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God's Spirit in the World: Ecumenical & Cultural Essays

Christian Philosophical Studies, II

By
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FOREWORD

Many theologians have been convinced of the need in the Church today for the Holy Spirit to be given more attention. The question is not merely to add some more theoretical knowledge to what we already know about the Spirit's role in human life. Such greater knowledge does not necessarily equal greater spirituality and greater intimacy with the Holy Spirit. This is not to deny that profound theological knowledge can lead to a deeper relationship with God and to greater intimacy, but this does not happen as a logical necessity.

When we gain knowledge about God without personally responding to him, such stocking up on knowledge without applying it to our lives is in large measure vain and fruitless. One can have great abstract cerebral knowledge about the Spirit, but this does not mean much of a living relationship with him. What we all need in our life is, in the last resort, existential and experiential knowledge of his presence and action.

The fact is that on the intellectual level the early Church certainly knew less about the Holy Spirit than many people in the Church today. But those Christians knew the Spirit intimately. His presence and activity were manifest in and through their lives. In particular, the apostles' lives were lived out by his power, and they gave a clear witness that the disciples of Christ were continually led by the Spirit's inspiration.

This is a compelling lesson for us today. What we need is to be drawn into deeper communication with the Spirit, the living experience of his presence in our lives and in the whole world. It is true that many theological books have been recently written on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. However, if you have sufficient theological knowledge, you may lack the necessary courage to admit the evident discrepancy between what you know and how you live.

Whoever, then, wants to write an inspiring book on the Holy Spirit first feels sincerely intimidated by the topic itself, which truly exceeds our human abilities. How can I write well, convincingly, and modestly about such a sacred mystery without hesitating to venture upon this difficult task? My attempt seems even more difficult since I have spent many years delving into the spiritual treasures of the Eastern Church tradition. I have been marked by a profound apophatic consciousness of God's incomprehensibility. This means that I cannot fully know and understand God and his Spirit. Humans will never know the ineffable mystery of God's being. Our knowledge of him includes only what he himself has revealed to us. This was announced in the Old Testament revelation: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). The very fact that we cannot know God fully should not discourage but rather lead us to praise him with gratitude for his infiniteness, greatness, and goodness.

In this book I want to write about what God's Spirit does in our lives and in the world. This is certainly not intended to be an exhaustive study covering all possible aspects of this comprehensive topic. Encouraged by George McLean and some other friends, I decided to write this book, convinced that we need such a reflection today in the era of ecumenical dialogue and mutual openness. As Christians we can learn a lot from one another about how to live out our faith in the Holy Spirit more intensely and effectively and about how to invoke him in our daily lives. For this reason I write not only from the context of Western theology, but also draw inspiration frequently from the centuries-long tradition of the Christian East. My views on the Spirit's presence and activity are not determined by one particular denomination. I want to seek out what God has said about his Spirit within the context of the relationship with other believers and traditions.

I realize that reading this book may not always be easy. It is indeed a difficult task to combine some more theoretical and scholarly knowledge with a witness of practical experience of the Spirit's presence and activity. This integral attempt can discourage both those who expect more critical examination and assessment of our faith in the Holy Spirit and also those who expect only an experiential and charismatic knowledge of his presence.

From a theological point of view, one has to take into account also some controversial issues related to God's Spirit, e.g. the so-called *Filioque* addition to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, the concept of sin against the Holy Spirit, and some eschatological questions. This will be done in some chapters of this book, but each time with a clear indication of the existential dimension of those issues. It is not enough to speak of the Holy Spirit only in scholarly terms without insisting on the need for a personal living relationship with him. As we shall see in some outstanding Christian witnesses, great spirituality grows out of lives wholly surrendered to and dependent upon the Holy Spirit. When people experience more of his presence, they then become, by his power, different not only intellectually but also by witnessing in their real lives.

Before his death Jesus promised to ask the Father to give the disciples "another Advocate", "the Spirit of truth" who will remain with them for ever (Jn 14:16-17; JB). Then he explained: "but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you. (...) When the Advocate comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness. And you too will be witnesses..." (Jn 14:26; 15:26). The implications of these biblical statements will be reflected upon successively in the following chapters of this book.

Speaking about the Holy Spirit requires certain necessary linguistic forms concerning pronouns. This may cause a stylistic awkwardness for our contemporary sensitivity which attaches much importance to inclusive language. For this reason I have decided to use the traditional form "he"

without implying any gender specification, i.e. as a pure neutral form of reference. As a transsexual being, Gods transcends all gender differences existing in the created world.

I am most grateful to some people for their help in writing this book. I wish above all to express my warm thanks to those who corrected the manuscript and brushed up my English – to the late professor Edmund Gussmann from Gdansk who died unexpectedly on September 2, 2010, and to Ron E. Day from Philadelphia. They both have been most generous with their time and advice. They paid detailed attention to the text commenting very helpfully on the whole work. Owing to the precious help and support of my friends, this book on the Holy Spirit can now be published and, hopefully, find some readers outside Poland. I want to thank warmly also George McLean, my editor, who has accepted this study to be published by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

Waclaw Hryniewicz, OMI
Lublin, Easter, 2011

CHAPTER I

THE GREAT PEDAGOGUE OF FAITH

The spiritual life of Christians is to remain in a lasting relationship with the Spirit of God. The New Testament speaks about the life “in Christ” on the one hand, and about the life “in the Spirit” or “according to the Spirit” on the other. The Christian is a being for whom Christ has become the point of reference in his or her life (cf. Phil 1:21). It is, however, the Holy Spirit who makes the mystery of Christ penetrate deeply into the totality of our existence. Through him this process of interiorization can take place in the heart of every, i.e. in the very depth of our humanity, where the fundamental orientation of life is determined by our decisions. It is the same Spirit who “reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10). Since the times of St Augustine, the tradition of the Western Church has considered the Spirit to be “the inner Master” (*Magister internus*)¹. The Spirit teaches the faithful, illuminates and transfigures their lives. In the Syrian *Acts of Thomas* the Spirit was called “the great Pedagogue of faith”, “the Illuminator who urges us to come to know Christ, reveals the hidden treasures, gives light to those who dwell in darkness”².

The Other Comforter

Before his death Jesus encouraged the disciples by telling them that “another Advocate” (Greek: *állos Paráklētos*) would be sent by the Father when he leaves this world. He implied in this way that he does not cease to be the Advocate himself. The word *Paráklētos* means literally someone called to stand close by as our defender, counsellor, comforter and supporter. Jesus himself asked the Father to send the Paraclete, “the Spirit of truth”. This was his own *epiklēsis* (Greek: *epikalēō* – call, call upon, invoke), the prayer addressed to the Father which constituted the prototype of the epiclesis shaped and developed later in the liturgy of the Eastern Church.

Jesus added that his departure will be to the advantage of all believers. “I must tell you the truth: it is for your own good that I am going because unless I go, the Advocate will not come to you” (Jn 16:7). The separation will be only temporary. He leaves his disciples to “prepare a place” for them (cf. Jn 14:2-3), but being with the Father he will not remain indifferent to their prayers (cf. Jn 14:12-14). The greatest reassurance is that

¹ Augustine, *De Magistro* XI,36–XIV,46. PL 32,1215-1220; *Sermo* 179,1. PL 38, 966.

² *Acta syr. Thomae*, 121,157, in: *Acta apocrypha* II,2, Leipzig 1903, 231, 267.

“Another Comforter” will come and be with them forever (cf. Jn 14:16). The very word “another” suggests someone who will be just like the first, and not of a different kind. The One who will come will be just like Jesus himself.

Already in the Book of Isaiah we read words often quoted in the liturgical texts at Christmas time: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called «Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace»” (Is 9:6). Here we see the Son referred to as the “Counsellor” and even the “Father”. This shows that God is really incomprehensible, incomparable to any other being, exceeding all our human concepts. He is outside our ability to grasp and categorize him, outside the realm of our fragile existence. All metaphors and analogies, although helpful, cannot express his true nature.

No wonder that the Holy Spirit was called by Jesus the “Advocate” or “Counsellor” like himself. In later Christian tradition, as we shall soon see, God’s Spirit will be presented and invoked even as true “Mother”. What a rich variety of meanings which keep us from oversimplifying a divine mystery!

When the disciples heard Jesus’ words about the Spirit-Paraclete, it was difficult for them to grasp their real meaning. They may have asked: How could it be better to exchange a human Jesus talking, eating and laughing with them for an invisible Spirit? Two thousands of years later most of us would also prefer a physical Jesus to a Spirit we cannot see and touch. But the Master himself reassured the disciples that it was better for them to have the Holy Spirit. He told them not to worry but instead to trust him: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still, and trust in me” (Jn 14:1).

After his death and resurrection Jesus told his followers to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Did they realize whom they were waiting for and what his descent would be like? One can reasonably doubt it. But they trusted their Master’s promise. In fact the fulfillment of this promise must have shocked all of them. No one had ever seen and experienced before the amazing power of the Spirit.

The life of the early Christians was gradually showing that it was indeed to their advantage to have this “another Comforter-Paraclete”. During Jesus’ public activity the disciples lived beside him and accompanied him. When he left they started to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Something astonishing has happened. Being indwelt by the Spirit is not a distant connection. The striking news is that people can become his dwelling place. The Spirit of God *inside* human beings!

What does this really mean? Receiving by faith the promise of the Holy Spirit we become his temple: “Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God” (1 Cor 6:19). As we live our daily life, the Spirit is dwelling in us. We are not just people living our life only by human energy. The Spirit of God is in

humans not as a remote force, but takes up residence in our lives. That is why Jesus said it was better for him to go to the Father and the Spirit to come. A distant connection has been replaced for people of each generation by an intimate relationship and familiarity with the Spirit.

This evangelical truth should be internalized, impact our inner being and manifest itself on our faces outwardly. But so often it is difficult to know from our lifestyle and actions that we are followers of Jesus. It happens that many unbelieving people seem in fact more compassionate, benevolent, joyful and at peace than those who openly declare themselves to be Christians – people “born again” through baptism, participating in the Lord’s Supper.

The Indwelling of the Spirit

The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians some striking words that call for reflection: “And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here. It is all God’s work” (2 Cor 5:17-18). What is this “new creation”? One can say it is the beginning of a new personal mode of existence in which the presence and self-communication of the Holy Spirit manifest themselves to human beings. Nobody maintains that Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection, as well as the Spirit’s descent on the Pentecost brought nothing new into the world. The newness, I believe, consists in the fact that the salvific mission of the two divine persons is effected directly in the secrets of the human freedom. Although real, it is not yet the full and ultimate gift of God’s salvation. The Bible calls it the gift of adoption as children of God and the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit “in our hearts” (Gal 4:6). The Apostle of the Nations declares openly: “The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God” (Rom 8:16). This Spirit truly “has made his home in you” and is “living in you” (Rom 8:9.11; cf. 1 Cor 3:16). John’s Gospel affirms with equal strength: “he is with you, he is in you” (Jn 14:17).

The concepts of indwelling and abiding express not only a simple and neutral presence, but also a certain closeness, familiarity, union and permanence. It is much more than a passing breath or momentary inspiration, as might be suggested by the New Testament comparison of the Spirit to the wind (cf. Jn 3:8). Rather what is denoted is the reality of being fully penetrated by the Spirit. In fact, a Christian takes part in what was originally the privilege of Christ himself, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1). A Christian can thus become a human being “full of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5; cf. 7:55; 11:23). The Evangelist Luke often speaks about people “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 1:15.41.67; Ac 2:4; 4:8.31; 9:17; 13:52).

Theology seems to be helpless in its endeavours to make more comprehensible the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Many explanations have been put forward, quite often very complicated and controversial. Theologians have wanted to define and make more precise the reality which

by its very nature is elusive and indeterminable. God's life is communicated to humans as a gift. The new relationship which emerges between God and us is very often linked with the Holy Spirit by the Greek Fathers who follow the Scripture. Through centuries the Western tradition was inclined to give priority to the concept of appropriation, i.e. attributing to the Holy Spirit the property of the indwelling in the faithful, common to all the persons of the Holy Trinity.

One can easily notice a weakness of this way of thinking in comparison with the realism of biblical statements and the teaching of the Eastern Church Fathers. It is not enough to ascribe certain actions to particular divine persons. The Holy Spirit inhabits us in a way proper to this person, without excluding the other persons. This fully personal, sanctifying and transfiguring inhabitation is a particular attribute of the Spirit who is a personal source whereby God reaches the depths of our humanity. This permeating activity of the Spirit could be symbolically compared to oil which penetrates the skin of the human body and helps to cure the wounds. That is why St John reassures us in his letter: "you have been anointed by the Holy One", "you have not lost the anointing that he gave you (...), the anointing he gave teaches you everything" (1 Jn 2:20.27).

The realism of incarnation means that by becoming a human being the Son of God personally entered the history of salvation. The descent and the action of the Holy Spirit in the world have also a fully personal character. In consequence human persons open themselves up, under the influence of the Spirit, to the acting presence of the Holy Trinity. The common action of the divine persons in the world does not exclude personal differentiation in their ways of acting.

According to the Eastern Fathers, God's common activity follows from the interpenetration of the divine persons (*perichōrēsis*). In this kind of theological thinking the undeniable priority belongs to the person himself, rather than to the divine nature as such. In contrast, Western theology went a separate way by stressing the divine nature common to all persons. This amounted to parting with the early personalistic approach. Consequently, grace was conceived of as a created reality (*gratia creata*) in the light of the philosophical category of accident which is inherent in the human soul (*accidens inhaerens animae*), and therefore as something added to it. This conception contained a hidden risk of reification, i.e. of regarding grace and the gift of divine childhood, as some sort of object, and not as a personal relation of benevolence and friendship. Grace was understood as participation in the divine nature itself. From this point of view, the relationship exists between the created beings and the divine nature, and not between humans and divine persons.

Contemporary Roman Catholic theology slowly abandons this way of understanding grace and the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit. It clearly opts for the personalistic conception of grace as participation in the life of the divine persons. This process is being shaped by a deeper reflection on the teaching of the Holy Scripture and by adopting the Trinitarian theology

of the Eastern Fathers in which priority belongs to the concept of the "person".

As indicated earlier, a discussion of grace entails a serious risk of reifying the most precious personal gift of God's benevolence. Grace should not be detached from the personal action of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern tradition speaks simply about "the grace of the Holy Spirit", about the uncreated grace which is identified with the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is always of an eschatological nature. During our earthly life the Spirit is only "what the Father had promised" (Ac 1:4), "the pledge of our inheritance" (Eph 1:14). The Apostle Paul writes only about "the first-fruits of the Spirit" (Ro 8:23) and about "the pledge of the Spirit" (2 Cor 5:5). The fullness of the understanding and experience of the Holy Spirit, as noted by St Basil the Great, belongs to the life of the coming age³.

The Motherly Role of the Holy Spirit

The Christian tradition speaks about the truly motherly role of God's Spirit in human life. It is not an easy task to determine precisely what that role entails. Human participation in divine life is, here on earth, always incomplete and imperfect. In the divine pedagogy the Holy Spirit fulfils a role similar to what in the life of a child belongs to his or her mother. It is the Spirit who urges us to address God as our heavenly Father: "The proof that you are sons is that God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts: the Spirit that cries, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal 4:6; cf. Rom 8:14-16). On the one hand, the Spirit reveals Jesus as Lord: "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). On the other hand, the Spirit makes him known as "the eldest of many brothers" (Rom 8:29). That pedagogy of the Spirit extends over the whole of human life. It is present in everyday activities and also exerts an intimate influence on the inner secrets of the human spirit. It is here that one can see a close connexion between the patristic concept of "the inner Master" (*Magister internus*) and the idea of "the pedagogy of the Spirit." What is involved here is not just a purely intellectual influence, but rather a fully personal action that embraces the whole human being and transforms it from the inside. This can indeed be compared to the intimate influence of mother on the consciousness of her child.

In the light of the Scripture, God is neither masculine nor feminine but a supreme being that totally transcends any differentiation of gender, i.e. any division into male or female. The Bible gives witness to this transcendence. It speaks about God as Father, but at the same time it attributes to God some maternal features. It displays certain traits which correspond to masculinity or femininity in the human world. The God revealed in the moving words of the Scripture is God full of tenderness,

³ *Contra Eunomium* 3,7. PG 29,669.

care, compassion and forgiveness, similar both to a tender earthly father (cf. Ps 103:13; Is 63:15-16), and to a gentle and loving mother:

Is Ephraim my dear son?
Is he my darling child?
For as often as I speak against him,
I do remember him still.
Therefore my heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord (Jer 31:20).

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son. (...)
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them up in my arms;
but they did not know that I healed them.
I led them with cords of compassion,
with the bands of love,
and I became to them as one
who eases the yoke on their jaws,
and I bent down to them and fed them (Hos 11:1.3-4).

It is particularly evident in the Book of Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah:

But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me,
my Lord has forgotten me."
Can a woman forget her sucking child,
that she should have no compassion
on the son of her womb?
Even these may forget you,
yet I will not forget you (Is 49:14-15).

As one whom his mother comforts,
So I will comfort you (Is 66:13).

Very significant with reference to God are the words: "As one whom his mother comforts". Tenderness is a distinguishing female feature. The love of God resembles the love of an earthly mother. Let us point out a certain terminological coincidence in the Old Testament vocabulary which gives special weight to that feature. The word *reḥem* means a maternal womb, the inside parts of the body (*rah^amīm*), and at the same time it expresses truly motherly tenderness, affection, kindness, goodness, patience, forbearance, love, and mercy. This peculiar love results from the deepest closeness, unity and bond which connect a mother and her child.

In the terminology of the Old Testament the two terms deserve special attention, as explained by John Paul II in the encyclical letter *Dives in misericordia*. First, the term *ḥesed* indicates an attitude of profound

goodness, of love that gives and grace more powerful than sin and betrayal. The two persons do not just wish each other well. They are also faithful to each other by virtue of an interior commitment and faithfulness to themselves. This faithfulness to the unfaithful people is, on God's part, fidelity to himself. Let us now look at the second term: *rah^amim* compared with that of *hesed*.

While *hesed* highlights the marks of fidelity to self and of “responsibility for one's own love” (which are in a certain sense masculine characteristics), *rah^amim*, in its very root, denotes the love of a mother (*rehem* = mother's womb). From the deep and original bond – indeed the unity – that links a mother to her child there springs a particular relationship to the child, a particular love. Of this love one can say that it is completely gratuitous, not merited, and that in this aspect it constitutes an interior necessity: an exigency of the heart. It is, as it were, a “feminine” variation of the masculine fidelity to self expressed by *hesed*. Against this psychological background, *rah^amim* generates a whole range of feelings, including goodness and tenderness, patience and understanding, that is, readiness to forgive.⁴

Thus it is already in the Hebrew Bible that we have, as the encyclical puts it, “a specific and obviously anthropomorphic ‘psychology’ of God: the image of his anxious love, which in contact with evil, and in particular with the sin of the individual and of the people, is manifested as mercy”⁵.

All this could be easily applied in a particular way to God's Spirit. The love of God is faithful thanks to the fatherly fidelity and loyalty, and also owing to the mysterious force of motherhood attributed so forcefully, as we shall soon see, to the Holy Spirit by the early Christian tradition. This love manifests itself in rescuing people from danger, in forgiving their sins and in the readiness to fulfil God's promises despite human infidelity: “I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them” (Hos 14:4).

The New Testament contains a richness of expressions and depth of meanings similar to that found in the Books of the Old Testament. One can discover an admirable synthesis of truly divine features in the attitude of Jesus “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1), capable of deep compassion and emotion: “And when he saw the crowds he felt sorry for them because

⁴ *Dives in misericordia*, 4, footnote 52. The Greek terminology in the Septuagint does not offer all the semantic meanings and nuances of the original Hebrew text.

⁵ *Ibidem*

they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mt 9:36; cf. Mk 6:34). On another occasion when he met the two blind men of Jericho, “Jesus felt pity for them and touched their eyes, and immediately their sight returned and they followed him” (Mt 20:34; cf. Mk 1:41). He showed similar emotions when he saw the dead son of the widow of Nain being carried out for burial, and he restored him to life (Lk 7:13). At the tomb of the dead Lazarus whom he loved so much, Jesus was in great distress and wept (see Jn 11:33-36).

It is worth recalling here that on occasion the Hebrew Bible clearly identifies God’s Spirit with wisdom: “Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given wisdom and sent thy holy Spirit from on high?” (Wis 9:17). This wisdom appears to be a female reality: “She will come to meet him [the man who fears the Lord] like a mother, and like the wife of his youth she will welcome him” (Sir 15:2). In actual fact, some Church Fathers prior to the First Council of Nicaea (325) followed the tendency to identify the Holy Spirit with wisdom⁶.

The female and motherly features of God were connected, in a particular way, with the person of the Holy Spirit by the Syrian tradition. In the Hebrew and Syriac languages the very word “spirit” (*ruah*, *ruho*) is of feminine gender, which appears as masculine only occasionally. No wonder that it is precisely in the areas of Judeo-Christian and Syrian culture that the Holy Spirit was often addressed as Mother⁷. The maternal feature in God’s image becomes most clearly known in the person of the Spirit. In the apocryphal *Gospel of Hebrews* Jesus utters the following words: “today I was taken by my Mother, the Holy Spirit, (...) and brought on the great mountain Tabor”⁸.

In the writings of ancient Syriac authors the Holy Spirit was often depicted with feminine and maternal traits. In the Syrian liturgical books the word “Spirit” (*Ruho*) appears as masculine in the context of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity. It is striking, however, that the feminine gender is used when the liturgy points to the specific role of the Spirit in relation to human beings: the Spirit (she) speaks through the prophets, gives birth to neophytes in baptism, opens the gate of repentance to sinners, encourages martyrs, prepared the crown of glory for the righteous and for those who have defeated the enemy.

⁶ See Irenaeus, *Demonstratio*, 10. SCh 62,46; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* I,7; II,15.

⁷ Cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syrian Tradition*, Cambridge 1975, 312-320.

⁸ *The Gospel of Hebrews*, fragm. 4 preserved by Origen. In the fragment 23, quoted by Hieronymus, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as Mother during his baptism in Jordan. Also in the Gnostic apocryphal writing of James from Nag Hammadi Jesus calls himself the son of the Holy Spirit. Among the Judeo-Christian Ebonites the Spirit is female as well (*Elenchus* 9,13). See J. Daniélou, *Théologie du judéo-christianisme*, Paris 1958, 33,77.

In this way the liturgical texts give a sense of importance to the idea that the Holy Spirit bestows special strength upon the witnesses of the Gospel in the world, encourages and comforts them in confessing their faith. The words of the Spirit resemble words full of motherly affection. In the Syrian liturgy one can often find the comparison of the Holy Spirit to a merciful Mother⁹. An early Syrian author Aphrahat (ca. 260/275–ca. 345) calls the Spirit Mother of those who decided to remain unmarried. They should “love and worship God as their Father and the Holy Spirit as their Mother”.¹⁰

In the subsequent Christian tradition these views ceased to be presented with equal distinctness and forcefulness. They practically disappear giving way to analogies between the formation of Eve from Adam's rib and the origin of the Church from the side of Christ on the cross when he “gave up his spirit” (Jn 19:30). These words of the Gospel started to be interpreted in pneumatological sense, in consonance with the Greek original: *parédoken tò Pneuma* (note the definite article!), meaning that Jesus “gave up his Spirit”. In this view the transmission of the Holy Spirit took place on the cross thereby becoming the moment of the birth of the Church.

In fact, the Greek and Latin Fathers and other Church writers began to pay more and more attention to the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit, thus giving rise to the centuries-old controversy on the *Filioque* issue between the East and the West. No interest was anymore shown to the question of maternal features of the Spirit, so prominent earlier in the Syrian tradition. This impoverishing limitation in the development of later tradition is worth pondering. When one tradition turns out to be in some respect weaker, poorer or too abstract, another one could make up for it. This should not be overlooked, especially when a real opportunity arises to enrich Christian theology and spirituality.

The maternal function of the Holy Spirit in our spiritual life deserves serious reflection. It constitutes a sort of supplement to the Christian vision of God and helps to overcome certain one-sidedness that characterises the traditional teaching as shaped during the past centuries. Theologians attributed to God the features of the most perfect and merciful fatherhood (cf. Lk 15:11-32) and also the traits of a “tough masculinity”, depicting the Almighty God as the severe *Pantokrátor*, Warrior, and the powerful King of all. In fact, God is of course neither man nor woman, but reveals paternal and maternal qualities at the same time. It is not without reason that the Bible emphasises so strongly the transcendence of God as the ultimate reality, opposed to the sexual differentiation among created beings. These certainly are no minor issues for the future of the Christian faith and spirituality.

⁹ Cf. E.P. Siman, *L'expérience de l'Esprit par l'Église d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche*. Paris 1971, 155, 211-212.

¹⁰ *Demonstratio* XVII. *Patrologia Syriaca* (PSyr) I,839.

Alibis of the Holy Spirit

A tendency developed in the Catholic religious mentality of the last centuries, which was aptly described by the French theologian Yves Congar as “substitution and alibi for the Holy Spirit”.¹¹ The maternal function of the Holy Spirit has been replaced by Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, and her special place in the Church. This development has generated a lot of criticism among Protestant theologians, who object that the Catholics attribute to Mary what in reality belongs to the Holy Spirit. This concerns, among other things, such devout titles given to her as “Mother of mercy, hope and comfort”; “Mother of Perpetual Help”, “Consolatrix”, “Refuge,” and “Advocate” before the severe Judge of the world. In one of the old devotions to Our Lady of Perpetual Help she is addressed in the following way:

O Mother of Perpetual Help, thou art the dispenser of all the gifts which God grants to us, miserable sinners (...). Thou art the advocate of the most wretched and abandoned sinners, who have recourse to thee. In thy hands I place my eternal salvation, and to thee I entrust my soul. (...) For if thou protect me, I fear nothing; not from my sins, because thou wilt obtain for me the pardon of them; not from the devils, because thou art more powerful than all hell together; nor even from Jesus, my Judge, because by one prayer from thee He will be appeased.¹²

Protestant sensitivity can easily be hurt and upset by ascribing to Our Lady the spiritual motherhood towards all the faithful and by comparing her inner guidance to the inspirations coming from God’s Spirit. These are no insignificant or unfounded objections. They are born of the fear that Catholics are inclined to accord to Mary such actions that properly belong only to the One whom the Gospel calls the *Paraclete*, the Advocate (cf. Jn 14:16.26), “the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father” (Jn 15:26).

Contemporary mariology, both Catholic and Orthodox, shows strong links between the Holy Spirit and Mary in the history of salvation. We become more and more aware that one is not allowed to ascribe to the Mother of Jesus an immediate and independent role in the life of grace, because it is the work of God alone, and especially of the Holy Spirit. Mary’s exemplary influence, as an example of faith and trust in God, is indeed the work of the Spirit, the author of the miracle of the incarnation. She was the first to receive Jesus Christ and to give him to the world. In this

¹¹ Y. Congar, *Je crois en l’Esprit Saint*, tome I, Paris 1979, 219-226.

¹² See *The New Marian Missal for Daily Mass*, by Sylvester P. Juergens, S.M., Leeds 1966, p. 1438-1439.

respect she can be regarded as the incomparable model for the Church and for every individual faithful.

In the life of grace the supreme priority belongs to the risen Christ and to his Spirit. Both the Catholics and the Orthodox believe that the salvific action of Christ and of the Spirit does not exclude intercession and exemplary influence of Mary, who as the first among the humans was so highly favoured by God as to be endowed with the fullness of grace (cf. Lk 1:28). However, her discrete role remains always in total dependence on the sovereign action of the Spirit. One should not attribute to her what belongs to God alone.

In this context the witness of Orthodox Mariology should be paid particular attention. It praises Mary as “the One bearing the Spirit” (*Pneumatophōra*, in Old Church Slavonic: *Dukhonósitsa*), Protectress, Guide (*Hodigíttria*). She is regarded as an ideal personification of pure and holy humanity, and therefore called “the Patroness of humanism”.¹³ In this sense, being filled with the Holy Spirit, she can rightly be called Mother and Protectress of our human pilgrimage to God. Truly ecumenical spirituality requires mutual penetration of awareness, correction of any one-sidedness and complementarity of views.

¹³ See J. Klinger, *O istocie prawosławia* (On the Essence of Orthodoxy), Warszawa 1983, 209-247 (An Outline of Orthodox mariology), esp. 238.

CHAPTER II

THE CONTINUING PENTECOST? VARIOUS GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

At the beginning of the 20th century the Orthodox theologian and philosopher, Fr. Pavel Florensky (+1937) claimed that the knowledge and experience of the Holy Spirit was insufficiently present in the Church and in the daily life of Christians. He went on to indicate some defects in theology and worship of the Spirit in the Orthodox Church as well. The following quotation explains his reasons for doing so:

As long as the history continues, it is only moments of illumination by the Spirit that are possible. Only some individuals come to know the Paraclete (Advocate) in certain moments, and then ascend beyond time into eternity. Time ceases to exist for them, and history comes to a halt. The full experience of the Holy Spirit is unattainable for the body of the faithful as a whole, in the same way as it is beyond the reach for any individual believer in the entirety of his life. The victory of Christ over death and corruption has not yet been fully assimilated by the created beings. In consequence there is no integral knowledge either¹.

One can infer from these words that Florensky attributed the living knowledge of the Spirit to some exceptional people only, who additionally attain it through momentary illuminations. These people are, according to him, “the chosen of heavens”. But even their knowledge of God’s Spirit is still imperfect, hidden, intimate and inexpressible. Otherwise this knowledge would totally transfigure and dazzle the human being by its evidence, and would turn the chosen ones into Spirit-bearing, or truly “pneumatophoric(al)” creatures. That would signify the coming of the fullness of time and the end of human history, where there will be no more delay and “the time of waiting is over” (Rev 10:7). But it is only the last events that will bring the fullness of the revelation of the Spirit. At the present time the Spirit acts in secret, out of sight, imparting to the elect the presentiment of the final transfiguration.

¹ P. Florenskyi, *Stolp i utverzhenie istiny. Opyt pravoslavnoj fieodiceei v dvenadcati pis'mach*, Moskva 1914; French translation by C. Andronikof: *La colonne et le fondement de la vérité. Essai d' une théodicée orthodoxe en douze lettres*, Lausanne 1975, 79.

Invocation Addressed to the Spirit

Florensky may have exaggerated somewhat in limiting the experience of the Spirit to the chosen people only, but he was right when he drew attention to the insufficiencies of the theology of the Holy Spirit in the Church. During the past decades this objection has in fact often been raised in Christian Churches and now the situation has changed for the better. The question remains, however, whether Christians pay enough attention to, and experience with due intensity, the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Needless to say, in the history of Christianity there were people bestowed with the profound knowledge of the Spirit due to their inner experience. They strived for a certain familiarity with the Spirit (I will come back to this issue later on), but even in this case their aim was not the eschatological fullness of the Spirit, but only “the first-fruits” (Rom 8:23) and “the pledge of the Spirit” (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). Let us stress again that the fullness of knowledge and experience of the Spirit belongs to the life of the world to come.

Are the Christians of our time able to rejoice even now over “the first-fruits of the Spirit” and to expect gratefully the fullness of his revelation at the end of time? The Church in her prayers often invokes his coming. In the encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (par. 18) John Paul II wrote:

The present-day Church seems to repeat with ever greater fervour and with holy insistence: “Come, Holy Spirit! Come! Come! Heal our wounds, our strength renew; On our dryness pour your dew; Wash the stains of guilt away; Bend the stubborn heart and will; Melt the frozen, warm the chill; Guide the steps that go astray”².

This appeal to the Spirit, intended precisely to obtain the Spirit, is the answer to all the “materialisms” of our age. It is these materialisms that give birth to so many forms of insatiability in the human heart. This appeal is making itself heard on various sides and seems to be bearing fruit also in different ways. Can it be said that the Church is not alone in making this appeal? Yes it can, because the “need” for what is spiritual is expressed also by people who are outside the visible confines of the Church. (...) This invocation addressed to the Spirit to obtain the Spirit is really a constant self-insertion into the full magnitude of the mystery of the Redemption, in which Christ, united with the Father and with each man, continually communicates to us the Spirit who places

² Sequence for Pentecost.

within us the sentiments of the Son and directs us towards the Father³.

However, the *kénosis* of the Spirit may continue for a long time in the life of believers, that is to say the state of his self-imposed “emptying”, depriving of power and laying aside his divine glory. In this way his presence becomes hidden or even forgotten. This is similar to the *kénosis* of Christ who “did not cling to his equality with God but emptied himself to assume the condition of a slave” (Phil 2:6-7).

Those who are sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit and experience it encourage all the faithful to revive their spiritual awareness, as it is accessible to everyone. Christian spirituality is by its nature Pentecostal. In the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed the Church professes her faith in the Holy Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life”. According to the encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* (par. 1) of John Paul II, the Church drawing on the experience of Pentecost “has proclaimed since the earliest centuries her faith in the Holy Spirit, as *the giver of life*, the one in whom the inscrutable Triune God communicates himself to human beings, constituting in them the source of eternal life”. This Spirit is indeed the giver of diverse gifts and charismata.

Spiritual Charismata and the Highest Gift of Love

God continuously supports the Church through many gifts (*charísmata*), ministries (*diakoníai*) and different ways of acting (*energémata*) among the faithful. These gifts are communicated “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7 NIV) so that salvation could be more effectively realised in each person. There exists a great variety of the gifts of the Spirit. The apostle Paul enumerates some of them (cf. 1 Cor 12:4-12; Rom 12,6-8). He reassures the faithful: “you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed” (1 Cor 1:7). A little later he adds: “everybody has his own particular gift from God” (1 Cor 7:7), and elsewhere explains: “Our gifts differ according to the grace given us” (Rom 12:6).

The concept of charisma should not be understood too narrowly, as often happens in certain movements of the charismatic renewal nowadays. It is not only the question of the visible manifestations of the presence and activity of the Spirit. One cannot reduce the charismata to such unusual phenomena as speaking languages, prophesying or healing the sick. According to St Paul, speaking tongues and prophesy are “spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 12:1: 14,1) which should benefit the community (cf. 1 Cor 12:28-29; 14:6.9.13.19). Otherwise, “if I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing”. And even more forcefully: “If I have the gift of prophesy, understanding all

³ Cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6.

the mysteries, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all” (1 Cor 13:1-2). This is both a serious warning and a strong encouragement. The Apostle adds frankly and without false modesty: “I thank God that I have a greater gift of tongues than all of you, but when I am in the presence of the community I would rather say five words that mean something than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:18-19).

The charismata do not belong exclusively to one particular group of believers. Everybody can have a share in them for the common good and the growth of the Church. To reduce charismata to the unusual and exceptional phenomena would run against the teaching of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul speaks unambiguously about such *ordinary gifts* of the Spirit as teaching, encouraging people, contributing generously to the needs of others (cf. Rom 12:7-8 NIV), sharing wisdom, knowledge and faith, recognising spirits, helping others and being good leaders (cf. 1 Cor 12:8-10.28). This list could be extended to include also the gift of prayer, the ability to preside over the celebration of the Eucharist in such a way that it becomes a real mystagogy and an unforgettable experience for all those who take part in it.

It should be remembered that all charismata are aimed at the still “greater gift” (1 Cor 12:31) of love, a way that is better than any other gift. The whole of chapter 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians sheds light on what the Apostle says in chapters 12 and 14 with regard to the proper use of the gifts of the Spirit. The life of a Christian becomes truly charismatic when it is inspired, permeated and directed by love, which is the greatest charisma, the supreme norm and superlative quality of the human existence. No fascination with unusual charismatic gifts could substitute for it. “The judgement to begin at the household of God” (1 Pt 4:17) will ultimately be a judgement concerning active love and mercy (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

The great tradition of eastern spirituality recommends special consideration, sobriety and unceasing vigilance. It cautions against the inordinate desire for extraordinary experiences and gifts of the Spirit. Already St Paul who warned the Christian community in Corinth of the same danger and treated such desire as yielding to the “flesh” (*sárx*) and psychological greediness. The gifts of the Spirit entail a certain likeness to the paschal mystery in that they require purification and submission to the inspirations of the Spirit. That is the reason why the ancient parallel version of the second invocation of the Lord’s Prayer according to Luke, instead of the words “Your Kingdom come”, has the following formulation: “Let your Holy Spirit come down upon us and purify us”⁴. This means that the Holy Spirit appears here as the synonym of the Kingdom: wherever there is the Spirit, there is the Kingdom of God.

⁴ Lk 11:2. Cf. *The Greek New Testament*, edited by Kurt Aland et al., Third Edition, United Bible Societies, 1979, 255.

When people receive the gift of the Spirit they may experience a sort of existential passage from spiritual death to resurrection. It is in these categories that the Apostle of the Nations experienced his own conversion and baptism in the Holy Spirit (cf. Ac 9:8.9.17-19). It is in the same way that he understood the profound change of life through baptism of all the Christians, and so preached it to others (cf. Rom 6:3-11).

Contemporary Movements of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal

In the era of growing secularization and “privatization” of religious life, some movements of spiritual and charismatic renewal have gained importance. These were initiated by Protestant pentecostalism as early as the very beginning of the 20th century. Their aim is to counteract the tendency to shape Christian life in total oblivion of the activity of the Holy Spirit. In this way they awaken the need for deeper religiosity, both individual and communal, characterized by spiritual warmth and spontaneity. A new style of life is being shaped, pervaded by the experience of God’s living presence and by the activity of the Spirit among the disciples of the risen Christ. It is precisely this experience of God’s power acting through his Spirit that becomes one of the most distinctive characteristics of charismatic spirituality. This sort of spirituality is alien to rational skepticism suspicious of the very possibility of God’s intervention into human life through the gift of languages or healing. The charismatic renewal movement gives a new dimension to Christian life by introducing into it some prophetic and pentecostal elements.

Looking back at the history of Christianity one can say that it has been marked by the expectation of the continuous Pentecost, particularly dear to eastern Christians. The charismatic movement fulfils this expectation and allows the individual to experience the reality of Christ’s promises. It is evident that the movement often goes beyond institutional church forms and causes certain tensions. In sum it is, however, a beneficial tension for the Church herself, because it points out the limits of the institution in what concerns the sovereign action of the Spirit, invoked by the praying community of the faithful. Christian spirituality has an undeniable right to individual initiative and spiritual experience. An ecclesiology based on the biblical category of communion (*koinonía*) promotes the development of spirituality which respects the variety of gifts, initiatives and experiences, of the individual.

