

CHAPTER IX

THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In our search for biblical themes to assist in developing a solid missiological framework for the Church's witness today, we inevitably come to the Holy Spirit. And we soon realise, he is not just merely one section in our study, but plays the central and foundational role in mission.

Roland Allen, writing more than four decades ago, challenged us to restore to the Holy Spirit his rightful role "primarily as the dictator and inspirer of missionary work".¹ So penetrating is his reminder that one reads with regret that his words were not heeded earlier. Our programmatic approaches to mission have unconsciously "turned the divine initiative into a human enterprise" as John Taylor puts it.²

Mission today betrays an overwhelmingly action-oriented approach to fulfilling God's purposes. Triumphalistic agendas and success-centred formulations give the impression of the manipulation of the business world rather than the miraculous outworkings of the Holy Spirit. When we give the Spirit his proper place in mission, we see God's people in their role alongside the divine initiative. There is certainly a human element in mission, but this has got to be seen from the perspective of the Holy Spirit's function in the divine programme.

For instance, Roland Allen, comments that seeing the book of Acts as the "Acts of the Holy Spirit" "obscures the human element".³ He states,

The apostles were men. Their acts were their own acts. They were not mere will-less instruments in the hands of another. Nevertheless, the fact that it was possible to call the Acts of the Apostles the 'Acts of the Holy Spirit' reveals at once the

truth that men have found in this book not merely the record of the acts of men, but the revelation of a Spirit governing, guiding, controlling, directing men the acts here recorded.⁴

Allen is careful to point out that Luke writes about individuals liable to human errors and passions, who were yet “recipients of a gift of the Holy Spirit”.⁵ This reminder must be emphasized as a corrective to the wrong emphases in mission today. There must be a balance between the work of humans and the work of the Spirit. The revolution in information processing and information technology could lead us to take statistical approaches to define the success of our mission. Also, in keeping with the action oriented generation, the programme prescribed for the church today is primarily seen to be one of continuing activity. But equally at fault are those who claim blind dependance on the Spirit with no room for human initiative.

Roland Allen, writing way ahead of his time, referred to the Spirit which impelled the missionary work of the early church as “a missionary spirit”.⁷ He states—

Our conception of the work of the Holy Spirit has been almost confined to the revelation of truth, of holiness, of Church government and order. Missionary work as an expression of the Holy Spirit has received such slight and casual attention that it might almost escape the notice of a hasty reader.⁸

Allen, however, makes a distinction between the “Spirit given at Pentecost” and “the Spirit which inspired the prophets”.⁹ He claims that the New Testament Spirit is distinct from the Old Testament spirit. But, it is the “the Spirit of the Son, the Spirit of the mission of the Son, the Spirit of the Incarnation, the Spirit of redeeming love.”¹⁰

The modern missionary movement has been characterised by zeal and action. Undoubtedly, the one biblical passage that has been the driving force for this movement is the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 “Go and make disciples”. Having grown up in this era, where mission and this commission have been spoken of synonymously, we have unquestioningly accepted its centrality. But we will be surprised to find that the Great Commission

has not always been the motivation for missions. That is why William Carey took pains in *An Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathen* to establish the need for obedience to the commission. Carey wrote in a period when the dominating theological position had almost stifled missionary zeal. Matt 28:19, and with it mission was relegated to the background, considered binding only on the disciples.

The teaching of the Reformers—Calvin and Luther, was that the pastor had no commission to preach to the world but to take care of his own particular church. Missiology was not part of their ecclesiology. There was no motivation for the church to reach out in missionary activity. The only way new Churches were added was by the dispersion of Christians. William Carey, nurtured in some ultra-Calvinistic circles in England, had been influenced by a friend Andrew Fuller who had written, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*. Fuller’s stress on the duty of all Christians everywhere to preach the Gospel captured Carey’s attention. He could see clearly that the duty of everyone to preach the Gospel had been obscured by the Reformers. His powerful plea and his own efforts to obey the commission, ushered in the era of modern missions which has resulted in the phenomenal spread of Christianity worldwide.

