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Barton W. Stone and Walter Scott on the Holy Spirit and Ministry

THOMAS H. OLBRICHT

Barton W. Stone (1772-1844) and Walter Scott (1796-1861) both embraced the Christian faith in contexts in which ministers of the gospel professed the assistance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit working with the Word may be found in the Reformed Confessions and theology of the Presbyterians as well as that of American Awakening preachers. These theologians, however, commonly criticized extremes in which the Holy Spirit was claimed to supercede the power of the written Word in both the life of the church and the power of the ministry.

Donald G. Bloesch, in his book *The Holy Spirit: Works & Gifts*, suitably wrote regarding the leaders of the 16th-century Reformation,

The mainline Reformers affirmed the decisive role of the Holy Spirit in creating faith and holiness, but they generally downplayed the role of the Spirit in empowering for ministry. While they had much to say on the gift of the Spirit, they regarded the gifts or charisms of the Spirit with considerable reserve. Although making a place for the Spirit's sanctifying work they were not convinced that the Spirit's miraculous work continued past the apostolic age. The Reformers rediscovered the charisms of preaching and teaching, though these did not remain charisms but offices. The Holy Spirit became the auxiliary of the Word rather than a catalyst for the revitalization of the church.¹

As Stone and Scott took up their own ministries, they reflected upon the manner in which the Spirit was at work through their efforts. Their perspectives were influential in the growing Restoration Movement in the first half of the 19th century.

BARTON W. STONE

Barton W. Stone was born in Maryland, but schooling took him to North Carolina, and preaching took him to Kentucky and finally to Illinois. In 1790, so as to obtain a classical education, he took up studies in Guilford, North Carolina, at an academy operated by David Caldwell (1725-1824), a new light Presbyterian. Though he anticipated a career in law, his thoughts turned to the ministry because of revivalistic stirrings. Stone attained the joy of salvation in (1793) upon hearing William Hodge, who focused on the great love of God for sinners. After repairing to the woods, he reported,

I yielded, and sank at His feet a willing subject. I loved Him—I adored Him—I praised Him aloud in the silent night, in the echoing grove around. I confessed to the Lord my sins and folly in disbelieving his word so long—and in following so long the devices of men. I now saw that a poor sinner was as much authorized to believe in Jesus at first as at last—that now was the accepted time, and day of salvation.²

Stone, now 21, considered taking up a ministry among the Presbyterians. It was necessary to read theology and undergo an examination in order to be ordained. Stone struggled through theological treatises and

the Westminster Confession in regard to the doctrines of the Trinity, atonement, election, and predestination but had difficulty with the conventional Presbyterian positions. He now traveled to Tennessee, preaching along the way. In 1797, he was appointed minister at Cane Ridge and Concord Presbyterian Churches in Bourbon County, Kentucky.

In the spring of 1801, Stone went to Logan County, Kentucky, west of Bowling Green, to observe firsthand the fires of revival stirred by James McGready. Stone perceived the events there as “passing strange;” nevertheless, he was amazed at the emboldened manner in which converts told others of their conversion. In August 1801, Stone returned to Cane Ridge determined to reproduce what he had witnessed in Logan County. The outcome proved to be a defining moment in American religious history—that is, the great Cane Ridge camp meeting. Perhaps as many as 20,000 came, involving especially Presbyterians and Methodists, along with numerous Baptists.

In 1803, Stone and a few other Presbyterian ministers formed the independent Springfield Presbytery. But in June 1804—after persistent conflict with the other presbyteries and convinced that the millennium might be on the horizon—they decided to abolish the presbytery, in order, as they stated in the *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (1804) to “sink into union with the body of Christ at large.”

Stone was always of the conviction that the Holy Spirit was at work through and in conjunction with the scripture to bring about conversion and sanctification. He worried over certain of the extreme Holy Spirit “exercises” in the great camp meetings, and came to think that proclamation of Christ’s death and resurrection leading to baptism—not a Holy Spirit experience—resulted in the forgiveness of sins. Nevertheless, he continued to believe that the Holy Spirit was at work in conversion and in producing a Christ-like life in the disciple.

Regarding the credentials of a minister, the *Last Will and Testament* declared:

*Item. We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.*³

Stone’s views on the Spirit at work in ministry are obvious in his advice to young preachers where he makes it clear that the Holy Spirit is to be involved in all aspects of the church’s work.