Within the current of charismatic renewal, the experience of God’s presence plays a major role. This is undeniably valuable, as the possibilities of the human perception of the mystery of God exceed the purely rational sphere. The spirituality shaped by the movement of renewal distances itself from rationalism and avoids its pitfalls. Christianity is lived out from inside, in direct contact with the mystery. This justifies the stress placed on the feeling of freedom, spontaneity, simplicity and the role of the heart. The preaching of the word of God and the liturgy celebrated in an atmosphere of

joy, thankfulness and personal commitment follow from this line of conduct. This commitment finds its external expression in the role of the body: hands raised up, singing, applauding, laying on of hands. In this respect the spirituality of the charismatics reassesses all dimensions in a human being, which had been neglected to some extent in a religion with too much order and dependence on the exigencies of the intellect.

This situation creates new channels for handing down the Gospel, but at the same time it brings a danger of anti-intellectualism and of making the faith shallow. History shows that doctrines without prophetic insight easily degenerate into legalism, just as prophetism without sound teaching quickly becomes an illusion. What is needed is mutual complementarity and correction. Although knowledge and understanding are not the highest values, they should not be disregarded or neglected. Christ often reproached his disciples for the lack of understanding or courage to ask questions. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom without understanding, the evil one comes and carries off what was sown in his heart" (Mt 13:19). Personal experience and its transmission require constant deepening of the faith and reflection on its content. Spoken words, witness, and spiritual experience cannot become values in themselves either. Their aim is to reveal the mystery of God's presence and his work among people. The Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movement, concentrated on the person of the Holy Spirit, calls for the Churches to take a privileged place in his activity. The Church is a community of charismata and ministries. The renewal movement should be regarded as a special grace offered by God to our times. Who, then, could dare to oppose God (cf. Ac 11:17)? The Apostle encouraged the Thessalonians: "Test everything. Hold on to the good" (1 Thess 5:21 NIV).

A specific theology of the spontaneous, direct, and personal relationship of the believer with God lies at the basis of the charismatic experience. His word is found in the Scripture, and his presence is lived out in the immediacy of the experience. This directness is a characteristic feature of the familiarity of many charismatic Christians with the Holy Spirit. It is true that God can enter the course of human life and guide it according to his plan for the good of other people. However, this conviction should not turn into total naivety and credulity which would reduce, in effect, to a claim that the Holy Spirit is at one's command. Such an attitude would be entirely alien to and incompatible with the great and sober-minded tradition of Christian spirituality. The Holy Spirit is, as we confess in the Creed, the sovereign "Lord and giver of life". Nobody has given us the power to claim God to be at our disposal by a momentary decision of our own will, totally neglecting human reason and effort.

A naïve faith in the possibility of a direct relationship of a human being with God and in the immediate action of the Spirit can lead to serious abuses and irresponsible behavior. One should not understand literally certain words of the Scripture, take them out of their context and ascribe everything to God. Yves Congar gives a very telling example of such

credulity. One of the young adepts of the charismatic renewal wants to go on retreat by hitchhiking. He waits for the occasion but as no car stops he begins to pray: "O Lord, if you wish me to go to the retreat send me a car among twenty passing by from now on". The ultimatum put to God brings an immediate effect. The twentieth car does stop and its driver is a pastor of the Pentecostal Church! The young man sees in it a true sign from heaven. In fact, it is nothing but a pure naivety verging on an abuse of faith!⁵

The Acts of the Apostles give some examples of the faithful seeking the best approach to a difficult situation, consonant with the will of God. In such cases they had recourse to three methods or criteria: experience of the action of the Spirit, the witness of the Scripture, and the confirmation of a decision by the community of believers. Such were the cases of the election of Matthias to replace Judas Iscariot (Ac 1:20-26) and the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Ac 10:19.44-45; 11:2-18; 15:7-12.19-20.28-29). The gift of the Spirit fulfils the prophesy of Joel. Addressing the crowd Peter said:

In the days to come – it is the Lord who speaks –
I will pour out my spirit on all mankind.
Their sons and daughters shall prophesy,
your young men shall see visions,
your old men shall dream dreams.
Even on my slaves, men and women,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit (Ac 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29).

The ability to discern requires not only an appeal to the Holy Spirit, but also the use of all accessible human means. That is why the Apostle encouraged the first disciples of Christ to become mentally mature in their religious outlook: "Stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults" (1 Cor 14:20 NIV). It would be completely fallacious naivety to compare the role of the Spirit to the function of a prompter in the theatre.

Gift of Tongues, Prophecy and Healing

As has already been said, desiring unusual gifts of the Spirit can become dangerous. Let us now look more closely at the three main ones. The gift of tongues assumed an almost anarchic shape in Corinth, and the Apostle had to instruct the Corinthians about the proper goal and use of this charisma. A charismatic language is not aimed at a normal communication with other people. It is above all an expression of the relationship with God: "Anybody with the gift of tongues speaks to God, but not to other people; because nobody understands him when he talks in the spirit about mysterious things" (1 Cor 14:2). Many instances in the history of the

⁵ Y. Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint*, tome II, Paris 1979, 215.

apostolic Church give witness that this gift was a sign of the coming of the Holy Spirit and of his acting in the community of believers. People experienced this proximity of the Spirit with joy and thankfulness, and were comforted and strengthened in their confidence in Jesus Christ. Sometimes this experience was accompanied by feelings of purification, inner integration, liberation, fullness, and of a profound change of one's personality embracing the whole human being. Such an experience transcends what human words and concepts can transmit. It finds a repercussion in prayers of the heart and in songs of praise, as confirmed in so many testimonies of pentecostalists and followers of the charismatic renewal.

Some criteria for evaluating the gift of languages were indicated by St Paul. These are: a) the profit and edification of others (1 Cor 14:4-13.26.28); b) the role of the human mind and understanding in prayer and singing (14:15); c) the avoidance of infantile attitudes (14:20); d) peace, dignity and order (14:27.29-33.40).

Some reflection should also be devoted to the gift of prophesy. The Apostle attributes greater importance to it than to the gift of tongues (1 Cor 14:1.5.39; 1 Thess 5:20). Speaking about gifts and ministries he mentions prophets immediately after apostles in several places (1 Cor 12:28; cf. Eph 2,20; 3:5; 4,11). Prophesy is a gift constantly present in the life of the Church. A prophet is not only someone who can interpret the signs of time and thus lead the faithful to a better understanding of present and future tasks of the Church in the world. A prophet has the gift to encourage, comfort, and warn people, and to correct improper attitudes. What is at stake in this case goes beyond teaching or the capacity to understand and explain the word of God. Prophesy is also present in transmitting the words inspired by the Spirit, which reveal the intentions of human hearts and call for the realization of some concrete projects. A prophet makes known the demands of God concerning the community or individual people.

The gift of prophesy is closely connected with the ability to "discern spirits", which should benefit the community and is invariably intended "for the common good" (1 Cor 14,26). The discernment and evaluation of prophesy take place by means of the mind enlightened by the Spirit:

Therefore we teach, not in the way in which philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually. An unspiritual person is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God: he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be understood by means of the Spirit. A spiritual man, on the other hand, is able to judge the value of everything... (1 Cor 2:13-15).

In this sense the gifts of discernment and recognition are not independent of prophesy, but rather constitute criteria and controlling factors against abuses. This applies above all to those who “aspire to spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 14:12). The act of discernment is a result of cooperation between God and people, i.e. between God and a concrete person or the whole community. The main criterion of evaluation is always reference to Christ and to the good of the Church. Whoever remains under the influence of God's Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord. No charisma can impair this faith. “I want you to understand that on the one hand no one can be speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit and say, ‘Curse Jesus’, and on the other hand, no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

Regarding the gift of healing one should be neither naïvely credulous nor too skeptical. Believing in the Holy Spirit, a Christian has faith and trust in his power to give life, purify, renew, and heal. Healing is a sign of the coming of the messianic times. The Spirit is himself a messianic and eschatological gift. St Paul mentions the gift of healing and working miracles among other charismata of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:9.28-30). This gift embraces both spiritual and bodily healing. In this way it proclaims the paschal victory of Christ over death and can be regarded as a distant anticipation of our own resurrection in “spiritual bodies” (cf. 1 Cor 15:44), free of corruption and decay. The inner healing, implying the true reconciliation with God and other people has an important influence on the bodily dimension of human existence as well. Just as many diseases have their source in degraded relationships among people, so the deep causes of some psychic disorders have spiritual roots for the human being is a psycho-physical whole. The human body records all aspects and manifestations of life in its own way, including both joyous and disturbed relations with others, tensions, conflicts, violence (especially in childhood!), mistrust, and love. The gift of healing occurs in the atmosphere of prayer, forgiveness, reconciliation, inner change, and in the faith that it is God's Spirit who acts at this moment.

Only in our times have Christian Churches begun to rediscover the long forgotten ministry of healing. This had been forcefully predicted in the second epilogue of Mark's Gospel added later: “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak in new tongues; (...) they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (Mk 16:17-18 NIV).⁶ The Anglican Church was the first to introduce officially the ministry of healing into her structures and practices (1982). People prepared to perform this task are called to take frequent journeys to different places. The Christian Healing

⁶ Biblical scholars have evidence that the most reliable early manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mk 16:9-20. The original epilogue seemed thus to end at 16:8 saying that the women fled from the tomb, “said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid”.

Centre was established in London (St. Marylebone) with its basic aim to educate Christians in spiritual healing.

It is a striking fact that all of this occurs in our critical times which often yield to the temptation of scientism and skepticism. Yet we become more and more aware that humans are not only mortal, but also fragile in their inner selves, vulnerable in their spiritual and bodily dimensions. The process of healing will always retain its mysterious character. Each disease affects both one's body and mind. The call for healing is a cry from the inmost depths of being, a desire to be regenerated to a more human and fuller life. This mobilizes all the forces and sets free new energies and expectations.

The prayer for healing does not absolve us of the duty to care for the sick in true solidarity with them. Quite conversely, it should mobilize all to a great spiritual effort in our struggle with disease. This should not be forgotten by those who trust in the power of the Spirit and gather together in the name of the risen Christ to pray for the gift of healing. The healing action of the Spirit joins the efforts of human faith, prayer and solidarity. One cannot expect miraculous healings on every occasion. By doing so we would merely reduce the gift of the Spirit to unusual phenomena, ignoring his continuous action in all human struggles with disease. A very intensive desire for the miracle of healing could lead to a distorted and false image of God the Saviour, created according to our imagination and expectation. Therefore the eager waiting for a miracle has to be subject to critical evaluation. There is a serious danger of distorting the inner attitude of a Christian towards God. The healing effected by the power of the Holy Spirit in the community of the faithful remains his sovereign gift which evades all human desire to exercise control over him. The plain fact is that not all receive the gift of healing and delivery from evil.

Nevertheless the healings that happen by means of the Church's prayer give witness that this gift of the Spirit has not vanished in our times as well. They urge us to look with new eyes at the commandment Jesus addressed to his disciples: "Whenever you go into a town where they make you welcome (...), cure those in it who are sick, and say, «The kingdom of God is very near to you»" (Lk 10:8-9). Today these largely forgotten words acquire their fuller meaning and practical importance.

The Fruit of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit acts in diverse ways. In the 13th century the tradition of the Western Church developed the theology of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, as well as the doctrine of his seven gifts. The latter is based on the text from the Book of Isaiah (11:2-3 according to LXX and Vulgate):

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,

the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

The interpretation of this text in the Eastern Church exposes the many ways of Spirit's actions. In the Western tradition, number seven was understood not as a symbol of fullness, but as an enumeration of the special actions and gifts of the Spirit. They were compared with the seven requests of the Lord's Prayer, with seven beatitudes, seven sacraments, seven virtues, seven deadly sins, and with other artificially invented combinations.

For Christian spirituality, however, the very fact that this teaching has been shaped in large measure by prayer for the gifts and fruit of the Spirit is much more important. According to St Paul "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22 NIV). Elsewhere he explains that the kingdom of God "means righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17; cf. also 2 Cor 6,6-7; 1 Tim 6:11).

It is worth emphasizing that the subject ("fruit") in the Pauline verse just quoted is singular. It says that there is one fruit of the Spirit. It does not say that there are many fruits. This single fruit incorporates diverse aspects or elements: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control". In this way the Apostle wanted to underline that God wants to transform the whole of our lives, because he knows what we mostly need in our relationship with him and other fellow humans. He desires and is able to help everyone of us to transform his or her life. He is not a coercive God, but the One who invites and attracts by his goodness and beauty. The fruit of the Spirit is not a particular attitude or dimension of human life, but the whole transfigured existence directed to its final fulfillment. The work of the Spirit will not be complete until God's kingdom comes in all its fullness. Transformation of life will then find its ultimate achievement. The fruit of the Spirit will be fully manifested in all its beauty and maturity.

What the fruit of the Spirit means practically could be better appreciated when one bears in mind the opposite: aggressiveness, violence, lack of acceptance of others, egoistic concentration upon oneself, vindicating only one's own rights and profit. In the Apostle's eyes such would be the rich harvest of the "flesh" not subject to the Spirit: immorality, impurity, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, wickedness, greed, depravity, deceit, malice, arrogance, boastfulness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness (cf. Gal 5:19-21; Rom 1:29-31). A long list indeed!

No wonder that the fruit of the Spirit is truly paschal generosity, ability to sacrifice oneself, openness that is mature in its simplicity, quiet, and serene patience. In an eloquent manner this realizes concretely the greatest gift, exalted in the Apostle's song of praise to love (1 Cor 13:4-7). This gift and its implementation determine to the highest degree the quality

of our Christianity. It can make the Church the space for our continuing Pentecost.

CHAPTER III

EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

An authentic and creative spirituality should go hand in hand with profound theology. Both of them testify to something particularly mysterious in the person and action of God's Spirit. We call him the Holy Spirit, although according to the Gospel "God is spirit" (Jn 4:24) in all three persons, and holiness is one of his essential attributes. Speaking about his action in the world biblical texts resort to symbols comparing him with the elements of fire, wind, and water. But nevertheless, as has already been said, this immeasurable and impetuous power of the Spirit reveals something of a mother's tenderness and care. His person appears in the New Testament in the shape of a dove, and his action is symbolized by anointment. The Holy Spirit is the source and giver of life – like air, light, water, and warmth. To what a rich spectrum of comparisons this area opens!

The One who is everywhere present and fills everything does not show his own face. This may be on purpose, so that we come to recognize it in the faces of people transfigured by his benevolent and beneficent power. The Christian tradition has often been challenged by this fact, but the experience of the Spirit's presence provides Christian spirituality with some distinguishing features. It displays a mutual bond between spirituality and a true wisdom of life.

In this chapter I will limit my considerations to Eastern Christianity, and more specifically to the forceful witness of the three prominent figures of saints, i.e. Basil the Great, Symeon the New Theologian and Seraphim of Sarov – people of different centuries and cultures.

Familiarity With the Spirit

In its many hundred years old spirituality, the Christian East has remained very sensitive to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world. In this way there appeared the unusual idea of human "familiarity with the Spirit", which centuries later was transformed on the Slavic soil into the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" as the goal of Christian life.

It was St Basil the Great (329-379) who first introduced the concept of “familiarity with the Spirit” (*oikeíosis Pneúματος*)¹, and, through the Spirit, with God the Father and the Son (*oikeíosis Theou, oikeíosis pròs tòn Theón*)². This idea expresses closeness and respectful intimacy. However, intimate familiarity does not entail unceremonious behavior which would bring discredit to the Holy Spirit. It consists in the intimate identity of inner dispositions, strivings and goals. The secret of our humanity is best implemented in familiarity so conceived. It is not the initiative of the human person who familiarizes us with God’s Spirit. The Spirit is the ultimate cause of this familiarity, when people open to divine grace and benevolence.

The process of becoming human involves many activities, influences, and effects of the Spirit. Basil never stops short of multiplying synonyms in order to describe the revealing, illuminating, liberating, and sanctifying energy of the Holy Spirit. It means that the Paraclete works through various uncreated “energies” (*enérgeiai*)³ enlightening the human person from its inner self, giving it an existential orientation and leading to the final fulfilment. Both this great Cappadocian Father and his contemporaries spoke in an anthropomorphic way about God, using the language of their time. To their terminology belong such concepts as illumination (*photismós*), liberation (*eleuthérosis*), vivification (*zoopoíesis*), sanctification (*hagiasmós*), adoption as God’s children (*hiothesía*), purification (*kátharsis*), similitude to God (*homoíosis*), familiarity and affinity (*oikeíosis*), fulfillment (*teleíosis*) and deification (*theopoísis*). Using these and similar terms St Basil tries to explain the dynamic influence of the Holy Spirit on the inner human self. The biblical idea of the indwelling of the Spirit in the faithful as in a living temple was the point of departure in developing his teaching on this familiarity.

The Greek term *oikeíosis* is a dynamic concept. It conveys a vision of kinship, close friendship, family relationships, and likeness (*oikeios* means literally someone belonging to the household). This is also the case when someone becomes familiar with the Holy Spirit. From an ethical point of view this familiarity can be regarded as spiritual and moral affinity, a common desire for the same good.⁴

The familiarity with God is, according to Basil, the meaning and goal of the whole economy of salvation: “The economy of God, our Savior, concerning the human being consists in bringing us back from our exile, in returning us into intimacy with God (*eis oikeíosin Theou*), in bringing us

¹ Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* IX, 23; XV,35. Cf. a critical edition in: SCh 17bis, 324, 416. Below I will indicate only chapters and paragraphs referred to.

² Ibidem VII,16; VIII,17; XV,35; XVIII,45; XIX,49.

³ Cf. *Epist.* 234-235.

⁴ Cf. *Moralia* XXII, 2. PG 31, 741.

out of enmity created by disobedience".⁵ We have an inborn desire and longing for this *oikeiosis*, i.e. for the initial primeval state of being the children of God (*archaian hiothesian*), the desire to be recovered by enlightenment from above. This is all the work of the divine Pneuma. Jesus Christ has made it possible in his own humanity. To become an experienced reality, this process needs the action of God's Spirit.⁶

In the light of St Basil's teaching, the Holy Spirit is God who initiates the first contact, thus preparing the ground for a new relationship. The Spirit purifies the human person and bestows on it the grace of a new beginning leading, as the Consummator, all that has begun in our being to its ultimate fulfillment. The action of the Spirit has a creative and an eschatological character. In the work of creation humans acquired the ability, as icons of God, to receive the gifts of the Spirit. Basil the Great interprets the creation of humankind as the beginning and the promise of continuing a Pentecost which will reach its finality only in the resurrection of human bodies⁷. The Divine Pneuma, the "All-Holy" (*Panágion*) is the personal source of sanctification and inner transfiguration, although it remains still hidden in action⁸. The presence of the Spirit is manifested in the life of those people whose humanity has been touched and transfigured by its action. For this reason St Basil does not hesitate to call the Paraclete "the space of the saints" (*tópos ton hagíon*), in which the righteous people are at home. Similarly, the sanctified person becomes a suitable or "proper place" (*tópos oikeios*) for the Spirit.⁹

The Paraclete is "Lord of life" (*zoēs kyrios*)¹⁰, whose vivifying influence extends from the beginning of a new life in baptism to the final resurrection. The Spirit raises us from death to life, liberates us from slavery and alienation to the freedom of God's children. The activity of the Spirit is not limited to individual people only. It embraces also the universal history of salvation, the whole humankind and cosmos. But, in general Basil devotes relatively little attention to this issue. He would rather concentrate on the relationship of the Spirit to the Church in the process of building up a Christian community.

Familiarity with the Holy Spirit is closely linked with spiritual illumination (*photismós*) as its effect. The Divine Pneuma as Light from above enlightens all humans, frees from false beliefs, teaches the truth and leads them to true understanding of what is necessary for salvation. Thanks to this illumination believers experience the mystery of God as a close

⁵ *De Spiritu Sancto* XV, 35. The translation of St Basil's texts is mine, W.H.

⁶ *Ibidem* IX,22.

⁷ Cf. *Adversus Eunomium* V. PG 29,724; *Hom. in Hexaemeron* X,4; XI,3. SCh 160, 174. 230-232.

⁸ *Epist.* 159,2. *De Spiritu Sancto* IX,22; XIX,48.

⁹ *De Spiritu Sancto* XXVI,62.

¹⁰ *Ibidem* XIII,29.

reality. The enlightened human person is drawn nearer to Christ and the liberating power of his Gospel. The illumination not only influences the human intellect, but affects the whole inmost being, i.e. the human heart, the will and the emotions. By nature we long for truth, goodness and beauty. Since baptism the Holy Spirit leads Christians to the true knowledge of the living God and to the perception of divine “inexpressible beauty”.¹¹ Changing human life from inside, this knowledge requires co-operation (*synérgeia*), constant purification and effort in following the inspirations of the Spirit.

The Divine Comforter is the perfecting and fulfilling cause (*teleiōtike aítia*) of all things¹². What the Father and the Son begin will be brought to ultimate fulfillment by the transforming energy of the Spirit. The familiarity with the Paraclete strengthens us in the good and makes us participants in God’s life (*theopóisis*).¹³ Being equal to the Father and to the Son, the Holy Spirit can lead humans into the transcendent divine world. This takes place already during our earthly existence. The human person may thus find more and more likeness to God (*hómoios Theo*) according to which it was created. All this concerns not only the chosen individuals but all people called to realize their genuine vocation and destiny. Only those who have a living faith can experience this unusual human adventure even now.

The fact remains, however, that our human possibilities are always limited. Everything happens according to the capacity and measure of our created nature. Speaking about the familiarity with the Spirit, Basil was at the same time well aware of the unbridgeable gap which separates the human being from God. For this reason he emphasized the divinity and transcendence of the Spirit. This did not weaken his profound conviction that the Holy Spirit guides humans towards participation in the divine life.

The idea of familiarity expresses in a dynamic manner the goal of the Christian life as a whole. It had a great influence on the development of spirituality in Eastern Christianity. This idea can also influence the renaissance of paschal and Pentecostal spirituality today. Its blessed time, the true and fruitful *kairós*, may hopefully draw near.

What St Basil taught about the Divine Pneuma and the human person is not an abstract formula, but an existential truth about our own life. What he developed may be called a pneumatological anthropology or even a pneumatology of the human being. His teaching reminds us that the mystery of our destiny is hidden in the depths of the mystery of God, i.e. in the mystery of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. The Basilian notion of *oikeíōsis* should make us more sensitive to all biblical images of the presence and activity of the Paraclete in human life and history, especially to those which speak of indwelling, renewing, and fulfilling. The Holy

¹¹ Ibidem IX,23.

¹² Ibidem XVI,38.

¹³ Ibidem XIX,49; *Adv. Eunomium* III,5. PG 29,665.

Spirit as the “eternal inhabitant” (*aeternus habitator*)¹⁴ remains in an intimate relationship with the human self; it is present everywhere, and penetrates everything like the hidden fire in the essence of all things. One may be inclined to regard the Pneuma as the God of the ‘human inside’ par excellence, the God of our freedom, present where our being is crystallized.¹⁵

Our culture, dominated by male and authoritarian models of life and language, should revive the old ideal of an integral humanity. This is certainly not an easy task. Our traditional images of God as mostly masculine fail to take into account the Old Testament prophets who spoke of God’s attributes using female and motherly terms. Basilus’ (St. Basil’s?) teaching about *oikeiosis Pneúmatos* brings back to our memory the fact that the very word *ruah*, denoting God’s Spirit, is of feminine gender in Hebrew.

Basil the Great can also teach us, contemporary Christians, an intensive way of experiencing the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world discretely and less noisily. It is a pity that many followers of the charismatic renewal have not yet discovered for themselves the thought and spirituality of the prominent Church Fathers. The teaching this movement develops of “the baptism in the Holy Spirit” and charismas continues to be detached from the familiarity with God’s Spirit in the early Church. In actual fact, as we shall see, Christianity has always been aware of the Spirit’s action in the human life. This also refers to the traditions of Christianity divided by different religious denominations.

St Basil and many other Church Fathers teach us to experience the closeness and activity of the Holy Spirit in the ordinary Christian existence. We have to learn from them today the truth about the real goal of Christian life and Christian spirituality. This is the truth about the human being who can discover the fullness of his or her humanity in what has been named *oikeiosis* with the Holy Spirit.

To Receive the Holy Spirit

Simeon (Symeon) the New Theologian (949-1022) lived in one of the greatest periods in the history of Byzantium. At that time some meaningful insights were gained about the nature of the human being and his relationship to the invisible world. One of them concerned the human person as an open, iconic, and relational being who realizes his or her destiny in communion with God and other people through their own free decisions. This destiny is the participation in God’s life emerging out of the

¹⁴ This expression comes from Caesarius of Arles (*Sermo* 213,5).

¹⁵ More about this see W. Hryniewicz, *Die Vertrautheit des Menschen mit dem Heiligen Geiste (Oikeiōsis Pneúmatos) nach Basilus dem Großen*, in: *Basilus, Heiliger der Einen Kirche*, ed. by Albert Rauch, Paul Imhof SJ, München 1981, 98-108.

effort to transcend the limits of human nature and to remain open to the uncreated energies of the Holy Spirit.

Byzantine Christian culture developed a specific philosophy of life and human history. In its view the human being should not be considered a small and frightened creature living a constrained life. God loves people. He created them in his own image and likeness. This is his astonishing gift. At the same time it is a difficult task to be realized throughout our human life. Created in the image of God, we are all called to achieve freely a “divine similitude”. The Byzantine anthropology, inspired in its openness by the Greek Fathers of the Church, showed humans as “theocentric” and “pneumatophoric” beings, i.e. capable of becoming persons filled with the Holy Spirit. An outstanding Orthodox theologian, John Meyendorff, wrote years ago:

The central theme, or intuition, of Byzantine theology is that man’s nature is not a static, “closed”, autonomous entity, but a dynamic reality, determined in its very existence by its relationship to God. This relationship is seen as a process of ascent and as communion (...). The dynamism of Byzantine anthropology (...) can prove itself to be an essential frame of reference in the contemporary theological search for a new understanding of man.¹⁶

Symeon is one of the most engaging figures in the history of Byzantine theology and spirituality. He was adamant in stressing that Christianity is a personal communion with, and experience of God, accessible to all through Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. His hymns, prayers and instructions are full of “the fire of the Spirit” and marked by the freshness and farsightedness of religious inspiration. They teach us how to invoke the Spirit and to rejoice in his presence.

Symeon’s writings testify to the Byzantine courageous search for the experience of the Holy Spirit. His personal life was marked by struggle, loneliness, and suffering¹⁷. He was severely tried in the course of his life, but was able to defend unyieldingly his views in the struggle for the renewal of the Byzantine Church. Posterity came to appreciate his efforts and called him the New Theologian (in the Eastern Church the title “Theologian” was granted to three people only: to St John the Evangelist, St Gregory of Nazianzus, and St Symeon). He was canonized, and generations of Eastern Christians have regarded him as the greatest mystic of the Middle Ages. He taught that the Spirit alone was the final authority and the ultimate criterion of truth in the Church. No wonder that Symeon

¹⁶ J. Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, New York 1974, 2; cf. 138-150.

¹⁷ Cf. B. Krivochéine, *Dans la lumière du Christ: Saint Syméon le Nouveau Théologien 949-1022. Vie – spiritualité – doctrine*, Chevetogne 1980.

stands as an exceptional witness to the tension in Christianity between all forms of “institution” and freedom of the Spirit. Let us turn then to his exceptional testimony. In his writings, and in particular in his *Hymns*, he talks about his inner life, his experience of Christ and of the Spirit. He stresses that the Church is always given the same fullness of gifts as was the case in the apostolic period.

Do not say that one cannot receive God's Spirit.
Do not say that one can be saved without him.
Do not say that one can have him without knowing this.
Do not say that God does not allow to be seen by people.
Do not say that that people cannot see the divine light
Or that it is impossible in the present times!
Never does it exceed the limits of possibility, friends,
But it is possible indeed for the willing.¹⁸

Such facts can come from someone undergoing deep spiritual experience, someone who truly believes in the possibility of “receiving God's Spirit”. To receive him one has to invoke him with one's entire being. One has to experience one's own misery and insufficiency. Symeon composed a moving prayer invoking the Holy Spirit at the turn of the first millennium of Christianity. It is a kind of great epiclesis for the time of the unknown future, an ardent invocation of the true Light.

Elthè tò phōs tò alethinón...
Come, the true Light.
Come, eternal life.
Come, hidden mystery.
Come, nameless treasure.
Come, ineffable reality.
Come, endless happiness.
Come, light that does not know the sunset.
Come, the unfailing expectation of those who have to be saved.
Come, the awakening of those who are asleep.
Come, resurrection of the dead.
Come, O Mighty One who always makes all, renews and transforms by your will.
Come, O Invisible and totally intangible, and impalpable. (...)
Come, you whom my miserable soul desired and desires.
Come, you alone to me lonely, because you see I am alone.
Come, you who have separated me from all and made me solitary in this world.
Come, you who have become yourself desire in me,

¹⁸ *Hymn 27*, 125-132. Sources chrétiennes (SCh) 174, 288. Translation of Symeon's texts is mine, W.H.

You who made me desire you, absolutely Inaccessible.
 Come, my breath and my life.
 Come, consolation of my poor soul.
 Come, my joy, glory and delight without end.¹⁹

This prayerful hymn covers the whole of the human experience: desire, expectation, solitude, yearning, hope, and joy. The language of this prayer is marked by the feeling of mystery, poverty, and helplessness of all human words. Side by side with affirmative statements there appear others that express positive content by means of negation. The Spirit is not just “true Light”, “eternal life”, “hidden mystery”, “light not knowing the sunset”, “resurrection of the dead”, “breath”, “consolation”, “joy, glory and delight”. An apophatic, seemingly negative language invokes the Spirit as “nameless treasure”, “ineffable reality”, “endless happiness”, as well as “Invisible”, “intangible and impalpable”, “absolutely Inaccessible”. This is a language of paradoxes and antinomies: “The Inaccessible” is the “Mighty One who always makes all, renews and transforms by his will”. The “intangible and impalpable” becomes himself desire, life, breath, joy and glory in the human person. The One who by his nature is the Spirit of communion is at the same time able to “separate from all and made solitary in this world”.

This living knowledge of the Spirit results from intimate experience expressed in meditative and hymnal theology, full of wonder and prayer. What is the most genuine in the human person often manifests itself by prayer, hymns, inspired song, and great religious poetry, which exceed all patterns of discursive thinking. The intimate experience of the Holy Spirit proves to be the best testimony of a real contact of humans with the divine world. The Spirit is indeed accessible to our experience. His mystery can be approached by mind and heart, joy and expectation, labor and love, through the whole personal self. The world of the Spirit meets the world of humans.

How can we speak about this mysterious meeting of the two worlds? How can we come nearer to this intimate bond between the experience of the Spirit and the participation in the paschal mystery of Christ, so typical for the Eastern tradition? One has to make use of the language of inspired simplicity, astonishment, and admiration. There is a paradox to be observed in this regard as prayers addressed directly to the Holy Spirit do not often appear in Eastern Christianity. In spite of a particular sensitiveness to the presence of the Spirit, Eastern Christianity directs its prayers above all to the Father, to Christ or to the entire Trinity. The Church asks the Father and the Son for bestowing the gift of the Spirit. She prays with the Spirit and in the Spirit: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit

¹⁹ *Hymns*, vol. 1. SCh 156, 150-153 (introductory Mystical prayer: invocation to the Holy Spirit preceding the Hymns).

himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom. 8:26 NIV).

The New Theologian's prayerful hymns were not created in a vacuum. They grew out of an intensive experience of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in his life. His desire was that this experience should become accessible and near to all believers. He was deeply convinced that everyone who truly accepts Christ and his Gospel accepts at the same time the Spirit who already now introduces people to the new world of resurrection.

The writings of Symeon are a specific expression of the Eastern tradition which strongly emphasizes the role of personal experience of the Spirit and of free human openness to his action. Humans are summoned to cooperation, effort, renouncement, and self-dedication. In one of the *Catechetical Discourses* he says in all simplicity and clarity:

Both before receiving the grace of the Spirit and after its reception nobody is freed from the darkness of the soul and no one contemplates the light of the Most Holy Spirit without much toil and pain, without sweat, violence, privations, and tribulations. For "the Kingdom of heaven has been subjected to violence and the violent are taking it by storm" (Mt 11:12), because it is through much hardship that we should enter the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Ac 14:22). Therefore the Kingdom of heaven is the participation in the Holy Spirit. It is what has been said: the Kingdom of heaven "is within you" (Lk 17:21), so that we should make an effort to receive the Holy Spirit within ourselves and to guard him (*tò Pneûma tò Hágion entòs hēmōn labeîn kai échein*). Let those then who do not constantly experience violence, self-denial, humiliation, and affliction say to us: "We have the Holy Spirit within ourselves". Without action, sweat, and practice of virtue nobody achieves this recompense.²⁰

According to Symeon, one has to do violence to oneself and make a great effort to "receive the Holy Spirit" and rejoice in his light. This involves not only passive acceptance, but active preparation and openness. As we shall see, eight centuries later a Russian elder (*stáretz*), Seraphim of Sarow, will use an even more vivid and active language, and speak about "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit".

Symeon, the Byzantine mystic often emphasizes that direct experience of the Spirit's presence is accessible to every person, regardless of age and status. Without his life-giving breath the human soul becomes empty and no longer alive. It is he who cleanses the human heart and

²⁰ *Catechisis* VI,105-118. SCh 104,22-23.

resuscitates the dead soul to a new life. Sin cannot destroy the divine image in the human being, although it does not allow the human person to achieve a divine similitude and shine with full light and beauty. God's Spirit comes to renew and transfigure what has been distorted²¹.

The human body also takes part in the life-long process of purification and transfiguration, and becomes pervaded by the ineffable divine light. Those who are plunged in darkness, can, by repentance, participate anew in this light. Symeon admits in all simplicity and sincerity: "it seems to me that every day I begin to be purified and to see".²²

The knowledge of the teaching of the Church Fathers helped The New Theologian to describe various manifestations of the Spirit's action in the human person. His own teachings bear testimony to the genuine conscious experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit who gives the vision of divine light. The experience of purification and transfiguration is both something painful, and simultaneously full of joy and gratitude. It is followed by all the fruits of the Spirit: peace, love, happiness, and the learning of divine mysteries. The Holy Spirit is the One who "initiates and gives light", he is the Mystagogue and Illuminator.²³

Symeon's spirituality is deeply pneumatological in character, but remains in fact a truly paschal and Trinitarian mysticism. The risen and glorious Christ sends down the Spirit who, in turn, reveals him to people. The salvific action of the Spirit is inseparable from that of Christ. It is the Spirit who brings about the union of humans with Christ. In this context the following words of St Symeon deserve special attention:

That is why I say and will not cease to repeat that those who do not imitate the sufferings of Christ through repentance and obedience, those who have not become participants in his death, (...) will neither become participants of his spiritual resurrection [*tes pneumatikes autou anastáseos*, i.e. performed by the Spirit] nor will they receive the Holy Spirit. For it is by the Holy Spirit that the resurrection of all occurs. And I do not speak about the final resurrection of the bodies (...), but about that of the dead souls which happens every day in a spiritual way, spiritual regeneration and resurrection; [I speak] about the resurrection given by the One who died and rose again once for all...²⁴

²¹ Cf. *Ethical Treatise* 7, 336-356. SCh 129, 180-181; *Hymn* 44, 373-377. SCh 196,96-97.

²² *Hymn* 8,43. SCh 156, 218-219.

²³ *Ethical Treatise* 9, 450-451. SCh 129, 252.

²⁴ *Catechisis* 6, 353-366. SCh 104,44-47.

This is, in sum, Symeon's doctrine on spiritual resurrection. For him the true meaning of the "imitation" of Christ consists in sharing in his "spiritual resurrection" and in the reception of the Holy Spirit. However, neither of these can be obtained without participation in the sufferings and in the death of Christ. One can see how far this teaching goes beyond the idea of a simple imitation of Jesus' humanity, and acquires in this way a clearly pneumatological character.

The New Theologian returns with predilection to this motif of the spiritual resurrection in the Christian life. In his paschal catechesis he explains that the resurrection of Christ is not only an event celebrated every year in the liturgy of the Church. It is continuously, every day, re-presented in those who have come to know his mystery. It happens mystically in ourselves, when we truly desire it. But first, one has to come down to "the tomb of repentance and humility".²⁵ Christ unites then with our "dead soul" and resuscitates it. Thus we become able to perceive "the glory of our mystical resurrection". In this way Christ's resurrection becomes our own resurrection²⁶.

In this context Symeon supplies the following explanation of the "sacred formula" of a paschal hymn read at holy communion during the Divine Liturgy: "Having seen the Resurrection of Christ (*Anástasin Christou theasámenoi*) let us adore the holy Lord Jesus who alone is without sin". This formula does not say: "having believed in the Resurrection of Christ", but "having *seen* the Resurrection". The mystic is well aware that Christ's resurrection happened only once and nobody was an eyewitness to this event. We do not see the resurrection in this way, although it takes place in a sacramental way in the believers. Christ appears spiritually and mystically to their "spiritual eye". This is done by the Holy Spirit whose "radiating presence" (*he photophóros parousía*) allows us to "see" the resurrection of Christ and gives us grace to "see" the Risen One himself²⁷.

This teaching of The New Theologian confirms the truth that Pentecostal and charismatic spirituality has to be thoroughly Christological and paschal. One has first to go through the sufferings of Christ in order to come to the resurrection brought about by the Holy Spirit of God. "Hasten then to receive the Spirit (*speúsate labéin tò Pneuma*) who comes from God, the divine Spirit"²⁸ – this encouragement of the Byzantine mystic has remained very much alive in the Eastern Church.

It may be difficult to imagine that this man was also a severe critic of the shortcomings and abuses of his Church. In particular he warned against the danger of the uncritical acceptance of an ecclesial leadership. Without personally receiving the gift of the Spirit and experiencing his

²⁵ *Catechisis 13*, 9-11.37.49-50. SCh 104, 190.192.194.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, 54-56 (p. 194).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 110-120 (p. 198-200).