However, Harry Boer has recently pointed out that the biblical account of the life and witness of the early Church surprisingly reveals no reference to this commission. It is Pentecost, the event of the outpouring of the Spirit on the Church, that appears as the conscious ingredient in the mission of the early Church in mission.⁶

Human efforts are needed, and William Carey’s role is not to be minimised. But the role of the Spirit, alongside these efforts will need to be restored to see God’s total working in mission. If the Great Commission only encouraged an action oriented mission then we need to be corrected. Why is it that the early Church hardly appeals to the Great Commission? Peter speaks of the Gentiles hearing the

Gospel on the basis of the revelation of God and the universal availability of the Holy Spirit (Ac.15:7f). Paul only refers back to the command he had received personally (Ac. 22:21; 26:17ff; Gal. 1:16; Eph. 3:8). Let us look at three particular arguments from Harry Boer's thesis.

Peter and the Great Commission

The book of Acts records six utterances by Peter which refer to the universality of the Gospel (Ac. 2:16, 17; 2:21, 39; 3:25, 26 and 4:12). Although there is no doubt in Peter's mind that the Gospel has universal implications, he is not explicit about the motivation he derives from the Great Commission. Some may point to Ac. 10:42 "And he commanded us to preach to the people . . ." as the exception, as it could imply reference to the Great Commission. But, the Greek has *to laos* in Lucan usage is reference to "The people of God" in contrast to *okhlos*, the word he utilizes for non-Jewish people. Is Peter then restricting the universality of the Gospel to mean that only all the Jews are to receive it? Peter's Jewish exclusivism and particularism cannot be concealed. However, God deals with him starting with the powerful experience at Pentecost and then later speaks to him through the vision in Ac.11. Peter understands God's impartiality and confesses, "who am I to withstand God" (Ac. 11:17). Even if the Great Commission had earlier made an impact on him, the Jewishness in him probably brushed it aside till a more powerful reminder comes. He has to continue to battle with the fact that God's gift truly was to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews (Ac. 11:17).

The Church and the Great Commission

Let us consider the incident where the Church in Jerusalem (Ac. 11) arrives at the conclusion, "Then to the Gentiles also hath God granted repentance unto life" (11:18). We are further surprised that there is no reference to the Great Commission. It is even more surprising that Luke having recorded this acceptance of Gentiles participation, proceeds to describe the expansion of the Church with no reference to the Great Commission.

One can explain Paul's reference to his own experience and the Lord's personal command, or also Barnabas' work amongst the Gentiles as he was not there with the disciples when they received the Commission. But, putting all these arguments together, we may conclude that the Great Commission played no explicit part in the mission of the early Church. Could it be that it was no command after all?

Paul and the Great Commission

Luke indicates that the motivation that Paul receives is not from the Great Commission but from a direct divine intervention. The first indication of Paul's missionary involvement is to Ananias—"Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before Gentiles and Kings, and the children of Israel" (9.15).

Then the Holy Spirit designates Paul and Barnabas (13:1-3), and the first of Paul's recorded statements comes in Ac. 13:46-47. First, he points to the rejection of the message by the Jews that necessitates his going to the Gentiles. Again, it is not the Great Commission but a quotation from Isaiah, pointing out that he is a "light to the Gentiles" (Is. 55:3).

Even later, (Ac. 22:15) Paul's claim to be a witness to all people, is that which God revealed to him through Isaiah. Before Agrippa he uses words that Christ has spoken directly. Finally, in Paul's assertion of his apostleship and declaration of his missionary calling there is no reference to the Great Commission. Where then, is the justification for so great an emphasis that is placed today on the command from which even the early church did not get its direction? Could it be that we have blown out of proportion what the disciples themselves wanted to keep in the background?

Pentecost and the Early Church

Boer is careful not to displace the Great Commission from its place at "the heart and soul of all missionary witness".¹¹ What he wants is to show that it derives its

meaning and power wholly and exclusively from the Pentecost event. This seems acceptable, but before drawing our conclusions we must outline the meaning and significance of this event for the early church.

The apostle Peter is the first to refer to the eschatological significance of the event in his speech recorded in Ac. 2:17ff. The continuity between the Old Testament and the New is clearly established with Pentecost is seen to be the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Spirit. We can even go right back to the Abrahamic covenant and the promise of blessing to all the families of the earth (Ge. 12:3). Boer concludes that “after creation and incarnation the outpouring of the Spirit is the third great work of God”.¹² Further,

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit made the Church as body of Christ His dwelling place. In distinction from the limiting of his operations to Israel in the old covenant, and from concentration in the Messiah in the Gospels He became, after Pentecost, universal in His activities. The Church, moreover, became consciously aware of the presence of the Spirit in her midst, and lives and acts in His power. The change that Pentecost affected in the relations of the Spirit to men was therefore radical.¹³

