

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BELIEVER TODAY

A REPLY

By John Allfree

"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine".

Paul.

"He that is taught of the written word is taught of God, and a man hath just so much of the Spirit of God in him as he hath of the Truth in him intelligently and affectionately believed".

John Thomas.

"One would think that if men possessed the Holy Spirit they ought not only to know it themselves, but be able to give such convincing proofs of their possession that others should know it as well as themselves".

C.C. Walker.

"If I identify myself, without a standing protest against it (error), with those who believe and advocate it, I become by example an enemy of that which I believe is true".

John Thomas.

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2002

INTRODUCTION TO THE 2002 EDITION

It is sad that it has been found necessary to produce another edition of this “Reply” to the booklet “The Holy Spirit and the Believer Today” by Alfred Norris (afterwards referred to as HSABT). The booklet is now readily available on the internet and is there promoted as a publication of considerable merit. The reason for this new edition is the re-issuing in Australia and North America of HSABT in electronic format.

Having been acquainted with the fact that there was a move afoot to produce HSABT in this way, before proceeding to reissue the “Reply” I wrote to Brother Norris and to the Editor of “The Christadelphian” (representing the Christadelphian Magazine Publishing Association [CMPA], the original publishers) in the hope that they would seek to dissuade those intending to reissue the booklet from doing so. I received a response from neither and so have no idea whether any attempt was made to try to prevent the booklet from being reissued.

It may be asked why it has been deemed necessary add this introduction; why not simply reprint the original? It was my view that the considerable change that has taken place in the intervening years should be mentioned.

The CMPA figured rather prominently in the unhappy circumstances of the 1970’s and I can see no reason to change the facts as set out in the early pages of the “Reply”. But it would be churlish not to mention the fact that the CMPA no longer produces HSABT. The CMPA has also withdrawn a more serious publication, “The Epistles of John” by Neville Smart. As far as I am aware at no point has the CMPA acknowledged publicly that either of these two publications was doctrinally unsound, but it would appear that they have shifted ground and now stand nearer to, if not precisely at, the traditional Christadelphian position that the “Reply” sought to maintain. The historical notes in the early pages of the “Reply”, and any references to the events surrounding the publication of HSABT, should therefore be read with this in mind.

A few minor changes, mainly grammatical, have been made and a few new endnotes of clarification have been added otherwise the content of the “Reply” is essentially unchanged.

John Allfree, September 2002

INTRODUCTION TO THE 1976 EDITION

CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The past few years have provided evidence of an increasing divergence of opinion in the Central Fellowship on the subject of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. In addition to private publications articles have appeared in "The Endeavour", "The Believer" and the "Glad Tidings" arguing for the present possession of the Holy Spirit as the means whereby an individual is guided to the truth, the gospel becomes effective in his mind and the believer becomes strengthened against sin and temptation. The following quotations from the pens of six independent authors associated with four publications emanating from the Central Fellowship are representative of the kind of teaching which is gaining ground in the Brotherhood - in each case care has been taken to select quotations which are truly representative of the author's intentions:-

(1) "Repent and be baptised...and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...This declaration remains today the basis of the true Christian call, and the resultant assurance and peace. Repent, be baptised; have your sins forgiven; and a new power of holiness enters your life to transform your character into the image of the Son of God. That power is the 'gift of the Holy Spirit'".¹

(2) "The possession of a Bible gives no surety of knowledge of the purpose of God. The number of sects all claiming their foundation to be the inspired Bible, yet who are hopelessly divided as to the nature of God's purpose is evidence enough that the "spirit of truth" to guide into all truth is as much needed today as ever".²

(3) "When we read the Bible we come up against such exhortations as "Be filled with the Spirit...desire spiritual gifts", and we are told that the Father will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. These statements are outside the benefits which will come from devotional reading or moral instruction. Above the knowledge of the will of God and understanding of His purpose we need power to walk righteously. The Holy Spirit is that power".³

(4) "We come to the position that having the written word in our hands is not enough; reading it is not enough. We have to ask, "What is the missing factor?"...Surely the Christian attitude is to confess that our own reasoning powers if unaided, would be more likely to lead us to wrong

understandings than right ones and to plead for enlightening BY GOD'S SPIRIT. And unless we believe that God not only can hear our prayers but can answer them in some practical way - unless that is God's Spirit is really going to do something for us - it were better to save our breath..."⁴

(5) "The Scripture makes it quite clear that the promise of the Spirit is to be permanent and universal".⁵

(6) "The main function of the Spirit, as seen from the epistles is (along with the word of God) to assist the believer, in developing a life of personal holiness".⁶

(7) "WE DO NOT REQUIRE DETERMINATION IN THE OVERCOMING OF OUR SINS, BUT SO ROMANS 8 DECLARES, THE RESIGNATION OF SELF TO THE OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT".⁷

(8) "In any age, when men respond to the Gospel call, God separates them and dwells in them 'by His Holy Spirit'. This separating work of the Holy Spirit goes on today. Have you experienced this work of the Holy Spirit in your life? Every true believer has".⁸

