

The Holy Spirit and the Calvinistic Westminster Confession

After **the** 'Theologian of the Holy Spirit,' John Calvin (1509-64), his views were enshrined especially in the 1647 *Westminster Confession* of the British Puritans.

The Spirit-drenched *Westminster Confession of Faith* (2:1) insists that "there is but one only living and true God, Who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure Spirit." Nevertheless, "in the unity of the Godhead, there be three Persons -- of one substance, power and eternity." They are: "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost." Each is distinct from the Other Two, yet Each also co-operates harmoniously with the Others -- "**the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding** from the Father and the Son." *W.C.F.* 2:3.

Now it was precisely the third Divine Person -- "**God the Holy Ghost**" -- Who inspired "the Holy Scripture." Consequently, the latter is now "most necessary" -- all "**former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.**" *W.C.F.* 1:1. Holy Scripture, continues the *Westminster Confession* (1:2), is therefore "the Word of God written." It comprises sixty-six books, "all of which are given by in-spir-ation of God." This means they have all been in-breathed by the Holy Ghost.

Indeed, we are next told, "our full persuasion and **assurance of the infallible truth** and divine authority thereof, is **from the inward work of the Holy Spirit.**" He, the Holy Ghost, keeps on "bearing witness by and with the Word -- in our hearts." *W.C.F.* 1:5. Furthermore, "the whole counsel of God...by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture -- unto which **nothing at any time is to be added...by new revelations of the Spirit.**" *W.C.F.* 1:6.

"Nevertheless, we acknowledge the **inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary** for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." *W.C.F.* 1:6. Too, "the Old Testament in **Hebrew**" and "the New Testament in **Greek**...are **to be translated** into the vulgar [**or common**] **language of every nation unto which they come.... I Cor. 14:6,9,11,12,24,27,28.**" *W.C.F.* 1:8.

Clearly, the above *W.C.F.* 1:8(u) insists on a truly-linguistic view of, and precludes any other (glossolalic-ecstatic!) notion about, I Cor. 14:6-28. Indeed, "**the infallible rule** of interpretation of Scripture, **is the Scripture itself.**" *W.C.F.* 1:9. Consequently, "the Supreme Judge by Which all controversies of religion are to be determined..., can be no other but the **Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture!**" *W.C.F.* 1:10.

The *Westminster Confession* (8:8) further reminds Christians that it is the Triune God Himself Who saves Christians -- and Who keeps on "**persuading them by His Spirit** to believe and obey." He alone is to keep on "**governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit.**"

God also effectually calls men to belief in Christ "**by His Word and Spirit..., enlightening their minds** -- spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God." *W.C.F.* 10:1. The elect are "quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit," and "thereby enabled to answer this call and to embrace the grace offered." *W.C.F.* 10:2. Indeed, even "**elect infants** dying in infancy, **are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit.**" *W.C.F.* 10:3. For all "children of God...receive the Spirit of adoption." *W.C.F.* 12:1.

"God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect; and Christ did, in the fulness of time, die for their sins, and rise again for their justification. Nevertheless, they are **not justified until the Holy Spirit doth in due time actually apply Christ unto them.**" *W.C.F.* 11:4. Thus, "**the grace of faith...is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts.**" *W.C.F.* 14:1.

Christians have "**the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit, dwelling in them.**" In this way, they become "more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to **the practice of true holiness -- without which no man shall see the Lord!**" *W.C.F.* 13:1.

Now this unleashes "**a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit -- and the Spirit against the flesh.**" *W.C.F.* 13:2. In that war, "**through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part doth overcome....** So the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." *W.C.F.* 13:3.

This produces in God' s elect **good works..., wholly from the Spirit of Christ.... Besides the graces they have already received, there is required an actual influence [or ongoing influx!] of the same Holy Spirit -- to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. Yet are they not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty --unless upon a special motion of the Spirit.** But they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them!" *W.C.F.* 16:3. Thus, all of "our best works" -- to the extent or "as they are good" -- indeed "proceed from His Spirit" alone! *W.C.F.* 16:5.