The coming of the Spirit cements all the events within the total redemptive plan of God, binding them into a continuity from the Old into the New Testament. If mission is the total perspective of God’s dealings with humankind, it is the Holy Spirit who holds this totality together. The anticipation of the Old Testament saints is fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit. Although the Holy Spirit is active in the Old and New Testaments prior to the event, Pentecost is the arrival of the final dimension in the work of God in History. Passages such as Joel 2:28; Eze. 11:19; 37: 27 look ahead to this event. Jesus looked ahead to the Holy Spirit’s pentecostal coming. Jn. 16:8, 13, 14; Lk. 24:45ff. The disciples were commanded to do nothing till they had received the promised power from the Holy Spirit.

There is a problem in John’s mention that “the Spirit was not yet” (Jn. 7:39b). But this cannot be taken to mean

that John was ignorant of the Spirit’s activity earlier. The explanation must be that John is referring here to Pentecost and the universal availability and activity of the Holy Spirit. Any attempt to establish a discontinuity between the activity of the Spirit in the Old Testament and in the New Testament will not do justice to the fact that the apostles accepted only one Spirit. That was the same Spirit who was active in the Old Testament now poured out in the new covenant of God. What was denied to the people of God as a whole in the old Covenant has become the property of the people of God in the new covenant.

At Pentecost the activity of the Spirit in the last days has been inaugurated and demonstrated to the entire Church. Pentecost has been applied so much to the individual experience that its ecclesiological and eschatological significance has been minimized. It is the event that has direct reference to the mission of God now being universalized and salvation made available for every one who calls on the name of the Lord (Ac. 2:21 cf. Joel 2:28ff). “The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Ac. 2:41).

In eschatological language we have entered into the new and final aeon, which will culminate in the total victory of the Spirit of God over all that is old. The Spirit has in a way introduced us in advance to the anticipation of this glorious life. But we are still in the process of experiencing the final victory and live in anticipation of God’s fulfillment. It is the “incompatible conjunction or co-existence of the old aeon moving to its consummation”.¹⁴ Even creation groans in anticipation of this final redemption.

Grasping the significance of the overlapping of these two aeons restores a New Testament thrust to our mission today. The individual struggle for sanctification, the battle of the Church for unity, the groaning of creation for redemption and all other conflicts are central to the mission of God to humankind. The Spirit’s restoration activity is not just an activity in an individual in isolation

from the rest of humanity and history. God sends the Spirit to empower the Church for its mission to declare to the world that which is to come, by demonstrating what has already been done within the lives of those who have become his children.

Pentecost or Great Commission?

Boer's thesis with its thoroughly biblical investigation leaves us wondering whether we have mistakenly focused attention on the Great Commission when all along it is Pentecost we should have stressed. He himself is careful not to imply any dethroning of what he believes "has always been, is now and always will be, the heart and soul of all true missionary labour". He suggests that the meaning and place of the Great Commission has got to be differently construed than is customarily done. While we sympathize with Boer's cautious approach, we ask whether the church has wrongly succumbed to an unwarranted legalism in mission. Has the Great Commission led to this legalism?

Boer correctly points out that the Great Commission and the Holy Spirit are essentially linked together. The Holy Spirit brings life into the law. However, the emphasis has been placed so much on the law of the Great Commission that the Spirit's empowering for mission has been lacking. The role of the Spirit must be recognised anew and understood within the context of Jesus' promise of power after which "you shall be my witnesses". (Ac. 1:8). This does not merely point to what the Church *would do*, but what the Church *would be*.

The Spirit makes the fear-filled band of disciples become a power-filled witnessing Church at Pentecost. With the emphasis placed on what the people of God have *become* the mission of God becomes what God wants it to be. It is the *becoming* and not the *doing* that makes the Church the people God in mission. Pentecost empowers the *becoming*, while the Great Commission enables the *doing*. It is their coming together that must energise mission.

What the Church should *do* in obedience to the law today could be no more than mere action according to a programme, proclaiming Christ in neatly packaged presentations with results systematically predicted. One wonders whether the over emphasis on action has resulted in the mammoth multinational strategies which lack the sensitivity to the Spirit impelling us *to become* God's people in our individual contexts. The Spirit empowers the church to be faithful just like the early Church. Led by the Spirit, the disciples waited when they needed to be waiting, prayed when they needed to be praying, and acted when they needed to be acting.