Take heed to yourself, and learn this truth, that without me ye can do nothing—Christ, the great teacher of the world, never preached the Gospel till he was full of the Holy Ghost—his apostles were forbidden to leave Jerusalem and preach the Gospel till they had received the Holy Spirit of promise, endued with power from on high. Even deacons, who were to attend solely to the temporalities of the Church, must be full of the Holy Ghost, as a qualification of their office. The Lord will have no servants in his Church without this qualification. Without we have the Spirit, how can we minister it to others.⁴

In Stone’s view, effective preaching must be Holy Spirit empowered.

I not only advise you to preach the Word, but also preach it in the spirit. In vain we attempt to preach in the spirit, unless we have the spirit, and experience the force of that truth we deliver to others. A man may preach the truth in the letter without the spirit. Such preaching is vain—useless to saint and sinner. Apathetic and moral lectures on religion have almost ruined the world, and swelled the number of skeptics. For they thus argue: Did these people believe what they preach or read, would they be so cold and unfeeling in their addresses? Would they not cry aloud and spare not? Did you ever know one such preacher convert a sinner from the error of his ways? A person may also preach with a great vociferous zeal and

manner. This may be and often is nothing more than mere animal nature, without the spirit. Live and walk in the spirit, and preach in the spirit; then will the attention of your hearers be arrested, and good effects will follow.⁵

Various views were expressed over the value of revivals and revival preaching. Stone himself had reservations about some aspects of the revivals. But clearly he affirmed that much good resulted despite some questionable aspects. He especially commended the manner in which the Holy Spirit worked through the preachers when the revivals were in full sway. The results were a powerful acceptance and affirmation of the gospel.

The good so far exceeded the evil, the latter almost disappeared. I saw the religion of Jesus more clearly exhibited in the lives of Christians then, than I had ever seen before or since to the same extent. The preachers were revived. I saw them filled with the Holy Spirit of their Lord, addressing the multitudes, not in Iceberg style, nor according to the studied rules of rhetoric and oratory; but in the language and spirit of heaven. Impressed with the worth of souls—of unconverted souls, exposed to everlasting punishment—feeling their awful responsibility to God; and feeling the force of divine truth, and the power of religion, in their own souls, they spoke with earnestness, as dying men to dying men. They regarded not the censure, nor the hard speeches of opposers—they might be called enthusiasts and represented as mad, and beside themselves—This did not move them, unless to pity, to tears and prayers for their opposers.⁶

Stone held a strong conviction about believers coming to salvation. The Spirit's work in salvation was through the preaching of the Word.

We have been frequently charged with denying the operations of the Spirit. I do not recollect of having ever known one among us that did deny them; yet some may have given cause for the charge, by using expressions which seemed to lean too far that way. —But I think the very reason why we have been thus charged, is because we have continually asserted and do yet firmly believe, that the bible gives us no grounds to expect these operations while we abide in unbelief. To assert the contrary we think dangerous.⁷

But after believing and being baptized, one receives the Spirit so as to empower the work of God including preaching.

That which I think to be the truth, is this: Suppose God, having handed me the bible, should thus speak: "Take this book—in it are all things necessary for you to know, believe, and do—believe them as the truths of heaven, and come to me and ask, and I will give you the holy spirit, and every promise of the New Testament." On this plan I should be encouraged to activity in every duty, in the confident expectation of help and salvation.⁸

WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott was born in Moffatt, Dumfriesshire, Scotland. He studied at the University of Edinburgh. In 1818, at the invitation of a New York uncle, he immigrated and served as a Latin tutor on Long Island. He moved to Pittsburgh in 1819, where he taught in an academy founded by George Forrester. Forrester preached for a small Scottish Baptist church influenced by James A. and Robert Haldane. Scott was baptized, and a year later succeeded Forrester as teacher and minister upon Forrester's untimely death by drowning.

