

Revivals And Church History :: A Brethren discussion on the role of the Spirit in the Church Service

A Brethren discussion on the role of the Spirit in the Church Service - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2012/2/12 21:26

This seminal reading is included here because of its historical significance and its influence on the 1951 revision of the Hymn Book. It reflects the genuine desire of the brethren to give the Spirit His proper place and response in the service of God following the Lord's supper, as well as in other meetings.

While the Spirit's service may be rightly alluded to at any time, subsequent experience and inquiry has confirmed that \hat{A} — instead of random prayers and hymns throughout the service \hat{A} — the Person and dignity of the Spirit requires that He should be given His own unique place in the service. The scriptural principle and pattern for this refinement is found in Ephesians 2: 18: "through him" "we have both access by one Spirit to the Father". GAR

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J.T. It has come out distinctly that the light which, we might say, the Holy Spirit has given to us of Himself has led to much thought as to divine Persons and our ability to distinguish between them,

and to discern which of them is specifically speaking at any time, or whether we say they all speak, which is also true. I believe it is important not only that we should discern what divine Persons are saying \hat{A} — that is, the expression of the divine mind \hat{A} — but we should be able to discern who says a thing, whether it is the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit. I believe it has been much in the minds of many as to who it is who speaks when there is a divine oracular statement made, whether it is in the Scriptures or at any time in ministry. The Spirit, as here sent down from heaven, is the power for all ministry, of which there is a good deal at the present time.

So I believe we should all be concerned whether we can discern in ministry who it is that speaks, whether the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. I believe it is quite possible to discern and understand who speaks at any time, whether it is a record as in written ministry, or actual ministry such as at the so-called three-day meetings, which afford time for the development of a subject, or subjects.

As regards divine Persons themselves and the way the Scriptures are written, much is being said and thought of as to the poetic part of Scripture, and there is much more that is poetic than is generally understood.

The understanding of that is to have some influence with us because it is a question of right spiritual feelings, and these very often turn the whole matter in a meeting.

Scripture affords much material for that, beginning with the books of Moses and then passing on to the Psalms. There are the same number of the books of Moses as there are of the Psalms \hat{A} — five in each case.

Moses had to do with the Pentateuch and David had to do with the Psalms, and David is said to be the sweet psalmist of Israel.

There is good reason to bring up this whole matter now in view of the liberty that has been shown in recent times and in view of the end of the dispensation, so that we might go up on the proper note when the Lord comes, and that there should be readiness for it.

Rem. You would look for some expression in our hymns that would answer to the Spirit and the bride saying "Come".

J.T. Just so. The idea of which divine Person is speaking is to be kept in mind. How often it is mentioned in Scripture as to which Person speaks; as, for instance, in the word,

"As says the Holy Spirit", Hebrews 3: 7.

Ques. Does Scripture indicate that the Spirit is the principal Speaker at the present time?

J.T. I think so, but He is at all times.

"Every scripture is divinely inspired", which would refer to the Spirit, "and profitable for teaching".

Then there is the question of the poetic features, which might be particularly used in song; because we have the idea of song, as it says,

"I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing also with the understanding", 1 Corinthians 14: 15.

The understanding is, perhaps, where we have been defective; because much fault has entered into hymns generally, a

and one of the things in mind in a revision would be to make corrections wherever this might be needed. Rem. It would, of course, be in mind to correct any defects brought to our notice.

J.T. Then too we would have new hymns which would be suitable for the present time.

A.W.R. Is it of interest to note that where we have a reference to departure from the truth, it says,

"But the Spirit speaks expressly", 1 Timothy 4: 1?

J.T. Just so. I wish to bring out the thought as to discerning the divine Person who speaks, and when we have a series of meetings— what we call three-day meetings— whether the ministry stands the test of Scripture.

W.M.B. I would like to ask what bearing the speaking of divine Persons to us has on our response to them, especially in song.

J.T. I should think chiefly to convey intelligence. The word is,

"I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing also with the understanding".

So that an editor of a magazine— as you are— would be much concerned as to the accuracy of everything he receives for publication.