There is a spontaneity, not because of compulsion by a law, but the desire to be faithful through the inner motivation of the Spirit. This spontaneity of the witness of the early church, for instance, is captured in Peter's words, "We cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard" (Ac. 4:2). Paul similarly declares—"necessity is laid upon me, for woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Co. 9:16).

The role of the Holy Spirit was to bring the teaching of Jesus Christ before the church—all that was needed to make them dynamic witnesses. Having considered the evidence, it will be hard to maintain that the only motivation before them was the Great Commission. Jesus taught them so much more. This is significant for mission today, which needs to be clothed afresh with the entire activity of the Spirit of God.

While Boer does not upset the traditional view, he is bold enough to point to the "spiritual decadence in so far as the emphasis is on the binding character of the Great Commission and the responsibilities to the Law".¹⁵ Where the spontaneity of an inner motivation is lacking, all the activity in obedience to a law could only be an empty engagement. We must however admit that since William Carey, the Great Commission's impact on the Church has resulted in an unparalleled growth of the Christian community. This need not justify the place accorded to the

Great Commission but remind us of the grace of God that works despite our limitations.

The great need today is for a restoration of a total perspective of God's activity in terms of his mission of the kingdom. We have tried to put together all the pieces to make up the whole rather than attempting to get a grasp of the whole itself. If both the Great Commission and Pentecost can be seen to belong to the one complete mission, we will see that one cannot be separated from the other. The "*why*" of missions should be the Great Commission. But the "*how*" will always be the Pentecostal power made available by the Holy Spirit. We add, that the "*what*" of mission is the cross and resurrection. We cannot separate these elements.

A fresh power is needed in mission today. This will not come with any command, nor with words, but wholly through the power of the Holy Spirit. The law has no life unless the Spirit activates it. As Roland Allen has reminded us—"Others direct from without, Christ directs within; others order, Christ gives the Spirit which desires and strives for that which He commands; others administer a dead letter, Christ imparts life."

The Holy Spirit and the Ministry of Jesus

The close link between the ministry of the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ is underlined even more in the critical events in the life and ministry of Jesus. The Holy Spirit's acts in accomplishing God's purposes are prominent. The ministry of the Spirit is not different or contradictory to the ministry of Jesus. It is the Spirit who empowers Jesus' life for his mission.

The Virgin Birth

Matthew and Luke show the Holy Spirit to be the agency through which the Virgin Mary conceives. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you", Luke records, and Joseph finds her "to be with child of the Holy Spirit" even before they are brought together (Lk. 1:35, Mt. 1:18). Hindu mythology portrays crude scenes of gods mating with

humans to produce their offsprings, but the biblical narrative depicts the conception with dignity. It is unlikely that Luke is using a euphemism for sexual intercourse; rather, he emphasizes the certainty of the hand of God on Mary.

Throughout the Bible the Holy Spirit is the giver of life. The same Spirit who acts in creation, the *life giving* spirit, functions in God becoming flesh to manifest divine life to dying humanity. The emphasis in the birth narratives is certainly not on the *manner* in which conception takes place, but primarily on the *agency* of this conception. The Holy Spirit's activity right from the incarnation could be God's announcement that the whole mission and ministry of our Lord Jesus is to be intimately interwoven with the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

This fact has implications for the life-giving mission that we are to be involved in. When life itself is the content of the message we offer, we do not need to settle for anything else. The kingdom mission of God is to restore fullness of life. Led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus accomplished his mission, and this same Spirit provides vitality to the Church today.

The Baptism of Jesus

The inaugural event in the ministry of Jesus commands the attention of all the gospel writers. The Spirit's role in the public introduction of Jesus' messianic mission serves as a divine seal on his mission. Jesus does not become Messiah at this point, rather the messianic office is made public.

At the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit's descent is dramatized by utilizing the imagery of the dove. Whether the dove is literal or figurative is outside our scope, but it is important to see that the event takes place before all present to witness. Jesus is appointed to his messianic office. The fact is further attested by the words of the Father God, who affirms that Jesus was his "beloved son" in whom he is "well pleased" (Lk. 3:22).