(9) "The Holy Spirit, or Spirit of God, or Spirit of Christ, or the Comforter, or the indwelling Christ, or Spirit of Truth (these terms are equated with one another) operates in the hearts and minds of believers to strengthen, comfort, guide, counsel etc".⁹

(10) "Victorious living is only possible when we know that of our own selves we can do nothing. The initial victory is the Lord's and the continuing victory is his as well: through the Holy Spirit - whose spiritual power transforms our lives in Christ".¹⁰

THE C.M.P.A. SPEAKS ITS MIND

In 1974 after an appeal not to publish a previously announced series of articles, the "Glad Tidings" proceeded to commit the Central Fellowship (being its preaching magazine) to a new doctrine on the possession of the Holy Spirit. When a group of brethren seeking to uphold the accepted Christadelphian teaching on the matter initiated a protest, that protest was cut short by the Christadelphian Magazine Publishing Association (CMPA.). The doctrinal position set out at that time in the "Glad Tidings" was at no time acknowledged to be wrong either by the "Glad Tidings" Committee or by the CMPA. At the time the CMPA promised, "to

produce further material on our understanding of the manner of God's action in our lives". This promise has now been redeemed with the publication of a booklet written by Brother Alfred Norris entitled "The Holy Spirit and the Believer Today".¹¹ This booklet will in many quarters be regarded as an "official" statement on the subject representing the mind of the Editor of the "Christadelphian" and his Committee. It will be seen as speaking for Christadelphians of the Central Fellowship and presumably this pamphlet would now be given to any enquirer seeking our understanding on this important subject.

This is a serious situation for the booklet sets out a new understanding of the subject, which is fundamentally different from that which has previously been accepted by the Ecclesia. In 1959 Brother John Carter, the then editor of the Christadelphian, saw it to be his duty to oppose these same ideas when they were published at that time.¹² Having recently re-read this debate it is clear that Brother Norris has not changed his understanding of the subject to the least degree. Presumably, then, the present Editor of the "Christadelphian" and his Committee who are now publishing Brother Norris's booklet have been converted to the new views.

UNLESS THERE IS A VIGOROUS PROTEST FROM BRETHREN AND ECCLESIAS THE CENTRAL FELLOWSHIP WILL BE COMMITTED TO A NEW DOCTRINE WITH SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES.

THE POINT OF DISPUTE

We wish to limit our comments to the subject which the book really sets out to consider - the part played by the Holy Spirit in the salvation of believers today. In such a dispute as this it is essential that each understand precisely what the other is saying. Let it be clear then that both sides **in this dispute are agreed that the possession of the power to perform miracles, i.e. the possession of the gifts of tongues, healing, prophecy, etc. is irrelevant to the discussion.** Both parties acknowledge that these passed away in the early history of the Ecclesia. The point at issue is one that has to do with the way in which men are "being saved" (1 Corinthians 1:18RV).

WHAT WE ARE SAYING

Until now [i.e. 1976, JA] the Christadelphian position has always been ¹³ that the gift of the Holy Spirit consisted of divine supernatural help, which was given to the first century Ecclesia to assist the early brethren in the work of establishing the Truth in the earth. The Holy Spirit was withdrawn when that for which it had been given was accomplished and the Ecclesia established. It is not received by any today. As far as we today are concerned, we have **available in the word of God the result of the Holy Spirit acting upon apostles, prophets and other inspired writers.**¹⁴ If we of our own free will allow this word to influence our minds there is created in us a new mind, or spirit, which is referred to as "the Spirit of Christ" or "Spirit of God"¹⁵ which is recognised by works of righteousness, or fruits of the Spirit.¹⁶

WHAT BROTHER NORRIS AND THE CMPA ARE SAYING

The doctrine set out in the booklet cannot be reconciled with the above statement. According to Brother Norris the gift of the Holy Spirit is not to be identified with the miraculous powers but it is an unexplainable inner power of righteousness received by all believers at baptism. It is not, according to his booklet, sufficient simply to assimilate the mind to the word of God and allow the word to do its work in our lives producing righteousness by obedience to its commands, in addition to the Word we are told that God sends His Holy Spirit into the life of the believer to strengthen him against temptation and help him to overcome his sin.¹⁷ This Holy Spirit or Comforter, which gives strength and courage¹⁸ cannot be explained¹⁹ but its working can be felt within²⁰ as it works the transformation of the mind.²¹ The receiving of this Holy Spirit is thus part of the process of salvation; in fact without it salvation would appear to be impossible.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEW DOCTRINE

Either Brother Norris and the CMPA are correct in saying that God transforms the character through the direct activity of the Spirit (in which case Dr. Thomas and other Christadelphians since his day, ourselves included, have been sadly wrong in trying to overcome their faults by leaning on the Word of God) or else the traditional view is right, in which case the new ideas constitute a snare and a delusion which will lead the

Brotherhood away from the necessary struggle of reading the commandments of Jesus and keeping them.²²

The writer of this reply believes the new view to be unscriptural and fundamentally unsound.²³ If tolerated, since, as is acknowledged on page 16 of the pamphlet, it vitally affects our understanding of salvation, its acceptance will lead to the introduction of more obvious heresy - some of which is already manifesting itself in certain quarters.