W.M.B. I was thinking rather of the purpose of this meeting, as to how it would bear upon the Person to whom the song is addressed.

J.T. We have no hymns to the Holy Spirit directly, so far as I know. They have them in the systems around us, but we have none, and it seems that the Lord now is raising the matter.

The Spirit is God Himself, and God as the Supreme One ought to be spoken to.

But the first thing to see is that when we have a series of meetings for ministry there should be some exercise amongst us as to the accuracy of the ministry, that we do not allow it to pass if it is not correct. How do you look on things yourself in your own service?

W.M.B. I seek to follow that up in dependence on the Lord and the Spirit.

C.H. Whilst the ministry must be correct— the reference to the "understanding" bearing upon that— would the word, "I will sing with the spirit" involve the feelings of joy that may be in the heart? The understanding is a question of another faculty that balances the man.

A.H. In view of the truth we are now enjoying of the Spirit Himself speaking, do you think we should be concerned to make response to Him personally?

J.T. That is right. There are no hymns addressed directly to the Spirit in our present book, and I think that the main defect lies there.

H.F.N. Would the word in Ephesians come in here, after it says,

"But be filled with the Spirit", it goes on to say, "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" Ephesians 5: 18-19?

J.T. That is directly a reference to it. It says, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs".

The Psalms would refer to experience and therefore the book of Psalms is largely used in the epistle to the Hebrews, especially in the first chapter. The book of the Psalms is almost entirely used in that chapter, showing how experience must enter into response to the ministry.

H.F.N. In Colossians, too, the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are the outcome of the word of the Christ dwelling in you richly.

J.T. Quite so. These are very good remarks. We should note where these things are mentioned in the Scriptures themselves.

Ques. Are the divine Persons distinguished for us in that scripture in Ephesians 5? It says,

"But be filled with the Spirit";
then "chanting with your heart to the Lord",
and then "giving thanks at all times for all things to him who is God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ".
We get all three Persons mentioned and it is in connection with singing.

J.T. In the service of song on the first day of the week, the question would be whether we have got material to answer, in the service, to the ministry we have had during the previous week.

Can we put our thoughts and exercises into song in the service that may appear on the first day of the week? So in 1 Corinthians 14 it says,

"I will sing with the spirit, but I will sing also with the understanding".

I would say that the understanding is the main thought there. It is important because there is so much error in singing, and the danger comes in when ideas are being put together in poetry.

A.J.G. The Lord said as to the Comforter,

"He shall not speak from himself; but whatsoever he shall hear he shall speak";

so that, from one point of view, it is the Spirit's voice but from another point of view it is the Father or the Lord. How would that enter into what we are saying?

J.T. You understand that that is all that the Spirit says?

A.J.G. I had assumed that the Spirit was here in that relatively subordinate capacity and therefore did not speak from Himself.

J.T. Now we have to compare spiritual things with spiritual, and the Lord speaks of Himself in a similar way in John 12 where He says:

"For I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what I should say and what I should speak".

Now both these passages— one referring to the Spirit and the other to the Lord Jesus— have the same force, that is, they do not speak from themselves. It refers back to the Father and we have to understand that and look into the matter and understand what it means.

A.J.G. That is why I was raising the matter.

J.S.E. Have we to come to this point of distinction? There is what each of the Persons of the Godhead may say to us, but we have to be able to distinguish which One of them is speaking.

Have we not been taught that each of the Persons of the Godhead is now to be known and appreciated by us as an Object in Himself to be addressed, and can we limit the thought of singing to two of those Persons and leave the other out? May I ask further as to a remark in one of the three-day meetings in America as to the word, "The Lord is near", and you inferred that it might represent the nearness of the Spirit to us in lordship.

J.T. I would rather say that the Lord there is the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit is not said to be made Lord, but Christ is said to be made Lord.

The Father, of course, is Lord but is not said to be made Lord, because He would have to do it Himself.

I only refer to that for accuracy and when it says in Philippians 4, "The Lord is near", I think it is the Lord Jesus.

P.L. Referring to the Pentateuch, have we a distinctive song to God in the song of Moses in Exodus 15; then a distinctive song to the Lord in Numbers 10, "Rise up, Lord", and then a distinctive song to the Spirit in Numbers 21?