In 1821, Scott became a tutor in Robert Richardson's school and there met Alexander Campbell. Scott was more interested in the ancient gospel and conversions than in the ancient order—that is, restoring the church. He concluded that the central point of Christianity is that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah. In

1827, Scott was appointed evangelist for the Mahoning Baptist Association of northeastern Ohio. He soon offered a five- (or six-) step conversion plan, which he typically called the fundamentals of the ancient gospel: faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, the Holy Spirit, and the resurrection or eternal life. In 1831 Scott moved to Cincinnati, then to small towns in the region.⁹

In 1827, when Scott was appointed the evangelist for the Mahoning Association, he began to focus more pointedly on the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion. The Mahoning Association itself espoused the standard Calvinistic views expressed in the Baptist Philadelphia Confession of faith (1764), but they were not as evangelistic as preachers more influenced by the Second Awakening. According to Baxter, in regard to the preachers of the Association,

Great stress was in those days placed upon what was called a religious experience—more reliance, indeed, upon the feelings and mental exercises of the penitent than upon a chance of conduct and obedience to the plain teachings of the Word of God; indeed, it was by no means uncommon to hear the Word of God spoken of as powerless and inefficient; but any unusual agitation of the feelings was regarded as the direct influence of the Holy Spirit upon the sinner's heart. Dreams and visions of a grand or gloomy nature were thought to indicate the anger or favor of God, and to persons of warm and lively imaginations these were seldom wanting; and those who could relate the most wonderful stories in regard to the soul's enjoyments or conflicts were regarded as favorites of heaven, while the equally earnest and sincere, yet more sober-minded, were thought to be in a far less hopeful condition.¹⁰

Scott became convinced, as the result of much study in the Bible, that the role of the Holy Spirit had not been placed in the proper sequence nor probed systematically. First, he decided that the mission of the Holy Spirit was only to the church and not the means through which one entered the church.

Our Lord Jesus was sent personally to the Jewish nation and his personal mission terminated on that people. The Apostles were sent to all the nations, and their mission terminated accordingly: but the Holy Spirit was sent only to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so far as his gifts were enjoyed, his mission terminated in that institution.¹¹

Clearly then, in Scott's thinking, the Spirit was received after persons heard the gospel and obeyed.

In fine, it will be shown in regard to the Holy Spirit, that he was not sent to dwell in any one, in order to make him a Christian, but because he had already become a christian; or in other terms it will be proved, that the Holy Spirit is not given to men, to make them believe and obey the gospel, but rather *because* they have believed and obeyed the gospel.¹²

Scott believed that God worked on hearts, but it was in order that they would learn from his word and obey. He ended his chapter on the Holy Spirit by offering 17 "Objections Removed." In item 10, he took up Lydia's conversion. "The Lord opened Lydia's heart. Granted, and he will open your's too, if you read his holy book in order to know and do his will."¹³

The purpose for which the Spirit was sent was to comfort the disciples, convince the world, and to glorify Jesus. The Spirit carries out this mission through the church.

The Spirit, then, can do nothing in religion, nothing in christianity, but by the members of the body of Christ. Even the word of God, the Scriptures, have been given by members filled with this Spirit—they spake as the Spirit gave them utterance. But mark, reader, that there is no member of the body of Christ in whom the Holy Spirit dwelleth not; for it will hold good at the end of the world and in eternity as it does now, and it holds as good now as it did on the day of Pentecost and afterwards, that '*if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his.*' If therefore, the Spirit convinces the world of sin, or glorifies Jesus, it is all through

the agency of the members of the body of Christ, whom he fills—the church.¹⁴

Clearly, Scott believed in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the individual believer—as it was put later—separate and apart from the Word. The Spirit therefore was present in conjunction with the scripture in the proclamation of the gospel.

As to the order, Scott especially stressed the positioning of the Holy Spirit. Faith was produced, not by the Spirit as most evangelicals believed, but by testimony establishing Jesus' messiahship. "The Spirit ... was uniformly given to those who believed and obeyed the Gospel, not to produce faith, but to reward it."¹⁵

In *The Gospel Restored*, Scott emphasized that the Spirit worked in the hearts of those who had been baptized into the church, and in order to bring unbelievers to belief.