USE OF SCRIPTURE

The object of this reply is not to examine each of the passages quoted by Brother Norris for to do so would take a work much longer than the present one, and in any case this has been adequately performed by others.²⁴ It is our intention to state the hitherto accepted Christadelphian position and to show that the scriptures quoted are all capable of being understood in the way in which Christadelphians have always understood them and that they in no way support the new doctrinal theory.

Before examining further the point of view advanced in the booklet mention must be made of the method employed by the author. We deplore the way in which odd verses and phrases have been taken out of literary and historical context and strung together to create, what, to the superficial reader, will appear to be a very strong case. By the same method what a tremendous case could be made for the false doctrine of the pre-human existence of Jesus, heaven going at death, and a personal devil! The importance of context is seen in the following two key passages used by the author to support his theory.

(1) "YE SHALL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT" - ACTS 2:38

No matter how well you think you know this chapter please put these notes down and read it through — all of it. It is a key chapter in this dispute and its consideration takes up no less than two and a half pages of Brother Norris's twenty-page booklet. His case, to a large extent, stands or falls on this passage even though he admits that his interpretation of it may be wrong. Read the chapter through and you will see that:-

(a) No-one without preconceived ideas could read this chapter and come to the conclusion that when Peter said, "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit", he referred to anything other than the same miraculous

powers which had aroused their curiosity and brought about their conviction. The reasoning of Brother Norris which argues that the gift of the Holy Spirit was something other than the miraculous powers is wishful thinking entirely without foundation in the record. There is no power other than the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned by Peter in his speech so how could his listeners (or his readers since) understand him to be speaking of any other kind of power? In Acts 10: 45 the gift of the Holy Spirit consisted of the power to speak with tongues, and Acts 11: 17 says that this was "the like gift" as was given to the brethren on the Day of Pentecost which consisted therefore also of miraculous powers.²⁵ Thus we see that:-

(i) a natural reading of Acts 2: 38 in its context teaches that the gift of the Holy Spirit consisted of miraculous powers.

(ii) the other references to the gift of the Holy Spirit in the Acts confirm this.

(iii) there is no evidence in the record that the gift of the Holy Spirit was an inner power of righteousness to the presence of which the miraculous powers merely pointed.

(b) The point is made²⁶ that since the promise of the Holy Spirit was made subsequent to the cry of the Jews, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" that of necessity it must be connected with their desire for forgiveness. Again a willingness to let the record speak for itself shows that Peter offered them, on condition of their repentance and baptism, the forgiveness of their sins. The need expressed in the anxious question of the Jews was fully met in the assurance of God's forgiveness. This has been the Christadelphian position for the past 125 years.²⁷ We went to the waters of baptism looking for the forgiveness of our sins. We did not go seeking the Holy Spirit. Our need was met in the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus as was theirs.

But God had made a special promise for those days through the prophet Joel. The Jews on the Day of Pentecost heard the apostles speaking with tongues and Peter, in addition to offering them the forgiveness of their sins, offered them a part in this great, miraculous work of God in those days.

The argument²⁸ that because the record does not go on to say expressly that those who responded did in fact receive the miraculous powers, it is

unlikely that they did receive them and therefore the gift of the Holy Spirit is something other than the miraculous powers, is quite lacking in reasonableness and definitely not supported by the context where there is no mention of any kind of Holy Spirit other than that which is miraculous in its working.

The "promise" to which Peter referred in his answer to the repentant Jews was surely the promise of Joel 2 - "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh", and a reading of Joel 2 and the use Peter makes of it in Acts 2 leaves no room for doubt that this had reference to miraculous powers - "dreams", "visions", "prophecy" — Peter's statement in Acts 2: 33 should remove all doubt.²⁹

(c) As to whether or not this promise of Peter concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit was restricted in time or not, an honest appraisal of the passage within its context will sustain the following observations:-

(i) "The promise is to you and to your children and to all that are afar off" refers without question as Brother Norris points out, to Jews and Gentiles.

(ii) "Even to as many as the Lord our God shall call", however, does not refer to the period of time during which Jews and Gentiles would be given the Holy Spirit but defines which Jews and Gentiles would be given it, namely, those called by God.

(iii) The *only* mention of time is in verse 17 where speaking of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, Peter says, "It shall come to pass *in the last days* I will pour out of my spirit..." Thus Peter proclaimed that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on Jews and Gentiles during "the last days", and the scriptures leave us in no doubt that those "last days" were the last days of Israel as constituted under the Law Covenant. See for example Heb. 1: 1; 8:13; I Peter 4: 7; I John 2: 18). The Holy Spirit was poured out in those days being manifest by signs and wonders, and the absence of the signs and wonders since those days confirms that this understanding is correct. To assert that it has been poured out on "all those who come after" is to deny the facts of history and the teaching of scripture.