J.T. Quite so. And another thing that might be added is that divine Persons Themselves are prior to anything that we have in the Scriptures.

The economy in which they are now known is in time. It is a matter of time, but the actual condition of divine Persons is inscrutable and involves that They are all equal.

We cannot just say that in revelation divine Persons are now on the same level, for They are not; They were at one time, as far as we can see, but in the economy which has come in in time the Father comes first, and the Son comes second, and the Spirit comes third.

That is clearly the order, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The brethren might well take account of that in view of the thought in mind of improving our hymn book.

There should be understanding in what we say in the morning meeting— so-called. We are to understand what we are

singing and why we are singing it.

E.L.M. I would like to ask whether you would be happy in the thought that in the blessing which follows on the truth of the nazarite, in Numbers 6, the three Persons each appear under the title Jehovah.

It says, "Jehovah bless thee, and keep thee; Jehovah make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; Jehovah lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace", Numbers 6: 24-26.

J.T. That refers to Jehovah only. There was no other name given then to divine Persons.

E.L.M. I was thinking that the Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old, and wondered whether we could extend the thought that that title attaches to the Spirit equally, and that it attaches to all divine Persons?

J.T. I do not think you would be supported in saying that. The Old Testament had only Jehovah in mind and that name is given there expressly.

The Spirit, of course, was spoken of as well; God by His Spirit garnished the heavens; but I think, as a matter of fact, the name Jehovah is only given incidentally in the New Testament.

In the Old Testament the name Jehovah is given as the specific name of the divine Person then speaking.

E.L.M. I was thinking of Luke 2; the word 'Lord' there, according to the footnote, is Jehovah.

J.T. The footnote is not exactly Scripture. I do not think it is intended in the New Testament to bring forward the names employed in the Old.

Rem. In the economy each divine Person has His own distinctive name.

J.T. That is what I thought. The names, Father, Son and Spirit, did not exist in Old Testament times, therefore it is a matter of the economy, and we have to go by what is given to us in the New Testament.

Rem. When we come to the New Testament we have the fulness of Christianity involving the names by which God is now known.

Rem. As to the matter of understanding in singing, I believe the brethren generally would like help as to the Spirit being in an objective position.

We have generally thought of the Father and the Son as presented objectively to be worshipped but we hardly brought the Spirit into that. I think that is where help would be appreciated.

J.T. I think so too; and help will come, I believe, in the conversation we are engaged in now.

Ques. Do we begin with the thought that the Spirit is God and an Object of worship?

J.T. Exactly. The spirit of a man is the man himself, and that is the thought in the Spirit of God.

Rem. Deity is as full in the Spirit as in the Father or the Son or in the three Persons.

J.T. Quite so.

W.C. Is it largely a matter of understanding in the hearts and souls of the brethren, based upon the truth of the equality of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son, that these desires to praise and worship the Holy Spirit are springing up amongst us without any definite scripture indicating that we should do so?

J.T. Well, there are definite scriptures, I think; for instance, Numbers 21.

W.C. I was thinking of the New Testament.

J.T. In the New Testament we have persons who address the Spirit. Peter did, according to Acts 10. The context would show that the actual Speaker there is the Spirit, and then that Peter spoke to Him.

That is a direct statement in the Scriptures of address being to the Spirit.

W.C. I was thinking more definitely of actual praise and worship. You would extend it to that, praise and worship being directed

ue to the Spirit?

J.T. I certainly would.

P.L. Divine honours cannot be rightly ascribed to any One of the Persons of the Godhead short of praise.

J.T. So our hymn No. 126 does that. That hymn was accepted by J.N.D.

No. 126 in the 1932 Hymn Book (composed by J. Montgomery):

Praise we to the Father give,
God in whom we move and live;
Children's praise He loves to hear,
Children's songs delight His ear.
Praise we to the Firstborn bring,
Christ the Prophet, Priest, and King;
Glad we raise our sweetest strain
To the Lamb that once was slain.

Praises for the Holy Ghost
Sent from heav'n at Pentecost;
'Tis through Him that now we live,
And the precious truth receive.

