8:47). He who is doing sin is out of the Slanderer (I John 3:8). The substantive occurs in the Greek in the latter passages. It is sheer human speculation to ignore the facts of the original and say that the first is not a fact, but a hyperbole. It is intelligent faith to acknowledge rather that the first is an *absolute* truth, and the other statements are *figurative*. They are true only in a *subordinate* sense, which does not at all infringe on the only rational and revealed foundation of the universe – all out of God.

Let no one misjudge these assertions. These statements are based on the evidence of the Greek text, not on private opinion.

When we say that “*God is Light*” is not *literal*, we do not wish to shock sensitive spirits, but to express what everyone really believes. They acknowledge it whenever they give the matter thought. When we enter a dark room and press the electric light button, the darkness is replaced by light. *This is not God*, but it is like Him. When the sun rises in the morning and sheds its welcome beams on the earth, we should not fall down and worship the light; but we should adore Him Who is like the light, and Who, by the bold figure of metonymy, calls Himself Light.

So also with that brightest and most blessed affirmation which can be uttered by the human tongue or inscribed by mortal pen. God is not *literal* love, a feeling, an emotion, though this is the happiest in human experience. Even as light pervades His whole

creation, so love illumines all of His creatures in varying degrees. We enjoy it and are delighted by it, but we do not deify it. We do not worship a quality; we do not adore an abstract, impersonal thing; but we do adore Him Whom it reveals, Who is so like it that, in a forceful figure, He calls Himself by the delectable name of Love.

While the statement “*God 'is' spirit*” is a fact, there is a faded figure in the word “spirit.” In both Hebrew and Greek it is used literally for a blast of air as well as for the invisible, intangible power of life, action and intelligence, which is denoted by the word “spirit.”

The Hebrew *rûach* is often used of the wind. Yet it is translated hundreds of times “*spirit*” and occasionally mistranslated “*breath*.” This tells us that air in motion is the best illustration, in the material sphere, of metaphysical spirit.

THE “PERSONALITY” OF HOLY SPIRIT

One of the greatest hindrances to progress in things divine is the use of an unscriptural or extra-scriptural vocabulary. One word, which intrudes into this discussion, finds no place in God's revelation, but it seems to be essential to theology. This is the term “personality.” An orthodox creed must affirm “the personality of the Holy Spirit.” The statement in itself is quite correct, but, as is usually the case with human amendments to the inspired oracles, the implications are false. The Holy Spirit is a Person, but it is not a *distinct* personality from God Himself. No other spirit has two personalities. God ‘is’ spirit. He is called by this appellation when attention is diverted from His deity to His operations in creation and salvation – but He is not two spirits.

There are many instances in which the spirit of God is identified with the Deity in His operations. These may not always prove their identity, for an agent may be merged in the One for Whom He acts. There is one example, however, which cannot be misconstrued, which clearly shows that the Father and the holy spirit must be one and the same “personality.” We refer to the generation of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The vital question, "What think ye of Christ – whose Son is He?" (Matthew 22:42) ought to find a clear and accurate answer from everyone who believes in Him. Yet Christendom is actually in a quandary on this important point. If we say, with Peter, "Thou art the Son of the living God" (16:16), or tell, with John, of the Only Begotten of the Father (cf. John 3:18), we seem to deny the explicit accounts of His birth by *holy spirit*. Believing this, we seem to be continually at variance with a multitude of passages which proclaim Him in deed and in truth the *Father's* only Son.

How many Fathers did Christ have? We read that Mary was found pregnant by *holy spirit* (Matthew 1:18). Joseph is assured that that which is being generated in her is of *holy spirit* (Matthew 1:20). The messenger of the annunciation said that,

Holy spirit shall be coming on you, and the power of the Most High shall be overshadowing you; wherefore the Holy One Who is being generated also, shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Is it not evident that, if generation by *holy spirit* made Him the Son of God, then God and this *holy spirit* must be a single "personality?"

The problem becomes more complex when we examine the formal statement of His generation more closely. It is in the form of a Hebrew parallelism. His conception was not only by spirit, but by *power*. The power of the Most High overshadowed her. It is stated thus:

Holy spirit will be coming on you, and the power of the Most High will be overshadowing You.