Thus an open minded reading of the record in Acts 2 approaching it and seeking its simple teaching leads to the conclusions that:-

- (1) The gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles and others on the Day of Pentecost.
- (2) This gift consisted of miraculous powers, particularly on that occasion the ability to speak in tongues.
- (3) This was given in fulfilment of Joel 2 where God promised to pour out the Spirit so that they would prophesy.
- (4) This same gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to those who repented and were baptised.
- (5) This promise, being that spoken of by Joel, was for "all flesh" - Jews and Gentiles called of God.
- (6) The period of time when this promise was to be kept by God was "the last days" of the Jewish nation.

This we submit is all that the record contains. It is simple. It is easy to understand.³⁰

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

John 7: 39 states that "the Holy Spirit was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified". The Holy Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost and Brother Norris maintains that this Holy Spirit was a power of righteousness in men's lives, the giver of strength in their fight against sin, and not the miraculous powers given to the early Christians. We ask then, "Is the process whereby men are saved from this time of Pentecost a different one from that which prevailed before Pentecost? E.g. was the process of Abraham's salvation (faith and obedience) different from that of the believers today?"

(2) ANOTHER KEY PASSAGE - EPHESIANS 3: 14-21

This passage provides another corner stone in Brother Norris's argument being referred to no less than five times in the booklet,³¹ but on no occasion is the literary and historical context allowed to give meaning to the phrases quoted. The author seeks to demonstrate by the use of this scripture that in some unexplainable mysterious way God will grant inner strength to modern believers who ask for it. Again we ask the reader to read through the entire chapter and he will see that this scripture does not teach this, rather he will see that:-

(a) Paul's prayer for the Gentiles in Ephesus was that as a result of their being "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" Christ might dwell in their hearts *by faith* (v.16, 17). The end product was Christ in their hearts by faith.

Now the apostle says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10: 17). Here then is strong presumptive evidence that being strengthened with might by the Spirit actually has reference to the word of God working faith in them.

(b) This is confirmed by the context. Paul has already in this chapter spoken of the way in which new revelation was being given to the apostles and prophets at that time by the Spirit (3: 5) and thus it is reasonable to conclude that it is this same Spirit to which he refers when he prays for the Gentiles that they might be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the "inner man" (v.16). That which strengthened was the revelation, or the word, spoken by means of the Spirit through the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, as they ministered instruction, counsel and guidance to meet the needs of the ecclesia.³²

The "inner man" which Paul prays might be strengthened is "the new man" (Eph. 4:24) which is conceived by the word of God (I Peter 1: 23), brought forth by the word (James 1: 18 R.V.) and which is strengthened and nourished by the word (I Peter 2: 2).³³ The ability of the word of God to strengthen the inner man that Christ may dwell in men's hearts by faith is just the same whether it falls direct under the influence of the Spirit from apostolic lips, as in Ephesus in the first century, or whether, as in our day, it is read in the pages of the Bible, for the word of God is living and powerful (Heb. 4: 12). The new theory comes perilously close to denying this power of God's holy word to save us.³⁴

(c) Paul's final ascription of praise in this chapter again needs to be considered in the first century context in which it was written. "Unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in ("among" N.E.B.) us", has reference to the gifts of the Holy Spirit which were present in the ecclesias at that time.

Thus it is seen that this key passage, this pillar of the new theory, contains nothing that cannot be understood in the traditional Christadelphian way and the context demands that it be so understood.

CONFUSION

It is thus suggested that two key passages used by the author of the booklet when considered in their literary and historical contexts do not support the ideas that he seeks to impose on them.

We wish now to demonstrate that in the use of the remaining scriptures Brother Norris has used them indiscriminately in failing to observe the clear distinction that exists between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Christ that is created in the believer's mind by the Word. Brother Norris maintains that when Paul writes, "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. 8: 9) he is talking about the same thing as Peter, when, in Acts 2: 38 he declared, "Repent and be baptised for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit". To have the gift of the Holy Spirit is, according to Brother Norris, the same as having the Spirit of Christ.³⁵

This position is easily demonstrated to be entirely without foundation by reading carefully Acts chapter 8 and noting:-

- (1) The Samaritans believed and were baptised (Acts 8: 12)
- (2) Being baptised they were "in Christ" (Gal. 3: 27)
- (3) Being "in Christ" they belonged to Christ (Gal. 3: 29)
- (4) If they belonged to Christ they had the Spirit of Christ for "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. 8: 9)
- (5) **But they did not have the gift of the holy spirit** for the record states that it was not until Peter and John laid hands on them that they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17) which was "the gift of God" (Acts 8: 20). Thus the Spirit of God, or Spirit of Christ in Romans 8 is **not** the same as the gift of the Holy Spirit. Failure to appreciate this difference has pushed Brother Norris to adopt the position he now advocates.