Blest our portion, thus to be
Glorying in the Trinity;
For the gospel from above,
For the word that "God is love".

Rem. It was written by one of the Moravian brethren.

J.T. It was included in the 1856 Hymn Book, was it not?

Rem. Just so, in its present form.

F.V.W. In the 1932 revision the word in Colossians, "singing with grace in your hearts to God" was thought to refer to the Father. Are you suggesting that may allude to the Spirit as well?

J.T. "God" would include all Â– the three Persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is specific there, and "God" is a word covering the three Persons Â– the Deity, as we call It.

Ques. Would there be justification in that verse for singing to the Spirit?

J.T. Only in the sense that He is God.

W.B.H. Does the end of Ephesians 3 run in line with that? It says,

"But to him that is able to do far exceedingly above all which we ask or think, according to the power which works in us, to him be glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus unto all generations of the age of ages".

Is the word "Him" there in the last verse Â– "to him be glory" Â– inclusive of all the divine Persons?

J.T. "To him" Â– that is God. It is God as ordinarily used in Scripture, as in Genesis 1, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth". It is God Himself as supreme.

In the New Testament we have the truth as to the three Persons, and in Ephesians 3: 21 it is God Himself Â– the three Persons.

W.B.H. I wondered if the word "him" in that sense would not be a basis upon which to render to the Spirit also what is due to Him?

J.T. I do not think we should go outside the ordinary usage of Scripture. If Scripture says "God" it is generally the three Persons, but we must keep all Scripture in mind and there is the word in 1 Corinthians 8

"to us there is one God, the Father", which has to be understood. But when it says "God" it is normally the three Persons. In 1 Corinthians 8 the Spirit is left out, but the Father is specifically mentioned.

If God is mentioned it is the three Persons, and in Matthew 28 the one name covers the three Persons.

A.J.G. Whilst we need certain hymns addressed specifically to the Spirit, should we have also a few more hymns addressed to God?

J.T. Quite so; though what we want now is hymns addressed to the Spirit, as such.

W.S.S. In one of Mr. Raven's letters, as brethren will generally know, he writes on the assumption that the Spirit is not viewed objectively and says if He were viewed objectively then He must be worshipped. I thought it was a helpful remark in view of what we understand of the truth now.

J.T. I do not see why the early brethren did not take on the thought of the Spirit of God as we have now. It was evidently not brought out at that time. I have no doubt, however, at all that if Mr. Raven had what we have now he would fully agree with it, and Mr. Darby as well. I fully believe that.

Rem. Peter in the Acts knew who was speaking to him, and answered that Person and no one else.

J.T. Quite so.

Ques. Practically all the references to the Spirit in the hymn book are incidental; is that sufficient?

J.T. It is not sufficient. Scripture warrants hymns addressed directly to the Spirit, hence the present occasion.

Rem. It would seem there is a real need for some adjustment in the book.

J.T. Quite so.

F.E.S. With reference to the thought of God covering all three divine Persons, should all three or more than one be addressed in one particular hymn?

J.T. I think so. In hymn No. 126 the three divine Persons are mentioned. There has been a change made in that hymn for it originally read, 'Glory to the Holy Ghost'.

F.E.S. In some of our hymns when there is a change over from addressing the Lord to addressing the Father we find the use of them tends to bring in a little confusion.

J.T. I do not know. There is much confusion but I am not sure if there is any confusion on that point.

F.E.S. Sometimes hymn No. 209 is given out and it may not be opportune to use the whole hymn.

No. 209 in the 1932 Hymn Book:

O Lord, it is Thyself; none, none but Thee
Could so call forth response from every heart;
The love that stood the test of Calv'ry's tree
Doth to our longing souls fresh joy impart.

Thou speakest, Lord, of Him Thou hast revealed,
Thy Father, whom Thou lov'st— His glory, Thine.
Thou, His eternal joy, Thyself didst yield
To bring to pass His thoughts of love divine.

Thy heart, our God, made known— all, all is told!

The glory of Thy love, all time before,
He to our raptured hearts doth now unfold,
And moves our souls to worship and adore.