The mission of Jesus is not only *Spirit-initiated* but also *Spirit-orientated*. The Holy Spirit has already been active in Jesus' life, in his conception as well as in his physical and spiritual growth. But now the world is ready to witness the intimate link between the Spirit and Jesus as the promised mission of God is fulfilled. The same spirit through whom he was conceived, now baptized and anointed, is the one who will empower Jesus to demonstrate the power of God through his authoritative proclamation of the Good News, his mighty miraculous works, and his atoning death, resurrection and exaltation.

The Temptation of Jesus

Although chronologically the baptism is the inaugural event, it is not till after the temptation that we actually see the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. It is perhaps the reason why Mark places the two events in immediate sequence. Jesus experiences the "Spirit descending upon him", the voice from heaven attests his Sonship, and "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness" to be tempted (Mk. chaps. 10-13).

Jesus is definitely engaged in a spiritual conflict and the Spirit will lead him to a triumphant encounter. His victory over the devil in the temptation account is only the start of a series of authoritative victories over the devils he will meet in the course of his public ministry. To those who doubt the validity of Jesus' authority over the devils, an exposure today to ministries in Asia and Africa would help change attitudes. Spirit filled Christians face similar conflicts even today, and cause devils to shudder and flee in the authoritative name of Jesus. In this sense, it is sad that some Christians, in their aversion to certain Pentecostal and Charismatic overemphasis, have demythologised mission. One of the central characteristics of Jesus' mission is his victory over Satan, and mission today must continue to confront satanic activities in all forms.¹⁶

The Public Ministry of Jesus

Luke's account places the promise of the Spirit in Is. 61:1,2 at the outset of Jesus' public ministry. Undoubtedly

this reflects the significance of the Spirit's role in the Old Testament expectations of the Messiah, now to be fulfilled in our Lord Jesus. It is for this purpose he is anointed by the Spirit. Again, the Spirit brings continuity to God's mission which is so essential to capturing the total impact of mission as depicted in the Bible.

The references to the filling of the Holy Spirit prior to the temptation (Lk. 4:1), to the empowering of the Spirit following the temptation (Lk. 4:14) and now to the anointing of the Spirit at the commencement of his mission, clearly underline the integral link between the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ in the messianic mission. The Spirit from now on who will work in and through Jesus Christ, the anointed one, to accomplish God's purposes. This is what Jesus had emphasized in his Paraclete Discourses.

Just as Jesus' did not start his ministry till the filling, empowering and anointing of the Holy Spirit, so also the disciples cannot embark on their ministry until the Spirit has come upon them. They must wait (Lk. 24:45ff) and when they are empowered at Pentecost, they will commence a witness with the potential to reach the ends of the earth (Ac. 1.8). The Spirit then is central, not only to the public ministry of Jesus, but also to the continuation of this ministry through his followers. His Church, just like Jesus, must be led and empowered by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit and Individuals

The underlining of the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church's life and witness does not diminish the ministry of the Spirit in the individual life of the believer. The church is made up of individuals, and so, there is no mission without individuals in mission. Let us clarify some facts.

Individual Salvation

Before he left this world, Jesus said "I am going to send you what my Father has promised" (Lk. 24.49). What was to follow was a clothing with "power from on high", and the community that was going to be called Christians was

ushered in. This community comprised individual men and women saved “in-Christ” through the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit would bring conviction (Jn. 16:8), . . . set us apart for obedience to Christ (1 Pe. 1:2), . . . enable us to call Jesus our Lord (1 Co. 12:3), . . . assure us of our being the children of God (Ro. 8:9b, 14,17). The whole burden is on the Holy Spirit, performing in each person the miracle of God’s grace made available through Christ.

Regeneration

Nicodemus steeped in all his religion struggled to understand Jesus’ teaching “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5). Put plainly, flesh gives birth to flesh and Spirit gives birth to Spirit. Nicodemus was getting more than he asked for! Even this Pharisee, this member of the Jewish ruling council, despite all his prominence needed to be “born of the Spirit”. The act of being “born anew” or “born from above” is no human effort as sometimes wrongly communicated in our evangelistic mission. It is God’s initiative and brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Humanity in its fallen condition is in direct contrast to Christ in his Spirit filled condition. We cannot make the right choice (Ro. 1:32), cannot accept the things that come from the Spirit of God (1 Co. 2:14), cannot please God (Ro. 8:7) nor can we accept God (Jn 14:17). There is no way we can challenge ourselves to set our lives right and therefore God has given the Spirit who will initiate a response in us towards God. The Holy Spirit who renews human fallenness, gives us new life in Christ, so we can live as children of God being born anew.