Each of the scriptures which Brother Norris quotes and mingles indiscriminately together may, by examining their context, be discovered to refer either to the gift of the Holy Spirit which has been withdrawn and is no longer available to believers today, or to the Spirit of Christ which is the "mind of Christ" or "new man" which is created in us by the word. The scriptures quoted by Brother Norris may be classified thus:-

(1) REFERENCES TO THE MIRACULOUS GIFTS THAT WERE WITHDRAWN³⁶

Luke 11: 13
John chapters 14-16
Romans 5: 5
Romans 14: 17
I Corinthians 3: 16
I Corinthians 6: 19

(2) REFERENCES TO THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST CREATED BY THE WORD³⁶

John 3: 3-8
Romans 8: 4, 9, 11, 14
Galatians 5: 16, 18

THE APPEAL TO THE 1964 HYMNBOOK

The appeal to the Hymn Book³⁷ to support the new doctrine is unfortunate for all that it demonstrates, if it be found to support an unscriptural position, is that it too is Scripturally unsound.

What was in the unenlightened mind of the author of "Abide with me" ought not to concern those whose minds have been illuminated by the true Gospel. For them God has spoken:-

Blessed are they who to observe
His statutes are inclined;
And who do serve the living God
With their whole, heart and mind.

Such in His ways do walk, and they
Do no iniquity
Thou hast commanded us to keep
Thy precepts carefully.

Oh that thy statutes to observe
Thou wouldst my ways direct
Then shall I not be shamed when I
Thy precepts all respect,

(Psalm 119: 1-5)

This paraphrastic translation sets out beautifully the "traditional" Christadelphian position and shows it to be in harmony with the revealed will of God:-

- (1) God has given His word.
- (2) We must give our hearts and minds to it.
- (3) We must manifest obedience to His commandments.
- (4) God will be active in the lives of such faithful children and, by angelic control of their lives, will direct their ways to keep his statutes (see Psalm 119:67, 71).

“IT IS GOD THAT WORKETH IN YOU”

A number of scriptures are quoted by Brother Norris which do not speak of the direct activity of God in the life of believers by the Spirit but, which, once the idea has been accepted might superficially appear to teach it.³⁸ Since we do not consider the scriptures do teach this direct inward spirit working we see no necessity to read it into them.

Of course "it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2: 13) both then and now. But in this work He uses means, and the appointed means of our inward renewing is the Spirit-given word of truth, which, (again notice the importance of the context) if they (and we) would allow it to exert its power in their lives would produce obedience (verse 12) by developing "the mind...which was also in Christ Jesus" (verse 5).

GOD IN OUR LIVES

Since Brother Norris apparently cannot understand how it is that Christadelphians have for 125 years been able to deny that God works directly within by His Spirit and yet have believed that God is very active in the lives of His children answering their prayers,³⁹ their position should be stated again in simple terms.

We have hitherto believed that God is very active in the lives of His children. In this external work of God, which produces inward results (cf. Heb. 12:6) God employs the angels who are "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14).⁴⁰ We object to the way in which Brother Norris lightly dismisses the ability

of angels to manipulate the circumstances of the lives of God's children to give, in answer to their prayers, the encouragement they need at any time.
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One of the tragic side effects of accepting the new doctrine is the way in which the work of angels becomes of little importance in the lives of saints.

SALVATION NOT OF WORKS

Lest any be persuaded that the present writer is suggesting that by our own strength we can achieve salvation, then let it be said that he readily acknowledges that salvation is "not of works, lest any man should boast". The victory belongs to God through our Lord Jesus Christ. It is His word that has the power to change us; it is His forgiveness that is extended to us; they are His angels that look over us. But God expects our submission to His revealed will, our acceptance of His forgiveness and our awareness of His hand in our lives. Our acceptance of the sweet influence of His word will change us and this change is a condition of our salvation. The evidence that we have been changed is seen in obedience to His commandments for "whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God" (I John 3:10). It is no "humbler" to obey a supposed direct action of God's spirit than it is to obey His written command.

The idea of the present possession of the Holy Spirit as a power of righteousness within is a dangerous doctrine for it leads ultimately to the position where there is no need to exert ourselves to read and obey and battle with sin. 42

THE NEW DOCTRINE SHOULD BE OPPOSED

- Because it is unscriptural,
- Because it will lead ⁴³ to a denial of the power of God's word and will reduce the believer's dependence upon it for strength and guidance, ⁴⁴
45
- Because it will lead to a lack of appreciation for the need to keep God's commandments and produce in consequence a moral decline,
- Because it will encourage reliance upon human, subjective feelings as the basis and evidence of our religion, ⁴⁶
- Because it will lead to the delusion of "instant salvation" as seen in the evangelical churches,

- Because it will change the gospel of the Kingdom, as Christ and the apostles preached it, from a literal kingdom on earth to one which is mystical here and now; ⁴⁷- It thus leads to "another gospel", ⁴⁸
- Because it will blind men to the importance of miracles in God's outworking purpose, ⁴⁹
- Because it will detract from the doctrine of angelic supervision of the lives of saints. ⁵⁰

GOD IN THE BELIEVER'S LIFE - A SUMMARY

The author of this reply believes that the following is a true statement of the Christadelphian position in its positive and negative aspects.