O circle of affections all divine,
The foretaste of eternity's bright scene,
Where all the glories of His love shall shine
In everlasting joy and peace serene!

J.T. Hymns need to be carefully given out and at times certain verses only can be given out so as to avoid confusion.

C.H. In regard to the matter of understanding, I wondered whether we have not only to bear in mind that the Spirit is a divine Person, but also the particular place He has taken in the economy, and would not that enter into the intelligence of the brethren in using the hymns?

There is the place the Spirit has in the economy and in the service of God, and His service can be referred to, not exactly in an incidental way, but in an accessory way. Would that govern the use of hymns addressed to the Spirit?

We would be governed by the part the Spirit has in the service where He draws attention to the other divine Persons.

E.C.M. Would what has been said make us more selective in giving out hymns or verses of hymns?

J.T. Quite so, and that is constantly done. Certain verses are given out which are applicable to a certain time of the meeting.

Eu.R. It has been looked upon as retrogressive, after we have passed to the Father, in the service, to go back to the Lord. What about the Spirit? Would it be any retrogression to speak to the Spirit after having spoken to the Lord Jesus?

J.T. The same thing should apply as applies to the Lord Jesus, because the Spirit takes the third place in the economy; the Son takes second place.

The Father has the last part of the service and at that point the Son is not addressed and the Spirit would not be, because He takes the third place in the economy. The Spirit would take the same kind of place in the service as the Lord does, whereas the Father is supreme.

Eu.R. Would the Spirit come in particularly in the Supper in the character of the nameless servant who brings the bride to Isaac?

J.T. Quite so. It is quite right to use the types as seen in that incident.

W.M.B. I would like to raise a question with a view to getting help. We are all happy and clear as to the worship of the Spirit as a divine Person.

Would the place He has taken in the economy and the absence of any direct doxology to Him in the New Testament restrain us in any way in our approach to Him?

J.T. If you have one scripture to support a thought, that is enough, for the Scripture cannot be broken.

The authority of Scripture is involved and therefore if we have one scripture to support any thought or principle it is quite right to use it.

A.J.G. Would what safeguards the position be the fact that the service of God can only be rightly carried on in the liberty and intelligence that the Spirit affords and if we are subject He will not lead us to do anything out of place?

J.T. The Spirit of God is God and He permeates everything that refers to the service of God.

A.H. May I enquire about the expression in Ephesians 3

"Strengthened with power by his Spirit in the inner man"?

How would that come into the service? Would it be in order to address that blessed Person at the particular juncture of the meeting when we are before the Father?

J.T. He would come in in relation to whatever is referred to.

A.H. I would like to be clear that it would not be retrogression to refer to the Spirit as the service proceeds. Mr. Roberts referred to the thought of retrogression, but if I am addressing the Father, and the Spirit gives me to feel that He is strengthening me inwardly for that response, I could suitably speak to Him at that juncture?

J.T. We must remember another thing. We sometimes have the Spirit referred to as the Spirit and not as the Spirit of God or the Spirit of the Father, or the Spirit of Christ, but just as the Spirit. In that way He is viewed as a divine Person and takes third place in the economy— not second place or first place— and we must recognise that.

A.H. I fully recognise that but I was concerned as to the service. It is an exercise in the minds of many if we have addressed the Father on Lord's day morning whether it is in order to turn aside and thank the Holy Spirit for His inward support.

J.T. I would say it would be as the Spirit of the Father or as the Spirit of adoption in the last part of the service.

Eu.R. You think we might speak to Him as the Spirit of adoption at that time?

J.T. Yes.

Rem. It would be with a view to augmenting the service.

J.T. Just so.

Ques. In connection with the composing of hymns to the Spirit, would it be in keeping, or out of keeping, to employ names that are typical, or would the more holy language be to address Him in a personal way?

J.T. Typical teaching is quite right, if we understand it. The word says:

"The Lord will give thee understanding in all things".

Anything that the Lord gives us in the way of understanding would be proper to use at the given time.

Ques. You would be free about a hymn addressed wholly to the Spirit?

J.T. Yes; that is what we are hoping to have. We have not one now.

