CB Samuel spoke at Tabor College for Tear on 23 July 2010 on the topic of Set Free: Justice and the Holy Spirit, this article is a summary of the talk based on notes by Rebecca Walker. While CB has developed a global ministry, teaching frequently in Asia, USA and Australia, he and his wife Selina remain strongly engaged in integral mission in India. They have a particular passion for building and strengthening younger leaders in their spiritual formation and their mission engagement. CB is Chairman of Micah Challenge India and serves on the Board of the UK-based Oxford Centre of Mission Studies. The mission of God and culture

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND EVANGELISM

In 1910 there was a conference in Edinburgh on mission and the evangelisation of our generation. 2010 is the centenary of that conference. A few years before the Edinburgh conference, in 1906, there was a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street, which became the beginning of western Pentecostalism. In 1903 there was a similar move of the Holy Spirit in India. There was also a Pentecost outpouring at the Mukti Mission before 1907. The Edinburgh conference in 1910, looking to evangelise their generation, completely missed or overlooked the beginning of the Pentecostal movement. It was not until the Lausanne conference in 1987, that the charismatic movement, at that time exemplified by John Wimber, was recognised as a movement of God by the evangelical community.

In the 1980s there was a great tendency to separate the charismata and evangelism in the understanding of the Holy Spirit. Today, the Holy Spirit is mostly talked about in reference to the spectacular gifts. However, Biblical teaching about the Holy Spirit is largely in the ideas of the Prophets. It is important to know that Old Testament prophetic tradition is steeped in the Spirit. In Luke 4, Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah, and then talks about the Holy Spirit as being the one who directs his steps into mission.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHARACTER OF GOD

The New Testament talks about the Holy Spirit as God’s engagement in society. What God is doing in society is done through his Spirit. The first mention of the Holy Spirit is in Exodus 31, in relation to a craftsman who built the tabernacle. God says to Moses that he has filled Bezalel the Son of Uri “with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft” (Exodus 31:3-5 ESV). This says a lot about the way God works. It is a liberating understanding of God at work in the ordinary. In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was given to people to fulfil the work of God, for the task of mission.

Today, often churches see the Holy Spirit in terms of his entertainment value. Many organisations that talk about the Holy Spirit are not engaged in mission. However one-third of missionaries in the world are Pentecostal. The prophets of the Bible were largely concerned with the issue of the character of God. “Holy” Spirit emphasises the character of God. Many people emphasise the power of God over the character of God. However, the Bible presents a God of character—“Holy”. What is more integral to the person of God, the gifts of the Spirit? Or the character of God? To speak of the Holy Spirit is to talk of the character of God in us. Justice is the character of God. Justice is not the program of God. We emphasise love as an issue of character, but justice is treated as
a program. However, biblically justice is the character of God, and the Holy Spirit is the spirit of justice.

Isaiah 11:1-9 - This passage is known as the servant songs. It says that the Messiah will be empowered by the Spirit of Justice. The Spirit of God brings reconciliation. We cannot be a community of justice without a concern for reconciliation. It is fashionable to talk about reconciliation without justice, however the two aspects need to be kept in balance. Reconciliation requires justice.

Isaiah 32:15-20 - The Holy Spirit is a spirit of renewal, he is the restorer of creation. He is the Spirit of Peace, the effect of righteousness and justice will be peace.

Isaiah 42:1-4 - A person anointed by the Holy Spirit would be known not for force or violence, but sensitivity, not “breaking bruised reeds”. This kind of person bends down to lift people up. Nowadays spirit-filled people are known better for power than care. The Spirit is essentially the Spirit of Freedom and the Spirit of Liberation.

Isaiah 44:3-5 - The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Blessing, not only to one generation, but to many generations. Wherever God moves, the blessing is also for the children’s children.

Isaiah 59:21 - The Spirit gives the equipping word. Those anointed with the Spirit bring words of encouragement, healing etc.

Isaiah 61:1-2 - The Spirit is given in the New Testament as first-fruits of what God is going to do. The mark of the inauguration of God’s kingdom is the Spirit’s presence; it is the beginning of Jubilee.

Ezekiel 37, 47:1-12 - Speaks of the Spirit is the indwelling person of God, not just empowerment for work. The Holy Spirit brings life (the river of life).

The Spirit of God in the Old Testament was the spirit of Justice bringing about God’s kingdom; the reconciliation in the body of Christ, and in the world. No division between Jew and Gentile, Man and Woman, Rich and Poor. The Biblical understanding of the Holy Spirit is different from our understanding where the Holy Spirit becomes entertainment in worship time.

In India the church is growing among 70% of the poor. It is nearly getting to the point where the church in India is predominantly made up of first generation Christians.

TO SPEAK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IS TO TALK OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN US. JUSTICE IS THE CHARACTER OF GOD. JUSTICE IS NOT THE PROGRAM OF GOD. WE EMPHASISE LOVE AS AN ISSUE OF CHARACTER, BUT JUSTICE IS TREATED AS A PROGRAM. HOWEVER, BIBLICALLY JUSTICE IS THE CHARACTER OF GOD, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE SPIRIT OF JUSTICE.