He appeals to all those who love the Truth to make their voices heard on its behalf. Ecclesias and individuals are urged to make their feelings known to the CMPA asking them to withdraw the publication that has prompted this "Reply".⁵¹

POSITIVE

1. The foundation of belief is the Scripture written by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and therefore an infallible and truthful guide.
2. This Scripture is the written record of the things God has done for our salvation, instructions as to how to avail ourselves of that salvation, and prophecy showing how that salvation will ultimately be brought about.
3. The Scripture is the voice of God and His Son, and as such is powerful to change the characters of those who come to it with an honest heart.
4. It does not, however, reveal its secrets to those who are not prepared to read it in its natural sense. Those who expect hidden meanings to be divinely revealed will 'receive' varied and often extraordinary interpretations not obvious to a reasoned study.
5. Christ is formed in us through a careful reading of the record about him, and through keeping his commandments. In this way we can understand his character, his words and his works and so come to grow more like him. He dwells in our hearts by faith, i.e. through our belief in the things concerning him.

6. Of great importance in the altering of our characters is the knowledge that Christ will return bodily to the earth. Until that time we are guided as to right and wrong only by the word.
7. We are, however, under the control and guidance of angels, who watch providentially over the lives of all believers, and control the circumstances of their lives. But within that framework of angelic control we are left to ourselves (with help and guidance from the word) to deal with the situation.

NEGATIVE

SCRIPTURE DOES NOT TEACH THAT:-

1. There is a divine influence, which, entering into our hearts causes us to understand Scripture.
2. There is any influence received direct from God that improves a believer's character, or helps him to overcome sin.
3. Men are unable to do good even when they accept the Scripture until the Holy Spirit has acted upon them.
4. Men in our age receive the Holy Spirit directly, as in the First Century, either:-
 - (a) Before they can repent
 - (b) After they repent
 - (c) When they are baptised
 - (d) When they are converted
 - (e) Whenever they pray for it.

Endnotes:

- ¹ "Endeavour" No.24, page 9
- ² "Endeavour" No.26, page 14
- ³ "Endeavour" No, 26, page 14-15
- ⁴ "Believer" Vol.2, No.12, page 13
- ⁵ "Believer" Vol.3, No.15, page 21
- ⁶ "Believer" Vol.3, No.16, page 11
- ⁷ "Believer" Vol.2, No.16, page 12 (capitals are by the author of the original article)
- ⁸ "Believer" Vol.4, No.24, page 11
- ⁹ From a letter from the editor of a Christadelphian preaching publication.
- ¹⁰ "The Holy Spirit" by Edgar Wille (See footnote 45)
- ¹¹ In these notes this is referred to as HSABT, without reference to the author.
- ¹² Also by Brother Norris in his booklet "Being Born Again". See "Christadelphian" 1959, page 163, 203, 243, 309.
- ¹³ See W. J. Young, "Christadelphian" 1910 p. 13 - "We hold (i) that the Holy Spirit in the first century was given in open and recognisable fashion; (ii) that it was given to true believers only: (iii) that its possession was attested by miraculous powers, (iv) that, with the completion of their purpose, the cessation of those gifts was foretold, and the Spirit's presence ceased to be evident; (v) that at the present time the Spirit is not given to men".
- ¹⁴ See Dr. J. Thomas "Clerical Theology Unscriptural" page 17 "God's power is manifested through means. His Spirit is His power by which He effects intellectual, moral and physical results. *When He wills to produce intellectual and moral effects, it is by knowledge revealed by His Spirit through the prophets and apostles.* This knowledge becomes power when received into "good and honest hearts"; and because God is the author of it, it is styled "the knowledge of God" (II Peter 1:2), or "the word of truth" James 1:18), by which he begets sinners to Himself as His sons and daughters".

¹⁵ See Robert Roberts, "Christendom Astray" page 129 (1922 Ed) "The result of an intelligent apprehension of what the Word of God teaches and requires...has its seat in the judgment, and lays hold of the entire mental man, creating new ideas and new affections, and in general, evolving a "new man". In *this work the Spirit has no participation except in the shape of the written word*. This is the product of the Spirit - the ideas of the Spirit reduced to writing by the ancient men who were moved by it".

¹⁶ See R. Roberts, "Christendom Astray" page 366 (1922 Ed). "Nothing will save a man in the end, but an exact knowledge of the will of God as contained in the Scriptures, and faithfully carrying out the same. The wise may protest against the "dogmatism" and "bigotry" involved in such a course, but the enlightened conscience will approve".

Ibid, page 374, "Ultimate acceptance will depend upon the character he develops in this new relation. If he bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, viz. moral results proceeding from the spirit-words (John 6:65) which have obtained a lodgement in his mind as the motive power, he will be approved by the Lord when he returns".

¹⁷ HSABT, page 19,26

¹⁸ Ibid. page 19,21.