We often call people to be “born again” not realising that for the Hindu salvation is *not* being born again but a liberation from this cycle of life and death! While one needs to be careful in communicating this message, there is no need to discard the fact of new birth. The term “born again” has unfortunately become synonymous with present day Gospel preaching. The fact to note is that Jesus’ emphasis

is on a birth from above, a new birth, and this the Hindu may accept.

Adoption

One often confronts impersonal relationships in the religious experience while preaching the message in Asia. The *personalness* of God brings us into a rich personal relationship. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us” (1 Jn. 3:1) having through the Spirit made us his children. The graphic picture of adoption brings out this personal relationship we enjoy through the Spirit (Ro. 8:14ff, Gal. 4:6). Not merely richness, but an intimacy in this relationship stirs us into “*Abba*” terms with our Heavenly Father. Not only that, we are now fellow co-heirs with Christ (Ro. 8:17). All of the Spirit that was available to Jesus is now available to us, making available to us “all things with him” (Ro. 8:32).

An individual in Christ “is no longer a slave, but a son” (Gal. 4:7). This is an already accomplished reality for those who are “led by the Spirit” (Ro. 8:14), as we have not received a spirit that makes us slave to fear, but rather have received “the spirit of Sonship” (Ro. 8:5). It is present possession which, “the Spirit himself testifies” (Ro. 8:16) an assured relationship. Largely confronted by religion amid fear and superstition, we need to boldly lead the believer into a more meaningful relationship with God.

However, this adoption is yet to be actualized. Paul says even we “who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Ro. 8:23). What he implies here is that although we now enjoy the “first fruits”, the benefits of the whole harvest will only be available through this same Spirit in the future. John vividly says that although “we are now the children of God . . . what we will be has not yet been made known (1 Jn. 3:2). We deal with this aspect a little further in the discussion below.

Assurance

The Holy Spirit is “a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession (Eph. 1:14). The Spirit assures our position as well as our possession in Christ, and this is appropriately pictured in some Pauline pictures.

First, we have the “first fruits”, familiar to the farmer who anticipates the final crop from a tasting of the first fruits. The Holy Spirit as “first fruits” will be greater appreciated if the Church deliberately attempts to provide more teaching on the Spirit to its congregation. There are some congregations where any reference to the Holy Spirit is avoided lest they be branded as “Pentecostals.” We are the Church, started and held together by the Spirit’s activity. We are sustained on God’s word, inspired and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. If this is the first fruits, the final harvest could only be beyond all our human expectations.

Secondly, utilising a business term, Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that, having believed, they “were marked in Him with a *seal*, “the promised Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13). The seal stamps an article in order to identify its ownership. The seal of the Holy Spirit therefore stamps on us the identity as children of God having tasted of Christ’s salvation. Sadly, organizational or even denominational identities, materialistic preoccupations and high powered business infrastructures have concealed this seal. It is time we allow the Holy Spirit to burn away that false exterior and make our real identity more recognizable.

Another commercial word describing the Holy Spirit is the *deposit* or *earnest* guaranteeing the final payment or possession (Eph. 1:14). “It is God who has . . . given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come”. The first instalment or down payment is an assurance of the transaction that has already been made. The Holy Spirit is this guarantee, assuring us of the full salvation that we will one day enjoy in Christ.

To these Pauline pictures, we must add the fourth, the highly debated Johannine term—*Paraclete*, God’s assurance of Christ’s presence to humanity. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “another Paraclete”. In other words, the Holy Spirit will be to the disciples what Jesus Christ has already been. Jesus will soon leave his disciples, but during his absence the Holy Spirit will assure them of Christ’s presence and his triumphant return to receive His Church into Glory. Jesus’ work will not cease at his death, and resurrection, nor will his fellowship with his disciples terminate upon his departure from them.

The misleading invitation in our Gospel message to “Accept Christ in your hearts”—needs to be corrected. The biblical promise is the filling of the Spirit who will bring to the believer the presence of Christ. We need not split hairs over this matter but must recognise the important distinction. John reminds us of the identity between the Spirit and Jesus “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn. 14:18). Again, all that Jesus was to his disciples will now be represented by the Spirit to those same disciples soon to become the Church. The believer needs no greater assurance—the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Paraclete continues to guarantee to us our present and future in Christ.