²⁸ *Hymn 44*, 406-407. SCh 196, 98.

active presence one cannot truly dedicate one's life to people, one cannot love them and lead them to the light of knowledge. Human ambitions, dishonesty, pride, and insensitivity would then come to the fore. It is easy to find oneself among those who teach others while they themselves do not have the true wisdom coming from the Holy Spirit of God. How can one absolve people of their sins without the grace of the Spirit? Therefore St. Symeon often repeats that sheer ordination is not enough to enable one to fulfil effectively priestly functions or episcopal duties. What is needed is a conscious reception of the Holy Spirit into one's life and ministry. Otherwise one would only preach "empty words".²⁹

The New Theologian's influential views are a clear testimony that the spiritual legacy of the Byzantine Church is highly diversified. Side by side with the conservative Byzantium, often rigorous, closed, and timid, there existed also another one: courageous, open, inquiring, and self-critical. This other theology and spirituality bear the mark of a creative unrest. They also partook in striving for the renewal of the Church and Christian life. Symeon's teaching on the Holy Spirit glows with the spiritual beauty and wisdom of Christ's Gospel. It speaks about the human yearning for a better world and a more credible image of the Church, about our faults and the need for reconciliation, about the hope which perceives the power of the resurrection among earthly weaknesses, and about the invocation and reception of the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth and of the entire human existence.

Acquisition of the Holy Spirit: the Aim of Christian Life

This characteristic formula comes, as has already been mentioned, from one of the greatest Russian saints, Seraphim of Sarow (1759-1833), known in the world as Prochor Moshnin. He was, as George P. Fedotov describes him, "a personality of extraordinary spiritual endowments, with gifts of a higher order than can be tested by the religious historian with purely rational methods".³⁰ In this personality we can see some features which are traditional and medieval, but also some prophetic gifts inspired by the Holy Spirit. Tonsured a monk and given the name of Seraphim, he was ordained a deacon and some years later a priest. Soon after he removed himself into the solitude of the "wilderness" and spent the next fifteen years in the virgin forests of Sarow in complete seclusion.

Although well-read in the Bible and in the ascetical literature of the Greek Fathers, especially of the Hesychasts³¹ known to him through the

²⁹ *Catechisis* 33, 215-218. SCh 113, 264-265.

³⁰ G.P. Fedotov, *A Treasury of Russian Spirituality*, Gloucester, Mass. 1969, 242.

³¹ The hesychasts represented a special current of Eastern monastic spirituality. The Greek word *hesychía* means stillness or silence, but far more than merely refraining from outward speech. This term can be interpreted at

Philokalia, he lived and thought in isolation from modern culture. It is worth noting that his life coincided with the period of Enlightenment, free masonry, insurgent Europeanization of his country, of the French revolution, and Napoleon's invasion of Russia. It was also the time of the birth of modern Russian literature and of new education which led to the formation of the new intelligentsia. In the Church this caused some conservative reactions, and also stirred new theological thinking and interest in reading the Bible available in the Russian translation. In sum, we can say that this was a challenging period when the modern age of Europe had begun offering new possibilities, while at the same time bringing with it serious risks and dangers.

Seraphim lived in another world, not touched by this unquiet modern life. He simply began to assist those who flocked to him. At the age of sixty-six he left his secluded cell and turned to the world of human suffering as a seer, a healer, and a spiritual guide, thus becoming the first known representative of spiritual elders (*startzy*) in Russia³². He is considered to be the prophet of the new era: "his approach to the world is unprecedented in the Eastern tradition".³³ When people started to gather at his threshold he would meet them with a radiating face of friendship and compassion. His usual greeting was: "My joy!" (*Rádosti moyá!*). Then he would address each one of his visitors with the paschal exclamation: "Christ is risen!" In terms of sincere tenderness, the supplicants were given practical advice concerning their existential problems. One detail deserves mentioning: he broke with the monastic tradition and instead of the black cassock obligatory for Eastern monks, he usually wore a white peasant's costume. It is in this appearance that he is presented in icons.

Let us look now at his new form of spirituality marked by an unusual experience of the Holy Spirit. His views are best known from *A Conversation with Nicholas A. Motovilov*³⁴, the most devoted of his spiritual sons. He once healed Seraphim, who left memoirs concerning him (?). This *Conversation* forms the central point of his teaching but should not

many different levels, in connection with solitude, return to oneself, spiritual vigilance and spiritual poverty. Cf. Kallistos Ware, *Silence in Prayer: The Meaning of Hesychia*, in: *Merton and Hesychasm: The Prayer of the Heart. The Eastern Church*, ed. by Bernadette Dieker and Jonathan Montaldo, Louisville, Kentucky 2003, 17-40.

³² In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* F. Dostoevsky skilfully described this new phenomenon of Russian *startsy* (monks as the spiritual guides), enjoying a spiritual authority which arises from the inner life of the individual elder. In the figure of Father Zosima he portrayed his own conception of the ideal *staretz*.

³³ Fedotov, op. cit., 243.

³⁴ *A Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov with Nicholas Motovilov concerning the Aim of the Christian Life*, in: Fedotov, op. cit., 266-279 (=Excerpts).

be subject to any purely intellectual interpretation. It is something more than a rational discourse. One cannot rationalize a living experience of someone who was never a professional teacher. Seraphim's mystical experience embraces the whole mind and soul, and is expressed by all human senses. His thoughts contain a dogmatic core which offers a moving witness to the realism of the event of Transfiguration and Pentecost. The divine-human person of the risen and glorified Christ is at the center of Seraphim's contemplations, with special emphasis on the Son of Man in glory, blessing the people. However, in the *Conversation* he often recalls his words and acts, not focusing on the human life of Christ and explaining the Gospel, but simply living it.

In Seraphim's view, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is the source of divine life in the Church and makes the transfiguration of humanity possible. This is the universal message of our self-realization in Christ through the action of the Spirit. Every human person can become the bearer of the Spirit. Every Christian is called to his or her own transfiguration by the freely accepted divine gift of grace. In this context Seraphim spoke about an assiduous "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" (*stiazanie Sviatogo Dúkha*) as the aim of the Christian life. His appeal sounds even more credible as there was in him a great love for the simple people.

Prayer, fasting, watching, and all other Christian acts, however good they may be, do not alone constitute the aim of our Christian life, although they serve as the indispensable means of reaching the aim. The true aim of our Christian life is to acquire the Holy Spirit of God. (...) In acquiring this Spirit of God consists the true aim of our Christian life, while prayer, watching, fasting, almsgiving, and other good works done for Christ's sake are only the means for acquiring the Spirit of God.³⁵

Hearing the words about "the acquisition of the Spirit", Seraphim's disciple Motovilov was greatly surprised. He did not understand their meaning. How can one acquire the Holy Spirit? The Elder, the son of a building contractor, had to explain to him that it is somewhat similar to gaining or acquiring money in worldly affairs.

The aim in life of ordinary people is to acquire or make money, and for nobility it is in addition to receive honors, distinctions and other rewards for their services to the government. The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is gained in

³⁵ *A Conversation of St. Seraphim...*, 267.268.

very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital.³⁶

Seraphim has used a language comprehensible to his listener, an educated layman, and compared the acquisition of the Spirit with solicitous care and planning for the future. What he strove for was not to inculcate a merchant's mentality in a Christian, but to emphasize the importance of the wholehearted openness to God and the highest values of human life. Only good deeds done for Christ's sake bring us the grace of God, the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our life here, and reward in the life to come.

The grace of the Spirit is given mostly through prayer which is always in our hands as an instrument for acquiring this grace. It is always available to everyone and great is its power. What about other acts done for Christ's sake in order to acquire the grace of the Holy Spirit? Motovilov wants some more practical indications. Seraphim explains to him what to do.

Acquire, my son, the grace of the Holy Spirit by all other virtues in Christ; trade in those that are most profitable to you. Accumulate the capital of the grace-giving abundance of God's mercy. Deposit it in God's eternal bank, which brings you unearthly interest, not four or six per cent, but one hundred per cent, for one spiritual shilling and even more, infinitely more. (...) Trade thus spiritually in virtue. Distribute the gifts of the grace of the Holy Spirit to them that ask, as candle, burning with earthly fire, lights other candles for the illuminating of all in other places, but diminishes not its own light. If it be so with earthly fire, what shall we say about the fire of the grace of God's Holy Spirit?³⁷

According to the Staretz, Jesus himself compared our life to a marketplace where we can buy the things we need. One has to use time wisely, to do good and thus to receive heavenly blessings through earthly goods performed for Christ's sake, the blessings confer on us the grace of the Spirit. In this context Seraphim interprets in an original and spiritual way Christ's parable of the ten bridesmaids, five of whom were foolish and five were wise (Mt 25:1-13). The lack of olive oil in the lamps of the unwise does not denote the absence of good deeds which prevent them from entering the wedding hall. They simply lacked the grace of the Holy Spirit symbolized by oil.

In this spiritual and metaphorical interpretation of the parable there is a close connection between the Holy Spirit and oil – the connection suggested by the very practice of anointment during the celebration of the

³⁶ Ibidem, 268.

³⁷ Ibidem, 270.

sacrament of baptism and chrismation (i.e. confirmation, in Western terminology). In the course of the conversation the Staretz spoke about the gift of Pentecost. The presence of Holy Spirit had been manifested in tongues of fire, which sat upon each of the disciples and filled them with the strength of divine flame-like grace. Precisely “this same fire-inspired grace of the Holy Spirit is given to all the faithful in Christ in the sacrament of Holy Baptism”.³⁸

The foolish bridesmaids had forgotten the necessary fruit of good works which is the grace of the Spirit, without whom there is and cannot be any salvation. Furthermore Seraphim quotes the words of an Orthodox liturgical hymn of Matins sung before the Gospel is read: “By the Holy Spirit is every soul quickened and by purity exalted, yea, is made bright by the Three in One in holy mystery”. He also recalls the indwelling of God’s Spirit in the soul, mind, and heart of those who believe. This presence is granted to us through our strenuous efforts of assiduous acquisition of the Holy Spirit who sets up the Kingdom of God in us.

The wise and sensible virgins took their lamps and flasks of oil as well, and were ready to meet the bridegroom. The foolish brought no oil, and had to go first to those who sell it and buy some for themselves. They missed the arrival of the bridegroom. The parable says that those bridesmaids who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. Seraphim gives the following commentary:

The marketplace – this is our life. The door of the wedding room, shut and barring the access to the Bridegroom – this is our human death. The virgins – wise and foolish – are the Christian souls. Oil does not symbolize our actions, but the grace through which the Holy Spirit fills our being and transforms it: corruptible into incorruptible, psychical death into spiritual life, darkness into light, stable where our passions are chained up like animals into temple of God, into nuptial chamber where we meet our Lord, Creator and Savior, the Bridegroom of our souls.³⁹

Looking at his own times, Seraphim regrets deeply that people have departed so far from the true Christian life and from the vision of early Christians: “Under the pretext of education we have reached such a darkness of ignorance that now to us seems inconceivable what the ancients saw so clearly that even in ordinary conversation the notion of God’s appearance did not seem strange to them”. What one observes now is “almost universal indifference to the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ”.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 271.

³⁹ *Entretien avec Motovilov*, in: Irina Gorainov, *Séraphim de Sarov. Sa vie*, Abbaye de Bellefontaine 1979, 160 (155-185).

⁴⁰ *A Conversation of St. Seraphim...*, 270.271.

Pride of our minds has made us very inattentive to the work of our salvation and therefore we receive no true enlightenment from the Lord.

To show that the grace of the Holy Spirit is the light which enlightens our life, Seraphim recalls some biblical witnesses. When Moses came down after his talk with God on Mount Sinai people were unable to look at him, because of his shining radiance. One has to think also of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. His garments became white like snow so that the disciples fell on their face for fear. This was an extraordinary effulgence of the inexpressible light of the Holy Spirit. The apostles were deeply aware of the presence of God's Spirit in themselves.

But how can those who believe know that they are in possession of the grace of the Holy Spirit? Towards the end of the conversation Motovilov personally experiences what this grace means. He vividly describes how he was given the chance to see the face of the Elder radiating with unusual brightness, to feel immense joy of those moments, to experience calmness and peace, warmth, sweetness, and happiness by the whole inner self. He was given this experience not just to retain in his memory but also, according to Seraphim's reassurance, it was addressed "to the whole world in order that you yourself might be confirmed in God's work and might be useful to others".⁴¹ God seeks the hearts of those who love him and their neighbor. His Kingdom is in the human heart.

This admirable testimony of an Orthodox saint is marked by an extraordinary simplicity, authenticity, and freshness of the faith in the transfiguring presence of the Holy Spirit. The language of this simple monk reflects a great Christian mystagogy inspired by Eastern spirituality.

Looking back at what has been said so far I can embrace the opinion of A.F. Dobbie-Bateman, a well known English researcher of Russian Orthodoxy:

St. Seraphim was one single and very vital personality, combining and fusing in himself many facets of religious enlightenment. The touch of the healer, the insight of the seer, the eccentricity of the Fool in Christ, the glow of the mystic, the obedience of the son by adoption and the perfect dignity and humility of God's instrument – all these may be seen in him.⁴²

When Seraphim defined the aim of the Christian life as "the acquisition of the Holy Spirit", he referred most probably to the words of Macarius of Egypt (or to the writer whose homilies are ascribed to St. Macarius) about living in the fullness of the Spirit. This formula was indeed alien to the vast majority of spiritually minded lay-people in Russia at that

⁴¹ Ibidem, 278.

⁴² A.F. Dobbie Bateman, *St. Seraphim of Sarov*, in: Fedotov, op.cit., 251 (246-266).

time. They received it as a kind of revelation, as something accessible to and destined for all Christians. It is precisely this fact that turned out to be highly attractive to the creative minds during the short period of the Orthodox Renaissance before the revolution (1900-1917).

In 1903 when Seraphim was canonized, some prominent members of the Russian intelligentsia dismissed the event as a mere “canonization of peasant ignorance”. This initial mistrust was gradually overcome however and the intellectuals began to return to the Orthodox Church. In those pre-revolutionary years of the approaching crisis and growing eschatological tension, St. Seraphim became the prophet of the expected revelation of the Holy Spirit and the forerunner of the new form of spirituality. This spirituality – people thought – should replace the severe ascetical monasticism. To put it in symbolical terms: the white, spirit-bearing flame of the mystical experience should take the place of the black of austere life. In the post-revolutionary period Seraphim was a source of enduring influence in the Russian religious consciousness. The hardships which had befallen the country forced many to think again about the destiny of humankind as a whole, the presence of God in the world and about the meaning of the world for God.

The Apostle Paul wrote to his beloved Philippians: “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may *gain Christ...*” (Phil 3:8 NIV, *italics mine*, W.H.). St Seraphim of Sarov spoke instead about “the acquisition of the Holy Spirit”. One can see the same logic in both cases: “to acquire is the same as to gain”, as Seraphim himself explained it. Today Christian spirituality needs a more conscious Pentecostal orientation, which constitutes an integral part of the paschal spirituality of transfiguration. The spirituality which is sensitive to the action of the Holy Spirit finds, in fact, more and more recognition among Christians of different denominations.

Come and See!

What has been said about the remarkable testimony of the three great saints constitutes a clear example of the continuity of the charismatic spirituality in the Eastern Church. Contemporary Christians are preceded by many other fellow Christians who experienced long ago the mysteries of the faith and strove to live them in their own personal life. Every Christian can and should learn from our predecessors in the faith. The rich theology and spirituality of the Church Fathers and their successors can be creatively assimilated today by nurturing the inner experience of the faithful. It is not only erudition which is at stake. Much more important is the creative imagination and spiritual affinity in religious thinking, which are able to revive the old texts and transform them into a living testimony for our own time.

The tradition of Eastern Christianity offers a clear lesson that the best guardian of the faith is a person truly transfigured through the power of the Holy Spirit. One can trust such a person more than any institution. This conviction implies an unshaken hope that God alone will raise, if need be, “prophets” and “confessors” who will help the Church to preserve in her life the unaltered identity of the Gospel. No wonder that those who often awakened human consciences were in fact charismatic elders (*startzi*), people filled with God’s Spirit, full of inner peace, endowed with the gift of discretion, empathy, and the healing of spiritual infirmities. Whenever the life of the Church was threatened by formalism and fossilization of tradition, there appeared also individuals called *sáloi* or *iuródivyie*, i.e. “fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor 4:10), very courageous and inwardly free, truly “visited by God”. They would shake the believers out of religious sleep, insensitivity, and pharisaism, while themselves remaining permanent pilgrims, renouncing or not caring about their good name among people.

The way to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church is accessible in different degrees to all. “Come and see!” (Jn 1,46) – said Philip, one of the first disciples of Jesus to another Galilean, Nathanael, inviting him to meet the Teacher of Nazareth. We may also say: Come and experience for yourself the presence of the Spirit! Everyone has to do it on his or her own account. On the other hand, one has to admit that it is not easy to discover that holy fire brought to the earth by Jesus, who said: “how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lc 12:49 NIV). This is the fire of the Spirit, so often covered by ashes of mediocrity and the indifference of the believers themselves.

The Orthodox Church is not open and receptive to contemporary charismatic movements to the same degree as the Western Churches. She appreciates more the gift of “spiritual tears” of compunction than the gift of tongues. The main reason lies in the understanding of the Church as the privileged space of the continuing Pentecost. Above all the experience of the Holy Spirit is considered to be of a sacramental character. In this perspective the very celebration of the Eucharist appears as an irreplaceable charismatic event and a source of the various gifts of the Spirit. The Church does not exercise control over the action of the Spirit, who remains the supreme sovereign Spirit of God. She can only persist in the attitude of invoking the Spirit’s coming down upon us and upon the eucharistic gifts to make the bread the Body and the wine in the cup the Blood of Christ.

The epiclesis means an invocation (*epikaléō* – invoke on somebody or something), a solemn request made to the Father to send down the Holy Spirit. This is a request which is always answered, fulfilled, and effective, because the whole Church, celebrating the holy mysteries of our salvation addresses it to God. The most developed form of the epiclesis appears in the eucharistic liturgy (called in the Eastern Church the Divine Liturgy), when the celebrant on behalf of the congregation (“we”) asks the Father to send down the Holy Spirit “on us” and also on the offered gifts of bread and wine. First on us, so that with the purified and transfigured eyes of our mind

and heart we may be able to recognize, through faith, the life-giving power of the gifts changed by the Spirit into the Body and Blood of Christ. The epiclesis is a prayerful expression of Pentecostal spirituality.

In the course of our earthly existence we may thus draw nearer to the living experience of the presence of God's Spirit in the mystery of the Church. We learn to experience, in ourselves and in other people, the spiritual beauty of the transfiguration. The beauty and the power of the Spirit transform us and prevent the disintegration of our humanity. The degree to which we can experience this beneficial process is commensurate with our inner change which takes place through spiritual effort (called *pódvig* in Old Church Slavonic). The spirituality of the epiclesis arouses a deep sensibility of one's own shortcomings in living up to the Gospel of Christ. It makes us more and more aware of the need for continuous dependence on God's Spirit. It also teaches us to live in the epicletic atmosphere of invoking the Spirit amidst our poverty and sinfulness. Existentially, the epiclesis means invoking the Spirit out of the very depth of our being. Everything within us cries then for the transfiguration of what continues to be an expectation of the real change.

An ancient Eucharistic prayer used in the Syriac liturgy calls the Holy Spirit "the witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus"⁴³ – not a neutral or indifferent witness, but one full of compassion and love. It was the Spirit who descended upon him already during his baptism in the river Jordan (cf. Lc 3:22) and later inspired him to lay down his life for the salvation of all. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews wrote therefore: "how much more effectively the blood of Christ, who offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to God through the eternal Spirit, can purify our inner self from dead actions so that we do our service to the living God" (Hbr 9:14).

We can experience the beneficial presence of the Holy Spirit through continuous effort to follow Christ and to live up to his Gospel as his disciples. One should not forget, however, that in the sovereign action of the Spirit there is something of truly divine anonymity and abiding discretion. For this reason one can speak with some Orthodox theologians about "the kenosis of the Spirit", who seems to expropriate himself, remain deprived of his own face, in order to be seen even more clearly in the face of Christ and the people touched by his transforming power. This often happens when the believers become unfaithful to their vocation or become unable to perceive the inspirations of the Spirit. The kenosis of the Spirit has something to do with the human guilt. The New Testament's warnings should be taken seriously. This concern our lives too: "Never try to suppress the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19 JB)! Another text sounds similar: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30 NIV). In the Book of Revelation we hear seven times the provocative words addressed to the seven Asian churches:

⁴³ E.-P. Siman, *L'expérience de l'Esprit par l'Église d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche*, Paris 1971, 200

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7.11.17.29; 3:6.13.22 JB). Number seven is a symbol of fullness and universality and it means that the words are directed to the Church as a whole.

CHAPTER IV

WESTERN TRADITIONS AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The various types of spirituality in other Christian Churches, especially those issued from the Reformation or influenced by it, are marked by a breath of freedom, personal expectation of the active presence of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the awakening or revival of those who truly believe. The presence of the Spirit is experienced there in different ways. Let us take a closer look at some selected examples of the living experience of the Spirit in other Churches and communities. What follows can of necessity be only a brief outline of the issue.

In the School of the Holy Spirit

Protestant pneumatology envisages Christian life in the freedom of the Paraclete. Both Martin Luther and John Calvin vehemently protested against the outgrowth of authority and power in the Church. They criticized the lack of flexibility and spontaneity, but also they strongly opposed the teachings of religious enthusiasts, zealots, and dreamers (*die Schwärmer*). It was a reaction to the views of those who wanted to be free from all external structures and institutional elements, who preached the radical priority of the spirit over the letter, and claimed to receive direct illumination from the Holy Spirit, independent of the proclamation of the word of God and the administration of the sacraments.¹

According to Martin Luther, the Holy Spirit leads people into the community of the Church and through the preaching of the Gospel draws them close to Christ. The Spirit reveals the meaning of the word of God and makes it effective in penetrating the depth of the heart. Thanks to this believers can understand the meaning of the word addressed to them, accept it with confident faith, and remain faithful to its requirements. Luther emphasized the role of external, temporal means or instruments of the Spirit's action, i.e. of the word of God and the sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper). He believed that the Holy Spirit had called him through the Gospel, enlightened him, and maintained him in the true faith (*The Little Catechism*). In this way the acting presence of the Spirit is linked with faith in Christ and with listening to the word of the Gospel. Anyone desiring to become a true Christian must pass through the experience of the Spirit acting in his heart. "For nobody can understand God and his word, if he has

¹ Cf. M. Luther, *Schmalkaldische Artikel* (1537) III,8, in: *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Weimarer Ausgabe-further: WA], 50,245-246; idem, *Von den Konziliis un Kirchen* (1539). WA 50,646.

not been directly enlightened by the Spirit. One should experience, perceive and feel the action of the Holy Spirit. Only these experiences become the school of the Holy Spirit. Without them the words remain only words".²

The *Symbolical Books* of Lutheranism maintain that only the transfiguring power of the Spirit can overcome human misery and weakness, and through the gift of faith (*sola fide*) bring justification to sinners. The sanctifying action of the Divine Giver of Life takes place in the community of the Church. The redemption brought about by Christ can be actualized and made effective through the Spirit. As the Son of God was incarnated by the power of the Holy Spirit, so it is through the Spirit that Jesus Christ reveals himself to people and leads them to the final fulfilment of salvation.

In the Protestant view, the free and sovereign action of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for both the whole Church and individual Christians to recognize in Jesus their Lord and Saviour. All those who have received the Spirit may give witness to their personal experience of the divine gift. They know full well that one has to implore in humility the coming of the Paraclete who enlightens the way to the living Christ and to his Gospel. It is the Spirit who liberates us from egocentric and egoistic attitudes with their spiritual emptiness, and leads us into the fruitful life of grace and freedom.³

The father of the German Reformation made a serious effort to overcome both the danger of institutionalism and the pure subjectivism and radical emancipation of "the enthusiasts". While pleading for "spiritual Christianity" subject to the sovereign power of the Spirit, he did not reject the visible dimensions of the Church as People of God. This is a very characteristic feature of Luther's pneumatology and spirituality. In his writings one can discover a profound theology of the Holy Spirit, developed within the Western tradition. This fact is positively evaluated also by some Orthodox theologians who warn against the Orthodox "monopolization" of the teaching about the Holy Spirit in its connections with the conception of the Church.⁴

John Calvin took great pains to emphasize the role of the inner experience and witness of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to this experience the faithful are able to distinguish the inspired word of God from what it is not.

² WA 7, 538. These words appear in Luther's commentary to the *Magnificat*. The Mother of Christ personally experienced what it meant to be enlightened and taught by the Spirit.

³ Cf. M. Plathow, *Der Geist hilft unserer Schwachheit. Ein aktualisierender Forschungsbericht zu M. Luthers Rede vom Heiligen Geist*, „Kerygma und Dogma“ 40 (1994) 143-169; Ch. Henning, *Die evangelische Lehre vom Heiligen Geist und seiner Person. Studien zur Architektur protestantischer Pneumatologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, Gütersloh 2000.

⁴ See N. A. Nissiotis, *Is there a Church Ontology in Martin Luther's Ecclesiology?*, in: *Luther et la réforme allemande dans une perspective oecuménique*, Chambésy-Genève 1983, 403-426, esp. 408-409.

The Spirit not only illuminates them so that they can understand the word of God, but enables them to recognize the truth in their conscience and enlightened mind. The authority of the Scripture and the certainty of faith are based entirely on God who cares for the salvation of his people. His grace acts both from within, through the testimony of the Spirit; and from without, by the proclamation of the word and the celebration of the sacraments. The risen Christ is the only head of the Church. He rules his people by his word and Spirit.⁵

The Reformed Churches (called Presbyterian in Anglo-Saxon countries) are governed by presbyters (elders) according to the apostolic model found in the New Testament. Worship is simple, orderly, and dignified, with an emphasis upon listening to and preaching the word of God. Few Churches have weekly celebration of the Eucharist while monthly celebration is frequently the norm. Leaders of the Reformed family of Churches were among the pioneers of the World Council of Churches.

Continual Invoking of the Holy Spirit

The Church of England separated from Rome in the 16th century during the reign of Henry VIII. The Act of Supremacy (1534) rejected the authority of the Pope. A new national Church was established whose beliefs and organization reflect both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions and teachings. It was understood to be “the bridge Church” between Roman Catholicism and the continental Protestantism. The Protestant principles of the Reformation were introduced gradually with the Bible available to all and recognized as the final authority; the sacraments were reduced in number. It must be pointed out that Anglicanism stressed the continuity of its faith and maintained all the creeds and doctrines of the early Church.

This inclusiveness or comprehensiveness has left room for all shades of opinion within the Anglican Church. Its members include both evangelicals, with their emphasis on simple faith, the sense of freedom in the Holy Spirit, and personal salvation, and Anglo-Catholics with their high view of sacraments and ritual. They are held together by a common faith and doctrine, common liturgy, and episcopal structure. There is no specifically Anglican confession of faith and no central authority. The Anglican Churches overseas are all independent national Churches. At the time being there are serious tensions and controversies in the world-wide Anglican Communion, mostly over sacramental and ethical issues (ordination of women, homosexuality), which jeopardize its inner unity.

The Anglican Church has considerably enriched its own experience of the Holy Spirit which deserves special attention. In the official dialogue with the Orthodox Church, Anglicans have come to appreciate the epiclesis

⁵ See P. Jaskola, *Panem jest Duch. Zasadnicze kierunki reformowanej pneumatologii (The Spirit Is the Lord: Basic Trends in the Reformed Pneumatology)*, Opole 2000, 17-73.

– the invocation of the Spirit – especially in the celebration of the Eucharist. This was clearly expressed in the Moscow Joint Statement of 1976:

The Eucharist is the action of the Holy Trinity. The Father gives the Body and the Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit to the Church in response to the Church's prayer. The Liturgy is this prayer for the eucharistic gifts to be given. It is in this context that the invocation of the Holy Spirit should be understood. The operation of the Holy Spirit is essential to the Eucharist whether it is explicitly expressed or not. When it is articulated, the *Epiclesis* voices the work of the Spirit with the Father in the consecration of the elements as the Body and the Blood of Christ (par 29).

The consecration of the bread and the wine results from the whole sacramental liturgy. The act of consecration includes certain proper and appropriate moments – thanksgiving, anamnesis, *Epiclesis*. The deepest understanding of the hallowing of the elements rejects any theory of consecration by formula – whether by Words of Institution or *Epiclesis* (par 30).

The common declaration emphasizes also some other essential aspects of the eucharistic event, relating the action of the Holy Spirit to the entire community of the Church and to the whole creation.

The unity of the members of the Church is renewed by the Spirit in the eucharistic act. The Spirit comes not only upon the elements, but upon the community. The *Epiclesis* is a double invocation: by the invocation of the Spirit, the members of Christ are fed by his Body and Blood so that they may grow in holiness and may be strong to manifest Christ to the world and to do his work in the power of the Spirit. 'We hold this treasure in earthen vessels'. The reception of the Holy Gifts calls for repentance and obedience. Christ judges the sinful members of the Church. The time is always at hand when judgement must begin at the household of God (2 Cor 4:7; 1 Pet 4:17) (par 31).

Although *Epiclesis* has a special meaning in the Eucharist, we must not restrict the concept to the Eucharist alone. In every sacrament, prayer, and blessing the Church invokes the Holy Spirit and in all these various

ways calls upon Him to sanctify the whole creation. The Church is that Community which lives by continually invoking the Holy Spirit (par 32).⁶

This important Statement has had a strong impact on the book of *Common Worship* for the Church of England published in 2000. In the Eucharistic Prayers (A-H), like in those of the Roman Catholic Church introduced after the liturgical reform of Vatican II, there are clear references to the transforming and uniting action of the Holy Spirit. In *Prayer A*, for example, in the opening dialogue the congregation praises God for Christ, his living Word: –“Through him you have sent upon us your holy and life-giving Spirit, and made us a people for your own possession.” – [All] “To you be glory and praise for ever.” Before the words of institution the celebrant asks:

Accept our praises, heavenly Father,
through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ,
and as we follow his example and obey his command,
grant that by the power of your Holy Spirit
these gifts of bread and wine
may be to us his body and his blood...

Then at the end of the eucharistic prayer come the words concerning all the participants of the Lord's Supper:

Accept through him [Jesus Christ], our great high priest,
this our sacrifice of thanks and praise,
and as we eat and drink these holy gifts
in the presence of your divine majesty,
renew us by your Spirit,
inspire us with your love
and unite us in the body of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.⁷

Also in other eucharistic prayers one hears the constant call of the Church addressed to God the Father: “Send your Holy Spirit”. And the Spirit is praised as the One by whose power our Saviour took flesh, and who gathers into one in God's kingdom all those who share the one bread and one cup (Prayer B). Thanks to the Spirit, people “may feed on Christ with opened eyes and hearts on fire” (Prayer D). In all these prayers one can see the vital implications of the theology of the epiclesis. To remain

⁶ *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Moscow Statement Agreed by the Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission 1976 with introductory and supporting material*, ed. by Archimandrite Kallistos Ware and the Reverend Colin Davey, London 1977, 90-91.

⁷ *Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England*, London: Church House Publishing 2000, 184-187.

faithful to her mission the Church must continually invoke the Holy Spirit for our human weakness. This should be a fruitful lesson for all Christians.

The Inner Light

The Reformation gave birth to a large number of movements and religious communities which, to a greater or lesser degree, proclaim their conviction of the inner inspiration and illumination by the Holy Spirit⁸. One of the most prominent examples in this regard is the community of Quakers, later called the Religious Society of Friends. It originated about 1650 under the leadership of George Fox (1624-1691) and other itinerant preachers. Within a short time their message spread throughout many countries of Northern Europe and the British colonies. The Quakers rejected compulsory church attendance, refused to take up military service and disregarded some social conventions such as deference to superiors and judicial oaths. For this reason they met with vigorous opposition. In 1682 William Penn founded the Quaker community in Pennsylvania. The Friends oppose any form of violence, bring help, and defend the rights of every human person. In 1947 they were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

The central doctrine of the Society of Friends is the "Inner Light" which can be experienced by every person. Emphasizing the paramount importance given to the Inner Light, Fox rejected the traditional practice of the sacraments, the ministry, any form of church authority, outward worship, creed, or the Bible. The only true baptism is spiritual by its nature. The divine rule of life is the Holy Spirit revealed by this Inner Light which gives the sense of God's presence and of the direct working of Christ in the souls of the faithful. The possession of the Light frees human beings from sin, unites to Christ, and enables them to perform good works. One has to listen to the voice of God in silence and unite with God in spiritual communion. God speaks through all people and all things. Every human being is a sacred reality and as such he can come into a personal, direct, and independent contact with God.

It is not my intention to evaluate such religious attitudes from the outside. To many Christians it would seem to be a case of far-reaching individualism, where everything is based on personal inner illumination only. The principle of freedom and autonomy of the Spirit reach here their ultimate consequences. The teaching and the sacramental life of the Church are of practically no importance. It is often difficult to distinguish the voice of one's own conscience from the true light of the Holy Spirit. However, Christian spirituality of this sort can be attractive to people who, in their

⁸ Here and below see *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, ed. by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, second edition, London 1967; *The Ecumenical Advance: A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, volume 2: 1948-1968, ed. by Harold E. Fey, London 1970; *Handbook Member Churches: World Council of Churches*, ed. by Ans J. van der Bent, Geneva 1982, 17-29.

quest for God, yearn for tranquillity and silence in our world full of noise and empty words.

The Guidance of the Spirit

The Mennonites, the oldest Protestant Free Church, share some characteristics with the Quakers. They follow Menno Simons (1496-1561), a former parish priest in Dutch Friesland who renounced his connections with the Roman Catholic Church in 1536 and joined the Anabaptists. These suffered severe persecution after their attempted introduction of "the kingdom of the saints" in Munster. Simons reorganized the stricken communities, stressing believers' baptism, the responsibilities of the local congregation, non-resistance, and peaceful witness. The different Mennonite communities reject church organization, infant baptism, and the doctrine of the real presence in the Eucharist. They refuse to join military service or perform any public office. Every congregation is independent and the Lord's Supper is administered by elders chosen by the community. There is no common doctrine. Some Mennonites hold the doctrine of the Trinity while others are practically Unitarian. The Dutch and German communities were founding members of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The Mennonite World Conference seeks to promote the kingdom of God in greater obedience to Christ, and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit they aspire to deepen faith and hope in the ministry of the Church to the world.

One can also mention here some other Free Churches and their experience of the Holy Spirit. The modern Baptist Church was founded in Holland (1609) by John Smyth, a clergyman who had left the Church of England. He opposed infant baptism holding that the Church should receive its members by baptism after they had, as adults, consciously acknowledged their faith. The revival movements greatly contributed to the spread of Baptist Churches. The Church as the body of Christ is considered to be a communion of the faithful who have made, personally and voluntarily, a decision for Christ. Because of their personal confession of faith they become, through baptism, members of Christ's Church animated by God's Spirit. Only the Bible is recognized as the ultimate binding authority. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit each Church, may interpret the Scriptures and shape the concrete life and activity of its community.

The Methodist Church following John and Charles Wesley tried to bring a greater spiritual enthusiasm and joy given by the Holy Spirit to the life of the Church of England in the 18th century. In their teaching they stressed the inner witness and the fruits of the Spirit. Their efforts at revival proved unacceptable to the Anglican ministers, so that a separate Church had to be established. In contrast to the Calvinistic ideas of election and predestination, the Methodists share the optimistic view that salvation is possible for all human beings because "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8.16).

Several groups of Christians separated themselves from the Presbyterian Church in North America early in the 19th century. They desired to restore the congregational pattern of the Church shaped during the New Testament times. These groups called themselves simply “Christians”, “Christian Churches”, “the Church of Christ” or “Christian Disciples”. Soon they joined together in one body called Christian Churches or Disciples of Christ. The word of God as expressed in the New Testament is seen as the perfect constitution of the worship, discipline, and government for church community. In their view the Bible is the best source of Christian knowledge about God and the way of salvation, far better than creeds or statements of dogma. For this reason the Disciples of Christ believe in the Trinity, the action of the Holy Spirit in human life, the vicarious atonement, and the necessity of spiritual rebirth in the believer’s baptism by immersion. From the very beginning the Disciples have been active in the ecumenical movement. Inspired by their belief in the essential oneness of the Churches in the Lord Jesus Christ they cultivate the spirit of brotherhood and fellowship.

Pietism and the Spirit of God

From their emergence in Germany in the mid-seventeenth century, the Pietists were also marked by the aspiration for personal revival of faith and experience of the Holy Spirit’s presence in human life. The movement started as a reaction to the doctrinal inflexibility of the Lutheran orthodoxy. Its followers tried to go back to the original form of Lutheranism. Therefore they revived the feeling of personal responsibility, emphasized the need of illumination and visitation by the Spirit, and the sharing of spiritual experience. The Pietists wanted to live their life of faith as people reborn again of the Spirit to the kingdom of God (cf. Jn 3:3-8). Philipp Jakob Spener established the so-called “associations of piety” (*collegia pietatis*) and laid down the basic principles for the renewal of life: 1) the Holy Spirit acts in all believers; 2) one has to allow the Spirit to act; 3) nobody has the exclusive right to the gifts of the Spirit; 4) without the Spirit even the Scripture remains a dead text which does not disclose its spiritual riches and does not become the place of God’s presence.

Pietism shaped a specific type of Christian spirituality and mysticism, characterized by intimacy and intensity of religious experience. Its history gives witness that from the very beginning it was addressed to small groups supposed to become “the true Christians”. With time passing the attitudes changed and new horizons were opened. Although Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760) concentrated his attention on the person of Jesus as Saviour, he stressed the role of faith in spreading the Gospel much more than spiritual experience as such.

The current understanding of Pietism as sentimental religiosity, unfavourably disposed to theology and intellectual effort is not consonant with the richness of the spiritual attitudes within this movement.

Contemporary neo-Pentecostalism developed in some measure also under the influence of Pietism and other types of spirituality characterized by "revival" which stressed the action of the Holy Spirit and personal experience of the Paraclete's presence.

The revival and renewal movements kept appearing throughout centuries in various evangelical Churches. They were accompanied by the atmosphere of eschatological expectation of the coming of Christ and by charismatic manifestations of different kinds. Some Christians surrounding E. Irving (died 1854) in London aimed to restore the original Pentecostal dynamism to the Church, including the gift of prophesy. The 20th century neo-Pentecostalism has its antecedents in earlier charismatic experiences.

Pentecost Revisited

The first years of the 20th century saw the rise of the co-called Pentecostal movement which spread rapidly in different countries. It was initiated by believers who practiced baptism in the Holy Spirit accompanied by the gift of speaking in tongues, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles: "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech." (Ac 2:4).