As the Most High must be identified with the Father rather than the spirit, we find that the most explicit announcement which we have of His paternity gives us to understand (if we hold the doctrine of the trinity) that He had two Fathers! Yet the divine deduction is different, for we read,

Wherefore, also, that Holy One Who is being generated shall be called the Son of God.

He is not the Son of Gods, but of God. He is not the product of three persons but of two. He had one Father, God.

Hebrew parallelism is a marvelous literary device for preserving God's revelation to mankind. The meaning of many a word is fixed by its synonym in a couplet. The sense of scores of passages are saved by the presence of a parallel line. In the repetition before us, "coming on" is clearly equivalent to "overshadowing." Similarly, "holy spirit" is "the power of the Most High."

Here we have a definition of holy spirit by God Himself. It is worthy of the closest consideration. The holy spirit is *not* the Most High, but the *power* of the Most High. The relation between God and His spirit is not that of two distinct personalities, but that of power to the one whose it is. Christ was begotten by power. That power was the holy spirit of the Most High.

The discovery of a "discrepancy" in the Sacred Text is



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a great temptation to discredit the divine record and declare such of it as does not seem to suit our concepts spurious and uninspired. Yet, when we examine the manuscript evidence for these passages, we find that there is not the slightest ground for discrimination. All of the manuscripts and versions agree in retaining these statements as given. If we would cut out the Spirit's place in His conception, we must also expunge the Father's.

How often do we read that *God* was His Father! He was “*the Only Begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). The Jews sought the more to kill Him because He said His Own Father is God (John 5:18). Nothing is more readily proven than that the Deity is the God and Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, for those who read this treatise, it is unnecessary to produce any evidence, for it not only pervades the Sacred Word but has been inscribed on their hearts. God and the holy spirit are His Father, hence they are one “Person,” and not two. The Scriptures know no dual deity such as exists in the minds of many who worship Him.

This does not deny “the personality of the Holy Spirit.” It establishes it. Yet why cling to such man-made phrases, made to frighten timid spirits into a forced assent to a theological speculation? It should be stated more explicitly: “the *distinct* personality of the holy spirit,” for this is what it usually implies. In this form the intelligent saint can see that it is in direct conflict with the facts of Scripture and has not a single solid statement to support it. Only a few ignorant inferences can be found which even seem to suggest that God and His spirit are distinct “Persons.”

Strange as it may seem, this very absence of evidence has been appealed to as the strongest pillar to prop it up. We are told that it is one of those truths which must be apprehended, for it cannot be fully comprehended. It cannot be illustrated even from the Scriptures. All that can be done is to give the statements of God's word and base our faith on these; but when these statements are set forth, we find that our faith is not to be based on straightforward facts but on futile inferences.

Almost all of the passages produced prove the deity of the holy spirit or they prove His “personality,” but not one of them shows that it is a *distinct* deity from God the Father.

The same theological dilemma confronts those who teach the new birth. The spirit is never spoken of as their Father, yet they are begotten by the spirit. Is not he who begets the father of the one who is begotten? It can hardly be that they have two fathers. Who then is the One Who regenerates those who enter the kingdom? The holy spirit is God's spirit, not another “Person.”

From the human, philosophical standpoint, absolute deity is difficult to be definite. Only the spirit of God knows God. We are entirely dependent on revelation for our information. The popular supposition that the possession of divine “attributes” distinguishes the deity is most deceptive. All of God's creatures have some minute measure of His qualities. These mark them as *His*, not *Him*.

Take the single attribute of power. What living thing does not have it in some degree? He differs from them in the magnitude of His might. Theirs is limited, His is infinite. So with all of His attributes. His knowledge is uncircumscribed, His wisdom knows no bounds, His love no limits.

We are told that the holy spirit is eternal (Hebrews 9:14). Of course, this should read *eonian*, but let us grant that it has its philosophical meaning of “without beginning or end.” This is certainly true of God's own spirit, but it is no proof that it is a distinct ▶

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personality. Christ offered Himself flawless to God through this spirit. We know that this was the will of God.