Ques. Assuming that we had one, at what moment of the service would it be in order to give it out?

J.T. I would say in the first part of the service.

H.F.N. If a hymn has been addressed to the Lord, would there be liberty to address the Spirit after that?

J.T. Certainly, but in the latter part of the meeting it would be as the Spirit of adoption or the Spirit of sonship, I would say. It says the Father is bringing many sons to glory.

Ques. Is it in your mind that a hymn such as Mr. Nunnerley has in mind should be on that line?

J.T. Quite so; even if it is in type.

A.P.B. Speaking again of the Spirit, just as the Spirit and not as the Spirit of adoption or the Spirit of Christ, would that have any particular place in the service?

J.T. It would be in keeping with His place in the economy— He has third place in the economy and it would be in keeping with that.

A.P.B. It would then have to come in early in the meeting?

J.T. Yes.

Ques. How early would you say?

J.T. As a divine Person, there is liberty to address the Spirit at any time, but we must bear in mind that when the title "the

Spirit" is used, it has in mind His place in the economy and that is a third place. We should not therefore address Him to us once we have moved to the Father.

Rem. You mean if we have begun to address the Father He would be in our minds as the Spirit of adoption but prior to that it would be suitable to have a worshipful hymn to the Spirit.

J.T. Certainly.

Ques. Could we do it immediately after the Supper?

J.T. I would say before or after the Supper but before we deal with the Father. The Father has the main place in the economy. It is a question of what divine Persons have decided to have and the incarnation is the turning point in everything.

Ques. Would hymns to the Spirit be proper for the opening of a meeting?

J.T. Quite so; for this meeting or at any time.

P.L. In ministry we would call upon the Comforter's help, and the title "Spirit of truth" would serve there.

W.H. Would the setting of the Spirit as in 2 Corinthians 3 come in immediately after the Supper?

J.T. Quite so; but there is one thing that bears upon that, and that is that the only One said to be made Lord is Christ.

A.M. Has the Spirit a special place in the matter of change, such as the change in the service from the Lord to the Father?

J.T. He comes in happily there.

Rem. In Ephesians 2 we have:

"For through him we have both access by one Spirit to the Father".

The Spirit comes in there in connection with access to the Father.

Ques. In a hymn addressed to the Father might there be verses addressed to the Spirit as the Spirit of adoption?

J.T. That would be quite in order. No. 209 usually has to be divided and that illustrates what you say.

Ques. It would not be oscillation when addressing a hymn to the Father to use verses addressed to the Spirit as the Spirit of adoption?

J.T. It would be quite all right.

A.J.G. You have often pointed out that the Supper is the Lord's supper; it is not the Spirit's Supper nor the Father's. Do I understand you to say that it would be in order to commence the meeting with a hymn to the Spirit?

J.T. It would be quite suitable, if we are led that way. He is God. God is thinking of us and has us in mind, and He is valuing what our thoughts are at any time.

J.S.E. Would it all depend on our measure of spirituality at the time?

J.T. Quite so.

J.S.E. If the volume of hymns can be enriched, would it not provide more scope for the spiritual to draw upon?

J.T. That is what we are aiming at. We are here to that end, to improve the service of song.

C.H. Both in the composition of new hymns and in their use, the spirit and the understanding of the believer is intended to have a part, so that things will be maintained in true balance.

J.T. Sisters, of course, cannot take part audibly, and that has to be recognised and is taken care of by other means. Nevertheless, the service of God requires that sisters are sons.

We have to think of them as sons because they are such, and you have to come back to this, that ultimately the feminine idea is seen in the assembly.

Eu.R. As to hymn No. 126, could we have further hymns of that kind; one verse to the Father, another to the Son and another to the Holy Spirit? Would it be suitable towards the close of the occasion as recognising the deity of those Persons for such a hymn to be sung?

J.T. That hymn has often been sung.

Eu.R. We can then carry the three Persons in our minds in the one hymn?

J.T. We cannot make divine Persons too far away from us. They are thinking of us and the word comes in, "Of him are ye in Christ Jesus".

We belong to the divine circle, and divine Persons are thinking of us accordingly and what we do is in their minds of importance.