What characterizes Pentecostal Christians is precisely a renewal of the gifts of Pentecost consequent to baptism, especially the gift of tongues and healing. They put distinctive emphasis on conversion as cleansing from sin, justification and sanctification. All Pentecostalists are urged to perform good works as part of the Spirit-filled life and as a preparation for the coming of the Lord. This includes visiting the sick, encouraging the faint-hearted, strengthening the weak, and showing people the way of salvation. Members are constantly encouraged to do good in all its forms, to respect human life, and not to participate in war. Thus one can speak of the Pentecostal ethos which prescribes also a strict abstinence from such pleasures as smoking and drinking alcohol. The sole doctrinal authority is the Bible. Some Pentecostal Churches celebrate the Lord's Supper, but allow a free interpretation of its significance. Their worship is informal, spontaneous and marked by joy and inner freedom of expression.

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To sum up, we can say that the movements of religious revival constitute a permanent component of the spirituality of Protestant Christians. Admirable are the gifts of God's Spirit in historical Christianity! Not only ideas and doctrines, but above all living people are witnesses of the Paraclete's acting in human history. The Christianity of tomorrow will continue to seek ways to experience anew the reviving and transfiguring power of the Spirit. It is not without reason that early Christianity called the Spirit "the Lord, the giver of life", professing this in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRIT WHO ISSUES FROM THE FATHER: THE *FILIOQUE* IN THE DIALOGUE OF CHRISTIANS TODAY

The divine Paraclete, the Spirit of truth “issues from the Father” (JB) or “goes out from the Father” (Jn 15:26 NIV). This is the only New Testament witness about the so-called “procession” of the Holy Spirit who takes his origin from the Father. In the Latin version of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, at least since the late sixth century, the word *Filioque* (“and from the Son”) was added to its confession that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father”. The unilateral modification in the wording of the Creed and the underlying differences in understanding the origins of the Holy Spirit within the Trinity have long been considered a dividing issue between the Western and the Eastern Churches.

This highly controversial problem belongs rather to the general doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but is significant as it sheds light on the role of the Third Person in the history of salvation. Additionally it is important from the ecumenical point of view. For this reason it cannot be passed over in silence here.

Although a great deal has already been written, the theology of the Holy Spirit still remains an underdeveloped area of Christian theological reflection. This seems to be true also of the question of the origin of the Holy Spirit, an issue which spawned a polemical atmosphere in the past. The time has come when a genuinely ecumenical spirit should guide us in our search for new ways of expressing the biblical and early Christian understanding of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. This might direct all the Churches towards a creative ecumenical consensus. One can only hope that this process of reflection on the theology of the Holy Spirit will also take into account new formulations consonant with the most valuable insights of the Christian tradition.

In Search of an Ecumenical Solution to the Old Problem

The last decades have witnessed the growth of ecumenical interest in this problem. The Commission Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches initiated the debate during two ecumenical consultations (1978, 1979) and issued the so-called “Klingenthal Memorandum” on the *Filioque* from the ecumenical point of view.¹ After more than fifteen years a new ecumenical impulse came also from the Vatican. Urged by John Paul II, the

¹ *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi. Ökumenische Überlegungen zur Filioque Kontroverse*, hrsg. von L. Vischer, Frankfurt/M. 1981, 9-23.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published a clarification of the traditional doctrine of the *Filioque* (1995), intended as a contribution to the dialogue carried out by the Joint International Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.² In its first report (1982) on “The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity” (I,6) the Commission mentioned the centuries-old difficulty concerning the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit:

Without wishing to resolve yet the difficulties which have arisen between the East and the West concerning the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, we can already say together that this Spirit, which proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26) as the sole source in the Trinity and which has become the Spirit of our sonship (Rom 8:15) since he is also the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6), is communicated to us particularly in the Eucharist by his Son upon whom he reposes in time and in eternity (Jn 1:32).

The idea of the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and “reposes” on the Son in time and eternity was particularly close to the Antiochene-Syrian tradition. It offers, as we shall see later in our reflections, a possibility of a new approach to understand the relationship between the Son and the Spirit.

An international conference organized by the Foundation “Pro Oriente” (May 15-17,1998) in Vienna was devoted to the Vatican clarification. The participants opted for restoring in the liturgy the original text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed without addition of the *Filioque*.³

In fact some events seem to point to an ever-growing willingness on the part of the Vatican to recognize the normative character of the original Creed. When Ecumenical Patriarchs paid a visit to Pope John Paul II (Dimitrios I in December 1987, and Bartholomew I in June 1995), on both occasions they proclaimed with him in St. Peter’s Basilica the Creed in Greek, i.e. without the *Filioque*. It was also the case during the visit of Patriarch Teoctist in Rome (October, 2002), when both hierarchs did the same in Romanian at a papal Mass. The document “Dominus Iesus” issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (August 6, 2000) begins with the text of the Creed of 381, also without the *Filioque*. These events suggest a new awareness on the Catholic side of the normative value of the original Greek text of the Creed.

A very important contribution to the debate came shortly after that from America. Since June 1999 the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation continued its in-depth examination of the

² *The Greek and the Latin Traditions regarding the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, The Vatican 1996 (in French, Greek, English and Russian). Originally published in “L’Osservatore Romano” September 13,1995.

³ *Vom Heiligen Geist. Der gemeinsame trinitarische Glaube und das Problem des Filioque.*, hrsg. von A. Stirnemann, G. Wilflinger. Innsbruck - Wien 1998 (Pro Oriente, vol. XXI).

divergent teachings of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches about the origin of the Holy Spirit within the inner life of the triune God. On October 25, 2003 an agreed statement appeared under the title "The *Filioque*: A Church-dividing issue?"⁴ It presents the teaching on the Holy Spirit found in the Scriptures, offers historical considerations and theological reflections, and finally puts forward some theological and practical recommendations. One can hope that the statement will significantly contribute to the growth of mutual understanding of this difficult question on both sides.

The controversy concerning the unilateral addition by the Western Church of the word *Filioque* to the ecumenical confession of faith has already lasted for more than a thousand years. In endless polemics which led to the events of 1054 (symbolical date of schism), the Eastern Church pointed to the *Filioque* question as one of the main causes of division within Christianity. In consequence also the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed has ceased to be a clear sign of unity in common Christian faith. No wonder this situation has become an urgent challenge to all Churches. The problem of *Filioque* can be ecumenically resolved only when Western theologians learn to treat seriously the objections of the Orthodox, and simultaneously when Orthodox theologians critically reflect on the theological legacy of the West with equal openness. This must be a mutual learning process. One has to take into account the specific points of view of both traditions. It is a necessary hermeneutical principle of a truly ecumenical proceeding.

An ecumenical approach to this question requires that the Orthodox try to understand the original theological intentions behind the addition of the *Filioque* to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It took place in a situation where no in-depth knowledge of the great conciliar tradition was available. The Western Church officially acknowledged the controversial formula only at the beginning of the 11th century. Earlier it had begun to appear in some official statements (in the local synod of Toledo in 589, among others), although there was no intention to oppose the teaching of the Eastern Church. The insertion of the *Filioque* aimed to counteract the spread of Western variants of Arianism and adoptionism, reaffirming in this way the divinity of Christ. Towards the end of the 8th century the formula was added to the Creed especially at the court of the emperor Charlemagne, who, together with his theologians, tried to persuade pope Leo III (795-816) to approve this modification. The Pope refused to do so and ordered for display in St. Peter's two silver plates containing, in Greek and Latin, the original text of the confession of faith established by the great ecumenical councils. The memorable words of this Pope about the *Filioque*: "let it be removed from the Symbol" (*illud de symbolo tollatur*)⁵ are also today an encouragement in support of a bold ecumenical decision.

⁴ See the text of the common statement in "St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly" 48 (2004) no. 1.

⁵ PL 102, 971-976.

Despite papal directives the Carolingians continued to use the Creed with the *Filioque* during the Eucharist in their dioceses. The wise attitude of Leo III, who did not want to render the relations with the Eastern Church more difficult, was ignored. Western theologians did not realize the seriousness of the situation created by the addition of the *Filioque* and its implications. More understanding in this respect would have strengthened the opposition to any innovation and spared the Church unending controversy and animosity. In the middle of the 9th century Byzantine missionaries were expelled from Bulgaria. They returned to Constantinople and reported on Western practices of Frankish missionaries who used the Creed with the *Filioque*. This practice was strongly condemned by Patriarch Photios as blasphemous.

After two centuries of papal resistance, at the request of the Roman emperor Henry II, the custom of adding the *Filioque* was sanctioned under the pontificate of Benedict VIII (1012-1024). Since the coronation of this emperor in 1014 the Creed was regularly sung at papal masses in Rome with this addition, regardless of further negative consequences for the history of Christianity. In the tumultuous events of 1054 Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida, the legate of Pope Leo IX, accused the Byzantines of arbitrarily deleting the *Filioque* from the Creed! At the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1445) the controversial formula was interpreted as having the same meaning as the position of some early Eastern Fathers that the Spirit proceeds “through (*diá*) the Son”.

The Consensus in the Dogmatic Core of the Creed

After many centuries of polemical distortions the *Filioque* has finally become the object of a thoroughgoing ecumenical reflection. The Churches rediscover the common understanding of the dogmatic core in confessing the faith in the Holy Trinity. The Eastern and Western traditions affirm that the Holy Spirit is a distinct divine Person (*hypóstasis*) within the mystery of God, equal to the Father and the Son, and therefore is not just a creature or personified energy of God acting in the world. This means that in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed both traditions confess the common faith that the Holy Spirit is the true God who together with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified. Both the Christian East and the West affirm that the Father alone is the principle (*arche*), the sole primordial source (*pege*) and ultimate cause (*aitía*) of the divine being, and of all God’s operations in the created reality of the universe. Both sides maintain that all the operations of God in the history of the world are the common work of the three divine Persons, even though each of them has a distinctive role within those activities (creation, sustaining in being, redemption, and ultimate fulfillment).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol of faith does not determine the mode of the procession (*ekpóreusis*) of the Holy Spirit. The reticence of the conciliar Fathers, who did not want to define the relationship between

the Spirit and the Son was deliberate, wise, and well-taken. The Second Vatican Council chose to restrict itself to the language of the Gospel. The formula says simply this: the Spirit issues from the Father inasmuch as he is the Father of the Son. The procession of the Spirit from the Father presupposes a relationship existing within the Trinity between the Father and the Son who is eternally the Son of the Father. The analogy between the *ekpóreusis* (the “coming forth”)⁶ of the Spirit and the eternal “generation” of the Son clearly excludes any thought that the Spirit may be subordinate to the Son, either within the inner life of God or in God’s saving action in time.

This dogmatic core of the Creed serves the ecumenical consensus of the Churches also today. The Greek original of the Symbol contains the necessary fullness of the faith in the Holy Spirit. The new climate of dialogue offers a unique possibility of restoring the original text of the confession of faith. An encouraging sign is the fact that the Vatican clarification clearly affirms the normative character of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in its original form:

The Catholic Church acknowledges the conciliar, ecumenical, normative, and irrevocable value, as expression of the one common faith of the Church and of all Christians, of the Symbol professed in Greek at Constantinople in 381 by the Second Ecumenical Council. No profession of faith peculiar to a particular liturgical tradition can contradict this expression of the faith taught and professed by the undivided Church.

Reading these words one can wonder what prevents this from being the end of the centuries-long controversy on the insertion of the word

⁶ The noun *ekpóreusis* and the verb *ekporeuesthai* (“issue forth”) suggest a “passage outwards” from within the Father’s own eternal Person being the source of the Divine Being. This implies a kind of mysterious “movement out of (*ek-*)” the Father. Greek theology used to restrict these technical terms to the coming forth of the Spirit from the Father. Other Greek words, such as *proienai* (“go forward”) are used by the Greek Fathers to refer to the Spirit’s historical saving “mission” from the Father and the risen Christ. – Instead the Latin words *procedere* and *procession* suggest simply “movement forward”, without the connotation of ultimate origin or of the starting-point of that movement hinted at by the Greek. They denote origin of any kind, both the generation of the Son as well as the breathing forth of the Spirit and his mission in time. Both the primordial origin of the Spirit in the eternal Father and his “coming forth” from the risen Christ tend to be designated, in Latin, by the same word *procedere* and *procession*, while Greek theology normally uses two different technical terms. – Therefore it is easy to image how many misunderstandings were possible on both sides because of the subtle difference between the Latin *procedere* and the Greek *ekporeuesthai*.

Filioque into the Latin translation of the Symbol. This feeling is further strengthened when the same document gives the following interpretation of the Council's teaching on the basis of *Jn* 15:26:

The Father alone is the principle without principle (*arche anarchos*) of the two other persons of the Trinity, the sole source (*pege*) of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit therefore takes his origin from the Father alone (*ek monou tou Patros*) in a principal, proper, and immediate manner.

The Orthodox could easily recognize the language of Patriarch Photios and the long Eastern tradition in this formulation. What we do find in the document does not, however, lead to the conclusion that from now onwards the Catholic Church should use the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol without the *Filioque*. Instead an effort is made to explain the *Filioque* from a theological and a linguistic point of view, and to show that the Latin liturgical tradition does not contradict the ecumenical Symbol. The document regards the Greek and Latin teaching about the procession of the Holy Spirit as an expression of "legitimate complementarity, provided it does not become rigid, does not affect the identity of faith in the reality of the same mystery confessed". Thus, from the dogmatic point of view, the *Filioque* is orthodox in the Latin terminology, because the word *procedit* has a meaning different from the Greek term *ekporeuomenon*.

This explanation, although conducive to further dialogue, does not remove the main obstacle. In fact, the question of the theological interpretation of the *Filioque* is something else than its unilateral addition to the Latin translation of the Creed. The main obstacle in the dialogue is not the theology of the *Filioque* as such, but the very presence of this addition to the Symbol of faith. The Christian East does not require that the Western Christians renounce their theology considered to be a legitimate development. For many centuries the East has been requesting the Western Christianity to restore in its liturgy the original text of the Symbol, recognized now as "conciliar, ecumenical, normative and irrevocable".

The question of the participation of the Son in the "procession" of the Holy Spirit from the Father does not constitute the dogmatic core of the Christian faith in the Holy Trinity. For this reason it should be submitted to a certain *ridimensionamento*, i.e. reduced to its real dimensions and proportions. In fact, we are dealing here with secondary differences in the theological interpretation of the doctrine on the triune God.

The Roman document does not mention the unilateral insertion of the *Filioque*-clause into the Latin translation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. One cannot detect in it any sign of readiness to recognize unequivocally the historical error and to ask for forgiveness, as required by ecumenical sincerity and honesty. This, rather than undermine the credibility of the whole Western tradition, would contribute to the

process of purifying the memory of the past. True readiness to learn from the East requires above all the willingness to overcome the traditional attitude of superiority which so often comes to the surface in Western Churches.

Hope for a Greater Openness

The Symbol of unity requires all Christians to use the same normative text of the Creed in its accurate translation into different languages. In this situation there is only one truly ecumenical solution: "a particular liturgical tradition" (the Latin one in this case!) should give way to the universal consciousness of the Church. Therefore one has to restore the original text of the Creed without the insertion of the *Filioque*. As a theologian engaged for many years in the official dialogue with the Orthodox Church, I painfully experience the lack of determination and the wavering of my Church. Further delay can only reinforce the mistrust among the Orthodox.

The restoration of the original text of the Symbol would be the most effective and encouraging ecumenical boost, a sign of sincerity and reconciliation. All other efforts seem to be only a substitute solution which unnecessarily prolongs the period of inflexibility and uncompromising attitudes. A clear recommendation was given already by the Klingenthal Memorandum:

Therefore we recommend (...), that the original form of the third article of the confession of faith without the *Filioque* be everywhere recognized as normative and restored, so that the whole Christianity may confess through this formula its common faith in the Holy Spirit.⁷

This recommendation made by the Commission on Faith and Order encountered positive reception in some Western Churches in the last decades. The eighth plenary assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Curitiba (1990) allowed the possibility of omitting the *Filioque* from the liturgy, especially during ecumenical services, or in the countries where there are many Orthodox Christians. This decision was, on the part of the Lutherans, a sign of cautious openness to an ecumenical solution of a sensitive problem.⁸

In its pragmatism, the Anglican Church went even further. In 1988 the Lambeth Conference affirmed the earlier suggestions to remove the *Filioque* and it recommended the publication of modified editions of

⁷ *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 22-23.

⁸ See M. E. Chapman, *A Lutheran Proposal for the Neuralgic Question of the "Filioque"*. *The L. W. F. at Curitiba, Brasil 1990*, "Journal of Ecumenical Studies" 1991, No. 2, 239-259.

liturgical texts without the Filioque-clause. Anglicans admit that this clause does not belong to the historical and canonical context of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol. This historical decision was made with the conviction that the removal of the later addition would promote the cause of Christian unity. It is a promising example of ecumenical courage and sensibility.⁹

When the Western Churches restore the original form of the Creed, they do it without any feeling of betrayal of the theological heritage of the West. The theological interpretation of the *Filioque* is further regarded as an alternative truth developed in the Western teaching on the Holy Trinity. One can only hope that sooner or later also the Roman Catholic Church will restore to permanent liturgical use the original text of the Symbol of faith. A well-known Orthodox theologian Boris Bobrinsky from Paris wrote in 1981:

When the Latin dogma of *Filioque* loses in the eyes of the Orthodox its binding force; when the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Symbol recovers its original common form, and becomes the symbol of unity and love – then the *Filioque* will cease to be considered as sin against love and unity.¹⁰

An equally firm position was taken in 1991 also by a Greek Orthodox theologian from the United States, Theodore Stylianopoulos. If we are able, as Christians, to recite together the Symbol of faith without the *Filioque*, “it will mark a golden moment in our ecumenical journey”.¹¹ Orthodox theology has always regarded the approval by Popes of the use of *Filioque* in the Latin Creed as usurpation of the dogmatic authority which belongs to ecumenical Councils alone.

Such witnesses give courage to take bold decisions. They are important signs of good will to change the situation. The duty of the Roman Catholic Church is to make a decisive step forward. An old proverb says: where there is a will, there is a way. The removal of *Filioque* from the Symbol of faith would become an unmistakable sign of reconciliation. This decision would not imply a rejection, or discredit of the valid insights of the Western tradition. The legitimate truth contained in this theological tradition could become an object of future debate, but initiated in a new climate of mutual confidence. One can expect that the Orthodox could then recognize the *Filioque* as a Western *theologoumenon*, i.e. Latin explanation

⁹ Cf. Th. Stylianopoulos, *An Ecumenical Solution to the Filioque Question?*, “Journal of Ecumenical Studies” 1991, No. 2, 260-280, esp. 266-268.

¹⁰ B. Bobrinsky, *Das “Filioque” gestern und heute*, in: *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 119.

¹¹ Stylianopoulos, art. cit., 272.

of the Symbol, an interpretation which does not intend to add anything to the dogma proclaimed by the Second Ecumenical Council.

Orthodox theologians regard the Vatican clarification of 1995 as useful and valuable for further theological dialogue, although they do not conceal their reservations. The words of appreciation go on to a new vision of the role of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. One cannot be sure, however, what consequences should be drawn from this new vision. According to Olivier Clément, the role of the Spirit had long been neglected, especially in Western ecclesiology, and prophetic aspects of the Church were subject to "sacramentalism", this provoked in turn the reaction of the Reformation.¹²

The Spirit Who "Reposes" on the Son in Time and Eternity

The time has come to search jointly for ways leading to an ecumenical understanding of controversial issues. The new approach requires much courage, honesty and an open attitude of the mind and heart. The long controversy about *Filioque* seems to have no chance of solution if both sides only try to justify their traditional positions.

The Klingenthal Memorandum points to an alternative patristic approach which suggests that the Son is not alien to the procession of the Spirit and, on the other hand, the Spirit is not alien to the generation of the Son.¹³ Eastern theology teaches about the Spirit who "reposes" on the Son, "shines" and "radiates" through him. In this perspective it would be easier to comprehend or to imagine that the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Spirit go together simultaneously, and are inseparably linked with one another. Both aspects could be distinguished only logically, but they should not be separated from one another.

Great theologians of the East rightly emphasized the simultaneity of the eternal origins of the Son and the Spirit from the Father. St John of Damascus compares the Spirit with the Breath (*Pneuma*) of the Father, and the Son with his Word (*Logos*). This telling metaphor says that both the Son and the Spirit simultaneously have their origin in the Father.¹⁴ This means that the Father never was without the Word, and the Word never was without the Breath. The Word must always have its Breath. The Divine Spirit eternally accompanies the Word and reveals its action.¹⁵

Before Christ communicated the gift of the Spirit to people, he was himself the one on whom the Spirit "reposed". This fact gives witness to the divine reciprocity and mutual belonging of the Son and the Spirit. The "mission" of the Spirit in the world involves the Son, who receives the

¹² O. Clément, *Enfin, un oecuménisme créateur*, "Contacts" 1996, no. 173, 2-3.

¹³ *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 20.

¹⁴ John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* I, 7-8. PG 94, 804-805.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, I,8. PG 94,824.

Spirit into his humanity at his baptism in the river Jordan, breathes the Spirit forth on his disciples late on the day of the resurrection, and sends the Spirit into the world at Pentecost. According to the Gospel's account the Spirit first "descended on [Jesus] in bodily shape, like a dove" (Lc 3:22) during his baptism, and permeated his messianic presence and earthly activity. Jesus is fully obedient to the Spirit: he is "led by the Spirit through the wilderness" (Lc 4:1) and begins then to preach "with the power of the Spirit in him" (Lc 4:14). It was the same Spirit who had "prepared" the event of the incarnation of the Son: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" (Lc 1:35) – said the angel to Mary. Before his death, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit from the Father: "I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate [Paraclete] to be with you for ever", "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (Jn 14:16.26).

The role of the Spirit in the whole life of Christ reveals something of the eternal mystery of God. The Spirit "reposes" on the Son in eternity as he "reposed" on Jesus during his earthly life. This long neglected aspect of the New Testament teaching (manifested especially in St Luke's Gospel which later found a strong repercussion in the Syrian tradition), throws some light also on the theology of the eternal "procession" of the Spirit from the Father. The eternal and perfect reciprocity between the Son and the Spirit is in turn the reason of the Spirit's presence in the saving mission of the Son in time.

The insight showing the Spirit who reposes on the Son in time and in eternity offers perhaps the best possibility of a new approach to the understanding of mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit with all its implications. This vision a priori excludes any possible tendency to subordinate the Spirit to the Son. The resistance of the Orthodox theology to the *Filioque* derived in large measure from fear that this addition, present in the Latin version of the Creed, would diminish the role of the Holy Spirit also in the life of the Church as freedom and the prophetic spirit risk being submitted to institutions, structures, and juridical regulations. The *Filioque* does not say anything about the mutual relationship between the Son and the Spirit. Thus it creates a certain difficulty also for Western theology which claims to be faithful to biblical and patristic data.

Towards a Reconciliation of the Eastern and Western Traditions

The mode of the divine "processions" – the Son's by "generation" and the Spirit's through "coming forth" (*ekpóreusis*) – is incomprehensible to the human mind. We can only resort to metaphors and remote analogies. From a logical point of view the two mutually interdependent orders or movements can be distinguished: the movement "from" and the movement "to" (or "towards"). The *Filioque* speaks only a language of the movement "from" ("who proceeds *from* the Father and the Son"), but says nothing about the movement "towards" within the mysterious interpersonal process

of the divine processions. By emphasizing only one movement and one aspect of the eternal inner life of God one runs the risk of subordinating the Spirit to the Son and of diminishing his personal equality with the other persons of the Trinity.

The Christians of the two traditions, both Eastern and Western, could already today confess together their faith that the Spirit comes forth eternally *from* the Father *towards* the Son, and returns *from* the Son (or through the Son) *to* the Father, in one mysterious cycle of the divine life of the Trinity. According to St John of Damascus, the Spirit comes forth *from* the Father *to* the Son, in order to “repose” (*anapaúein*) on the Son and abide in him.¹⁶ But the Spirit who reposes (or rests) on the Son returns, as it were, from or through the Son to the Father, who is the ultimate principle, source and cause of the divinity of the two other Persons. In other words, the Spirit abides in the Son and thus eternally reveals or manifests him (*ekphaínei*) to his beloved Father.¹⁷ The idea of “manifesting” the Son to the Father implies a certain shining forth or radiating (*éklampsis*, *éllampsis*) of the Spirit from/through the Son to the Father. For this reason the same Damascene spoke about the mutual indwelling and interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of the divine Persons:

For the Son is in the Father and in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is in the Father and the Son, whereas the Father is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit, however without any fusion, mingling, or identification. The unity and identity exist only concerning the movement, because all three Persons have the same one surge [or impulsion, *égzalma*] and the one movement (*kínesis*). This cannot be traced in the created nature.¹⁸

Needless to say, this can only be our imperfect human image of the unending communion (*koinonía*) of love between the divine Persons – the image of mutual reciprocity and eternal exchange of love: “God is love” (1Jn 4:8.16). The “coming forth” of the Spirit presupposes the generation of the Son on whom he reposes and in whom he remains as the love of the Father who is always the Father of the Son.

It is true that the Greek and Latin theological traditions display some tension and are difficult to reconcile with each other. I am deeply convinced, however, that they no longer need divide us. In the light of the above interpretation they are able to come closer together and contribute to the process of mutual reconciliation. Recent ecumenical attempts to close

¹⁶ John of Damascus, *De fide orthodoxa* I,7.8.13. PG 94, 805.821.857.

¹⁷ *Ibidem* I,13 (856).

¹⁸ *Ibidem* I,14 (860). Cf. M.D. Torre, *St John Damascene and St Thomas Aquinas on the Eternal Procession of the Holy Spirit*, „St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly” 38: 1994, No. 3, 303-327, esp. 320.

the old controversy take into account the theological sensibility of both sides.

In this way the Christian theology of the Holy Trinity may regain some of its existential relevance. It would be easier then to understand that God's Spirit always leads us to Christ, because he eternally comes forth from the Father *to* the Son. At the same time the Spirit leads us through the Son back *to* the Father, because he eternally returns from the Son to the Father, from whom they both come.

A Plea for More Modesty in Our Knowledge of God

At the end of our reflections we may simply ask: who is really interested today in the problem of the *Filioque*? Certainly not the vast majority of the faithful in our Churches. Most often they do not even understand the meaning of this question and do not attribute any existential value to it. At the time when so many people are losing their faith in God or do not hide their skepticism, theologians still seem to be victims of their excessive curiosity and inquisitiveness. Why not take seriously into account the sense of the faithful (*sensus fidelium*)? An internationally renowned linguist, Anna Wierzbicka from the University of Canberra in Australia wrote not long ago:

After twenty centuries of Christianity, the sense is growing among Christians and non-Christians alike that the creeds that congregations recite in churches each week are largely incomprehensible even to the congregations, let alone to the outsider. It would, of course, be an illusion to assume that people who publicly confessed their faith in the past always understood the creeds of their churches. But perhaps the need to understand in order to believe was felt less acutely then than now. As individual reasoning and opinions have become the ultimate arbiters of what can and should be accepted as true, understanding has increasingly become essential to faith.¹⁹

We realize more and more clearly the difficulty of the whole of the hermeneutical problem. The mystery of God's inner life surpasses the ability of our mind and heart. One can reasonably assume that the long controversy on the *Filioque* would have been less acrimonious and acute if both sides had shown epistemological modesty, a living consciousness of the insurmountable limitations of our human knowledge of God. The Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity should not become merely a domain

¹⁹ A. Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*, Oxford 2001, 444.

of theological speculations. It has an existential character. Theologians have to become more realistic and sober in approaching the issues which they have not been able to solve for centuries.

The lesson of the past should not be forgotten. Those who really want to discuss the eternal origin of the Holy Spirit find themselves in the face of the ineffable mystery of faith. This mystery requires, both in the East and the West, a wise and reverent attitude inspired by a sense of the deceptiveness and the inadequacy of all human concepts and analogies. We all need an acute awareness of the transcendent reality and freedom of God, which imposes prudence and circumspection on our theological judgments. One can properly speak about the mystery of the triune God using above all the language of negative, i.e. apophatic theology which emphasizes the limitations of human thoughts, words and concepts.

An apophatic consciousness warns against any attempt to adjust the mystery of God to our fragile categories of thinking. However, Christians are not entirely doomed to complete silence in face of this mystery. They have to speak about God in order to bring the Good News to the world and give witness, and at the same time to confront their words with the witness of the Holy Scriptures.

There is one more important aspect of the theological language concerning the attempt to solve the problem of *Filioque*. The above mentioned Klingenthal Memorandum reminds all of us that "every speech about the Trinity is by its nature doxological".²⁰ This remark can serve as one of the basic hermeneutical principles. The centuries-long controversies on the *Filioque* have contributed in large measure to undermining the credibility of the Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity. Polemical distortions in which each side caricatures the position of the other risk discrediting this teaching. Today one has to go back to the language of the Bible and the early tradition, which was above all a language of doxology (*dóxa* – glory) which praised God for what he has done for the world in the history of salvation. Our task is to rediscover the original character, wisdom, and far-sightedness of this language.

The thinking and language of the early Church concerning the doctrine on the Holy Trinity developed in the doxological context of the confession of faith. The doxological statements are not just abstract definitions and descriptions. Their task is to lead people to the all-embracing, ineffable reality of God. They give guidance to human hope, thinking, speaking, and acting. Doxology is directed above all to the living God; it addresses him but is not exhausted in the linguistic form of prayer and adoration. Every kind of thinking, hope, and action may become doxological when it is inspired by the invocation of God and points to the future.

Doxology is closely linked with Christian hope, because our God is "the God of hope" (Rom 15:13). The aim of doxological utterances is to

²⁰ *Geist Gottes – Geist Christi*, 15.

give witness to the triune God, to praise him, and to invoke with confidence his holy name. The invocation (epiclesis!) is a sign of trust in God, an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving. When the invocation takes the form of the confession of faith, it becomes witness that the eternal God remains always the same as the One revealed in the history of humanity and that he desires to bring all fulfillment in the new world of the resurrection. Thus hope traces out the orientation to doxology, becoming expectation and anticipation of the unseen reality (cf. Hbr 11,1). The words of doxology and hope anticipate the ultimate fulfillment. Even now they partly realize what they mean, and therefore have a performing and creative character.

Doxology, confession of faith, hope, and invocation go together. The Vatican clarification referred to at the beginning of this chapter mentions only briefly and at the end the need “for constant invocation (*epiclesis*) of the Holy Spirit and his action (*enérgeia*)”. A truly ecumenical text should combine more closely the question of the procession of the Spirit with the language of doxology, hope and invocation, as this was emphasized by the Klingenthal Memorandum.

One has to continue this effort in the conviction that the language of doxology, invocation, and hope remains the best human instrument testifying to the presence of the triune God in the history of the world. Faith in the divine Trinity would then disclose its fuller meaning and come closer to our daily experience. If the Scripture says about the Holy Spirit that he “issues” or “goes out from the Father”, we have to confine ourselves to this statement. Authentic intellectual courage imposes limitations on its inquisitiveness. Let us not want to see more than is really needed! In this sense one can read the beginning of Cardinal John-Henry Newman’s “*The Pillar of the Cloud*”:

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom
 Lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home –
 Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene – one step enough for me.²¹

We all have to recognize the limitations of our ability to make definitive assertions about the inner life of God. Such an attitude helps us to discover “a reverent modesty” in all discussions about the origin and person of the Holy Spirit within the mystery of God, and about the relationships of Father, Son, and Spirit with each other.²² In this way we can grow together in respect for the wisdom of our Christian faith and its real depths.

²¹ J.H. Newman, *Prayers, Verses, and Devotions*, San Francisco 2000, 572.

²² *The „Filioque”: a Church dividing issue? An Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation* (2003), part III.

CHAPTER VI

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT

The biblical concept of the apparently unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit deserves special attention in our reflections. It has caused considerable misunderstanding. Some people may easily imagine that they have committed this terrible sin and seriously think that they will not be forgiven, either in this world or in the world to come. They live in an atmosphere of constant tension, anxiety, fear and despair. Such experience can poison the whole spiritual life, make it fruitless, deprive it of growth, creativity, joy, and hope.

How can we reconcile this situation with the wise advice of the Bible: “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh 8:10)? How can we share the conviction of the Apostle of the Nations: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Phil 4:4 NIV). Paul’s great encouragement can be expressed in other words: “I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness” (JB). Happiness cannot go hand in hand with an announcement of a forthcoming doom sanctioned by God because of an unforgivable sin. What is then the true meaning of this sin against the Holy Spirit? A better understanding of the Jewish prophetic tradition can bring us to a resolution of this exegetical problem.

The Hyperbolic and Paradoxical Language of Jesus

In her masterwork *What Did Jesus Mean?*, Anna Wierzbicka rightly draws attention to language as a key issue in understanding his message.¹ Many Western readers of the Gospel continue to find Jesus’ way of speaking extraordinary, strange, striking, riddle-like, paradoxical, hyperbolic, humorous, or even absurd. Examples of such utterances can be quoted in large numbers: remove first the plank from your own eye before you take the mote from your brother’s eye; do not strain out the gnat and swallow the camel; camels passing more easily through the eye of a needle than rich people entering into the kingdom of God; mountains hurled into the sea by strong faith; “hating” one’s own family and own life as a condition to become Jesus’ disciple; let the dead bury their dead; plucking out one’s right eye and cutting off one’s right hand when they would cause you to sin.

Numerous other, misunderstood sayings of this kind are widely recognized by scholars as indisputably authentic and characteristic of Jesus. In fact they are deeply rooted in ancient Judaism and, notwithstanding the

¹ A. Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts*, Oxford 2001, 455-464.

new character of his teaching, continue the heritage of the prophets. In his ethical teaching he often said things which he clearly did not mean literally, because they were logically impossible. When this sort of hyperbolic and paradoxical language tends to be taken literally, it may indeed seem strange, or downright absurd. But to understand what Jesus meant, one has to take into account not only his individual style but also the linguistic and cultural tradition out of which he emerged. The culture Jesus belonged to was largely that of the prophets of the Hebrew Bible.

Similarly, Jesus' personal style, shaped in a creative and distinctive way, has to be placed in its wider cultural context. His preaching shows how deeply he was immersed in the Holy Scriptures in his use of idioms and expressions. For this reason Christianity is directly linked with the Old Testament, as can be seen in the numerous allusions and direct quotations. Although there are clear differences in content and in style between the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible, there are continuities as well (see, for example, the colourful images in Is 55:12 or the threats in Jer 46:10).

When we read texts belonging to other epochs, peoples, and traditions, we need to know something about the so-called "cultural scripts" or "cultural rules" which shaped the ways of thinking and speaking reflected in those texts. To understand the ways of speaking which belong to a culture alien to us we must learn to perceive them in their proper cultural context and acquire some knowledge of this culture's established speech-forms. The culture of Jesus' times was profoundly influenced by the tradition of the biblical prophets. He spoke a language of the prophets shaped by Jewish scripts and cultural rules which contained certain shared linguistic patterns.

In his ethical teaching Jesus would often say something which could not be taken literally, because it was logically impossible. This way of speaking about God in a figurative language aimed to challenge people to think and to see for themselves, and so to discover the intended meaning. Wierzbicka rightly calls it "an attention-catching and thought-provoking device"². One says things which on the surface look self-contradictory, but in fact reveal deeper insights. That is why Jesus often preferred paradoxical ways of speaking about God instead of using unambiguous and simple language.

The failure to understand the Jewish prophetic discourse may obscure some of the central aspects of Jesus' teaching. To many Western Christians, especially those who insist on the infallibility of the letter of the Bible, the paradoxical sayings of Jesus present insurmountable difficulties and become great stumbling-blocks. How can one be a true disciple of Christ, if one does not faithfully obey what he commands us to do in order to be saved? Can the Bible err? Because of its linguistic paradoxes the

² See A. Wierzbicka, *Jewish cultural scripts and the interpretation of the Bible*, "Journal of Pragmatics" 36 (2004), 575-599, here 590. I owe this text to the courtesy of the Author.

Bible has suffered much violence from all kind of literalists who, forgetting the Jewish prophets, took the eschatological threats found in the Gospels at their face value. The lack of familiarity with the Jewish rhetorical tradition has often led to a misunderstanding of Jesus' universal message about God whose greatest concern is the salvation of all.

Biblical blessings and curses, beatitudes and woes, laments and hyperboles require explanation. Without a proper explanation Jesus' way of speaking can be misleading and disturbing. Unfortunately, the figurative character of his apocalyptic calls to repentance and conversion (*metánoia*) goes widely unrecognised even today. In actual fact there is no contradiction between the biblical conventions of warnings or threats on the one hand and the real message of God's unconditional love on the other. The God of Luke's prodigal son is the same as the God of John's vision of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The difference lies in the choice of images, comparisons and metaphors.

Forgiveness in the Prophetic Tradition

All that has been said so far applies in a particular way to Jesus' teaching about forgiveness of sins and eschatology. One cannot comprehend his sayings without taking the prophetic tradition into account. In this regard it is worth recalling that the New Testament includes 590 references to the Book of Isaiah alone. This very fact shows the importance of the prophetic tradition for the understanding of Jesus' Gospel.

Let us first look more closely at the striking images used by the Old Testament prophets. The God portrayed in the Book of Isaiah complains about the people who have rejected his love:

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for me;
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek me. I
said, "Here am I, here am I" to a nation that did not call on
my name. I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious
people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their
own devices; a people who provoke me to my face
continually ... (Is 65:1-3).

For this reason the prophet utters the threats to those "who forsake the Lord" (v. 11) and predicts their destruction: "I will destine you to the sword, and all of you shall bow to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer, when I spoke, you did not listen, but you did what was evil in my eyes, and chose what I did not delight in" (v.12).

What was the purpose of such threats which will soon be disavowed? They provide us no factual information about future events but rather they earnestly appeal to people to turn back to God and be saved (cf. Is 49:22). The same God who promises destruction and slaughter to a rebellious people reveals the new and joyous future:

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy (65:17-18).

We shall see that Jesus' apocalyptic warnings resemble those of the Jewish prophets. Through them God urged his people to abandon their iniquities and to return to him. In the Book of Jeremiah he declares that he has abandoned them, that he even "hates" the beloved heritage and will not forgive them. He forbids the prophet even to pray for them.

Behold, my anger and my fury will be poured out on this place (...). I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant. (...) Behold, I am bringing evil upon them which they cannot escape though they cry to me, I will not listen to them. (...) Therefore do not pray for this people (...). I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my soul into the hands of her enemies (...); she has lifted up her voice against me; therefore I hate her (Jer 7:20; 9:11; 11:11.14; 12:7-8).