The “omnipresence” of the spirit is another argument. Psalm 139:7 reads,

Whither shall I go from Thy spirit?

Yet there is far more reason to believe that there is only One Who is in all places, *by His spirit*, than even to imagine that two distinct Persons are everywhere. There is nothing in the Scriptures to cause us to believe it. It is sheer credulity.

The “omnipotence” of the spirit is given as a reason for a *distinct* personality. The passage produced is Luke 1:35, in which “the Holy Ghost” is paralleled by “*the power of the Highest.*” Why not go on and deduce the further fact that, under the circumstances, these must be identical? The holy spirit is “*the power of the Most High.*” As we have already shown, if these are distinct “persons,” then we must face the absurd conclusion that Christ was begotten by two distinct “personalities.”

We are told that the spirit is “omniscient,” for

When he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth (John 16:12-13).

If we are really to *reason* out the *distinct* personality of the holy spirit from this passage, we must prove that God is *not* “omniscient.” Then, indeed, they must be two persons; but, if they are One, as indeed they are, then this is an argument in favor of their identity.

In the same way, every passage which proves the deity of the holy spirit also proves its identity with God. Ananias, in a single act, lied to the Holy Ghost and to God (Acts 5:3-4).

Now Peter said, “Ananias, wherefore does Satan fill your heart for you to falsify to the holy spirit and to embezzle from the price of the freehold? Did it not, while remaining, remain yours? And, being disposed of, it belonged to you by right. Why is it that you placed this matter in your heart? You do not lie to men, but to God.”

The holy spirit was the active factor in creation.

The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life. (Job 33:4).

You send forth Your spirit; they are created (Psalm 104:30).

The spirit alone imparts life.

The Spirit is that which is vivifying (John 6:63).

And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7).

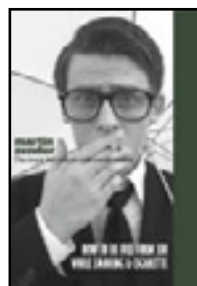
If the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His spirit that dwells in you (Romans 8:11).

The spirit is the Author of the inspired Scriptures.

For not by the will of man was prophecy carried on at any time, but, being carried on by holy spirit, holy men of God speak (II Peter 1:21).

All of this proves deity indeed, but in no case is there any call for a *double* deity.

(To be continued.)



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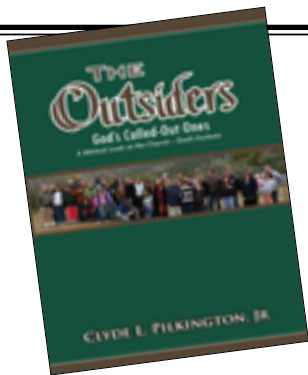


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The Outsiders: God's Called-Out Ones – A Biblical Look at the Church – God's Ecclesia

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

In 1995, after sixteen years of being in the “pastorate” the author walked away. He left the “religious system” by resigning from the very “church” and “ministry” he had formed. In many ways this work is a testament to these actions. This testimony was thirty years in the making – the results of a spiritual journey that the author found to be common to other saints scattered throughout the world and across history. This is an opportunity to explain why some who love the Lord no longer “go to church.” It does not seek to persuade others to do something different; but rather to be simply who and what they already are “in Him.” This is an uncovering of the truth of the church, and an encouragement for the members of His Body to enjoy the position and standing “in Christ” that they already possess, realizing that they are truly “complete in Him” (Colossians 2:10), that He alone is their Life (Colossians 3:4), and that His Life is full of freedom (Galatians 5:1).

The Outsiders was very encouraging. Thanks for your thoughts and study on the true Body of Christ and the lonely road we travel at times. – **MO**

I thank God for *The Outsiders*. I couldn't put it down. Read it all in one sitting. – **PA**

The Outsiders has something different about it. Upon finishing it an awareness has taken hold of my mind and spirit – a “knowing” that I have been afforded a special measure of His grace in just being allowed to be exposed to the truth contained within. – **KS**