The Holy Spirit and Mission of the Individual

One consequence of accepting the integral link of the Holy Spirit with mission is that it gives to it the fullness of its God-intended dimension. It is not merely the church’s programme. If the entire Christian life is controlled by the Holy Spirit, the outworking of this life is itself mission. This is true wholeness. In our arguments for a wholistic mission we have constantly approached the issue from the perspective of a programme with various elements, viz evangelism and social action artificially pieced together. When the Holy Spirit becomes key to this wholeness, he controls, directs, prioritizes and enables us to demonstrate a natural, even supernatural, wholeness.

The emphasis here is on our *being* available to God rather than *doing* what one thinks is important for God. Bishop John Taylor says “the gift of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship of the Church first enables Christians to *be* and only as a consequence of that sends them *to do* and *to speak*”¹⁷. He points out the consequence of putting the primary emphasis on the preaching or on the serving which erects “a functional barrier between ourselves and our fellow humans casting ourselves in a difficult role from the rest of men”. The Holy Spirit needs to be allowed to make us even more human so that we can truly manifest the wholeness in mission as God desires from us.

Secondly, linking the Holy Spirit with mission will restore the spontaneity urgently needed to renew the Church’s life and witness. The depressed and defeated disciples, much against their human intuition, awaited the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which God had promised. True to His word, God filled them. And from then on there was a spontaneity in mission which made the small insignificant group turn the then known world upside down.

The Holy Spirit not only motivates but also empowers men and women, enabling them to set out on their God given mission. This spontaneity makes them confess—“we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Ac. 4:20). Restoring this attitude should not result in a lack of planning, discipline and orderliness in mission. These, in fact, are some of the characteristics of the Holy Spirit. A fresh touch of the Spirit will reclaim the church’s zeal to fulfil God’s mission.

The Holy Spirit and the Church

We have sufficiently underlined that the life and dynamic of the Church clearly commence only after the descending of the Holy Spirit. The people of God brought together by the Holy Spirit are united on a common mission. “This great work of the Spirit is called the Church.”¹⁸ The Church then owes its existence to the Spirit, even as Paul accepts

the Church as “being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

We are cautioned against seeing the Church as emanating from the “Spirit’s own proper motion”.¹⁹

An analogy may be traced between the baptism of Christ, by which He was inaugurated into office, and the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, after He received the plenary unction of the spirit (Acts.2:33). In a word, these two events indicated two grades of unction, or two stages in the communication of the Spirit to Him. The former, accompanied with the descent of the Spirit, was meant to equip the Redeemer for entering His office. The latter was intended to found the Christian Church and supply it with the living organs and various gifts by which it efficiently exercises the Spiritual life for the advancement of Christian cause.²⁰

Having experienced this filling, the Church is not left on its own to conduct the mission entrusted to it by Jesus Christ. It will continually be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18); “to fight with the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17); to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions” (Eph. 6:18) and above all to “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). The Church, as a witness to the indwelling Spirit, should, moreover demonstrate the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:22). It is God’s elect, as Peter points out “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1 Pe. 1:2).

The Church on God’s mission depends on the Spirit for its mission. The long accepted division between the local Church and mission agencies is artificial and unwarranted. It is the Church that must be involved in mission. But, this does not mean that there is no longer room for para-church agencies. On the other hand, there is need for a fresh look at the whole question of ecclesiology—one that will not take the meaning and significance of the church from a narrow denominational understanding to its broadest missiological implication within the kingdom of God. Only then will the Church be fulfilling its rightful role as a Spirit-initiated community on the Spirit-motivated mission of the kingdom of God.

Notes

1. David M. Paton (ed.), *The Ministry of the Spirit, Selected writings of Roland Allen*, World Dominion Press, 1960, p. 20.
2. John V. Taylor, *Go Between God, The Holy Spirit and Christian Mission*, SCM Press, London, 1979, p. 3.
3. Roland Allen, *op cit.*, p. 3.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. Harry R. Boer developed his thesis on the Holy Spirit and Mission for his doctoral dissertation written for the Department of Missions of the Free University of Amsterdam. The book is published as *Pentecost and Mission* by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Michigan.
7. Roland Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
8. *Ibid.* p. 21.
9. *Ibid.* p. 8.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Boer, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
13. *Ibid.*, p.74
14. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
16. This we have already considered in our discussion on the kingdom of God.
17. Boer, *op cit.*, p. 134.
18. George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit, The Banner of Truth Trust*, 1982, p. 259.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 260f.