At the same time God begs his people to acknowledge their guilt and come back to him. Despite the earlier threats he renews his promises, reaffirms his merciful love and never-ending forgiveness. His severe threats are only a corrective by which he leads his people into a new covenant of enduring love.

Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord. I will not be angry for ever. Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the Lord your God... (3:12-13).

There is hope for your future, says the Lord (...). Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord. (...) I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah (...) I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (31:17.20.31.34; cf. 33:8).

The prophets often expressed anger on God's behalf, but this anger was conditional, momentary, instrumental, subject to change, and always included a call to return and to be saved. It consumes itself and disappears

as quickly as it bursts out. Why is it so? Because God's love, in contrast to his anger, is unchanging, compassionate, faithful and everlasting. Let us listen again to the resounding voice of the two great prophets we have already mentioned:

In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer (Is 54:8).

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you (Jr 31:3).

The same applies also to other prophets. The witness of Hosea is particularly striking in this respect. Jesus quotes him twice in St. Matthew's Gospel while speaking about God's mercy: "Go and learn the meaning of the words: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice* (9:13), "And if you have understood the meaning of the words: *What I want is mercy, not sacrifice*, you would not have condemned the blameless" (12:7; Hos 6:6). It may not be pure coincidence that the second reference to these words of Hosea occurs precisely in the chapter where Jesus speaks about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

At the very beginning of the Book of Hosea God categorically denies the covenant relationship with faithless Israel: "you are not my people and I am not your God" (1:9). Nonetheless, despite the threat, there are the encouraging words of love and promise behind it: "(...) in the place where it was said to them, «You are not my people,» it shall be said to them, «Sons of the living God»" (1:10; chap. 2:1 in Hebrew); "And I will have pity on Not pitied [*Lo-Ruhamah*], and I will say to Not my people [*Lo-Ammi*], «You are my people», and he shall say, '«Thou art my God.»" (2:23; chap. 2:25 in Hebrew).

As we shall see in the context of the Book of Hosea as a whole, it is clear from the start that God does not contradict himself. Eventually, his will to forgive is going to cancel out his apparent willingness to punish. The sinful people will be reconciled with God and a new age of universal covenant and peace will begin:

And I will make for you a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy (2:18; chap. 2:20-21 in Hebrew).

The prophetic discourse reaches the limits of the human language. The prophet can speak turbulently both about tender goodness and angry harshness and the severity of God. Could this God be vindictive, cruel, inconsistent, and full of contradictions? In fact, this inconsistency lies in the eye of the beholder only. Let us consider what the ever-changing imagery of language reveals about God. At one point he is full of tender love for Israel (“Ephraim”):

When Israel was a child, I loved him and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me (...). Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them (11:1-4).

Then come the expressions of disappointment and truly apocalyptic anger. Because the people have refused to return to their Redeemer, there will come a time of enslavement and destruction (11:5-7). But God’s compassionate love is able to cancel out the threats: “My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy” (11:8-9).

Yet, this is not the end of the changing pattern of God’s attitudes. There appears again the complaint about Israel’s iniquities: “they multiply falsehood and violence” (12:1). No wonder the prophetic discourse shows the drastic image of God acting in terrible anger: “So I will be to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will tear open their breast, and there I will devour them like a lion, as a wild beast would rend them” (13:7-8).

Is Hosea’s comparison to wild animals God’s last word? Certainly not! To tear open one’s breast means to touch the human heart, the centre of our decision-making in the biblical language. Here we come close to the words of the prophesy of Ezekiel: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (Ez 36:26). This is a promise of the great transformation – the goal of the prophetic discourse: “Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up” (Oz 6:1).

Presently God appears to have forgotten his anger as he urgently calls the people to return to him: “Return, o Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity” (14:1). Finally we see the image of healing and happiness: “I will heal their faithlessness; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be as the dew to

Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, he shall strike roots as the poplar” (14:4).

The Sin Against the Spirit – the End of Forgiveness?

Proper appreciation of the prophetic discourse is a prerequisite to the understanding of Jesus' Gospel. In his preaching Jesus also occasionally resorted to frightening images of the future (although not as drastic as the one in Hosea comparing God to wild animals), to call people to repentance and necessary change of life here and now. Reminding them of human destiny in the coming future, he urged those who listened to him to take serious decisions at the time of God's benevolence offered right now to all. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned people:

But I say this to you: anyone who is angry with his brother will answer for it before the court; if a man calls his brother “Fool” [*Raca*, an Aramaic term of contempt] he will answer for it before the Sanhedrin [The High Court in Jerusalem]; and if a man calls him “Renegade” [apostasy as the most repulsive of all sins] he will answer for it in hell fire (Mt 5:22).

We must not interpret such words, especially those concerning “the fire of hell”, as a clear prediction of what will actually happen to sinners in the future. This would be incompatible with the cultural rules used by the prophets in their often irate interventions. The words about sins which will not be forgiven are, in fact, emotionally-charged appeals enjoining the hearers not to commit such sins.

Very significant in this regard is Jesus' warning of the greatest sin which seems to be excluded from the possibility of forgiveness.

And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven (*ouk aphethesetai*), either in this age or in the age to come, *en toúto to aioni oúte en teméllonti* (Mt 12:31-32 NIV).

In the Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem* John Paul II tried to explain why blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. According to him, it consists “in the radical refusal to accept this forgiveness, of which he is the intimate giver and which presupposes the

genuine conversion which he brings about in the conscience”.³ And the Pope adds:

If Jesus says that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven either in this life or in the next, it is because this “*non-forgiveness*” is linked, as to its cause, to “*non-repentance*”, in other words to the radical refusal to come to the sources of redemption, which nevertheless remain “always” open in the economy of salvation in which the mission of the Holy Spirit is accomplished. The Spirit has infinite power to draw from these sources: “he will take what is mine”, Jesus said. (...) Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, then, is the sin committed by the person who claims to have a “*right*” to *persist in evil* – in any sin at all – and who thus rejects Redemption. One closes oneself up in sin, thus making impossible one’s conversion, and consequently the remission of sins, which one considers not essential or not important for one’s life. This is a state of spiritual ruin, because blasphemy against the Holy Spirit does not allow one to escape from one’s self-imposed imprisonment and open oneself to the divine sources of the purification of consciences and of the remission of sins.⁴

As the question is important for Christian life, the Encyclical provides some additional explanations about the sin against the Holy Spirit in connection with the human conscience. In this perspective the openness of conscience is necessary for the saving action of the Holy Spirit:

The action of the Spirit of truth, which works towards the salvific “convincing concerning sin”, encounters in a person in this condition an interior resistance, as it were an impenetrability of conscience, a state of mind which could be described as fixed by reason of a free choice. This is what Sacred Scripture usually calls “hardness of heart” (Ps 81/80:13; Jer 7:24; Mk 3:5).⁵

Biblical scholars continue to argue whether Jesus really uttered words about blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and what this assertion could in fact mean. In any case, the Greek word *aphíemi* means something

³ Encyclical Letter *Dominum et vivificantem* of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World, The Vatican 1986, par. 46 (italics in the original).

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Ibidem, par. 47.

more than just readiness to forgive, readiness which never ceases in God. It conveys also the idea of cancelling or remitting debts and freeing someone from punishment. If debts are not remitted, they must be paid for, but once paid, they cease to exist. If a transgressor is not forgiven, he has to undergo a punishment. An unforgivable sin is not necessarily irreparable or past redemption. It is nevertheless a sin which calls for adequate reformatory, corrective and remedial punishment.

As far as the sin against the Holy Spirit is concerned, the question is therefore not of a simple act of forgiving on the part of God. This kind of blasphemy is not subject to any kind of amnesty; it cannot be totally overlooked, renounced by God or left without punishment. In this regard there is no simple forgiveness "either in this age or in the age to come". Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be simply forgiven in the sense of debt being remitted and punishment annulled. One has to pay one's debt to "the last penny" (Mt 5:26). The punishment will cease and reconciliation with God will be possible only after "paying" all of the suitable debt through suffering and the painful process of purification. This kind of punishment is an expression of God's goodness and mercy. In this light one has to understand Jesus' paradoxical words about the sin which cannot be simply forgiven, but must be subjected to reformatory punishment.

However, in St Mark's Gospel the parallel text has a different, even more striking formulation which cannot pass unnoticed, especially in its literal translation:

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit has no forgiveness for an age/aeon, *ouk échei áphesin eis ton aiona* [i.e. for a period of time too long to be measured]; he is guilty of an "eternal" sin, *énochós estin aioníou hamartematos* (Mk 3:28-29).

Here we come close to one of Jesus' eschatological sayings whose understanding requires cross-cultural awareness. Those to whom the cultural linguistic traditions of such sayings were alien would find this text profoundly disturbing. If such readers are familiar with obvious metaphors and paradoxes they are prepared to understand images, but reading about "no forgiveness" and about an "eternal sin" they tend to take these words literally. Wierzbicka is right in what she says about such present-day readers of the Bible:

Even now, when most readers have come to realize that images like "the furnace of fire", "outer darkness", and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" should not be taken literally, the hyperbole of words like "everlasting" often continues to be unrecognized. And yet even in colloquial English, phrases like "for ages" or "forever" can be used

as a hyperbole for “a long time” (especially when referring to waiting). If this is possible in modern Anglo culture, which values understatement and on the whole is inimical to hyperbole, how much more should it be seen as possible in the context of the Jewish prophetic “Drohrede” (...), that is, the language of rhetorical threats and warnings. In fact, this is precisely how it was seen by early Fathers of the church such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and St Gregory of Nyssa, who held that all suffering (“punishment”) after death has a spiritual, healing, and purifying character and must therefore come to an end.⁶

The words about the sin against the Holy Spirit cannot mean that some human sins will never be forgiven by God. Jesus often taught that his Father’s forgiveness is limitless, and that people have to imitate God. When asked by Peter: “Lord, how often must I forgive my brother if he wrongs me? As often as seven times?” Jesus answered without hesitation: “Not seven, I tell you, but seventy-seven times” (Mt 18:21-22). If seven means here many times, then seventy-seven times is a symbolic way of saying “always”. Therefore human forgiveness should be limitless and imitate God’s limitless forgiveness shown in the past to the sinful inhabitants of Nineveh (the Book of Jonah), and promised to Egypt and Assyria, Israel’s chief enemies (cf. Is 19:24-25).

Nevertheless, according to the Matthew’s Gospel Jesus said: “Yes, if you forgive others their failings, your heavenly Father will forgive you yours; but if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your failings either” (Mt 6:14-15). In the Gospel of Luke we also hear the words: “grant pardon, and you will be pardoned” (Lk 6:37). In the model prayer Jesus taught us (“Our Father”) we ask: “and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us” (Lk 11:4).

All these words apply to one of the most frequent human sins. If God forgives, he wants us to do so as well. Could he then forgive everything except our refusal to forgive? Is God’s forgiveness only conditional and limited to those who forgive others? So what about Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son (Lc 15:11-32) showing the limitless forgiveness of the Father?

What Jesus says about God may seem, as in the case of Hosea, inconsistent and full of contradictions. Are there exceptions to the divine readiness to forgive? Does it mean that God ceases to love people who have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, and does not try to reconcile

⁶ Wierzbicka, *What Did Jesus Mean?*, 457. See also W. Hryniewicz, *Swiadcowie wielkiej nadziei. Zbawienie powszechne w myśli wczesnochrześcijańskiej (Witnesses of the Great Hope: Universal Salvation in the Early Christian Thought)*, Warszawa: Verbinum 2009.

them with himself? Is he on the one hand infinitely merciful, while on the other his mercy has some fixed limits?

Again, these contradictions appear only to those who are not familiar with the prophetic discourse and Jesus' paradoxical style of teaching. It is true that in the parable of the unforgiving debtor which follows Peter's question and Jesus' answer (Mt 18:23-35), the "king's" forgiveness is categorically refused to the "unforgiving servant". Does this mean that not everything can be forgiven or that it is unforgivable not to forgive?

Obviously not: saying that everything can be forgiven except a failure to forgive is a paradoxical, vivid, dramatic way of saying that everything *should* be forgiven (a point which nothing could highlight better than Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do", Luke 23:24). Thus, to speculate what kinds of sins are, according to Jesus' teaching, unpardonable, is like arguing whether God can forgive seventy eight offences ("didn't Jesus draw a line at seventy seven?", "didn't he draw a line at a 'sin against the Holy Spirit?'"). To interpret exhortations and appeals as judgment or predictions is to misunderstand the illocutionary force of the utterances in question.⁷

It is precisely this illocutionary force that is different from what the surface form of some utterances might suggest. Jesus' often repeated call for trust in merciful God should not be misinterpreted as a threat or prediction of an irrevocable and unhappy future, which can only cause fear and despair. Such misinterpretation would contradict the conventions of the Jewish prophetic speech.

Despite the temporal distance between Hosea and Jesus, their God is the same: it is the God of mercy and limitless forgiveness. Like Hosea, Jesus spoke in a paradoxical and dramatic way of the limits of God's forgiveness, but the images of a forthcoming doom he used are in fact exhortations and urgent appeals to change one's life right now. When he says to people that it is unforgivable to speak against the Holy Spirit, he tells them above all that they should not commit such blasphemy. The Spirit's presence and action in the world express God's love "poured into our hearts" (Rom 5:5). He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit imposes limits on the power of this saving love in human lives. In this way he decries and slanders the goodness of God, and self-destructively questions God's willingness to forgive. He denies that it is God who gives to people the strength to forgive all offences, and that God is the example of such limitless forgiveness.

⁷ Wierzbicka, *Jewish cultural scripts*, 586-587.

In the so-called Apostles' Creed the forgiveness of sins constitutes an essential part of the Christian faith: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins". There is no mention of an unforgiving God and hell in the Christian Creed. Jesus urged people to act like God. Sometimes, encouraging his disciples, he said so in plain words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lc 6:36 NIV). At other times he preferred to formulate the same message in a paradoxical and somewhat humorous way (may be with a benevolent smile!): if people do not want to imitate God in his infinite goodness and limitless readiness to forgive, then God will imitate people in their refusal to do the same, and will not be willing to forgive some sins. But in fact God is the first who is always willing to forgive. Otherwise how could he demand people to be always ready to forgive? If God were not himself always willing to forgive, people could not imitate God's permanent readiness to forgive.

Exegetical Misinterpretations and Their Consequences

In the light of what was said about the sin against the Holy Spirit, Jesus' words referring to Judas deserve mention: "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (Mk 14:21; Mt 26:24 NIV). A shorter version of the same utterance is found in Luke's Gospel: "The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him" (Lk 22:22). These words have often been understood as curse cast on Judas' life and, taken literally, as a definitive condemnation, i.e. they are alleged to mean that his betrayal will never be forgiven.

However, Jesus' words should not be considered as an irrevocable declaration that Judas will not be forgiven and will be damned for ever. Jesus spoke about his own disciple in sorrow and distress. Here again we have to do with a typical pattern of the Jewish tradition, expressed in forms of curses and woes. An example? Touched by enormous suffering Job cursed his own life bitterly and repeatedly (cf. Job 3:3-12; 10:18-19), but actually did not lose his faith in God and hope for salvation: "For I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25). The only aim of such curse is to say that it would be good if someone had never been born or if someone just died (cf. Is 6:5).

In the Gospels there appear some other "woes" which also may seem inconsistent with Jesus' overall teaching. This applies for example to his words addressed to those who "are rich", "well fed", "who laugh now" (Lk 6:24-25), and to some non-repentant cities:

Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable

for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the sky? No, you will go down to the depths [to Hades] (Lk 10:13-15).

Could Jesus for ever condemn the rich people and the towns which did not accept him? He, who had instructed his disciples to love their enemies, did he really intend to send Capernaum to hell? As a matter of fact these are not condemnations, but emotionally charged “woes”, modelled on the prophetic sayings in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Hos 7:13). They do not announce God’s final verdict and should not be interpreted literally as a threat of an everlasting hell. Here painful feelings are expressed in the traditional form of apparent predictions of the forthcoming doom. They should be read in the context of the Gospels as a whole and in conjunction with the Jewish tradition of such emotionally charged utterances.

These “woes” are similar to Jesus’ lamentation over Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate” (Lk 13:34-35). This is a language of sorrow and compassionate love, of appeal, call, and lament – the language of the Jewish prophets. The mystery of God’s compassion lies beyond any notion of anger, justice, retribution, and apparent non-forgiveness.

To treat Jesus’ woes over Judas and the unrepentant towns as sheer condemnations and predictions of non-forgiveness is to misunderstand their real meaning. An oriental mode of thought does not allow us to understand Jesus’ words literally. A literalist reading distorts the essential message of the Good News as a whole and misses its internal coherence. Any doctrine of the infallibility of the letter of the Bible leads to insurmountable difficulties, because it ignores their proper cultural context. The authors of the Books of the Bible multiplied metaphors, paradoxes and antinomies; they used dramatic expressions, in order to impress the reader and the hearer ever so strongly, so that people could feel what those authors actually wanted to say. Such modern values as accuracy, logical formulation, consistency, absence of contradictions and exaggerations, calm and fair reasoning, care for a precise scientific information were unknown to them. One should not take contradictions at their face value or to stop at the outer surface of the formulations.

History gives us a strong witness that by failing to understand properly the cultural context one can eventually accuse God himself of cruelty and intransigence towards sinful people. The doctrine of God’s non-forgiveness and everlasting hell has for centuries dominated the Church’s traditional preaching. It may be considered as one of the main causes of the de-christianisation of the West in modern times. The French historian Jean

Delumeau shows in his well-documented monograph⁸ that starting with the sixteenth century there emerged a movement rejecting Christianity which preached the unforgiving and punishing God, and threatened the sinful humankind with an eternity of hell. This movement, intensified in the post-Enlightenment period, led in consequence to the denial of all transcendent reality. Such was the result of the misinterpretation of the apocalyptic images and warnings of the Bible.

If God has to be at the end “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28), this means that sooner or later all sins and all evil have to be overcome and totally removed from the history of humanity. There are no sins which could not be eventually atoned for and expiated in their tragic consequences. Even if there is no simple way to forget, remit and cancel them, God has left to himself an astonishing possibility to reach the resistant human will, to heal and save it, “but only as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15 RSV) – the fire of the painful experience of suffering. This divine fire of God’s love, goodness and beauty has the power to purify and burn every stain of sin. This is no punishment for punishment’s sake, but an effective and healing therapy.

⁸ J. Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur: La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII^e-XVIII^e siècles)*, Paris 1983.

CHAPTER VII

GOD'S SPIRIT IN HUMAN LIFE

The Holy Spirit enables the human person to transcend himself and to remain open for participation in God's life; this is called divinisation by grace (*théosis katá chárin*) in the Eastern tradition. In this conception of the human person there is no opposition between nature and grace, so often present in the Western tradition. Grace and nature mutually permeate each other. Thanks to the Spirit human beings transcend themselves in an ecstatic movement towards God and the other people.

The Lord Entrusted Humans to the Holy Spirit

In speaking about the Holy Spirit one must preserve his personal self-dependence, i.e. the Spirit's own activity in the history of salvation. There is a relationship of full reciprocity between the Son and the Spirit, their mutual and harmonious co-operation in everything they do together. If the Spirit is eternal, equal to the Father and the Son in divinity, his activity cannot be reduced to the role of a mere mediator or simply subordinated to the Son. The relationship of full reciprocity excludes altogether any unilateral dependence and subordination (this is, as mentioned earlier, one of the Orthodox arguments against the Latin *Filioque*). The activity of the Spirit constitutes a new work, different in time and space from the work of Christ. The Pentecost has opened a new era of God's presence in the history of humankind. The distinct character of the divine persons does not permit any sort of diminishing of the proper activity of each one of them. There is only a difference in the mode of action.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons called the Son and the Holy Spirit "the hands of the Father".¹ It is through their intermediary that the Father acts, as if with his two hands, in the history of humankind. Irenaeus wrote in the second century of the Christian era: "the Lord has entrusted to the Holy Spirit the human person – his own good" (*commendante Domino Spiritui Sancto suum hominem*).² The human being is a creature called to existence by the Divine Logos, and therefore belongs to him as his own good and possession. Hence the surprising expression *suum hominem* – his own good, which means his belonging to Christ.

One of the most attractive features of Eastern pneumatology is a profound thinking about the basic structure of the humanity of each person.

¹ *Adversus haereses* IV. Pref. 4. SCh 100, p. 390: „Homo ... per manus eius plasmatus est, hoc est per Filium et Spiritum”; V,6,1; V,28,4. SCh 153, 72.360: „Per manus enim Patris, hoc est per Filium et Spiritum...“, „manus Dei, hoc est Filii et Spiritus“.

² *Ibidem*, III,17,3. SCh 211,336.

This reflection leads to a specific anthropology marked by close relationship with the Holy Spirit. One speaks therefore about the human being not only in relation to Christ but also to the transforming force of the Spirit. This pneumatological anthropology shows human laborious striving, in spite of all faults and shortcomings, for becoming “a new creation” (2 Co 5:17), a being on which God’s Spirit can “rest” and in which it can “dwell” (cf. Rm 8:9.11; 1 Co 3:16; 6,19).

Following the view of St. Basil the Great, Orthodox theologians see the specific role of the Holy Spirit as “a perfecting cause” (*teleiōtike aitía*).³ The Father creates everything through the Son (*di’ Yiou*) and perfects in the Spirit (*en Pneúmati*). It is the Spirit who brings to ultimate fulfilment the creative activity of the Father and the Son. Thanks to the presence and action of God’s Spirit all creatures achieve their final perfection (*teleiousthai*). This applies in a particular way to the human person, created in the image of God and after God’s likeness (cf. Gn 1:26). Every person is, by his very nature, a theocentric being, open upwards, able to receive “the breath of life” (Gn 2:7) and to participate in the life of God. The Greek Fathers, depending on the Septuagint version of the Bible, could therefore identify this “breath of life” with the Holy Spirit. The biblical expression acquired thus a pneumatological meaning. According to this interpretation, the human person was created in such a way as to be able to receive “the breath of the Spirit”. This ability would be therefore potentially present already in the very moment of creation of the first human being.

In a certain sense the whole salvific work of Christ was aiming at giving people the ability to receive the Holy Spirit. For this reason, following the Eastern Church Fathers, Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970) calls Christ “the great Forerunner of the Holy Spirit” (*le grand Précurseur de l’Esprit-Saint*).⁴ The Spirit’s activity leading creatures to their fulfilment was not considered by the Fathers as something extraordinary or miraculous. They saw in it the realisation of the original plan of God, consonant with human nature. The fullness of each person’s humanity consists, according to Irenaeus, of body, soul, and the received and indwelling Holy Spirit:

(...) perfectus autem homo commixtio et adunitio est animae assumptis Spiritum Patris et admixtae ei carni quae est plasmata secundum imaginem Dei.⁵
 (...) sunt tria ex quibus, quemadmodum ostendimus, perfectus homo constat, carne, anima et spiritu, et altero quidem salvante et figurante, qui est Spiritus, altero quod

³ Basil of Caesarea, *De Spiritu Sancto* XVI,38; XXVI,61. SCh 17^{bis},378.466.

⁴ *L’Esprit-Saint dans la tradition orthodoxe*, Paris 1969, 89. See also O. Clément, *Sur la Pentecôte*, “Contacts” 23 (1971) no. 75, 275-282.

⁵ *Adv. haereses* V,6,1. SCh 153, 72.

salvatur et formatur, quod est caro, altero quod inter haec est duo, quod est anima.⁶

The perfect human person is one who has received the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus thinks of human ontology in the light of the Pentecost following in this respect the apostle Paul's trichotomy of spirit, soul, and body (cf. 1 Th 5:23).⁷ The perfect human being is, in this perspective, a Spirit-imbued human being in whom this Spirit dwells penetrating deeply his or her soul and body (today we would rather say: his or her inner self). One becomes a "spiritual being", as Irenaeus puts it, by participation in the Spirit of God, *secundum participationem Spiritus*, but this does not mean the destruction of the body itself.⁸ Such a perfect and spiritual human person was created to the image of God and after God's likeness. Without communion with the Holy Spirit humans would remain only imperfect beings. Although they would bear the image of God in their bodies, nevertheless they would be deprived of God's likeness given by the Spirit. Only the connexion of all three realities, i.e. of body, soul, and the transcendent Spirit makes the human person a perfect being⁹.

Human Person as an Epicletic Being

We have become accustomed, owing to contemporary personalism, to speak about humans in terms of relationships, interpersonal relationality and outgoing concern for another human being. The Christian faith permits one to see another important dimension of human existence. This is the person's ability to respond to the call or invocation which comes from another person. This call is an appeal for acceptance, openness, and rescue. Each person possesses the inner fundamental ability to call and to be called.

Only a person can respond to another person in a free manner. Only the person called can freely respond to the calling addressed to him or to her. The ability to call and to be called makes a person an epicletic being. Great significance is ascribed in Christian liturgy to the epiclesis, i.e. to the invocation of the Holy Spirit (from the Greek: *epikalēō* – invoke, call upon). Humans call another person by their own existence, or can be called themselves. Relationality, relationship, and responsiveness are deeply integrated into the very nature of each individual person.

Christian tradition knows the concept of *epiklesis* in relation to the sacraments. It is an invocation of the Holy Spirit to come down and change the deepest meaning of the fruits and elements of the Earth (bread, wine, olive, water) and, by this, to transform the whole of human life. There is no reason why the concept of *epiklesis*, understood as invocation, could not be

⁶ Ibidem V,9,1. SCh 153,106-108.

⁷ Ibidem V,6,1. SCh 153, 78.

⁸ Ibidem (p. 74).

⁹ Ibidem (p. 76,78).

extended to an anthropological level according to the inner logic of Eastern tradition.

For many years I have been drawing attention to the fact that by our very existence, although fallen and often deteriorated, we continually invoke the Spirit-Creator, the Giver of Life, without being conscious of it. As a matter of fact, we do not have to be aware of living in the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Invoking the Spirit and being called by him do not as such imply being always conscious of this fact. I am convinced that there exists a special sort of ontological *epiklesis*, the one which is silent, voiceless, and wordless, but nevertheless real and effective. As epicletic beings, we are able to call from the depths of our inner disorder, confusion, and spiritual poverty. A ruined, perplexing and unfulfilled life itself, marked by experiences of guilt, feelings of emptiness and meaninglessness, bitter consciousness of wasted hopes, suffering, disorder, and death can become such a calling. No human person can adequately identify the voice of this wordless call. This can be done only by the Holy Spirit who penetrates the innermost recesses of the human heart and spirit. This is the same Spirit that “reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

Each person's invocation is always accompanied by a call coming from within – a call which the Christian faith identifies with the voice of the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit “comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit (...) expresses our plea in a way that could never be put into words” (Rom 8:26). Human life in the state of painful non-fulfilment is an expectation and urgent calling of God's Spirit, an unconscious longing for beauty, goodness, harmony, and peace. Without the Spirit this life burns out prematurely, becomes wasted and confused; thus it destroys itself and casts darkness on the life of many other people.

Humans are inwardly shaped by this kind of inner calling. We need others and are constantly challenged by them. Human nature carries in itself an appeal for rescue. The very existence of man or woman is a powerful *epiklesis* for the Creator himself, a call for rescue and final salvation. The epiphany of the human face expresses this ontological invocation. We may take up different poses to hide or ignore it, and show off our self-confidence. But in fact, all people are creatures which, through our own poverty, constantly launch an appeal for being spared, rescued, and led to fulfillment.

A well-known Russian religious philosopher, Lev Shestov, affirmed many years ago, that the most serious mistake in our thinking is the loss of our ability to call and invoke from the very depth of our being – *de profundis*¹⁰. This error does not permit us to reach the truth. Theological reflection on the “energies” of the Spirit acting in the world has, in the Eastern tradition, an epicletic character. The Orthodox pneumatology not

¹⁰ L. Shestov, *Kirkegard i ekzistentsial'naia filosofija*, Paris 1939 s. 62.

only discloses the real action of God's Spirit but, at the same time, teaches how to invoke this Spirit to come down and transform human minds and hearts. This takes place in the decisions of human freedom.

The true light "enlightens every human" (Jn 1:9). Everyone "that does what is true comes to the light" (Jn 3:21). The mystery of salvation becomes present, in a manner known only to God, in this very "doing what is true". This view is typical of the theology of the Apostle John, revered in a particular way in the East, where truth and the good are inseparably connected into one. The gift of salvation is accessible to all who "do what is true". No human can put a limit to the sovereign action of God's Spirit.

The Spirit Sent into Our Hearts

In biblical language the word "heart" denotes a personal centre of cognition, will, and feelings. It is the most intimate place in our being that decides about inner uprightness and integrity, or it is a sign of moral disintegration. The prophet Ezekiel announced the gift of a new spirit and sensitive heart, which would allow the people of God to fulfil his commandments: "And I will give them one [LXX: a new] heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Ez 11:19-20). And in other place we hear an equally strong promise of inner renewal: "A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (36:26). Also Jeremiah spoke about the new covenant and God's promise to give people inner knowledge concerning his will: "I will put my *law within them*, and I will *write it upon their hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33; here and below italics mine, W.H.).

The motive of the inner law written upon human hearts appears with the Apostle of the Nations as well. At the beginning of the *Letter to Romans* he lists the whole series of sins committed by the Gentiles (1:21-32). This is a thought-provoking description of moral degradation and the idolatry of humankind (cf. 1 Cor 6:9-11). But on the other hand he draws attention to the fact that there are among pagans also some people of high moral sensibility and responsibility.

Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are *written on their hearts*, their *consciences* also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them (2:14-15 NIV).

These words encourage us to recognize the Holy Spirit at work in the hearts and lives of the Gentiles. It means that with God's help Gentiles are able, although not always and not everywhere, to do instinctively what their conscience and the mysterious law "written on their hearts" urge them to do. The Spirit "writes" on the hearts of these "outsiders" and thus enables them to fulfil the requirements of the divine law. One can reasonably hope that such people find acceptance and salvation thanks to their moral sensitivity and their innate ability to distinguish the good from the evil. They are justified by the inner law present in their hearts. This is the law of love which fulfils the sense of every law: "for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. (...) Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law" (13:8.10). In this regard Paul's view appears only to be an echo of the Jesus' teaching about the greatest commandment of love as the ultimate criterion for judging the value of human life: "whatever you did", "whatever you did not do" (Mt 25:40.45).

In the same letter the Apostle explains that doing what God requires is impossible without his help in struggling against the power of evil and sin. Paul has painfully experienced this struggle with his own sinful nature, since he even calls himself "a wretched man" who has to put his whole confidence in Christ, the Rescuer.

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. (...) So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Mt? 7:18-19.21-25 NIV).

In the above quoted words concerning the law written on the hearts of Gentiles, the Apostle did not explicitly bestow upon these people the promises of the prophets. This is suggested, however, by his vocabulary so similar to the language of the prophets. We can therefore ask: who has written this law on people's hearts? Although Paul does not give us an unequivocal answer to this question, we can assume that it is God himself who puts his law within the hearts of those whom we used to call Gentiles. This sense seems to be indicated by his striking words addressed to Corinthians: "You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, *written not with ink but with the Spirit* of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3). Thanks to the Holy Spirit Christ is present in the life of the faithful who have thus become a specific "letter from Christ" written deep in their hearts, and not on tablets

of stone as was the case with God's covenant with Moses and his people (cf. Ex 24:12). The Spirit of God writes on the living tablets of sensitive human hearts. God himself, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in this way enables people everywhere to fulfil the requirements of his law.

The prophet Ezekiel spoke about a "new spirit" put by God within the hearts of his people. Christians can refer this description also to the Holy Spirit who acts in the depth of human hearts. Paul's words prompt us to perceive the action of the Spirit also in the hearts and lives of those called Gentiles. Thanks to this action they too can live not "according to the sinful nature" [literally: according to the flesh, i.e. dominated by selfish passions], but be "led by the Spirit of God" (Rom 8:4-5.8-9.12-14), and with his help fulfil the greatest commandment of loving God and neighbour.

It is true that Paul never spoke about noble and morally sensitive Gentiles in the same way as he used to do about Christian life in its multiple connections with the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5;8:14; 8:26-27). On the other hand, however, he did not deny the fact of the Spirit's presence in the depth of the hearts of Gentiles' and of his influence on their life. As we saw in the above quoted words, he stressed the role of conscience bearing witness in their own inner mental dialogue.

In the Apostle's *Letter to Galatians* there is a complementary explication of his kind of courageous thinking about all human destinies. He reflects here again on the universal enslavement of the whole of humanity: before God decided to avert this dramatic situation: "we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world" (Gal 4:3 NIV). Gentiles were worshipping the elements of nature, whereas Jews were subject to the enslaving action of the law. When the appointed time came, God sent his Son to deliver humankind from this bondage and to promote the dignity of his adopted children. This saving work of Christ is closely connected with the mission of the Holy Spirit: "Because you are sons [=children!], God sent *the Spirit* of his Son *into our hearts*, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father'" (Gal 4:6).

What is then the destiny of those non-evangelized who have never heard and accepted this Good News? What is to be thought about their salvation? Also in the same letter the Apostle does not explicitly reflect on their situation. In his views concerning the visible mission of Christ and the invisible mission of the Holy Spirit there appears however a possible answer to these questions. These views imply that there is a real, although invisible action of the Spirit in hearts and lives of all humans, and not only of Christians. The words about the Spirit sent "into our hearts" affirm his intimate relationship in the very depth of the human being. It is the Spirit who gives life (cf. Rom 8:1-27) and leads all the humans to ultimate fulfilment in the Kingdom of God. His saving power embraces all people – Jews, Christians, and Gentiles.

This line of thought on the invisible mission of God's Spirit allows us to perceive his universal influence on human hearts. The universal and

saving action of the Spirit counteracts the universal enslavement of humanity. According to the Old Testament, God's "Spirit" not only creates and sustains everything in existence (cf. Ps 104:29-30), but can also thoroughly renew the lives of repentant sinners (Ps 51:10-11). This creative power of God's Spirit is in no way limited to the chosen people alone, but is also active among those "outside" and in the whole world.

A very significant example of this is the striking figure of Balaam, a diviner from Mesopotamia, when "the Spirit of God came upon him" (Num 24:2). This foreign seer prophesied about Israel, king David, and even about Christ himself, "the Son of David". He proved faithful to the divine will. The God of Israel spoke and worked through him. He put into the mouth of Balaam an oracle which recognized that Israel was a nation chosen for a special destiny in the world's history. This foreign prophet did not curse the people of God, although he had been urged several times to do so by the Moabite king, Balak. On the contrary, he blessed the Israelites. This fascinating story throws light on the religious situation of all those "outside" (see Num 22:1-24:25) and on the action of God's Spirit on human hearts. It shows that the prophetic activity of an "outsider" can have an effect even on the history of God's chosen people. So there is no clear division between "outsiders" and "insiders" among those people with whom God has a friendly relationship in the surprising history of revelation and salvation.

There are then in the texts of the Bible some implicit insights which can help us today to understand the role of God's Spirit in every human life. As Christians we believe that it is always the Spirit of Christ sent by the Father into all human hearts, both "insiders" and the "outsiders".

All Truth, Good and Beauty Come from the Spirit

It is a great lesson for us Christians. The invisible action of the Holy Spirit cannot be separated from the presence of the risen Christ in the lives of all humans. Since Christ is present everywhere and in every human life, the Spirit is also present in every human life. This activity of the Holy Spirit goes beyond the Christian community. It was through Christ that "God was reconciling *the world* to himself (...), not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor 5:19). The work of "the Last Adam, a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor 15:45) is a great benefit for all. The Apostle Paul shows him as the glorified Lord of the whole creation (see Phil 2:9-11), "through whom all things came and through whom we live" (1 Cor 8:6), and whose presence reaches every human being. The power of Christ and of the Spirit he sent from the Father of the universe touches all human hearts and brings the gift of salvation.

Using biblical language one can speak about the Holy Spirit who "reposes" on Christ, the incarnate Divine Wisdom. This truth was revealed more explicitly only in the light of the New Testament: this incarnate Wisdom and the Spirit are the two different persons. The Spirit manifests

also the Divine Wisdom, foreseen and expected already in the Old Testament: "Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given *wisdom* and sent thy holy *Spirit* from on high?" (Wis 9:17).

These words, read in the light of the New Testament, express the inseparability of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. Where there is Wisdom, there is God's Spirit and his all-embracing power as well. Like God's Wisdom, the Spirit of God is also present everywhere and permeates everything. He works to transform everyone and everything in the world, and illuminates the pilgrim way of all humanity towards God. In its invisible mission the Spirit communicates life to everyone by the saving grace brought by Christ's death and resurrection. He accompanies us as Comforter, Counsellor, and Advocate invoked to stand by and help those in need. For this reason the Spirit is called "another Paraclete" besides Christ (cf. Jn 14:16). Moreover, this Divine Paraclete imparts the hope of ultimate fulfilment not only to all humans but also to the entire created world. It is the One who unites and sustains unity. Nothing remains outside his saving action and influence.

Unlike the person of the Son, the Holy Spirit has no human incarnation. The person of the Spirit has not revealed itself in human form. One can only speak about him through the intermediary of symbols and comparisons. The New Testament compares him with wind and fire (cf. Jn 3:8; Acts 2:2-3). The Spirit is the source of life. As an Eastern prayer to the Holy Spirit, already referred to, puts it, he is "everywhere and fills all things", although as person remains invisible and imperceptible. He is the Giver of life – like air, light, water, and warmth. The One who is present everywhere, acts in all humans and in the world. He does not disclose his own countenance, but always points to the face of the risen Christ and reminds us of him. In this way he somewhat expropriates and diminishes himself, deprives himself of his own face, in order to be found again on the face of Christ and of people transfigured by his power.

Ambrosiaster, an anonymous author of the fourth century with a deep intuition of universalism wrote: "whatever truth is said by anyone is said by the Holy Spirit" (*quidquid enim verum, a quocumque dicitur, a Sancto dicitur Spiritu*).¹¹ This sentence was many times quoted in the works of Thomas Aquinas in a slightly modified form: "everything that is true, no matter by whom it is said, is from the Holy Spirit" (*omne verum, a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*).¹² This wise saying could be referred not only to whatever is true, but also to what is good and beautiful, and to all true manifestations of the spiritual life of all people. All good, beauty and veneration shown to God, wherever they are present, come from

¹¹ Ambrosiaster, *In Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios primam* 12,3. PL 17,245; CSEL 81/2, 132.