Scott is not too explicit as to the specific ways in which the Holy Spirit empowered the Christians of his own time. In a broader sweep, he wrote: "The Spirit's mission then is briefly comprehended in three words, *comfort, glorify, convince* ..." ¹⁶ As to how the Spirit operates, he wrote,

As our spirits operate in our bodies and by their members, so the Spirit of Christ operates in the body of Christ and by its members ... Therefore, christians, do your duty, or you will either quench or grieve the Holy Spirit of God, as many, alas! have done, and are now doing at this day by their love of this world and by their prejudices.¹⁷

In another place, Scott proposed that the gifts of the Spirit were wisdom, power (to work miracles), and of goodness (love, joy, gentleness, meekness, longsuffering, fidelity, etc.) He believed, however, that the first two were available to those in the early church but no longer needed in his time.¹⁸ He concluded the chapter on the Holy Spirit in *The Gospel Restored* with 17 "Objections Removed," the 15th of which was, "What now, is proof of a professor's having the Spirit? His joyfulness in obeying the Christian religion by a holy walk and conversation."¹⁹

Neither, as far as I have been able to discover, was Scott explicit as to Holy Spirit's empowerment in the proclamation of the minister. Scott's earliest biographer, William Baxter, reports that Scott, often considering himself inadequate as a proclaimer, enlisted the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Brethren and fellow citizens: In all cases of public speaking, in the forum, at the bar, or in the pulpit, what is attempted should be done with power. Weakness is nearly allied to failure which admits not of apology, for audiences do not assemble to be tortured, wearied, disappointed, but instructed, persuaded, delighted. You are present this evening to hear of Jesus and the great redemption, and I to address you on these solemn and delightful themes. ... If distrust in my own powers impels me to place a higher reliance on God, my humility shall not hurt me. Pray for me, then, dear audience, that he who faints not, neither is weary, may strengthen me with all might by his Spirit in the inner man; that I may, with all saints, comprehend the heights and depths, and length and breadth, and know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge; that I may be filled with all the fullness of God; that I may open my mouth as I ought; and to him be eternal praises.²⁰

Scott commended an essay by a Mr. Adams published in the *American Biblical Repository*:

The success of the preacher under God, depends on two things:

1. *What* he preaches, and,
2. *How* he preaches.

First of all, then, we assert, that without piety in his own heart, the preacher can never comprehend the import of that message, in which is involved the whole secret of his success. Something more than genius and erudition is necessary to discern the gospel aright. Nor is this a matter of mere reasoning; but an assertion of inspiration also. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can

he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” “Non sine lumine.”—useless without the sun.—was the trite moto on the old fashioned sundial. Artificial light will not tell the time. A candle will not cast a true shadow. The interior (sic) illumination of the Spirit of God is indispensable to a correct perception of God’s own truth.²¹

Though Barton W. Stone and Walter Scott did not comment at length as to the empowerment of ministry by the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, they believed that each believer was a recipient of the Holy Spirit, and that effective ministering entailed the Spirit’s assistance.

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ENDNOTES

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- 3 *The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery in Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, ed. Charles Alexander Young (Chicago: The Christian Century, 1904), 20-1.
- 4 Mathes, 165.
- 5 Mathes, 342-3.
- 6 Barton W. Stone, *The Christian Messenger* 5 (July 1831), 164-7.
- 7 Barton W. Stone, *An Address to the Christian Churches*, 2nd ed., (1821), 82.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 82-3.
- 9 See *Walter Scott A Nineteenth-Century Evangelical*, ed. by Mark G. Toulouse, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001).
- 10 William Baxter, *The Life of Elder Walter Scott: 1796-1861* (Reprint, Indianapolis: Faith and Facts Press, 1992), 90.
- 11 Walter Scott, “Discourse on the Holy Spirit,” *The Evangelist* (1833), 26.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 26-7.
- 13 Walter Scott, *The Gospel Restored. A Discourse of The True Gospel of Jesus Christ, in Which the Facts, Principles, Duties, and Privileges of Christianity are Arranged, Defined, and Discussed, and The Gospel in its Various Parts Shewn to be Adapted to the Nature and Necessities of Man in His Present Condition* (Cincinnati: O. H. Donogh, 1836), 547.
- 14 Scott, “Discourse on the Holy Spirit,” 36-37.
- 15 Scott, article in *The Evangelist*, (1832): 56-8.
- 16 Scott, *The Gospel Restored*, 530.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 539.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 540-1.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 548.
- 20 Baxter, 324.
- 21 Scott, article in *The Evangelist*, (1842): 35.