Now the "infallible assurance" of our state of grace and salvation comes -- whenever the believer is "**enabled by the Spirit** to know the things which are freely given him of God." The believer indeed "may -- **without extraordinary revelation!** --in the right use of ordinary means, attain thereunto.... Thereby, **his heart may be enlarged in peace and joy in the Holy Ghost,** in love and thankfulness to God, and in strength and cheerfulness in the duties of obedience -- the proper fruits of this assurance!" *W.C.F.* 18:3.

Of course, even "true believers may have the assurance of their salvation [in] divers ways shaken, diminished and intermitted --as by negligence in preserving of it, by falling into some special sin which woundeth the conscience and **grieveth the Spirit....** Yet are they never so destitute of that seed of God and the life of faith, [of] that love of Christ and the brethren, [nor of] that sincerity of heart and conscience of duty -- out of which, **by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may in due time be revived!**" *W.C.F.* 18:4.

Now "God gave to Adam a Law.... This Law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness -- and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai in Ten Commandments.... The Moral Law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof.... Neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.... **Neither are the...uses of the Law contrary to the grace of the Gospel,** but do sweetly comply with it -- **the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully** which the Will of God revealed in the Law requireth to be done!" *W.C.F.* 19:1-7.

Further: "The liberty which Christ hath purchased for believers under the Gospel -- consists in their freedom from the guilt of sin.... The liberty of Christians is further enlarged...in the greater

boldness of access to the throne of grace and in fuller communications of the free Spirit of God than believers under the Law did ordinarily partake of." *W.C.F.* 20:1.

Moreover: "**The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself** -- and so, limited by His own revealed will.... **He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan....** Religious worship is to be given to God -- the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.... **Prayer with thanksgiving...**is by God required of all men.... **It is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit,** according to His will, **with understanding[!]**...and, **if vocal, in a known tongue[!]** I Cor. 14:14." *W.C.F.* 21:1-3 (and see again *W.C.F.* 1:8u as above)!

Thus: "The reading of the Scriptures...; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word in obedience unto God with understanding....; the singing of psalms...instituted by Christ -- are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God." This is quite "besides **religious...thanksgivings upon special occasions** (Ps. 107 & Est. 9:22) -- which **are, in their several times and seasons, to be used!**" *W.C.F.* 21:5. For example, at the Acts 1:7 "times" and "seasons" of annual Whitsuntides -- alias the Feast of Pentecost, year after year. Acts 1:13-14; 2:1-4; 18:21; 20:16; I Cor. 16:8-9.

Hence: "God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24); as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself. So, **more solemnly** in the publick assemblies -- which are not carelessly or wilfully to be neglected or forsaken when God by His Word or providence calleth thereunto." *W.C.F.* 21:6.

The word "solemnly" here implies -- "with **understanding** and "in a **known** tongue." *W.C.F.* 21:3m, with 21:6i. This means: not "praying or speaking in a strange language." Thus the 1580-1651 *National Covenant or Confession of Faith* of the Scottish Presbyterian General Assembly etc. Indeed, "the public worship being begun, the people are wholly to attend upon it..., abstaining much more from all private whisperings...and other indecent behaviour which may disturb the minister or people." So too the minister is to preach God's Word "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power..., abstaining also from an unprofitable use of unknown tongues, strange phrases, and cadences of sounds and words." Thus the Westminster Assembly's 1645 *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*.

Last. The 'baptism of the Spirit' in Acts 2:38f & I Cor. 12:13 refers not to any subsequent blessing later in life, but to what occurs when even the infant child of the covenant is engrafted into Christ's Church. *W.C.F.* 25:2bc, 27:1-3h, & 28:1b -- cf. too *Westminster Larger Catechism* 62wx, 161s, 162ab, 165klm, 167pqy, 177s, etc. Indeed, this is the very basis for the need to show 'tender loving care' in the Church -- alias the "Communion of the Saints." *W.C.F.*, ch. 26!

-- (Rev. Prof. Dr.) Francis Nigel Lee