¹² Cf. *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 172, a. 6, ad 1. At his time Thomas thought, with many other scholars, that the author of this saying was St Ambrose of Milan.

the Holy Spirit. They testify about the reality of his presence and action. The Divine Paraclete is the inspirer of all good, beauty, true knowledge and openness of human spirit to God. Like Christ he is also the light and life of the world. He also reveals to humans the presence of God and leads everything to its final fulfilment.

Today, in this time of ecumenism and dialogue, we are witnesses of encounters among Christians and representatives of the world's religions. During such meetings prayer for peace has a privileged place. Such an important meeting was held in Assisi (October 1986) on the initiative of John Paul II, in spite of negative opinions even of some members of the Roman Curia who thought it could betray Christian faith in Jesus as the only Saviour of all. The Pope replied to the accusations of syncretism in his Christmas address to the Roman Curia (22 December 1986), adapting the maxim of Ambrosiaster and Thomas Aquinas. He spoke not of truth but of prayer: "every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit". He also explained that the Spirit is "mysteriously present in the heart of every person".¹³

This is a very strong witness to the universal presence and saving activity of the Holy Spirit in world's history. In fact, the prayer for peace was addressed to God by the participants of the Assisi meeting at the same time, but in different religious groups. It is the Spirit who prompts the believers to this kind of prayer. I also firmly believe that it comes from the Paraclete's inspiration.

A similar prayer of the representatives of different Christian denominations and other religions took place during the International Congress for Peace "People and Religions" in Cracow (6-8 September 2009), seventy years after the outbreak of the Second World War, twenty years after the victory of the Polish movement *Solidarnosc* and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Leaders of the world's religions went over in pilgrimage to the former German concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, and then prayed for peace. This was a significant test of the maturity of religions open to dialogue.¹⁴

The beauty of transformation comes from the Holy Spirit. A person transfigured by this power distinguishes himself by a deep solidarity with people and by compassion for every living creature which toils and suffers in the days of its existence. A bit of transformation discloses the beauty of God's image in human beings. A humanity touched by the transfiguring grace of the Spirit allows us to have a feeling of the reality and beauty of the divine world. The Holy Spirit is the One who reveals the divine beauty. A genuine spirituality of people is in actual fact their spiritual countenance and inner beauty, their life is subject to the transfiguring action of the Spirit. Wherever there is true beauty and wisdom, there is also the Spirit of God, and the other way round: Where there is Spirit, there is beauty and wisdom.

¹³ „Acta Apostolicae Sedis” 79 (1987) 1082-1090, here 1089.

¹⁴ Cf. „Tygodnik Powszechny” (Cracow) Nos. 34,36, 37, 38:2009.

The personal presence of the Holy Spirit among peoples, their cultures, and religions assumes diverse forms of activity, in large measure unknown to us. It takes effect in various ways and with different intensity. Concerning such issues we need a deeper understanding of the very concept of personal presence. The category of presence throws light on the mysterious action of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the world. Nothing justifies the affirmation that outside the Church God's Spirit is absent and inactive. No religion nor human culture can exist outside of his influence. Nobody is deprived of his beneficial and saving presence. An unusual adventure of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10) reminds us forcefully of this fact, as we shall soon see in our reflections.

*God's Spirit among all the Corneliuses of the World:
Astonishment and Understanding*

In his earliest letter addressed to the Thessalonians St Paul wrote: "when we brought the Good News to you, it came to you not only as words, but as power and as the Holy Spirit and as utter conviction" (1 Thess 1:5). It is the saving power of the Spirit which transforms the hearts and lives of people. What are we to say about all those who have not been reached by the word of the Gospel and who have not experienced this power of the Spirit? Everyone who faces essential religious questions and sincerely seeks answers can count on help of the Holy Spirit, because these questions are inspired by the same Spirit of God. One can rightly consider him the discrete and patient Companion of our life, the unfailing Comforter and Friend in the most fundamental matters of our faith and hope.

The same Apostle assured Corinthians: "no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3b). Those who were pronouncing this short confession of the faith in Jesus during prayerful assemblies of the whole community could be sure that they do it under the influence of the Spirit. Perhaps these words were also an encouragement to declare belief in Jesus as the Lord, especially in time of persecution. People had to know that in such moments the Holy Spirit would give them courage not to hesitate over their faith. In his teachings Jesus himself was preparing his disciples to face boldly the difficult time of trial: "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it is not you who will be speaking; the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you" (Mt 10:19-20). No one who has the courage to confess his or her faith under the influence of the Holy Spirit can say: 'Curse Jesus'" (1 Cor 12:3a). Such a person will not deny their faith in Jesus, even when in danger to lose one's own life.

Paul wrote also to the Christian community in Rome: "Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. (...) The Spirit himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God. And if we are children we

are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing his sufferings so as to share his glory" (Rom 8:14.17).

In the description of the visible descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, Luke mentions not only Jews and proselytes but also strangers from almost all nations of the ancient world being surprised by this apparition: "Partians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Capadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome (...), Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11). All those people were bewildered, amazed and astonished to hear the Apostles speaking their native language: "we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God. Everyone was amazed and unable to explain it; they asked one another what it all meant" (v. 11-12).

In this context a question arises: What did the author of the *Acts of the Apostles* think about the situation and ultimate future of those who had never heard of Jesus and did not answer his Good News by their faith and hope? What will be their final destiny as they still live according to their own customs and convictions? Luke describes some concrete cases of the Spirit's action among Gentiles which throw light on the situation of such people. These events can help us in seeking solutions to our questions.

The most striking and thought-provoking is a detailed description of the encounter of the apostle Peter with the Roman centurion Cornelius, a devout Gentile praying to God and giving generously to those in need (cf. 10:1-11:18). Luke relates three times about Peter's unusual vision which changed his understanding of God's plan concerning all the Gentiles. Both Cornelius' family and his friends had received the Holy Spirit even before they were baptised: "While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too, since they could hear them speaking strange languages and proclaiming the greatness of God" (10: 44-46).

How understandable is that human astonishment which pervades Luke's accounts – that great surprise caused by the sovereign action of God's Spirit among "outsiders"! The Apostle himself admits in all sincerity: "God has made it clear to me that I must not call anyone profane or unclean. (...) The truth I have now come to realise (...) is that God does not have favourites, but anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:28b.34-35). These words express a true wisdom. One can see in them a sort of manifesto of Christian universalism of hope for the salvation of all.

The time of uncertainty is over when God himself intervenes in situation of human perplexity and shows his benevolence to all people. First came a symbolic vision of a clean and unclean food to teach Peter about the proper understanding of the place of Gentiles in the divine plan of salvation. As no food given to people should be called unclean, no human person should be considered unworthy of participation in God's gift of

salvation. This is a strong symbol of breaking the barriers which divided the Israelites from the Gentiles, who were regarded as unclean. Under the influence of the received vision and inspiration of the Spirit, Peter invited Cornelius' envoys into the house to be his guests (10:23) and later himself remained with the centurion for several days as his guest (11:3). What earlier seemed impossible, became a new reality.

The lesson has not been wasted. God helped Peter to deliver himself of religious prejudices which before had kept him clear of people belonging to different religions and cultures. It turned out to be an unusual benefit and blessing for further development of Christianity. One should be open and ready to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit where people live in righteousness, worship God and enjoy his favour. Why not respect the religious life and experience of people outside our own community, when we know that they also receive inspiration from God and enjoy the presence of the Spirit?

These remarkable facts testify that the presence and action of God's Spirit far exceed the limits of Christian community. People "from the outside" can even become an important edification for Christians themselves, especially for those who are leaders of particular communities, as was revealed in the case of the Apostle Peter. He had to explain to the church in Jerusalem the perturbing case of Cornelius: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life'" (Acts 11:18 NIV).

And so through divine ordinance Peter will become an advocate of the Gentiles at the council of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:7-11), a spokesman and intercessor of the mission directed to the pagan world. Gentiles, an overwhelming majority of the ancient world, could thus become members of the People of God without being subject to the duty of following the prescriptions of the Jewish Law, such as circumcision and prohibitions to consume "unclean" food. Let us then not hesitate to speak also today about the religious experience of non-Christians. Christ is "Lord of all", "the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:36.42). He bestows upon all people the best gifts of the heavenly Father of all.

Pneumatological Ecclesiology

One has only to rejoice that our human destiny is so much interrelated and intertwined with God's Spirit, the greatest *Mystagogue* of our faith and hope. It is this Spirit who makes the mystery of Christ and His work of salvation become a present reality, acting in the life of the Church and of each individual. The then Orthodox metropolitan Ignatius Hazim of Latakia (since 1979 Ignatius IV, the patriarch of Antioch) expressed, during the Fourth General Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala (1968), his personal, well known and afterwards often repeated affirmation on the role of the Holy Spirit. Let us quote it in original French:

Il [l'Esprit Saint] est personnellement la Nouveauté à l'oeuvre dans le monde. Il est la Présence de Dieu-avec-nous, «joint à notre esprit» (Rm 8,16); sans lui, Dieu est loin, le Christ est dans le passé, l'Évangile est une lettre morte, l'Église une simple organisation, l'autorité une domination, la mission, de la propagande, le culte une évocation et l'agir chrétien une morale d'esclave.

Mais, en Lui et dans une synergie indissociable, le cosmos est soulevé et gémit dans l'enfantement du Royaume, l'homme est en lutte contre la «chair», le Christ ressuscité est là, l'Évangile est puissance de vie, l'Église signifie la Communion trinitaire, l'autorité est un service libérateur, la mission est une Pentecôte, la liturgie est mémoriale et anticipation, l'agir humain est déifié.

L'Esprit Saint fait advenir la Parousie dans une épiclese sacramentelle et mystiquement réaliste, il fait naître, il parle par les prophètes, il remet toutes choses dans le Dialogue, il met en communion en étant répandu lui-même, il attire vers le second avènement¹⁵.

As mentioned earlier, some old codices of the Lord's Prayer according to Luke, instead of the invocation "your kingdom come" (11:2), offer the following alternative: "May your Holy Spirit come down upon us and cleanse us" (*elthētō tò Pneuma sou tò ágion eph'ēmas kai katharisátō ēmas*)¹⁶. This variant form found a lively resonance in the Eastern spirituality. Evagrius of Pontus explained its meaning in the following way: "Your kingdom come. The kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit. We ask the Father to send him down on us".¹⁷ The Holy Spirit is thus a synonym of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of truth, goodness, and beauty. With the Pentecost, the history of salvation has begun the last stage of its movement towards ultimate fulfilment. It is the time of the laborious formation of the Kingdom to come. Each invocation of the Spirit is therefore an eschatological *epiclesis*.

Where there is Spirit, there is also a variety of gifts and charismas. By her very nature the Church should be a space of the Spirit's acting through the diversity of gifts. The Holy Spirit is not at the Church's disposal. No person and no concrete community has an exclusive right to the Spirit who acts independently of human initiatives and institutions. The Church should constantly invoke the coming of the sovereign Spirit. Here one can see also the ecclesiological importance of the *epiclesis* which is

¹⁵ Ignace IV. *La résurrection et l'homme d'aujourd'hui*. Paris 1981, s.36-37

¹⁶ See *The Greek New Testament*, ad locum.

¹⁷ *Tractatus de oratione*, 58. See I. Hausherr, *Les leçons d'un contemplatif. Le traité de l'Oraison d'Evagre le Pontique*, Paris 1960, 83.

only a prayerful application of pneumatology. The spirituality of epiclesis deepens the feeling of the total dependence of the Church on the Paraclete. It teaches us to live in an epicletic atmosphere, remembering one's inner poverty and insufficiency¹⁸. This consciousness helps us better understand many Orthodox reservations concerning the Roman-Catholic teaching about the primacy, infallibility, and the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome.¹⁹

In this regard we can speak about an important *criterion of the epiclesis* concerning the Church's life. The community of believers invokes the Holy Spirit not only in order to ask him for his gifts. It prays also to God that the gifts already bestowed become fruitful in our life. The epiclesis is a challenge to each Church and every individual believer. It conveys a continuing appeal to keep a beneficial distance towards oneself, an appeal for a spirituality full of modesty and feeling of poverty before God. This is not an easy attitude towards spiritual values. What we all need is a certain spiritual nobleness and disinterestedness. We have to become mutually a gift for each other and be accepted by others as gift without renouncing our own identity. Such is the demanding ecumenical *ethos of the epiclesis*.

In the light of the Eastern tradition, the best witness and guard of the faith of the Church is a person truly transfigured by the power of the Spirit. Such a person could be trusted more than any institution. If need be, the Spirit will inspire prophets and confessors who will help the Church remain faithful to the Gospel of Christ. No wonder that in the Orthodox Church, the charismatic elders (*startzi*) were often the ones who woke the believers' conscience. They were people full of inner peace, having the gift of discernment and empathy, able to heal spiritual illnesses. When the Church was threatened by formalism and fossilization, there appeared also the so-called *iouródivyie* (Greek: *sáloi*), "fools for the sake of Christ" (1 Co 4:10), courageous and inwardly free. While remaining themselves perennial strangers and pilgrims who did not care for their good name among people, they would wake up the church community from pharisaic attitudes and the insensitivity to human pains and sufferings.

The Christian Gospel (*eu-aggélion* means the Good News!) reminds the followers of Christ that here on earth there is no final fulfillment of God's reign, for there is always something more to come. God is already coming, but *incognito*, especially in the person of those who

¹⁸ The importance of the pneumatological approach to ecclesiology was stressed among others by N. A. Nissiotis, *La pneumatologie ecclésiologique au service de l'unité de l'Église*, „Istina”, 12 (1967), 323–340; idem, *Pneumatological Christology as a Presupposition of Ecclesiology*, „Oecumenica”, 2 (1967), s. 235-251.

¹⁹ On this topic see W. Hryniewicz, *The Cost of Unity: The Papal Primacy in Recent Orthodox Reflection*. “The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies” (Nijmegen-Leuven) 55 (2003) No. 1-2, 1-27.

are in need or who suffer (cf. Mt 25:35-45). Any service done for the real good of other people is, in its essence, a service to God's kingdom. Acts of compassion are crucial in our life as humans.

In this way we come back to thinking about humans as epicletic beings who call and are called, who invoke the Other and are invoked by others. The present existence of the world is not its final form. The "today" of our earthly existence calls for a "tomorrow" of the future world – the world of human hopes for the ultimate fulfillment of the good, truth, and beauty. Any choice of goodness and truth is, in fact, an existential salvific event. As such, this event puts humans eye-to-eye, not only with their natural truth and authenticity, but also with their ultimate truth and destiny. This is the consequence of the fundamental option of goodness, truth, and beauty. According to the Second Vatican Council, "by His Incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man".²⁰ The pastoral Constitution of the Church in the modern world is explained in *Gaudium et spes*:

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.²¹

This unusual solidarity of Jesus Christ with every human being is also stressed by Eastern tradition, although it escapes precise analysis. The light of grace of the Holy Spirit penetrates the inner core of human freedom in a way "known only to God". Each decision to serve the good and to follow its requirements is already some sort of realization of the mystery of salvation. The good, by its nature, brings about rescue and salvation, prevents destruction, liberates, and leads to ultimate fulfillment. The choice of truth and goodness made within one's inner self has a rescuing nature.

Spiritual values live by our existence, loyalty, and commitment. They address everyone with an appeal to entrust oneself to them. They wither away and die whenever people allow them no access to themselves and fail to respond with their own commitment and faithfulness. To exist, they need the person's free co-operation. A dramatic feature of all human values is that they are dependent on our response. But the individual decisions are always uncertain. These values exist as much as the people opting for them allow them to inspire and direct their actions. Indeed, the

²⁰ Constitution 'Gaudium et spes', 22. In: *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbot, S. J., general Editor, very Rev. Msgr. Joseph Gallagher, translation Editor. London-Dublin-Melbourne 1967, pp. 220-221.

²¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. Ibidem, p. 221-222.

challenge of the Holy Spirit leaves no one unattended, in peace and quiet. This challenge approaches us with an incessant call. And it dies at the doorstep of the one who chooses evil. By rejecting it, humans deprive it of its reality and become deaf to the inner call.

Living by the Spirit

St Paul encouraged the Galatians: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature", "Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:16.25 NIV). Christians are familiar with these words. But do these words affect our lives in a practical way? What does it mean to "keep in step with the Spirit"? Certainly it does not mean simply to add the Spirit to our lives, so that he would join us in our journey and follow us on our ways. On the contrary, we are commanded to follow him daily, to be led by him and to be attuned to him. This is a lifelong process and the "fruit" of our own lives.

Living by the Spirit implies a continual connectedness with him and active interaction supported by his divine inspiration and power. This does not happen by our own strength. Both the Spirit's action and our response are necessary in this mutual relationship. As the Apostle wrote: "Therefore, my dear friends, (...) continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:12-13 NIV). There is no contradiction in this passage between the two aspects of our human situation before God. When God's Spirit works in us, there is also work left for us to do which requires continual commitment and discovering how to live a Spirit-filled life today.

We may have our own shortsighted purposes for desiring the Spirit's presence and power in our lives, but God has his own purpose. The Apostle of the nations reminds us, however, that each follower of Christ is given "the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7), i.e. for the edification of the community of believers. One is not allowed to use the manifestation of the Spirit for his own human glory. This would mean ignoring the priorities God tells us to pursue. We humans cannot impose our own desires upon him. Desiring the Holy Spirit means that we allow him to guide us. It is he who requires that we submit ourselves to be led by him.

Everyone is called to be led by him. The decision to follow belongs to us. To submit to the guidance of the Spirit is a lifelong journey. Although God does not give us his Spirit solely for our personal good, it is nevertheless true that one of the greatest benefits of being in relationship with the Holy Spirit is intimacy, familiarity, love, joy, peace, and encouragement. Many Christians spend much of their life struggling against insecurity concerning their own salvation, living out of fear and determination to earn divine acceptance. It is the Holy Spirit whom gives us confidence and hope: "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has

poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Rom 5:5 NIV). With this confidence from the depth of our being we can live and serve God as his children and not as guilt-ridden slaves: “Because you are sons [and daughters!], God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Gal 4:6-7; cf. Rom 8:15-17).

What an amazing truth which may be experienced in intimate moments of relationship with God! This is truly one of the beneficial gifts the Holy Spirit gives us. He assures us that we are accepted as God’s children and therefore have nothing to fear. It is the Spirit who reminds us of the ultimate victory of good over all evil – the victory that will come when God’s kingdom is fully realized.

Not to Quench and Grieve the Spirit

An American pastor relates a saddening case which gives us much to think about regarding our Churches. A former gang member came to his church in California. He was curious to see what the Church preaching the Gospel of Jesus was like. After a few months he was no longer to be seen. When asked why he did not attend church services any more he gave the following explanation:

I had the wrong idea of what church was going to be like. When I joined the church, I thought it was going to be like joining a gang. You see, in the gangs we weren’t just nice to each other once a week – we were family.²²

In fact what this man expected is what the Church is intended to be. And the pastor adds his own commentary on the situation. His words deserve a thorough reflection.

It saddened me to think that a gang could paint a better picture of commitment, loyalty, and family than the local church body. The church is intended to be a beautiful place of community. A place where wealth is shared and when one suffers, everyone suffers. A place where when one rejoices, everyone rejoices. A place where everyone experiences real love and acceptance in the midst of great honesty about our brokenness. Yet most of the time this is not even close to how we would describe our churches.

²² Francis Chan with Danae Yankosky, *Forgotten God: Reversing Our Tragic Neglect of the Holy Spirit*, Colorado Springs, Co. 2009, p. 152.

Without the Spirit of God in our midst, working in us, guiding us, and living and loving through us, we will never be the kind of people who make up this kind of community. There is no such thing as a real believer who doesn't have the Holy Spirit, or a real church without the Spirit. It's just not possible. But what is possible is that we would individually and corporately quench and hinder the Spirit's activity in and through our lives.²³

And further on we can read yet another challenging observation:

Churches we build only by our own efforts and not in the strength of the Spirit will quickly collapse when we don't push and prod them along. (...) Our Scriptures teach that if you know what you are supposed to do and you don't do it, then you sin (James 4:17). In other words, when we stock up knowledge without applying it to our lives, we are actually sinning.²⁴

There is a strong scriptural command: "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thes 5:19 RSV), or in other translations: "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (NIV), "Never try to suppress the Spirit" (JB). Christians are encouraged to "test everything", to "hold on to the good" and to "avoid every kind of evil". The wisdom of the Bible says also: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30 NIV; cf. Is 63:10).

One may ask: Have we really such power over the Spirit? Is it right to say that God has feelings? Does it not belittle him? Is this not a pure anthropomorphism? No doubt, in our culture having feelings or emotions is often unjustly equated with imperfection and weakness. Yet, using human language the Bible does not hesitate to attribute feelings to God. The Spirit is said to be grieved and deeply touched by our broken relationship with God or with other people. We grieve the Spirit of God by our disunity, lack of love, concern, understanding and compassion, by hatred, enmity, jealousy and all sort of other bad attitudes hurting our fellow man. If we truly cared about the Holy Spirit's grief, there would indeed be fewer divisions in our Churches, fewer conflicts and broken relationships in our lives. We are most alive and become Spirit-filled people when we are loving, compassionate and giving of ourselves. Love surpasses all understanding (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). The Holy Spirit is the One who fills believers with God's love and enables us to love one another to his divine joy.

How do we relate to the Holy Spirit? This is a question each one of us has to answer on his or her own account. There is so often a big gap between the witness of the Scripture about the Spirit and the way many

²³ Ibidem, 152-153.

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 155,156.

individual believers and Churches live and act today. In fact, not only something, but Someone very important is missing in our lives, namely the Holy Spirit. That is why many people have left the Church without even been sorry for that decision. The Church relying only on her own strength resembles any other human gathering of people. The world around is not moved by her witness when it is deprived of the convincing power of the Spirit. Only when believers live a Spirit-filled life, does their presence acquire a new dimension and convincing force. If the Holy Spirit truly inspires and moves people, nothing can stop his transfiguring energy. Without his presence and work we cannot bring genuine fruit, no matter how much effort we would be ready to expend.

When those outside the Church see no difference in our lives, they certainly begin to doubt and question our faith in God. This situation reminds us of the Apostle's words about the hypocrisy of some Christians:

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grape-vine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water (Jas 3:9-12 NIV).

The exhortation addressed to early Christians can be reiterated to us today who have received the Holy Spirit, but often lack love, joy, peace, patience and kindness – all that constitutes “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). During the discourse in the Upper Room Jesus foretells the coming of the Holy Spirit who “when he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn 16:8 NIV). The “convicting” and convincing of the world is proper to the action of the Spirit. In his encyclical letter *Dominum et vivificantem* John Paul II explains this role of the Holy Spirit in the following way:

Nevertheless, Christ did not come into the world only to judge it and condemn it: *he came to save it* (cf. Jn 3:17; 12:47). Convincing about sin and righteousness has as its purpose the salvation of the world, the salvation of men. Precisely this truth seems to be emphasized by the assertion that “judgment” concerns only the “*prince of this world*”, Satan, the one who from the beginning has been exploiting the work of creation against salvation, against the covenant and the union of man with God: he is “already judged” from the start. If the Spirit-Counsellor is to convince the world precisely concerning judgment, it is in order to continue in the world the salvific work of Christ. (...) The Holy Spirit, who takes from the Son the

work of the Redemption of the world, by this very fact takes the task of the salvific “convincing of sin”.²⁵

However, no one but *he himself, the Spirit of truth, can “convince the world”*, man or the human conscience of this ineffable truth. He is the Spirit who “searches even the depths of God” (cf. 1 Cor 2:10).²⁶

Further on the Pope explains this saving action of the Spirit by reference to the human conscience. According to him, “the conscience is the «secret sanctuary» in which «God’s voice echoes»”.²⁷

The Gospel’s “convincing concerning sin” under the influence of the Spirit of truth can be accomplished in man in no other way except *through the conscience*. (...) In convincing the world concerning sin *the Spirit of truth comes into contact with the voice of human consciences*.²⁸

The Holy Spirit’s “convincing of sin” reveals therefore its salvific dimension. It becomes a manifestation that sin is conquered through the redemptive power of love in the crucified and risen Christ. Through his paschal mystery divine love can reveal itself in human history as stronger than sin and guilt, and in consequence as stronger than our ability to quench and grieve the Spirit.

The Scripture speaks of humans becoming “a new creation” (2 Cor 5:17) with the Spirit living in us. How is it possible? Nature itself is helpful in this respect and provides us with a striking illustration of radical transformation. Just look at the caterpillar, a little worm crawling around which wakes up one day with a new body and the ability to fly. It is but an example of the possibility of marvelous change. Our faith reassures us about a new Spirit-empowered ability to live a different life in “a spiritual body”: “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:44). The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead reveals to us this astounding truth which will, in the world to come, become a reality manifest to all. Now is the time when the Spirit lives invisibly in our earthly lives.

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Thinking about the universal presence and action of the Holy Spirit is a useful lesson of wisdom and hope. It urges us to learn together to live in peace with people other than ourselves, in order to build the world with a more human face and deliver it from all sort of enmity. It is also a clear sign

²⁵ *Dominum et vivificantem*, par. 27 and 28 (here and further italics in the original). See also par.31.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, par. 32.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, par. 43.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, par. 43 and 44.

of the time when people recognize the universal presence and activity of God's Spirit in the world, in every place and among people of different generations. This presence embraces not only particular persons but the whole history of nations, cultures and religions as well.

Let us emphasize again: the Spirit acts not only within religious traditions, but also in all human cultures of the world. It is his common action with Christ the Saviour, and he manifests himself in all that is good, true, and beautiful. Where there is goodness, beauty, and truth, there is also God's Spirit. I live with this conviction and this hope.

CHAPTER VIII

HOLY SPIRIT AND CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Christianity is a religion of hope, confidence, and encouragement. According to Clement of Alexandria, one of the prominent Greek Fathers of the Church, it is “religion as a whole which forms an exhortation”.¹ It puts before our eyes the gift of salvation, the saving power of the risen Christ and the continuous action of the Holy Spirit. The task of Christian spirituality is to heal and transform people through turning to our inner self. This turning has been called by the Latin term *itinerarium*, i.e. journey to oneself, into the depth of one’s humanity. We have to discover what inside of us is still preserved in its original beauty as the uncorrupted and iconic similitude of God. It is a journey of the human mind and heart enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Journey into the Depths of Human Spirit: The Mysterious Land of Spiritual Life

We are heirs of the past centuries of spiritual life. But there is no reason to remain today only the passive imitators of old patterns of thinking while experiencing the wisdom of Christianity. We are faced by new challenges and urgent tasks. Times have changed. Although people share some problems, hopes, cares, and anxieties similar to those of our predecessors, the present age is different from the past centuries. Our contemporaries have lost the feeling of the close presence of the transcendent reality. The face of the world is shaped more and more by the process of secularisation, or even secularism, and marked by indifference to the light of the faith. Quite a number of phenomena seem to indicate that we hasten away from the spiritual fervour of many generations of Christians in the past. However one should not lament. The world does not need weeping and lamenting Christians, but their courageous, patient, and wise witness. When the darkness lasts too long, one must start longing again for the light. The spiritual need for light can become then stronger than experience of emptiness and God’s absence.

The new currents of spirituality brought into being in our times are characterized by striving for a greater simplicity and concentration on the essentials. There is a growing distance of many people from the society of consumption. The state of material welfare and comfort alone cannot give one the feeling of happiness and true fulfilment in life. Turning inside invites inner integration which is able to overcome the process of

¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Paidagogos* I,1,3. „Sources Chrétiennes” (SCh) 70, p.110: „protreptikē gār ē pasa theosébeia”, „c’est l’ensemble de la religion qui est «protreptique»».

fragmentation and increasing shallowness. Greater depth means greater simplicity, limiting external needs and recovering one's own true identity. To descend into the depth of our inner being means to counteract the development unilaterally directed to the outer reality. The journey into the depths of the human spirit does not mean, however, the loss of contact with real life, or pure egocentrism and subjectivism. It always requires the complementary movement towards responsibility for other people and the world. Descending into my inner self I encounter there my greater sensibility to the presence of God and other people, and thus discover the real source of my own existence. Not in splendid isolation, but in solidarity with the destinies of my fellow humans.

The very term "spirituality" implies precisely this turn to the depth of human spirit, where the shape of our humanity matures as a result of its inner transformation. The concept of spirituality indicates the spiritual sphere within the human being and, at the same time, the Holy Spirit of God who penetrates our inner self. Spirituality is a privileged way to experience a personal relationship to God, to other people, and to the world of nature. In this experience Christians are confronted in a particularly distinct way with the person of the glorified Christ and the Holy Spirit. The great mystic, St Isaac the Syrian wrote in the 7th century about the spiritual realm in the depth of our humanity, purified and transformed by the grace of the Holy Spirit:

The country of the man who is pure in soul is within him. The sun that shines within him is the light of the Holy Trinity. The air that the denizens of this realm breathe is the comforting and All-holy Spirit. And those who make their abode with him are the holy and incorporeal natures [i.e. the angels]. Christ, the Light of the Father's light, is their life, joy, and happiness. Such a man is gladdened at all times by the divine vision of his soul, and he is enthralled by his own beauty which is truly a hundredfold more resplendent than the brilliance of the sun itself. This is Jerusalem and the Kingdom of God which is hidden within us, as the Lord says [cf. Lk 17:21]. This realm is a cloud of God's glory into which only the pure of heart may enter to behold the countenance of their Master [cf. Mt 5:8] and to have their intellects illuminated by the ray of His light.²

In symbolic and imaginative way, characteristic of the Syrian tradition, Isaac expressed the basic truth about Christian spirituality. In fact, the journey to the inner self consists in rediscovering that spiritual realm

² *Hom. 15. In: The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian.* Translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass. 1984, 85-86.

inhabited by God, where Christ and the Holy Spirit have their special mission. God himself is the spiritual sun, air, and joy of that hidden realm. Isaac's inner "country" is full of the Triune God. The presence of Christ as Light, and of the Spirit as Comforter, opens up the new space for our faith and hope. The journey abounds in great surprise at the discovery of the original beauty of each person's humanity. And travelers feel astonishment and admiration because of the closeness of God's kingdom, already invisibly present within us.

To find one's way to the truth about oneself and the world requires the assistance of the Holy Spirit. It is his light which helps us to overcome the darkness of our going astray, of our guilt and sinfulness; and through repentance to find the grace of divine forgiveness. God's kingdom within us means ultimately "peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). The connection between the Spirit and spiritual life is clearly emphasized in contemporary Christian thought. Christians become ever more conscious of the fact that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control", and that "we live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23.25 NIV).

Behold, in brief, the entire culture of the spiritual life! Note the striking sequence of the enumerated fruits of the Spirit. Joy follows in the second place, just after love, and precedes peace. People whose lives are not filled with love will not find the source of true joy and peace. They will remain irreconcilable with themselves and with others, permanently malcontent and prone to aggression, the opposite of peace and inner harmony. The true culture of the spiritual life manifests itself through inner radiation which becomes for the other people inspiration, encouragement, and guidance.

The spiritual life is definitely something more than a life devoted to religious practices. It brings unusual adventures within the sphere of the human spirit. It is there, in the depth of our spirit, that we meet God and find his presence within ourselves. Spiritual life is not exclusively the result of our human desires and efforts. The initiative belongs to God himself. He was the first who decided to bestow on us his presence and to reveal himself, especially through incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and through the descent of the Holy Spirit. For this reason one should not speak about God's unbroken silence in human history. We have not invented the spiritual life as a consolation for our human loneliness in the world. It comes from above as God's gift that invites us to encounter, dialogue, and participate. We are not left alone in our human condition.

Of course, some thinkers and artists may have a interior life and at the same time remain agnostics or atheists. By the creative force of their mind they are able to penetrate deeply into the reality of the world and experience their union with it. One can certainly speak in this case of a specific mysticism of nature in those people who in the strict sense are not religious. For example Albert Camus knew how to draw inspiration from a truly mystical feeling of unity with sun, sea, and sand. His early Algerian

descriptions of nature are a clear witness to that. Such an experience deepens one's consciousness of union with the whole of reality, transcending our human being. Most often it is a momentary and transient feeling, but it leaves an enduring impact on the human psyche. This experience is usually accompanied by the feeling of purification (*kátharsis*) and nearness to the mystery of all that exists.

An unbelieving thinker or writer keeps such moments in his memory, later giving them vivid expression in his creativity. To be conscious of the wonder of existence, not knowing where this miracle ultimately comes from and where it leads, is a continuous challenge to our minds and hearts. Those who become conscious of the fragility of their lives, look for some signs of hope in the encircling world. Every one of us desires at least a ray of light, especially in the darkness of suffering, misfortune, guilt, and death. If there is no God, hope attaches to the encircling reality. Nature becomes a symbol of what is pure, intact, and original. A person conscious of his or her guilt seeks purification in nature which then becomes their unique "holy place". Such experiences speed up the process of spiritual maturing. Nothing can suppress the longing within us for light and happiness. The mysticism of nature may become the last basis for human hope.

It is obvious that religious spirituality should not be identified with psychic life. The experience of God and his presence is not only an immanent and purely subjective event inside the human spirit. We do not create God nor invent him. What is in question is not a fictitious dialogue within our own mental life. The true experience of God is rooted in his all-embracing divine reality. The wisdom of the centuries says that he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves. God reveals his hidden presence in the depth of our inner self and we experience it more or less clearly and directly. Spiritual life is an answer for God's initiative that invites dialogue and participation. Religious experience is born out of this response to the invitation which comes from the very source of all truth, goodness and beauty.

The Spirituality of Transfiguration

Spirituality is a common good of all the believing people. During centuries past, Christian Churches gathered a great richness of spiritual experience. We have to make it a part of our own spiritual sensitivity. A genuine Christian spirituality is able to heal and transform human life. It has a therapeutic character. For this reason the Fathers of the early Church often used to call Christ the only good Physician and Healer (*Christós Iatrós, Christus Medicus*) who always acts together with the Holy Spirit.

The process of inner healing and transformation lasts through the whole of our human life. It is a process of continuous spiritual resurrection in the world, where there is so much suffering, despair, emptiness, cynicism, and nihilism. How to resurrect the "dead souls"? How to become

a witness of their spiritual resurrection? The Russian writer Nicholas Gogol (1809-1852) wanted to express all this through the art of the written word. He failed. When he understood his painful inability, he burned his works. Before his death he managed only to write with shaking hand the words: "Be living souls, not the dead ones!"³ His faith was full of unrest, anxiety, and despair. Painful experiences taught him that people live a shallow and unwise life as if they were asleep, satisfied with the very biological level of existence. He condemned the triviality of such a life, described the meanness and mischievousness of average individuals, as well as stigmatized evil in all its different forms.

Gogol's novel *The Dead Souls* shows the civilization of disintegration shaped by people caring only about enjoying all the pleasures of life. The result of such a life is boredom and emptiness. I do not know any other writer more sensitive to this spiritual disease of "hellish boredom": "It is boring in this world, gentlemen!" People become beings without their own face, losing the dignity of their humanity. The drama described by the writer is the drama of the world of "dead souls". He died not seeing any rescue. His life was a specific witness to the desperate search of a new spirituality in which the light of the resurrection and the energy of the Spirit could help to overcome the lifelessness of the world.

Large masses of people, also of believers, seem to be swept away today by growing indifference and boredom. The world seen through the eyes of a bored person is poor and one-dimensional. Boredom is a sign of the peculiar fall of the spirit, often described in the Christian tradition of spirituality by the Latin word *acedia*. This state of the human spirit blunts our sensitivity to the good and manifests itself in discouragement, despondency, and sadness. It is a blatant negation of hope. Such a person does not experience the joy given by a good and fruitful life, their lives are deprived of benevolence and the love of people. This kind of a person does not reveal any willingness to do good, is full of pusillanimity, bitterness and animosity, and at the same time takes perverse satisfaction in detecting evil and unrighteousness in other people.

We face here a reverse of spiritual richness in the human heart. That is why another outstanding Russian writer, Fyodor Dostoevsky, used to foretell that the destruction of humanity would be caused not so much by wars, but just by boredom, the state of metaphysical emptiness having something demonic in itself. Metaphorically one might say, with some exaggeration, that boredom reveals the face of an evil spirit. An empty and bored person needs constant stimuli, incentives, and ever new and stronger impulses. Indifference, boredom, and superficiality are evident manifestations of the emptiness within the human mind and spirit. Here lies the main cause of depression and finally of suicide resulting from a feeling of meaninglessness in life.

³ Quote after Paul Evdokimov, *Gogol et Dostoïevsky ou la descente aux enfers*, Paris 1961, 175.

All the religions are today facing the challenges of the modern style of living. The cult of new idols, the flood of tranquilizers and the unprecedented visibility of evil oblige believers to guard against the deep reserve of metaphysical unrest. Metaphysical emptiness is a terrible disease which urgently requires efficient therapy; otherwise it opens the way to cynicism and nihilism. The special responsibility for this state of the human spirit falls in this respect on Christianity. Let us not blame and accuse only liberalism, relativism, permissiveness, cognitive and moral nihilism, destruction of authorities, postmodernism, demoralization, pornography, and other “plagues” of our times. Within us there are things of perhaps even greater practical importance and urgency, such as a lack of benevolence, solidarity, and tolerance understood positively as “the virtue that makes peace possible”⁴. The very existence of another human being is too often perceived as a real threat to ourselves. The growth of aggression is seen practically every day. People lack respect for those who live, think, and believe differently. They lack respect for truth, honesty, and work, for everything that exists, for the whole of nature.

Indeed, it is not easy today to be a person who loves goodness, beauty, and truth. It is not easy to be a witness of hope! By its nature goodness is not boring. It is able to liberate much energy and creativity, but it requires a lot of care, vigilance and ingenuity. Otherwise it can easily lose its attractiveness and become boring. Without ingenuity goodness shrinks and wastes away, because of our human ineptitude, inefficiency, and weakness. Even our virtues may seem unbearable, haughty, and cruel. The good which is inept, imposed, or forced becomes a nightmare, casts shadows, repulses, and discourages. It is often perceived as a limitation of human freedom, whereas evil appears, at a short range, to bring liberation and to give the feeling of relief and lightness.

However, the historical realization of goodness in Christianity prompts many critical reflections. Good intentions were often advocated to justify initiatives which proved to be false and harmful. Goodness can be abused, vitiated, and distorted when arrogantly imposed by force and not accepted or done out of inner conviction. It is impossible to do good while hating people. Only those who do good with true love can find acceptance and can expect much compassion for human weakness and sinfulness. Genuine goodness has a great power of convincing and spiritual radiation.