¹⁹ Ibid, page 20

²⁰ Ibid, page 21 [In this connection a comment by the same author is of interest. Speaking of the perception by the individual of the working of the Holy Spirit within, he writes, "Some of quicker sentiments than others, may believe they feel the working of God ... Some like the ... author ... might find it hard to feel anything at all" (A. D. Norris, "A Personal Confession of Faith"). This seems to be saying that whether men feel God working within depends on our constitution. (JA, 2002 edition)]

²¹ Ibid, page 26

Contrast the above references (17-20) with the clear statement in the "Christadelphian" 1883 page 501. "We find no examples of the Spirit being given to make a man righteous. The promise of Jesus to send the Comforter can have no application of a personal nature in these days. We have seen the promise fulfilled and its work accomplished in the Apostles, not as a sentiment or feeling, but as a writer of miracles and as a light giver to their minds".

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- ²² See "Declaration" page 40 (1937 Ed) "Instead of immortality being inherent and natural, the Bible teaches it is a quality brought within reach by Christ in the gospels and will only be attained on condition of believing the gospel and obeying the divine commandments".
- ²³ John Carter, "Christadelphian" 1959, p.310, stated, "Whether we like it or not Brother Norris 's exposition is not sound".
- F. V. Morgan "Christadelphian" 1959, p. 321, said concerning Brother Norris's teaching "One suspects that these 'new ideas' involve so fundamental a change in our traditional doctrines that it may not be possible simply to leave them to the conscience of the individual".
- ²⁴ See for example "The Holy Spirit" by Graham Pearce, the series of articles on the subject by E. Whittaker and R. Carr in the "Testimony" 1974, 1975, and "The Holy Spirit" by Aleck Crawford.
- ²⁵ The argument on page 18 of HSABT, that because the New Testament uses the word 'gift' of other things that God has given, therefore the gift of the Holy Spirit cannot refer to the miraculous signs is a most eccentric piece of exposition, The fact remains that wherever the word 'gift' is used in *connection with the Holy Spirit* in the Acts and the Epistles a straightforward reading of the text will show that it *always* has to do with the miraculous powers (Acts 2: 38; 8: 20, 10: 45; 11: 17; Eph. 3: 7; Heb. 6: 4). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was the baptism of Spirit promised in Acts 1: 5. Concerning this Dr. Thomas wrote ("Faith in the Last Days" p.214), "Baptism of the spirit in all the subjects of it, was known to all observers *by the effects* produced. There could be no mistake in this. A Christian who said, "I have been baptised with spirit", could prove his assertion to the conviction of all reasonable persons. He never undertook to prove such a baptism by an appeal to his own feelings; for what he might feel in himself was no demonstration to his contemporaries".
- ²⁶ HSABT, page 16.
- ²⁷ See "Christadelphian" 1883, p.500 "It could not be said that the gift of the Spirit was necessary to the 3,000 to secure their salvation. They believed and were baptised into Christ; the Spirit being superadded to empower each possessor to continue the work, and *not for personal benefit*".
- It would be interesting to know how many members of the CMPA believed at the time of their baptism that they were about to receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit; or were they in the position of those in Acts 19: 2? If so what has happened to them since?

²⁸ HSABT, page 17 and 18.

²⁹ Once this is accepted, i.e. that the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 refers to the miraculous powers and not to some mystical inner power, then Brother Norris's case crumbles. For he admits that the miraculous powers have been withdrawn and so, if the gift of the Holy Spirit = the miraculous powers, then it follows that the gift of the Holy Spirit has been withdrawn. He admits that his understanding of this passage may not be correct (HSABT, page 18) and that it is only "probable" that the gift of the Holy Spirit does not refer to the miraculous powers (page 18). His whole theory then hangs on a "probable" interpretation which he confesses may not be correct.

³⁰ This was how Brother Roberts saw it. See for example "Christendom Astray" page 126 (1922 Ed).

Also see Dr. Thomas, "Christadelphian" 1876, page 50 - "In all this long series of ages and generations there are no gifts and no other baptism than that of water. The gifts answered their purpose and *then ceased* and nothing remained but "faith, hope and love", *the product of the word read and studied* by the honest and good hearted".

³¹ HSABT, pages 5, 7, 19, 21, 26.

³² See John Carter "Christadelphian" 1959, page 165 - "The Holy Spirit in the apostles renewed men and women by the word".

cf. Dr. Thomas "Elpis Israel" page 164 (1958 Ed) - "When in the exercise of (true religion) men and women are moved to action, they are acted on by an intelligent and earnest conviction of the Truth. This is the instrumentality by which He raises them then to religious exercise by the Spirit which is the Truth (I John 5: 6)".

³³ See John Carter "Christadelphian" 1956 page 248. "The 'new man' is 'created' by the formative influence of the word of God, by the habitual renewing of the mind. It is "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him". The formation of the new man is the result of a mental process in which a way of thinking is cultivated in harmony with the divine thought revealed in the word. By the agency of the divine revelation God reforms a man's thoughts and a mental "image of God" comes into being..." It (the new man) is put on by the conscious effort to learn a new way in opposition to habits of thought instinctively at variance with God's

thoughts...the "new man" is revealed in a new way of life in which the divine character is expressed".