There is in us the inextinguishable desire to do good which liberates the most noble aspirations of the human spirit and reveals the better part of our inner self. But on this side of life we have no clear knowledge about the ultimate destiny of good or evil. There remains only

⁴ Article 1: *Meaning of tolerance*, in: *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, 16 November 1995. The Member States of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, meeting in Paris at the twenty-eighth session of the General Conference, from 25 October to 16 November 1995.

faith and hope. In hope of the future victory of goodness every one of us must take an unknown journey beyond the gate of death. The human Passover will find its fulfillment at the end of the journey called our human life. The time of our earthly life is the time for maturing our spiritual life.

God reveals to people his love; he persuades, attracts, and invites, but he never imposes himself by force. He never destroys his own gift of freedom. Jesus himself suffered from "the secret power of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:7 NIV), and this is to continue till the end of history. One of the most far-sighted and open questions which came out of his mouth was: "But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?" (Lc 18:8). Such is the divine order of freedom and goodness. The faith compelled ceases to be a free act of confidence and trust. Imposed virtue is no longer virtue. A God imposed upon people can only cause scandal and rejection, and will be recognized as an enemy of human dignity and freedom.

If Christianity wants to bring about a ferment of transfiguration, it must steadily uncover and concentrate upon what is the most essential in our faith and hope. The power of its inner spiritual radiation depends on this; the creative spirituality of an epoch grows out of this attitude. Such a spirituality gives and deepens the ultimate sense of human existence. Some contemporary thinkers strongly stress the need to build a civilization on the foundation of goodness, in spite of all the negative experiences of the past. The good has in itself the power to resurrect what has become lifeless. The evidence is demonstrated by the paschal logic of Christianity. I am deeply convinced that our Christianity should become more paschal in its faith and spirituality. Such appeals have resounded many times throughout the 20th century.

The strongest foundation of Christian hope is the faith in the presence of the risen Christ and in the action of the Holy Spirit, even in the situations of the greatest darkness and complete destruction. The spirituality of transfiguration emphasizes above all a change in the very way we think about and understand human life. The New Testament describes this change with the Greek word *metánoia*: "Repent (*metanoieite*) and believe the good news" (Mk 1:15). However, the word "repentance" does not express the deep insight of the biblical *metánoia*. To be changed, we first have to radically change our thinking. One has to start thinking (*noeo*) anew after (*metà*) the bad decisions, false actions, and harmful experiences of life.

The spirituality of transfiguration suggests a new type of asceticism – one of open eyes and a compassionate heart, that is, greater sensitivity to God, other people, and the whole surrounding nature. For this one has to slow the tempo of life, limit the noise, regain inner peace, and appreciate the moments of silence.

To the overworked, exhausted, and restless people of today, whose resistance to any form of suffering has drastically diminished, it is not easy to recommend any additional practice of renouncement or mortification. Life itself has become enough turbulent, full of affliction, trouble, and

distress. Our spiritual effort should therefore aim not so much at renouncing any decent way of life, but above all at reasonably modifying its style.

It will be easier then to notice other fellow humans beside us who are also in need of being rescued and saved in their humanity. Mutual sensitivity shapes the culture of benevolence and understanding. We are all responsible for each other. In centuries past people were able to observe the severe discipline of fasting and mortification, for example. Today the present conditions of life require different forms of spiritual self-realization. The very idea of fasting becomes rather an appeal to limit one's own needs in order to have an open heart for all the needy. This understanding of fasting is very close to the teaching of the ancient prophets. In the Book of Isaiah we read:

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am (Is 58:6-9).

The human person is realized most fully in love, benevolence, and care for the destiny of other people, because these give intensity and depth to our life. Loss of the ability to love, lack of life-long passion, and vagueness of aspirations lead inevitably to inner emptiness, a spiritual state of being burnt out, disappointment, bitterness, fear, loneliness, and a feeling of absurdity of existence. One who has nobody nor any real purpose to live for, will be inclined to feel that his or her life is empty, barren, unfruitful, and unhappy. The inability to love, to understand other people and to do good is a clear sign of the slow degradation of our own humanity.

St Augustine has expressed this existential truth in a very concise phrase: *Pondus meum, amor meus*, "My gravity is my love".⁵ What an impressive and moving description! The whole specific weight of our humanity, the entire importance of life is expressed in these four words! If the paschal mystery of Christ is a living expression of his devotion and a gift of salvation to humanity, then the above dictum could be paraphrased as follows: *Pascha meum, amor meus*, "My Passover is my love". In this case also the ancient Christian hymn: *Ubi caritas et amor, ibi Deus est* could begin with the words: *Ubi caritas et amor, ibi Pascha est*. Where there is no love, goodness, friendship, benevolence, and mutual

⁵ *Confessiones* 13,10. PL 32,849.

understanding, there cannot occur the true Passover in the depth of our humanity. Thus no transition from darkness and death into light and life could be accomplished.

The spirituality of transfiguration is a paschal spirituality in which Christ and the Holy Spirit are the constant source of life, inspiration, and a permanent point of reference. If God by his nature is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8.16), then love and benevolence constitute the very core of the mission of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the history of the world. Christ is our Savior, because through his life, death, and resurrection he has introduced into human history the new redemptive power which attracts, cures, vivifies, and transforms our life. In this regard he may be compared with the great magnet and its attractive force: "And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). When he draws someone to himself, he does it with the greatest respect for human freedom. He attracts from the inside by his love, dedication to save all, and by the beauty of his glorified humanity. Diseases of the human spirit can be cured only when we freely accept the saving power of Christ and transforming energy of his Spirit. This deepest therapy leads to a new way of existence, freed from the closed infernal circle of one's self-centeredness and insensibility. Accepting God's gift of life, I become able to enter the world of spiritual resurrection.

Spiritual life is a sphere of inner freedom, where the process of therapy and transformation takes place. The way of spiritual resurrection is a paschal task for the entire human life. The Gospel encourages everyone to trust God who is the supreme Lord of the history of humanity and of the world's future. Spiritual life helps us to understand God's drama in the history of humanity. His love is patient and humble. He can wait infinitely long for the free answer of his own creature. This is an astonishing truth: God has not ceased to love the world despite human faults and sins. We humans have not managed to discourage him! The risen Christ remains for ever our Savior, Healer, and Physician. The same is also true of the Holy Spirit who never ceases to be the Eternal Paraclete, i.e. Advocate and Comforter.

The methods of spiritual life can change, and surely will be changing in the future, but its basic finality remains the same: to cure and to transfigure the human being. Christ has initiated for all this process through his life, death, and resurrection. The work of universal therapy and transformation needed such a Savior and Physician. The sick inner self of our being is full of darkness. Spiritual therapy brings in the light of transfiguration. We all participate in this process, and the Holy Spirit, the Consummator, is on our side. The whole sacramental pedagogy of the Church aims at making people more and more sensitive to the reality of spiritual resurrection and transfiguration. Thus in the Eastern tradition baptism is called "the little resurrection". Through it we enter the world of the resurrected and anticipate future fulfillment. The Eucharist and other sacraments intensify and deepen this participation.

Perhaps in the future Christianity will become more and more a religion of those who have been converted to it. They will bring into it a fervor and the freshness of faith of the neophytes. Some of the converts of the 20th century were earlier atheists, agnostics, or totally indifferent people (Clive Staples Lewis, Paul Florenski, Olivier Clément, André Frossard). Others converted from Judaism (Alexander Men'). Early Christianity also knew such outstanding people who later became great saints (Augustine and Ambrose). Each of these converts made a specific mark on the history of their own believing community. Looking at their example we can see how much the question of faith becomes the most important decision in a person's life. Such people often become a real blessing for the Church and God's gift for the future generations.

Christianity will always remain dependent on Christ's Passover and Pentecost. It is sustained, to use again the expression of St Irenaeus, by the two "hands of the Father" (*manus Patris*): the incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit.⁶ One cannot count any more on the efficiency of the traditional way of transmitting the faith. Christianity has to become more and more the religion of people who consciously discover the meaning and the wisdom of the Gospel. It concerns both men and women alike. A genuine religion cannot be "a good hand-me-down religion", i.e. one inherited second hand. Faith requires a personal conviction, decision, and commitment. One who has searched for it and found it in the midst of inner struggle, hesitation, and doubts will cherish that gift as personal spiritual treasure.

In its deepest nature Christian spirituality is one and the same. We all draw from the common source which is to be found in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Easter and Pentecost are inseparable events. The paschal mystery, integrally understood, is and will always remain the living center of Christian spirituality of the transfiguration of human life: "There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all" (Eph 4:4-6). Behold the unusual vision of Christian universalism!

Openness to the Spirituality of Others

All Churches and all believers need a deepening of ecumenical spirituality, sensitivity to God's Spirit, and openness to otherness and diversity. It is true that ecumenical agreements reached by consensus and doctrinal convergences do not seem to have had great impact on the life and mutual relationships of the Churches. Agreements, formulas, and texts alone do not have power to restore unity. What is needed are improved relations between particular denominations and mutual openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, which is difficult to experience without deep ecumenical spirituality.

⁶ *Adversus haereses* V,6,1; 28,4. Sch 153, p. 72, 360.

However, to talk about this kind of spirituality one must first discover, understand, and appreciate the spiritual heritage of what is best in our own denominational tradition. The next step is openness to the spirituality of other denominations through contacts and direct personal experience. Only then we can experience a spiritual exchange of a therapeutic character. What my own denominational community lacks may be complemented in contact with the spirituality of another Church. It would be easier then to relieve psychological tensions and remove deformations created by excessive confessional identification.

The "Decree on Ecumenism" of the Second Vatican Council says at the very beginning that "the Lord of Ages wisely and patiently follows out the plan of his grace on behalf of us sinners". And it explains: "In recent times he has begun to bestow more generously upon divided Christians remorse over their divisions and a longing for unity. Everywhere, large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there increases from day to day a movement, *fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit*, for the restoration of unity among all Christians" (art. 1; italics mine, W.H.).

In the sphere of spirituality one can clearly see that ecumenism can be a blessed healing process, a therapeutic chance to find a fuller and wiser Christian identity. This process embraces the whole human being with mind, feelings, fears, and expectations. In the past spirituality was of denominational and closed character. Now, thanks to ecumenical dialogue it has become more sensitive and open to interdenominational, or even interfaith correction and complement. It is characterized by the quest, openness, and a feeling of mutual solidarity and dependence.

It is obvious that openness can bring a risk of a certain syncretism. A deep conviction that my Church is, by God's Providence, a place in which my religious and spiritual life has to grow and mature, is a remedy to this kind of danger. Today, we live our life and our Christian faith in different confessional Churches. In this fact we should perceive also the action of the Holy Spirit. God's plan of salvation has been carried out in the history of humankind through diversity and differentiation. Ecumenical spirituality allows us to accept this state of things as providential, and, at the same time, opens us to the richness of the spiritual experiences of other denominations. Thanks to it one can deepen the conviction that the ultimate truth is always greater than what we can say or think about it. It is also greater than what particular Churches may say about it. The action of God's Spirit goes beyond any denominational borders. It is He who leads people "to all truth" and "in all truth" (see Jn 16:13; both versions of the text are present in Greek codices). The Truth has a healing and liberating power.

I am certain that in the future Christianity will be able to better harmonize the conviction about its own exceptionality with the requirements of interfaith dialogue. The ineffable and inconceivable mystery of God evades the imagination of all people, though we all head for the same Ultimate Reality. God alone can make, beyond the frames of

human history, a great eschatological synthesis of all religions. He does not, in his benevolence and goodness, refuse anybody the possibility of salvation. Christians believe in the universal scope and extent of Christ's work of salvation. They do not have to resign from this belief. They cannot, however, claim a right to possess the ultimate truth. Christ is God's fullest revelation accessible to us all, but this revelation will never be totally adequate and fully expressed in human history. The Revelation given to humanity is not by any means absolute. It cannot be as it was given through the human consciousness of Christ, which does not reveal the whole mystery of God. God's full revelation in Christ is historic and able to be assimilated by human consciousness, but it is not ultimate. We have not yet come to the end of our pilgrimage to the Ultimate Truth, but only seek it. We all expect the Great Fulfillment of the eschatological sense of the earthly history of humanity.

These things recall the words of Paul the Apostle in his hymn to love: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (...) Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor 13,9,12 NIV). The Apostle utters this general truth in the same verse once again, this time in his own name: "Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known". We, the people of this earth, are doomed to know only partially and our knowledge is imperfect. The rest is hidden before our senses, our mind, and heart. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9).

The diversity of human ways to God is a blessing. We all know only partially and express truth partially with words. A part calls for the whole. Truth is expressed with a language of hope and from its very nature has a character of hope. We will one day learn the entire truth that today we comprehend only partially, thanks to our faith and hope. How greatly we should esteem this partial perception of truth and enjoy it, if it is a promise and hope of greater fulfillment! Our Churches speak too much about already possessing the whole "fullness of truth". We need to return to the modesty and caution exemplified by the Apostle's words about the partial and imperfect character of our earthly knowledge, always leaving room for hope and trust in God. Bringing hope, the truth is always related to its final fulfillment. Its relational and eschatological character are inseparable.

Thanks to ecumenical dialogue we realize better and better that what makes us Christians is not the mere fact of belonging to a given denomination, but the living faith in the Triune God and acceptance of Christ's Gospel. In the first place we are human beings and Christians, but in fact we experience Christianity in different denominational communities. Confessional affiliation cannot be ignored. Ecumenical spirituality allows us to perceive this in relation to a fuller Christian identity. I am not a Roman Catholic in the first place, and only then a Christian. I am, above all, a human person and a Christian. I do live my Christianity in the Roman

Catholic Church. Someone else experiences it concretely in the Orthodox or Protestant Church. Keen awareness of this fact brings a feeling of closeness and sense of mutual belonging. This allows for the creation of a new ecumenical atmosphere of friendship and benevolence, while deepening mutual respect and trust.

The Lima Document on “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry” (BEM)⁷ makes a clear reference to the Holy Spirit in this respect and reminds believers that mutual “openness to each other holds the possibility that *the Spirit may well speak to one Church through the insights of another*”.⁸ Such a great benefit is made possible by the ecumenical *perichóresis*, i.e. mutual intercommunication of consciousness. After centuries of the diminished sense of mutual belonging, the time has come to think and act, taking account of the whole of the living transmission of the Christian faith. As the Apostle of the Nations says: “All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God” (1 Cor 3,22-23 NIV). The process of the disintegration of Christian consciousness may be averted through restoring a sense of wholeness and mutual belonging. This is the way towards recovering the spiritual richness and universal values of Christianity. Lack of mutual benevolence and understanding of others impoverishes our own thinking and our living up to the Gospel.

We all remain sinful, imperfect, and fragile people who constantly must learn to accept each other as sinners of whom God has forgiven so much and who want, in turn, to forgive each other our faults. What unites us is our lack of love, benevolence, sincerity, respect, disinterestedness, brotherly feelings... The list of our sins and neglects is very long indeed! Encouragement comes from the fact that ecumenical strivings for harmony, concord, peace, reconciliation, mutual understanding, and recognition are not only the work of sinful humans. I believe that there exists also the *oikoumene* on God's side. “We may be unfaithful, but he is always faithful, for he cannot disown his own self” (2 Tim 2:13). God is for all. One can say only about him that he is God of every human being, God of those who think, pray, and believe otherwise. He is God of all unbelievers as well. Salvation and hope are for all. The human *oikoumene*, always deficient and insufficient, has its greatest hope in the *oikoumene* of God's abundant goodness, mercy, benevolence, and openness: “(...) we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 Jn 3:19-20 NIV). The divine *oikoumene* heals our divisions and unending quarrels. God calls all and accepts all into his divine *oikoumene*.

We do not want to encounter others to subordinate them, but to experience together the mystery of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, and with

⁷ Faith and Order Paper No. 111. WCC, Geneva 1982.

⁸ *Ministry*, par. 54, p. 32. Italics mine, W.H.

the help of the Paraclete of all to better fulfill the mission of Christianity towards every generation. This task requires the ability to distinguish the common foundations of our faith from secondary elements of one's own denominational tradition. A confessional focus on what is secondary and less central risks bringing pusillanimity and narrowness of spirit.

Ecumenical spirituality transforms concrete people and lives. It is not an abstract creation far from life. It is best understood when facing somebody truly open to God's Spirit and to others, sensitive and wise, with a sense of God's mystery and the transcendence of His actions. Hence, genuinely sensitive people of different denominations and religions are close to each other. They can see and appreciate all that unites them.

Spirituality of Dialogue and Solidarity

The 20th century was a privileged time to learn the importance of the dialogue for restoring unity among the disciples of Christ and to take a different, more positive look at other religions. In the Roman-Catholic Church the decisive step was made at the Second Vatican Council. We have learned that dialogue is born out of respect for the otherness of other believers. It grows also out of the conviction that the risen Christ is present and that the Holy Spirit continually acts in the faith and life of other Christian Churches. Without dialogue it is impossible to be a Christian in the world today. This concerns also dialogue with other world religions. The pluralism of religions has become a great challenge for all Christians. But interdenominational and interfaith dialogue creates new chances of spiritual enrichment, mutual knowledge, harmonious coexistence, and cooperation as well. One has to take seriously that societies of the future will become in growing measure multicultural and multireligious.

We realize more and more that the Gospel of Christ has universal significance resulting from the fact that it teaches great wisdom, permanent good, and spiritual beauty. It urges Christians to develop and deepen the spirituality of the dialogue, mutual respect, and recognition. This spirituality fosters more the integral development of individuals and societies. This is no supplement to Christianity, but determines the inner shape of being a Christian in the world of pluralism of beliefs, denominations, and religions. For those who believe the sufficient motivation for dialogue is the main truth of faith which reflects the theistic vision of all reality. We share the common human destiny. We believe that our common origin and the ultimate goal of our existence is in God who desires the salvation of all people (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). He is the Creator and Savior of all and wants to gather all in the invisible kingdom of the new world.

This faith strengthens the feeling of human solidarity and calls upon all to engage in dialogue. God is not the exclusive possession of any religion. He cannot become a prisoner of any Church or religion. The more we experience his universality and saving sovereignty, the deeper

motivation we have for dialogue, benevolence, mutual openness, and understanding. There is only one God who loves all and cares for all. He calls prophets and mystics in different religions. God's Spirit enlightens all and urges us to ask questions concerning the deepest motives of our human existence. I would even dare to speak about a certain universal Pentecost which happens in all times and places. God was, is, and will be God of all people. How not to be amazed by this divine universality! In fact all nations have been chosen to exist and take part in God's kingdom of harmony and peace. For this reason the last book of the New Testament speaks about the final reality of "the glory and honor of the nations" (Rev 21:26 NIV) which will be brought into the New Jerusalem of the new creation.

The spirituality of dialogue and solidarity is based also on deep existential, anthropological, and humanistic premises. We are bound together by a common search of the meaning of life and all earthly activity. All of us feel, more or less intensely, the mystery of existence and the human person. This sensitivity makes dialogue possible also with those who do not share our theistic vision of the world or do not confess their faith in a personal God. Earth is the homeland of all and its destiny depends of the behavior of all of us. In the depth of our heart we long for peace, concord, and harmony. The human person is a relational reality. It grows, develops, and matures thanks to relations with other humans. Let us talk with others peacefully and patiently about God, humans, and the world, and let us listen to each other! Dialogue teaches! Our doctrines and institutions are not the goals in themselves. They exist for the good of people. How timely are Jesus' words: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). These are some of the deepest foundations of universal spirituality, which favor dialogue and reconciliation.

According to the spirit of the Gospel each Christian should be a man or woman of dialogue. This results from the very essence of the Christian faith. God himself has chosen dialogue with humans as a salvific way to reach human freedom. The biblical history of salvation tells us about an unusual dialogue of God with people and with every person called by his or her name in the depth of their spirit and conscience. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God in this dialogue and the greatest inspiration to follow him. The Gospel shows how he, "filled with the Holy Spirit" and "in the power of the Spirit", treated others with extraordinary benevolence, respect, attention, and even admiration. He disputed only with Pharisees and the teachers of the law, but never said anything against representatives of other religious traditions when meeting Samaritans, Canaanites, or Romans. He observed such faith in the Roman centurion, faith which he could not find even in Israel (cf. Lc 7:9). He admired and praised the faith of the Canaanite woman (Mk 7:26-29). In this regard it is impossible not to mention here his astounding talk with a Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:6-42). We would say today that Jesus used the method of dialogue and asking questions with predilection. How otherwise to describe his night talk with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21) or with the two disciples going to Emmaus (Lc

24:13-32)? Too rarely we think of the importance of these facts which are examples to be followed by all.

Let us stop quarreling about the fullness of truth and means of salvation in human history, what is known to God alone. God and his Spirit act in different ways in the world. The most universal “sacrament” of salvation is doing good. Perhaps the forthcoming generations will understand it better than we do and will express it in deeper categories of thinking. God is greater than what he has revealed in Christ. His Spirit acts in every time, in all peoples, religions, cultures, and nations. He renews the face of the world. Dialogue helps us to discover his unceasing activity with gratitude and veneration. The spirituality of dialogue lives by, and feeds on, this conviction.

Towards a New Style of Being a Christian Today

Owing to the action of the Holy Spirit, Christianity can be seen today as a learning community of Churches. We are all Christ’s disciples, although not very bright and ready to learn something new. God’s mystery is equally incomprehensible to everybody. It is beyond human ability to grasp and define. In the face of God’s mystery we are all disciples. That is why I have so often urged a reevaluation of Christian awareness of the notion of “our common discipleship”, mentioned in the agreed statement of Lima.⁹

Ecumenical discipleship requires the ability to develop in oneself a polyphonic sensitivity. Experience of many years has convinced me that children singing in a choir from their early childhood have a differently formed sense of hearing. They retain for the rest of their lives a specific polyphonic sensitivity to the harmony of many sounds in diversity. Unison remains in their perception only a monotonous impoverishment of a possible harmony of sounds. In consequence, it is easier for them to consider the diversity of human ways to God as blessing. It is easier to understand, that there are such ways to salvation which only God knows. Let us not argue which one is the best or the only proper one. Let us not argue over the fullness of truth and the means of salvation. God who always acts through Christ and the Holy Spirit has more of these means than we can presume. He is God of everyone, the truly ecumenical God. How wise were the words uttered by Clement of Alexandria at the turn of 2nd and 3rd century: “The Savior is polyphonic (*polyphonos*) and acts in many ways (*polytropos*) for the salvation of people”.¹⁰ This unusual metaphor astonishes by its relevance, accuracy, and hidden depth. The Savior is indeed polyphonic and “polytropic” in order to save all, not only the chosen ones. The same could be, I think, applied to the Holy Spirit as well.

⁹ BEM, *Baptism*, par.6.

¹⁰ Clement of Alexandria. *Protreptikos* I,8,3 (Sources Chrétiennes 2, p. 62).

Being openly identified as Christ's disciple, full of understanding towards otherness and diversity, best serves inter-human communication. The deepest spiritual communication does not take place on only a verbal level. It goes beyond the sphere of words and notions. It is a communication on the deepest level of human and religious consciousness. It requires a spiritual maturity without which the perception and realization of truly ecumenical spirituality would remain superficial and without much influence on the reality of human relations.

People with a deep awareness of limited cognitive possibilities and imperfection of human efforts would easier respect the different ways of realizing and expressing the faith outside their own denominational community. They know that the opposite of one deep truth may be another deep truth, better received, expressed and confessed by others. We have to rely on mutual help in correcting any one-sidedness in our own community.

The striking logic of the Gospel, very often difficult to follow, teaches we have such a rapacious concern about ourselves that we may self-destruct. "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk 8:35 NIV). The manifestation of this paradoxical wisdom is even more striking when compared to a grain of wheat in the Gospel of John: "unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life will lose it..." (Jn 12: 24-25NIV). That is a thought-provoking dialectic of loss and salvation expressed in an image accessible to our ordinary experience! Nothing indicates that these words cannot also refer to our denominational Churches. The paradoxical logic of the Gospel concerns them also. There is still in them a lot of ecclesiastical narcissism, small-mindedness and greed. We all lose as a result.

Perhaps we do not search wisely and ardently enough for the reasons of our helplessness in the face of the drama of divisions. We do not patiently reflect on the source of our failures. The Jewish high priest Caiaphas prophesied that "Jesus was to die for the nation – and not for the nation only, but to gather together in unity the scattered children of God" (Jn 11:51-52). According to the words of Jesus, the fate of Jerusalem should be also a warning to the Church: "How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you desolate..." (Mt 23:37-38). Maybe the words: "and you refused" mean also: "you were unwilling, unable to let yourselves be gathered".

We all lack wisdom, understanding and creative imagination. The result is frightening – a desolate and abandoned house. Christians are not free from the risk of not recognizing "the time of God's coming" (Lk 19:44). That is the risk of not listening "to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches" (Rev 2:7.11.17.29; 3:6.13.22). The appeal to listen to the inspiration of the Spirit is repeated at the beginning of the Book of Revelation seven times! It means that we should listen to him always and

everywhere. Otherwise our house will be left desolate. That is why the drama of our division and our helplessness is prolonged. This helplessness will not be cured by mere declarations or any appeal to obedience.

Ecumenism requires a new style of being a Christian. It widens the horizons and frees us from a narrow confessionalism through the very fact that it gives us access to other spiritual worlds. To be a Christian today means learning the difficult ability of gratefully accepting others in their otherness. This concerns not only a way of thinking but, above all, a way of living up to the Gospel. A comfortable and stiff orthodoxy easily leads to too much self-confidence, narrow-mindedness of spirit, exclusivity and loss of a truly universal consciousness open to the spiritual world of others. Such an attitude is in opposition to the spirit of a genuine ecumenism free from sectarianism and self-sufficiency, open to truth, goodness and beauty wherever they are to be found.

Our churches face the two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, there is an ongoing process of secularization and emancipation of many people from religion. On the other hand, we can see a growing need for a deeper religious experience and a search for answers to the perennial questions of humanity. Many people turn away towards Islam, new religions and religious movements. Is it not the appropriate moment for a critical reflection about ourselves? A great challenge is a great opportunity to preach the Gospel to the people of our time. How can we speak convincingly today about Christ and the Holy Spirit? How can we give witness to the beauty and wisdom of the Gospel in order to reach the hearts and minds of so many lost people?

Let us not blame secularization for people drifting away from their faith and for teaching how to plan life without reference to God and spiritual values. It seems that much more attention should be given to the ideology of secularism which aims at freeing humans from any religious belief in the transcendent world. In this context the issue of faith and reason gains steadily in relevance. Today we are more aware that religious fundamentalism leads only to conflicts, xenophobia and intolerance. Christ's disciples are called to be "the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). The era of globalization brings new challenges in relations between the Churches of East and West, South and North. The call for justice and solidarity between the stronger and the weaker reverberates across the world. We are all co-responsible for shaping the future of humanity. In spite of many difficulties, believing in the presence of God's Spirit in the world, the Paraclete of all, we may trust in the transforming power of Christ's Gospel.

It is God and a personal relationship with Him that decide our Christian identity. This identity is our face, our image in the presence of God. I wish we devoted in theology more attention to thought about the inner countenance of every Christian. That would constitute a kind of extension of iconography in an anthropological direction. The identity of each Christian is, above all, a concrete, personal and relational reality. It results from the specific relations of human beings with God and other

people. It cannot be appropriated like a thing or idea. Life itself, with its dynamism for growth, newness and change, shrinks from this eventuality. In the history of the Church we have too often forgotten who eventually decides who the Church is. The greatest personal gift of Christ and the Holy Spirit has been treated with too much arbitrariness and impetuosity. Or, as the Second Vatican Council has recalled forcefully: "the truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth".¹¹ It is Christ's truth, constantly recalled by the Holy Spirit, that safeguards us and finally proves to be victorious.

Like every concrete reality, Christian identity evades all abstract a priori models of thinking. It cannot be reduced to a defined formula. Christianity has not been given to be lived as an abstract idea. From its very essence it deals with the greatest Personal Concrete, with *personale concretissimum* that is God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the other people whose names are known to us. Paul the Apostle does not ask to enjoy an abstract identity. In the already quoted passage he encourages us to rejoice over very concrete realities: over apostles, life, death, the present and the future, because "all are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 3:21b-23). These concrete realities reach indeed into the future and are as mysterious as human life and death.

The beauty of Christian identity is not achieved by confessional separation and isolation, but through a living exchange of spiritual goods, through giving and receiving from others. We need each other, so that we are not seduced by the feeling of our own righteousness and self-sufficiency. Division, lack of mutual acceptance and recognition impoverish us all and deprive us of the spiritual beauty of wholeness. The enriching exchange of gifts and charismas characteristic of particular churches is then broken. We may easily become prisoners of our own denominational doctrines, faults and errors of the past.

The Church truly aware of her spiritual shortcomings becomes more sensitive to others and more open. She can understand more, learn more and thus better serve the cause of reconciliation and unity. We all depend to the same extent on God, on Christ and on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is our common denominator and common destiny. Admitting this is an essential element of an ecumenical culture of honesty. Otherwise we fall into the trap of our own presumptuousness. And nothing more hampers the efforts to be reconciled than the feeling of our own superiority, perfection, fullness, possessed truth and power. In this regard ecumenism can and should be beneficial therapy.

Ecumenical therapy is not a matter of human intellect alone, but also of the wisdom of the heart. Ecumenism of the mind has to go hand in hand with ecumenism of the heart. Thanks to mutual trust, understanding and benevolence, we learn how to see the presence of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in others. A church different than ours is also God's Church, the

¹¹ *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, par. 1.

Church of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ is the most important Truth in person. Not without reason did he say to his disciples during the Last Supper: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). One has to search for the Truth not only on the level of formulations of the faith or in the doctrinal statements but, above all, in the encounter with Christ and the Holy Spirit – "the Spirit of truth" (Jn 16:13). The ultimate Truth is God himself.

We cannot lose sight of the basic fact that the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit are on both sides of every division. Doctrinal errors and deficiencies in ecclesial life attributed to others do not prevent Christ from being present in these Churches and communities. He is not a prisoner of defined doctrines or sacramental forms. Nobody has power to exercise control over him or his Spirit. If Christ is present in the sacraments of a given church, it is his own, divine and autonomous will to save all. Human faults and sins do not prevent Christ from bestowing the gift of his presence, just as the indignation of scribes and Pharisees (cf. Mt 9:11-13; Mk 2:15-17) did not stop him in the course of his earthly life to "seek out and save what was lost" (Lk 19:10). God will always be greater and more astounding than what our theological doctrines have ever discovered and expressed.

Joy and Hope in Christian Spirituality

The day of the resurrection of Christ was called in the Christian tradition "the eighth day", i.e. the day of the new creation which discloses something of the eternity of God. The contemporary Protestant theologian, Jürgen Moltmann reminds us of this old tradition when he writes that "with Easter begins the laughter of the redeemed and the dance of the liberated".¹² What kind of language can express all that brings the Christian experience of paschal joy and Pentecostal hope? Certainly, not the language of a cool discourse or impersonal information. A living and memorable experience requires something more. It wants to take part in the joy of the feast, to shape it and transmit it to others. No wonder that, in the experience of the Church and in her liturgical prayer, there is such a vast place for the language of astonishment, admiration, thanksgiving, and veneration.

The paschal liturgy of Christian churches reveals a particular density of mystical richness. It does not hesitate to speak the language of bold comparisons, metaphors and analogies about the mystery of faith and new hope. This can be seen already in the fragments of an early paschal hymn preserved by St. Paul but inspired by the texts of the prophets:

¹² J. Moltmann. *Kirche in der Kraft des Geistes*. München 1975 s.129. See also his *Die ersten Freigelassenen der Schöpfung. Versuche über die Freude an der Freiheit und das Wohlgefallen am Spiel*. 6.Aufl. München 1981 p. 35: „das Lachen der Erlösten, der Tanz der Befreiten“.

Death has been swallowed up by victory.
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?
(1 Cor 15:54-55; cf. Is 25:8; Hos 13:14).

This hymn breathes the joy of the victory of life over death. There resound in it echoes of “the laughter of the redeemed” because of the ultimate impotence of death. Hope, feast, laughter and dance are manifestations of human joy. The religious experience of liberation has recourse to such means of expression in order to hand on this experience to others.

One is not allowed so to treat God as if he were someone deadly dull and insensitive. If God is love, as emphasized twice in the witness of the Scripture (1 Jn 4:8.18), it means that he knows what the human language calls joy: “(...) as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is 62:5). It is not without reason that Jesus’ parables speak about the “rejoicing in heaven” and the “rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God” over the conversion of a lost human being (Lc 15:7.10.32).

Christians find the original source of cheerfulness and hopefulness in the unconditional and overwhelming love of God in whom they believe and whom they trust. Hope is an ally of the Christian sense of humour, and conversely, humour is an ally of the Christian hope. One has to love this world despite the fact that guilt, suffering and stupidity constantly mark its history in a dramatic way. The love for people manifesting itself through humour gives joy that the world exists and that we all are given an inestimable grace to exist in it. Humour cannot be identified with laughter alone, so often void and shallow. It is rather a particular kind of human ability to laugh, the sign of acceptance of oneself and of reconciliation with oneself. Thanks to it I can find an inner distance from myself and from all difficult situations. It allows me to transcend my little ego and is a manifestation of inner independence. I know that I am not the centre of the world nor the measure of perception of everything. This spiritual transcendence allows me to overcome all the negative sides of life and human coexistence. In this way I do not become a prisoner of myself and of all my limitations, and I do not lose the ability of laughing and smiling, in spite of unpropitious situations and painful experiences. Humour helps me to accept life as it is, together with all its intransigence, wounds and ruthlessness.

The sense of humour is a certain form of spiritual therapy and self-defence. A person gifted with humour loves people and the world in spite of its deficiencies. The inner freedom allows him to laugh also at himself. It is one of the signs of psychic and spiritual health. When joy, humour and hope are dismissed, Christianity easily becomes a sad reality deprived of wisdom, balance of mind and inner freedom. Religious devotion can assume then the shape of a gloomy and fanatic dogmatism which leads to

hostility towards people and suspects everywhere ruse, falsehood, deceit and evil.

Joy is not a by-product in the life of Christians. It is, as we saw earlier, one of the essential components of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22). Going hand in hand with hope it imprints a serene mode on our strivings, efforts and labors. Everything human is fragile and imperfect. Joy defends us against the feeling of futility which so often affects even the most noble and good people. Thanks to hope we envisage the direction in which the ineffable God and our own life lead us.

In genuine Christian spirituality there is a vast place for joy and hope. They rescue people from the feeling of absurdity and nothingness. Without them there would be only a sad caricature of Christianity. Faith fosters joy, humour and laughter. Otherwise it would deny the truth of Christ’s Gospel, the paschal and Pentecostal gift of the Good News for the world.

Ask Your Inside!

One should be aware of the fragility of human words which play only intermediary roles. They indicate things that go beyond all our concepts. We all face the great mystery of existence, the mystery of God and of the world. The wisdom of the mind and the heart teaches us how to remain modest and open to a reality greater than all our concepts and confessional appropriations. That is why ecumenism is necessary therapy.

What should unite all Christian churches today is a feeling of our spiritual deficiency and immaturity. We have to call God’s Spirit to descend upon our inner spaces of poverty. The invocation of the Spirit is a prayerful form of admitting what we really lack. May this ecumenical epiclesis resound in the hearts of all believers! Let the feeling of spiritual insufficiency grow intense, especially when the churches realize the need for inner renewal and permanent reform! The awareness of our own weakness opens up the way to God’s action: “for power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9 NIV), i.e. matures in our weakness.

The presence of the Holy Spirit can be experienced not only in situations of joy, harmony, beauty and goodness, but also in moments of darkness, hopelessness and absurdity. Guilt, pain and suffering are no obstacle for the Spirit. They can become a blessed occasion to feel his delivering power. The events of Christ’s death and resurrection as well as the descent of the Holy Spirit are eschatological witnesses that the grace of God is in human history a victorious and irreversible reality offered to every human being. Knowing our human weakness we have to learn how to trust in God’s promises.

On the one hand, the New Testament speaks about noble and sublime spiritual experiences, but, on the other, it strongly emphasizes the need of disinterested love of neighbor as the most effective way to experience the closeness to God. What is more, to those who love people

and help them in their needs Jesus promises the ultimate salvation during the day of divine judgment. The highest mystical experiences do not relieve us from a duty to do ordinary good to all. The greatest is love (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). And St. Augustine rightly says: "Ask your inside – if it is full of love, you have God's Spirit".¹³ Salvation as the ultimate gift of God's Spirit is brought about not only in sublime mystical experience but above all in the daily practice of love, benevolence, understanding, compassion and help. The Christian religion teaches the mysticism of seeking God in all things ordinary.

This applies also to the Spirit-filled life in inner freedom: "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17). However, one should not delude oneself that the way to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit is short and easy. We live in a paradoxical situation: the "already" of the presence and indwelling of the Spirit goes hand in hand with the "not yet" in the time of struggle with our own weakness, sinfulness and finiteness. This struggle becomes an imperative for our entire lives. Every Christian can recognize himself or herself in the words of the Apostle, incomparable in their sincerity and simplicity: "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (...) For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing" (Rom 7:15.18-19 NIV). The great tradition of Christian spirituality speaks about this inner struggle between contradictory human strivings. But the power of God's Spirit manifests itself even more strongly and clearly in our weakness.

¹³ Augustine, *In Epist. Joan. tractatus* VIII,12. PL 35, 2043: "Interroga viscera tua: si plena sunt caritate, habes Spiritum Dei".

CHAPTER IX

GOD'S SPIRIT, WISDOM AND UNIVERSAL SALVATION

In spite of the many assurances of the Holy Scripture we shall continue, above all in the situation of suffering and evil, to ask questions about God and his true face, and about the ultimate goal and meaning of our human existence. We shall ask about the reality of life after death and about the full extent of salvation. Some wide-spread and accepted views will often not convince us. We ourselves have to experience the need to think, ask, and search on our own account. The action of the Holy Spirit reveals itself in our human asking of essential questions. It is he who urges us to undertake deeper reflection, stirs up unrest and concern in the depth of our hearts in order that our religiosity should not become a matter of routine and superficial faith. Whoever asks fundamental questions and seeks understanding should know that “the Spirit helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26 NIV). However, it is not only a question related to our prayer (“we do not know what we ought to pray for”), but a deeper dimension of our faith in the living God as well. We have the divine Comforter-Paraclete, the One-called-to-help. He himself “intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (v. 26). With his help we are able to find true wisdom.