³⁴ Bro. Roberts in the preface to the "Bible Companion" saw no need for the inward working of the Spirit - "Salvation depends on the assimilation of the mind to the divine ideas, principles, and affections, exhibited in the scriptures. This process commences with a belief of the Gospels but is by no means completed thereby; it takes a lifetime for its scope and untiring diligence for its accomplishment. The mind is naturally alien from God and all His ideas (Rom. 8: 7; I Cor. 2: 14) and cannot be brought at once to the divine likeness. This is a work of slow development and *can only be advanced by the industrious application of the individual to the means which God has given for this purpose; viz., the expression of His mind in the Scriptures of truth*".

It is sadly noted that this statement is no longer printed in the introduction to the "Bible Companion" supplied by the CMPA.

³⁵ Bro. John Carter also observed in the 1959 debate - "The confusion in the use of the word (spirit) also appears to correspond to confusion in the thought. Truly he (Bro. Norris) rightly deprecates hasty definitions of what "spirit" is, and wisely suggests that we shall learn more by "letting the scriptures tell us, at all costs". But having said that, we look in vain for any clear indication of the different usages of the word in the Bible, and how we may distinguish these usages - yet passages appear to be cited upon the one basis of the occurrence of the word". (Christadelphian, 1959, page 163).

³⁶ For detailed exposition of these scriptures in harmony with the traditional Christadelphian belief see "The Holy Spirit" by Graham Pearce, the series by E. Whittaker and R. Carr in "The Testimony" 1974,75, and "The Holy Spirit" by Aleck Crawford.

³⁷ HSABT, page 22

³⁸ In the same way once the idea of the immortality of the soul has been accepted then Phil. 1: 22 appears to teach it.

³⁹ This lack of appreciation is seen in the misleading statement of the traditional position on page 7 of his booklet, paragraph 2.

⁴⁰ cf. John Carter "Christadelphian" 1956, page 166 - "We know the Spirit Gifts ceased: and we believe there has been divine activity with men through angelic ministration in what we may call the "ways of providence". We would say that in our view no-one since apostolic times can affirm with

certainty that there has been direct Holy Spirit activity in their lives and that they have been conscious of it at the time of such activity".

⁴¹ HSABT, page 21.

⁴² As an example of this see W. Davidson, "Believer" Vol.3, No.16, page 12 - "We do not require determination in the overcoming of our sins, but so Romans 8 declares, the resignation of self to the operation of the Holy Spirit".

⁴³ We are not saying that Brother Norris's booklet manifests all the listed errors of belief, but these are the logical outcome of accepting what he has written. Other writers, e.g. Edgar Wille quoted below, see themselves as reaching similar conclusions as Brother Norris.

⁴⁴ e.g. "The Holy Spirit" by Edgar Wille, page 28 - "The Bible is the source of information about the redemptive work of Christ. It reports the great redemptive act, but it takes something more than black words on white paper to work it into our experience".

⁴⁵ Although Edgar Wille is no longer (2002) a member of the Christadelphian Community this book has recently been made available by a Christadelphian sympathiser in North America, and is in fact being promoted on the same Australian internet site as HSABT. Also, sadly, EW is given space on the site to air his evangelical views, with apparent approval.

⁴⁶ E.g. "The Holy Spirit" by Edgar Wille, page 62 - "The Spirit is not "a subject" to be written about, to debate, to have a theology of, the Spirit is to be experienced".

⁴⁷ E.g. "The Kingdom of God", Alfred Norris, page 7 - "One or two things should be pointed out about this (present) aspect of the kingdom. It is real enough, as we have shown, and as Paul shows again when he says of the faithful that God hath translated them into the kingdom of his dear son (Col. 1: 13)... We can only gain admission to it by being born again: Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God' (John 3: 5)".

See also "The Holy Spirit" by Edgar Wille where he speaks of the time from Pentecost as "the age of the Spirit" - the kingdom or Kingly reign of God" (page 19). Concerning this "Kingdom" he states, "Not intellectual satisfaction or external power -but divinely initiated inner change alone could enable a man to perceive the kingly dominion (kingdom) of God which operated at a higher level than the physical" (page 18) "The Kingdom

now proclaimed was not a political or observable physical phenomenon but an inner state" (page 17).

⁴⁸ See "The Holy Spirit", Edgar Wille - "a true doctrine and real experience of the Holy Spirit is fundamental to the Gospel.

Also see, "The Believer" Vol.3, No, 16, page 12 "Both sides of the gospel appear equally important - belief of the Word of Truth and the work of the Spirit".

⁴⁹ The beginnings of this are seen in the work under review where the miracles of Pentecost are seen as fulfilling a relatively minor role.

⁵⁰ See for example, HSABT, page 21 - The only reference to angels in a work purporting to consider the activity of God in the lives of His children!

⁵¹ As stated in the Introduction to the 2002 edition, the booklet is no longer published by the CMPA and has been unavailable for several years. It is therefore a cause of great concern that it is once again being promoted.