When God communicates his life to creatures through Christ and the Holy Spirit, his wisdom appears most clearly through revelation and salvation. Whoever truly and deeply experiences this divine action undergoes a beneficial transformation. The revelation of the truth about God already has a salvific character, because it shows the meaning of life and thus enlightens the way towards ultimate fulfilment.

The light coming from God delivers us from darkness. For this reason the Gospel according to St John portrays Christ as the light and life of the world, and as truth and grace (cf. Jn 1:9,14,17; 8:12; 9:5; 11:25; 14:6). This is an obvious continuation of the Old Testament vision of the Divine Wisdom, presented with female features as Lady Wisdom. That Wisdom gives understanding, brightens human life, and helps to shape wisely the relationship with God and other people.

Wisdom exalts her sons [let's add: and daughters!] and gives help to those who seek her. Whoever loves her loves life, and those who seek her early will be filled with joy. Whoever holds her fast will obtain glory, and the Lord will bless the place she enters. Those who serve her will minister to the Holy One; the Lord loves those who love her. (...) For at first she will walk with him on tortuous paths, she will bring fear and cowardice upon him, and will

torment him by her discipline until she trusts him, and she will test him with her ordinances. Then she will come straight back to him and gladden him, and will reveal her secrets to him (Sir 4: 11-14.17-18).

Wisdom, Beauty, and Goodness

The benefit of wisdom is knowledge which can make people honest, noble, and righteous. Scripture reassures us that the hope of such people “is full of immortality” (Wis 3:4). Therefore wisdom has been called “a tree of life to those who lay hold of her”, and “those who hold her fast are called happy” (Prov 3:18). In the sapiential Books it is presented as a person who teaches, rescues, and transfigures human life, as an irreplaceable source for understanding its meaning, as food and drink necessary for spiritual growth: “Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my produce. (...) Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more” (Sir 24:19.21).

Wisdom guides people in their search for God who in his immense goodness created human beings. Without her we are too weak to recognize the will and the design of the Creator. For this reason the Old Testament prayer for wisdom ends with words of sober and deep realism pointing to a close link between wisdom and God's Spirit:

We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and what is at hand we find with labour; but who has traced out what is in the heavens? Who has learned thy counsel, unless thou hast given *wisdom* and sent thy holy *Spirit* from on high? And thus the paths of those on earth were set right, and men were taught what pleases thee, and were saved by wisdom (Wis 9:16-18; here and below italics mine, W.H.).

Those who seek further concretisation have to turn to the New Testament teaching which shows Christ, the Word, as the incarnate Wisdom of God, full of light and life: “The Word was the true light that enlightens all men; and he was coming into the world” (Jn 1:9). That light enlightens also all those who depart from this world. Christ declares himself: “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12), “I am the resurrection”, (Jn 11:25), and: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Christ as divine Wisdom is light and life for the whole world, the greatest promise of the ultimate fulfilment of human history. But the New Testament shows Christ and the Holy Spirit as acting always in mutual harmony and perfect reciprocity.

In the Bible there is a close connection between beauty, goodness, and divine Wisdom. It is particularly evident in the Book of Wisdom. A

poetic fragment enumerates twenty one (=3x7) attributes of the Wisdom extolled as “a pure emanation of the glory [i.e. beauty] of the Almighty”, as “a reflection of eternal light” and “a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness” (Wis 7:25-26). The author tells us that “she is more beautiful than the sun and excels every constellation of the stars” (v. 29). Later a basic truth is recalled that God himself is “the author of beauty”, and that “from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (13: 3.5).

In Greek manuscripts and ancient Latin translations the Book of Wisdom bore the title: *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Its author puts many times his own words into the mouth of Solomon. Because of this there dominated in the past an erroneous belief that the author of the book was just that king of Israel. For this reason the words about wisdom ascribed to Solomon:

I loved her and sought her from my youth, and I desired to take her for my bride, and I became enamoured of her *beauty*. She glorifies her noble birth by living with God, and the Lord of all loves her. For she is an initiate in the knowledge of God, and an associate in his works. (...) Therefore I determined to take her to live with me, knowing that she would give me *good counsel* and encouragement in cares and grief. (...) When I enter my house, I shall find rest with her, for companionship with her has no bitterness, and life with her has no pain, but gladness and joy (8:2-3.9.16).

The experience of centuries tells us that beauty has an unusual power to attract people, for it arouses the feelings of astonishment, admiration, and joy. One who perceives the beauty of divine Wisdom desires that she enlighten the whole of his or her life. This is more so because beauty is identical with goodness (the Greek adjective *kalós* means both “good” and “beautiful”). Beauty and goodness are essential features of wisdom.

One of the greatest Jewish theologians of the 20th century, Abraham Joshua Heschel (born 1907 in Warsaw, died 1972 in the United States) wrote about a mysterious kind of beauty closely connected or even identified with sublimity and wonder¹. According to him, the Bible urges us to raise our eyes up, to observe and to see. It encourages everyone to transcend himself or herself and thus to be able to see something greater and higher than themselves and their life. But how are we to ascend above the horizons of our own minds? How can we discover the ability to wonder and admire? The state of the spirit called sublimity is the expression of deepest astonishment, the feeling of stunning and wonderful beauty which

¹ A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, New York 1955, chapter 3 and 4.

wakes up the desire to worship, praise, and adore. Sublimity and magnificence are borne in the face of the mystery of existence, of its possibilities and its most noble experiences and manifestations.

For the prophets of Israel amazement was a certain form of thinking which exceeded the limits of human knowledge. In the biblical sense, one can discover sublimity not only in what is great, magnificent, splendid and unusual. It can be disclosed not only in the calm majesty of the mountains, but also in the wonder of the meadow in full blossom, in every grain of sand, in small stones along the road, in every drop of water and every snow-flake. It can be detected and felt in things which reveal beauty, in doing what is good and in searching for the truth. The perception of beauty greatly helps us experience what is sublime and worth admiration. Things hide a meaning greater than just their surface reality. They relate to something what exceeds them, to something that is beyond them and cannot be seen directly by our eyes. Let us not treat things as something evident and plain to our senses!

Heschel encouraged his readers to train in sustaining the feeling of astonishment and admiration. This can be done, for example, by praying with gratitude before our meals, received as a gift of God's goodness. Each time we are about to drink even a glass of water, let us recall the perennial mystery of the creation and bless the Creator whose word called all things into being. Of course, drinking water is in itself rather a minor action, but at the same time it can be a moment of conscious reference to the supreme miracle. When we want to eat a slice of bread or fruit, or enjoy a pleasant scent as well as a taste of wine; when looking at the rainbow or at the ocean; when watching blossoming trees or recognizing wisdom in human knowledge – in all these occasions we are persuaded to invoke God's holy name and awaken our consciousness of him. From this perspective ordinary events can be experienced as spiritual adventures which allow us to feel the hidden love and wisdom in all things.

Insensitivity to the mystery of existence destroys our ability to understand God and comprehend his creation. The sense of beauty, goodness and sublimity is an inexhaustible source of creativity, thinking and nobleness of life. Beauty hides in itself not only the power to attract, but also the mysterious force of saving our humanity. Life without admiration and the ability to wonder becomes empty and one-dimensional, deprived of faith, hope and wisdom. To remain conscious of the strangeness of our existence as a great gift is an important aspect of our deeply religious nature.

Our very existence is a great and admirable good. The Book of Ecclesiastes (Hebr.: *Qoheleth* = Preacher or Teacher) tells us about a man who intensively sought wisdom during his entire life. Finally he came to the conclusion that even the wisest man, in spite of his long labor, was unable to penetrate the depth of the mystery of everything that exists.

All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, "I will be wise";
but it was far from me. That which is, is far off and deep,
very deep; who can find it out? (Eccles 7: 23-24).

Everything that exists keeps out of sight a greater depth than we can perceive through our senses. The Bible often tells us that, with our ability we are not able to fathom the ultimate mystery of reality. Wisdom continually evades our human efforts. We can only be its lovers and searchers. Biblical authors of the so-called sapiential Books discover in their humility of heart that the world's existence and its ultimate goal is, and will remain an unfathomable mystery. We live on the surface of reality and do not know what is actually in its very depth. But we are all included and incorporated into that mystery. The more we try to penetrate it, the more we have to admit our basic ignorance and helplessness. Such is our human condition. The mystery of life – which is unfathomable, inexpressible and ineffable – remains a universal human experience. The sanguine certainty that, beyond the mystery, there is a hidden and ultimate meaning gives rise to hope, confidence, joy and thankfulness.

Nobody can boast of discovering definitely the ultimate truth: "Do not say, 'We have found wisdom'; let God refute him, not man" (Job 32:13 NIV). God himself is this wisdom, but his mystery will always remain hidden before us during our earthly life. In the Book of Job there are characteristic words which praise him in song:

Behold, God is exalted in his power;
who is a teacher like him?
Who has prescribed for him his way,
or who can say, "Thou hast done wrong"? (...)
Behold, God is great, and *we know him not*;
the number of his years is unsearchable.
(36:22-23.26; italics mine, W.H.).

As the prophet Isaiah explains, God's nature is impenetrable and inscrutable, and his thoughts and ways are unfathomable:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts (Is 55:8-9).

Compare also the recommendations of Ecclesiastes/Qohelet: "Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few" (5:2; 5:1 in Heb.). We worship God who in his wisdom exceeds all mysteries. Each one of us can be given a share in the wisdom of God whom

“no one has ever seen” (Jn 1:18). The New Testament brings us further the word of wisdom and hope which can shed some light on the dimness and impenetrableness of the mystery.

The Human Spirit Meets God's Spirit of Wisdom

The wisdom of life, that incomparable *ars vivendi*, is the best witness we can bear to the Wisdom of our Creator and Lord. When we let God's Spirit penetrate our minds and hearts, then we somehow offer him our own countenance. On our human faces there appears then something of the countenance of the Holy Spirit himself (we shall develop this point below). The divine beauty reaches the very depth of our humanity, where the spirit of a human person meets God's Spirit of Wisdom, and comes nearer to the invisible world. This results above all in the beauty of the transfigured heart.

This is why Eastern spirituality emphasizes so strongly the role of the heart as the center of spiritual life. In this respect one can properly speak about the spirituality of transfiguration of the heart. Through their spiritual beauty people imitate their Divine Prototype. The human face can express then something of the beauty of the invisible reality of God. For beauty is a real, although mysterious, force for goodness. In spite of frailty and possible dehumanisation, the human person maintains in the depth of his or her humanity the indelible trait of being created in the image and likeness of God. It may become no “beautiful animal”, but it still hides in itself the ability to repent and embrace goodness, if not here and now, in the earthly life, then in the beyond.

Owing to the presence and action of the Spirit, the creatures can attain their ultimate fulfilment. This applies in a particular way to all humans. Being created in the image of God (an indestructible gift of the Creator!), the human person is by nature a reality open to God and able, in spite of its sinfulness, to share in the divine life. Everyone has been created in the image of God, because the Creator himself bestowed on him or her “the breath of life”. Basing themselves on the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, the Greek Fathers identified this “breath” with the Holy Spirit. In this way the words of the Bible: “God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Gen 2:7) were interpreted in relation to God's Spirit. The identification was to show that humans were created with the purpose of being able to receive the breath of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who is the personal source of life, wisdom and beauty.

This purpose was already contained in the first moment of the creation of human beings (in evolutionary perspective, contemporary natural sciences would identify this moment, or rather a long process, with the appearance of consciousness, the existence of social ties among hominidae, and their ability to cooperate). From the theological point of view of the Greek Fathers, it is the Holy Spirit who gives to human persons

the ability to transcend themselves and openness upwards to the invisible reality. This Spirit is intimately present in every person and works from within. In this regard he performs a truly maternal role in relation to all of us – like Christ and together with him. That role is manifested in their common care for the destinies of all creatures and of every individual human being.

Thus the supreme divine source of the wisdom of hope – of that hope which lives in the heart of many believing people reveals itself. I also firmly believe that we are not doomed to a perennial erring and being lost far from the face and presence of God. The Wisdom of Christ and of the Holy Spirit has the convincing power to draw all people to God, and to save and transform also those who have been lost, without violating our human freedom.

One who goes deep into the history of Christian thought will notice that some early Fathers of the Church (e.g. Justin, Irenaeus, Origen, Athanasius) often spoke about the universal presence and activity of Christ. Commenting on the New Testament teaching they emphasized his role as the eternal Word of God in the history of creation, revelation and salvation. According to them, the Divine Logos has been active in the world from the very beginning of its existence and will not cease to work until the end of time and also beyond the visible Christian community. In the words of Irenaeus, “from the beginning the Son is the Revealer (lit.: Interpreter, *Egzēgētēs*, *Enarrator*) of the Father, because from the beginning he is with the Father”.²

In contrast, the early Church Fathers spoke rather sporadically of Christ and of the Holy Spirit as the divine Wisdom present everywhere.³ But one has to remember that Christ's activity in the world, understood as the universal history of divine Wisdom, remains always intertwined with the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is a consequent continuation of the fact that the earthly existence of the historical Jesus, starting from his conception, was entirely permeated by the acting presence of the Spirit. The activity of the risen and glorified Christ as universal Wisdom is also carried out through the presence and inseparable energy of the Holy Spirit, who ensures the continuing story of divine Wisdom.

In the Old Testament wisdom and spirit, parallel to each other, are personifications of the divine activity. The Book of Isaiah characterizes the messianic king in the following way: “And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, (...) the spirit of knowledge” (Is 11:2). So “the Spirit” is identified here with “the spirit of wisdom”. In the New Testament perspective, we can also speak of the Holy

² Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* IV,20,7: „Enarrator ergo ab initio Filius Patris, quippe qui ab initio est cum Patre”. Sch 100, 646.

³ In relation to Christ see e.g. Athanasius, *Contra arianos* II,78-79. About the Spirit as Wisdom of God see Irenaeus, *Demonstratio*, 10. Sch 62,46; Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolyicum* I,7; II,15.

Spirit as light and fire “resting upon” Christ as “the divine Wisdom” in person. Here Wisdom and Spirit appear as distinct divine persons. Christ, the incarnate and glorified Wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit are inseparable, and remain in an intimate relationship of reciprocity: where there is Wisdom, there is also Christ and the Spirit. To put it succinctly in Latin: *ubi Sapientia, ibi Christus; ubi Sapientia, ibi Spiritus*, and vice versa: *ubi Christus et Spiritus, ibi Sapientia* .

The Spirit of Beauty and Compassion

The Holy Spirit reveals divine beauty. The gift of transfiguration discloses the beauty of God's image in human beings. Humanity touched by the transfiguring grace of the Spirit allows us to feel in anticipation the eschatological beauty of the divine world. This was to be seen above all during Jesus' transfiguration: “his clothes became dazzlingly white, whiter than any earthly bleacher could make them” (Mk 9:3).

It is true that the most striking connection between wisdom, beauty and goodness is seen in the New Testament image of Christ. The Gospel of John says at the very beginning about the revelation of his glory, i.e. true divine beauty: “The Word was made flesh, and lived among us (lit.: *eskénosen*, pitched his tent among us), and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14). There is in this Gospel no description of the transfiguration of Christ on the Mount Tabor. His deeds alone reveal his glory, that radiating energy of beauty which becomes the motive for the disciples' faith. So it was from the first signs performed by Jesus in Cana of Galilee, when he miraculously changed water into wine: “He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him” (Jn 2:11).

Only the synoptic Gospels describe the divine glory of the transfigured humanity of Jesus. The initial astonishment and fear of the three chosen disciples are mixed with the desire to stay there and enjoy the vision of heavenly beauty: “Then Peter spoke to Jesus: ‘Rabbi,’ he said ‘it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah’. He did not know what to say; they were so frightened” (Mk 9:5-6). Beauty and awe may go together. In the biblical sense, beauty creates a feeling of respect mixed with fear and wonder, and prompts us to praise with gratitude God's ineffable greatness and goodness. Fear is born amidst astonishment and wonder in the face of a mysterious reality. They allow us to have a presentiment of the unusual character of what is invisible. The scene of the transfiguration points to the transcendence of human beings created in the image of God. This attitude marked by reverence and fear is a sign of religious wisdom: “If you seek it [wisdom] like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (Prov 2:4-5).

The last book of the New Testament, *The Book of Revelation*, already shows in the first chapter the frightening beauty of the risen Christ. How can we express the divine beauty on his face, embracing his glorified body? Here fragile human language has recourse to attractive and unusual comparisons and metaphors:

His head and his hair were white as white wool or as snow, his eyes like a burning flame, his feet like burnished bronze when it has been refined in a furnace, and his voice like the sound of the ocean. In his right hand he was holding seven stars, out of his mouth came a sharp sword, double-edged, and his face was like the sun shining with all its force. When I saw him, I fell in a dead faint at his feet, but he touched me with his right hand and said, 'Do not be afraid; it is I, the First and the Last; I am the Living One, I was dead and now I am to live for ever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and of the underworld' (Rev 1:14-18).

In a different way also the Apostle of the Nations encouraged the Corinthians to draw their attention to the beauty of God on the face of the glorified Christ. He compared this beauty with the original act of the creation of the world: "It is the same God that said, 'Let there be light shining out of darkness', who has shone in our minds to radiate the light of the knowledge of God's glory, the glory on the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).

It is understandable that we find no such vivid descriptions concerning the beauty surrounding the person of the Holy Spirit who has no direct incarnation in the human world. Beauty is a kind of illuminated and transfigured being. But all we can say about beauty in its highest manifestation is pre-eminently true also of the luminous radiance of the Holy Spirit. The beauty of Christ, the glorified Wisdom of God, reflects the beauty of the Spirit. According to St. Paul, the resurrection and glorification of Christ has been effected by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of life and beauty (cf. Rom 1:4; 8:11). This event has far-reaching consequences. The beauty of the Spirit is reflected also in the lives of people touched by his transfiguring power. He is the mysterious Paraclete and Comforter in the life of every human person. So one can justly say: where there is beauty, there is the Spirit (*ubi pulchritude, ibi Spiritus*), and the other way round: where the Spirit is, there is beauty (*ubi Spiritus, ibi pulchritudo*)⁴.

This applies therefore not only to the special presence of the Spirit in the life of Christ and his Church. As we have already stressed several times, there is the universal presence of the Spirit in the worldwide kingdom of God. Nobody remains outside this universal and beneficial

⁴ See G. O'Collins, *Salvation for All: God's Other Peoples*, Oxford 2008, 236-239, 245-247.

presence. The Spirit of God is active everywhere, revealing the divine reality and leading all people and all things to the fullness of salvation. The Spirit fills the universe, holds all things in unity, and gathers together everything for the final victory of goodness and beauty in the world. Not only Christ as divine Wisdom is the Light and the Life of the whole world. Also the Holy Spirit, inseparable from Christ, is the Light of the world and the Giver of life to the whole world.

The spirituality of a human person is, in this respect, the inner beauty of life submitted to the transforming power of the Spirit. As we have said, such a person lends the Spirit, in some way, his or her own face. In human visage one can then perceive the acting presence of God's Spirit. Beauty reaches the very depth of our humanity, where the human spirit comes in touch with the Holy Spirit. Through his or her inner beauty the human person comes closer to the divine Prototype. The human body, and above all the face, can then visibly express something of the invisible transcendent world. Beauty is a real and mysterious force of the good permeating the whole of human reality, both spirit and body.

Human life, even in its fallen state, is an expectation of the Paraclete, the Helper and Intercessor, to come, to bring comfort and to change. Life itself can become an invocation, most often an unconscious longing for harmony, peace, beauty and goodness. As was already mentioned, without the Paraclete our existence becomes prematurely emptied and burnt out. It withers away, loses its meaning and orientation, finally destroys itself and, at the same time, throws shadow and darkness on the existence of many other people.

According to Paul Evdokimov, a special responsibility in today's world falls to women who, by their very nature, are closely related to the Spirit, "the Giver of life" (in the language of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed). It is she who brings forth life, defends it and keeps it safe. She has a stronger ability of intuition, a certain knowledge of her inner self, of the values coming from the Holy Spirit. "From woman's heart springs spontaneously, instinctively, invincible resistance to materialism and to all the demonic elements of the decomposition of the modern civilization".⁵

The inner beauty of transfiguration comes from the Spirit. It is worth recalling here, that our Lady, the *Theotókos*, is called in the Eastern tradition the *Pneumatophóra*, i.e. the Bearer of the Spirit (an insight that determines to the large extent the development of Orthodox mariology). This tradition glorifies the inner beauty of every human person touched and transformed by the Spirit, the Spirit of beauty and compassion. Such a person distinguishes herself by a deep solidarity with all and by compassion for any living and suffering creature. Saint Isaac the Syrian (7th c.), who so much influenced the development of Eastern spirituality, is an outstanding example of this attitude:

⁵ P. Evdokimov, *La femme et le salut du monde*, Paris 1978, 265.

‘And what is a merciful heart?’ – he asked in one of his ascetical homilies – ‘It is the heart’s burning for the entire creation, for men, for birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing (...). From the strong and vehement mercy which grips his heart and from his great compassion his heart is humbled and he cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in creation. For this reason he offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner he even prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in his heart in the likeness of God’.⁶

The Syrian mystic had a deep intuition of “the beauty of truth” and of “the beauties of God”⁷. According to him the perception of the divine mysteries takes place “in the inner sanctuary of the heart”, as “a silent form of revelation and in visionless insights”⁸. The heart constitutes a very centre of the spiritual life. The mind and the heart have to act in harmony. Eastern theology often stresses the importance of such a harmonious co-operation between these two highest human faculties. The human heart, full of compassion and hope, has a better insight into “the mysteries of our Savior” than a mere logic of the mind, so often deprived of the sense of wholeness. God revealed by the Spirit is the God of the Great Symphony of the world to come⁹.

Beauty Will Save the World

We may sum up what has been said so far in the following way: Where there is beauty, there is Christ and the Holy Spirit (*ubi pulchritudo, ibi Christus et Spiritus*). And the other way round: where Christ and the Spirit are, there is beauty (*ubi Christus et Spiritus, ibi pulchritudo*). One can observe it on the faces of those people who have wisely passed through all the experiences of their lives. They are the best witnesses of the beauty of Christ and of his Spirit. During the centuries Christians have worshiped in various ways the beauty of Christ’s humanity transfigured by the power of the Holy Spirit. Very often, however, they were not able to perceive that it

⁶ Homily 71, in: *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian*. Translated by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Mass. 1984, 344-345.

⁷ Isaac of Niniveh (Isaac the Syrian). ‘*The Second Part*’, *Chapters IV-XLI*, transl. by S. Brock (=CSCO 555; *Scriptores syri*, t. 225), Lovanii 1995, ch. XLI, 1; p. 180.

⁸ *Ibidem*, XLI, 2; p. 181.

⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, XLI, 2; p. 181.

was the beauty of divine Wisdom. In the practice of the wisdom of Christ's Gospel, we usually lag behind and do not give to the world a good and effective witness to our Master and Lord. This deepens even more the consciousness that we need the saving and transfiguring energy of the Holy Spirit.

Well known are the famous words of Fyodor Dostoyevsky from his novel *The Idiot*: "beauty will save the world". Let us ask then: what beauty? This is certainly not an illusive and deceptive, sensual, bodily and purely external beauty, but the beauty which is the ultimate source of all good – the beauty of the divine Spirit manifesting itself in love. One can rightly add: it is the beauty of Christ and of the Spirit that is already saving the whole world here and now. It is goodness that saves the world. It is wisdom and divine love that will ultimately save the world. The question is not only about the future of salvation. The beauty of Christ's glorified humanity draws people already now to itself as the great magnet, attracting them to truth and goodness, transfiguring and saving also their humanity. It is through the beauty of Christ and his Spirit, even if only obscurely perceived, that we are led to truth and goodness. This unique beauty comes to us as a pure gift inviting everyone to open up and experience the great and beneficial transformation of our lives.

In contemporary Christianity there resound more and more appeals to rediscover the way of beauty (*via pulchritudinis*) as a concrete way to God who is the supreme source of Beauty. What is beautiful (*pulchrum*) is not only something wonderful but also something mysterious. As such it should become today a privileged way of evangelization and dialogue. Such a *via pulchritudinis* has had a long tradition in the Church. Therefore it is worth rediscovering now because it is often forgotten, falsely understood or even fought against by a dominating atmosphere of all-pervading scepticism and secularism. This concerns not only the beauty of the surrounding nature, but also the beauty of all artistic creativity of human hands, mind and heart. In time when the great truths recognized in the past encounter mistrust, and the existence of the universal good is in doubt, only beauty is able to unite people of different cultures. Beauty thus becomes an important stage along the way which may gradually lead us to recovering what is true (*verum*) and what is good (*bonum*).

I recall the words spoken in Stockholm by the famous Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, on the occasion of his receiving there the Nobel Prize. In his view the tree of being divides into three branches: the branch of truth, the branch of goodness and the branch of beauty. Our epoch has broken, according to him, the branch of truth and goodness. There still remains alive the branch of beauty. This branch now concentrates the whole force of the life giving saps in the tree of being. Only this branch can still blossom and bear fruit.¹⁰

¹⁰ See M. Stavrou, *Le mystère de la Création*, "Contacts"61(2009), no. 227, 217-235, here 233.

These remarks speak about the enduring role of beauty which has remained in our time perhaps the only privileged place to perceive the mystery of being. Hence an unusual role belongs to the love of beauty in human life. If we have really lost our sensitivity to truth and goodness, the hope of rescuing and saving our humanity still remains in the force of beauty. But it is not only visual and external beauty. True beauty cannot be separated from goodness. Beauty can manifest itself in the depth of spiritual life, in mutuality, in the fullness of benevolence and understanding human relationships, in friendly relations of people to God and in the world of nature, in culture and art. Such an attitude allows us to preserve sensitivity to the beauty of creation and gratitude towards its Creator. The very existence of the world of creatures expresses his love which directs all things to their ultimate fulfilment in the divine kingdom of beauty, goodness and truth.

Such is the power of God's beauty and wisdom. And such also is the power of that hope which "does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom 5:5 NIV). We are all endowed with this unusual gift. Let us not ask persistently about the truth of our doctrines alone or about goodness in our way of life. One has to look also for original beauty and wisdom in peoples of different cultures and religions. Other denominations and religions are usually evaluated by such standards as truth and moral goodness. Inter-religious dialogue would certainly be enriched by a greater sensitivity not only to truth and goodness, but also to beauty and wisdom. Do we really appreciate what is beautiful and wise in other religions, in their way of life, in their teaching and worship? Beauty may open up more helpful ways to truth and the good. Thus there would be in all of us more hope for a better tomorrow in the world in which we live. This is the world in which the Holy Spirit does not cease to fulfil his saving mission according to the promises of Christ: "but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

Perhaps it is the case that, in our human world love has to precede hope and faith. The person who has not experienced true love in his or her life remains unhappy. It is very difficult for such people to find their way to hope and faith. Through the beauty of expression, art is able to bring us closer to our consciousness of the truth contained in our daily experiences. For a long time I have been struck by the medieval painting kept in the French city of Colmar near Strasbourg. It shows the three women bringing spices to anoint the body of Jesus in the tomb. These women first heard the joyful, though astonishing and frightening news about his resurrection, and about his victory over death and evil. So the first shows *Love* in a red garment. This figure breathes an irresistible passion. It symbolizes the greatest gift which humans can bring to their Lord. Love is followed by *Hope* dressed in a green vestment. This one is able to penetrate the darkness of the tomb's mystery, to brighten the meaning of life and to anticipate the

future. Only at the end of this procession do we see *Faith* in a golden dress. Love and hope clear the path to the tomb. The enlightened eyes of the heart know the way. *Amo et spero, ut credam* – I love and hope in order to believe. The gold of human life, wherever it may be found, is slowly melted in the fire of love, in the endurance of hope and in the searching of living faith. Such is the divine aesthetic of salvation from all evil.

Thus the succession of the three theological virtues has been reversed in this artistic vision, displaying the great wisdom of life. It happens in consonance with the deep intuition of the Apostle Paul: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13 NIV). In this way we can again discover the presence of the Holy Spirit. The already quoted words of the same Apostle remind us of it: “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us”.

The Spirit of the Transfiguration of the Whole World

As I said earlier, the Holy Spirit is everywhere present and fills everything, but does not reveal his own face. He points to the risen Christ. In his powerful activity there is something of anonymity and infinite disinterestedness. For this reason we can speak about the Spirit's *kenosis*, discretion and humility, comparable to the *kenosis* of Christ (cf. Ph 2:7). His presence and activity goes beyond the institutional boundaries of the Church. It permeates the life of all people and reaches also into the whole area of human creativity and culture in its various forms and appearances. Nothing remains alien to Christ and his Spirit. The human person, being creative, co-operates with the Holy Spirit, the divine Creator. In its supreme achievements human culture becomes therefore an icon of the invisible Spirit, a manifestation of the power of the Incarnation and the Pentecost in our visible world. I agree with the intuition of an outstanding Russian Orthodox theologian, Serge Boulgakov, that “the Second Coming of Christ is also the *Parousía* of the Spirit which began with the Pentecost and is accomplished concretely with the *Parousía* of the Lord”.¹¹

We are not doomed to a passive expectation of the full epiphany of the Paraclete. It should be an active expectation, full of compassion for the destiny of all creation. The tradition of Orthodox spirituality abounds in witnesses about the human heart sensitive to the final fulfilment of all creatures. St. Paul's words, often referred to, are very significant in this respect: “From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth; and not only creation, but all of us who possess the first-fruits of the Spirit, we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free” (Rom 8:22-23). Hope and expectation imprint an eschatological mark on Christian spirituality.

¹¹ *L'Épouse de l'Agneau. La creation, l'homme, l'Église et la fin*. Traduit du russe par Constantin Andronikof, Lausanne 1984, 304.

Having “the first fruits of the Spirit”, all the Christians should perceive the religious sense of genuine creativity which brings the human spirit closer to the universal kingdom of truth, goodness and beauty. Human culture and terrestrial creativity bear in themselves the promise of the final transfiguration of the whole creation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Today gifts and charismas of the Spirit announce and foreshadow the final fulfilment of the world. The eschatological role of the Paraclete as the personal source of newness and beauty saving the world has often been stressed especially by Orthodox theologians. Only the ultimate fullness and beauty of transfigured creation will reveal the personal face of the Holy Spirit, the face radiating then from the multitude of transformed human persons.

Under the inspiration of the Paraclete, a most courageous hope has also been nurtured in the Eastern tradition throughout the centuries. This tradition has remained more open in its theology and spirituality to the hope of universal salvation, reconciliation with the God of all rational creatures, and an all-embracing communion of all creation¹². Christians are allowed to believe and trust optimistically that there will come a day when God will be “all in all”, *pánta en pásin* (1 Co 15:28).

This is our response to the growing skepticism and hopelessness of our times. Faith and hope teach Christians gratitude for the gift of life, however frail it may be. They also teach love for the earth and all of God's creation. The Holy Spirit is truly the Paraclete of all. Christianity is a religion of great and brave hope. In my conviction it gives the greatest motivation for reconciliation with oneself and other people and for the ultimate reconciliation with God, even God of the most rebellious creatures.

¹² Among several of my recent books dealing with this subject see: *Bóg wszystkim we wszystkich. Ku eschatologii bez dualizmu (God All in All: Towards an Eschatology without Dualism)*, Warszawa: Verbinum 2005, 274 pp.; idem, *Teraz trwa nadzieja. U podstaw chrześcijańskiego uniwersalizmu (For Now There Is Hope: At the Foundations of Christian Universalism)*, Warszawa: Verbinum 2006, 340 pp.; idem, “*Abym nie utracił nikogo...*” *W kręgu eschatologii nadziei (That I Should not Lose even One: Within Area of the Eschatology of Hope)*, Warszawa 2008, 271 pp.; idem, *Świadkowie wielkiej nadziei. Zbawienie powszechne w myśli wczesnochrześcijańskiej (Witnesses of the Great Hope: The Universal Salvation in Early Christian Thought)*, Warszawa 2009, 365 pp.; idem, *Mądrość nadziei. Boży dar zbawienia dla wszystkich (The Wisdom of Hope: God's Gift of Salvation for All)*, Warszawa 2010, 236 pp.

CHAPTER X

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CHRISTIAN PRAYER

Early Christianity was characterized by a plurality of charismata of the Holy Spirit. Early Christians prayed a lot, and the Church herself took her name from the assemblies of prayer: “when you come together as a church” (1 Cor 11:18 NIV). Prayer is the most privileged expression of the faith in the presence of the risen Christ and of the Spirit in the Church and in the world. This is the same Spirit who dwells in the hearts of those for whom the glorified Christ intercedes in heaven: “he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him” (Hbr 7:25; cf. 9:24). Prayer is somehow inscribed in the very ontology of Christ’s humanity and in the ontology of his Church.

Prayer of the Spirit within Us

The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is not only an invitation to prayer. It is also prayer itself, inspired by “the love of God (...) poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us” (Rom 5:5). The Apostle of the Nations explains: “those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires; (...) the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:5-6 NIV). The Spirit works peacefully towards unity and the reunion of the human person with God, and that is the main goal of prayer. The whole of the spiritual experience of the Apostle confirms the presence of the Spirit in the human being as the inexpressible imploration and continuous appeal: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express” (Rom 8:26 NIV). We often do not know how to pray. The Spirit prays then within us in an ineffable way. God knows the desires of the Spirit.

Those who believe have to learn to ask God for the ability and the grace to pray, which come with the gift of the Spirit. Grace does not rest in the ability to honour God with one’s lips, but above all in the openness of the heart and the mind, willing to praise God and listen to him. In prayer the human heart cannot remain far from our Creator and Redeemer (cf. Is 29:13). Christ assures his disciples that our Father in heaven will give not just “what is good” (Mt 7:11) but much more: “the Holy Spirit to those who ask him” (Lc 11:13).

In this way prayer opens new dimensions in the relationship of human beings to God. The presence of the Spirit within us becomes prayer itself and brings it to fulfillment. By the Spirit “we cry, «Abba, Father»” (Rom 8:15). This human cry may thus join the cry of the Spirit: “God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, «Abba, Father»” (Gal 4:6 NIV). We pray and the Spirit prays in us, too. We need

not ask who it is that ultimately prays and cries: the Holy Spirit or we ourselves. The Spirit “that we carry in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22) becomes our most sublime prayer of praise and supplication.

The depth of this identification cannot be fully expressed by means of human words and concepts. We encounter here a certain apophaticism of prayer, the inexpressibility of things which really happen in it. Apophatic theology finds its full reflection in the apophaticism of prayer. A popular maxim in the Eastern tradition says that a theologian is someone who can truly pray. He is aware in his inmost being that God’s Spirit is the deepest reality within us. The human “heart” becomes a privileged place of prayer and union with God. In a certain measure prayer anticipates the forthcoming eschatological presence of God, being “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). The truth about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and beauty, begins to appear in a new light. The faith lived and experienced in prayer becomes thus a great illumination for the whole of human life. It reveals new horizons of human perception.

Prayer seen in the light of Pentecost shows an astonishing nearness of God within our being and our existence. The invocation addressed to the Father to send down the Holy Spirit is a human cry for the gift of this nearness, for the grace of living it with utmost devotion. This explains why the New Testament authors urge the disciples of Christ to pray “in the Holy Spirit” (Eph 6:18; Jude 20). The reason is this: “We have received the Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us” (1 Cor 2:12). It is the Spirit who “reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 1:10).

Do we still need a more penetrating answer to the mystery of prayer? Let us ask then: what exactly are those “depths of God”? The One who in the life of the Triune God is called the Breath and reaches “the depths of God”, he also knows the secrets of the human heart better than we know them ourselves. This Holy Spirit teaches us how, through prayer, we can participate in the mystery of divine life, freedom and universality. If we rely on our own strength only, we fail to deliver our prayer from the limitations imposed by human existence. Our prayer constantly needs the immeasurable wideness of the divine breath. Only then, in God’s Spirit, can it embrace all humans and all of creation.

The aim of the liturgical life of the Church is to educate Christians and bring them to a better understanding of the importance of the gift of prayer. It patiently teaches confidence, courage and openness in seeking and approaching God (cf. Hbr 4:16; 11:6). As has already been said, prayer is the privileged time when the Holy Spirit and the Church of the living here on earth cry to the Lord of history: “Come!” (Rev 22:17). And there he comes, making the Passover of our salvation present in the world by the power of the Spirit and leading people to the Father of the universe. It is in prayer that Christian paschal theology finds its continuation and complement. He who truly prays addresses the God of our salvation with love, praise and thankfulness for the gift of liberation and transfiguration.

The Holy Spirit helps us to learn more disinterestedness in prayer, to overcome the temptation to use God only as a means to satisfy our short-lived human needs, desires and demands. Therefore the prayer of thanksgiving, praise and adoration should be particularly cherished by every believer. Only then will it become our personal and continuous Pentecost.

In the Syriac tradition the liturgical prayer of the Church is often called "the Hymn of the Spirit". The Divine Paraclete, the Comforter present in all movements of the human spirit towards God, animates the prayer of the Church and of every believer, prays and sings within us. Every religious impulse comes from God's Spirit. The person who prays and praises the glory of the risen Lord becomes, as St. Ephrem the Syrian poetically put it, "an intelligent zither of the Spirit".¹ How can we find out the spirit of true adoration and praise in the presence of God? How can we worship the Father "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:23-24)? We can do it only to the degree of being deeply penetrated by the Divine Breath: "the kingdom of God (...) means righteousness and peace and joy brought by the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

The lyrical style of the Syriac liturgical tradition should not overshadow its paschal and Pentecostal character. It conveys a strong conviction that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate source of prayer. The praying community finds inspiration and joy in the Spirit who gives it the strength to confess that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3). The Spirit's prayer within us is at the same time an intercession with the Father.

More than this: the Holy Spirit being the source of prayer is also its essence and goal. Recall again that the ancient parallel version of the second invocation of *Our Father* according to Luke (11:2) reads: "Let your Holy Spirit come down upon us and purify us", instead of "Your Kingdom come". This ancient tradition identified the Holy Spirit with the kingdom of God. To seek the kingdom of God and ask for its coming means to seek the Spirit and implore the Spirit's coming. It is the Spirit of our baptism and our Eucharist. The kingdom of God is the reality that was first initiated by the resurrection of Christ. The Spirit's purifying and transfiguring action prepares the coming of this kingdom, re-presents it among people and leads there those who have risen to the new life with Christ. This is also the meaning and the goal of each sacramental epiclesis. In order to receive the Spirit we have to experience our spiritual destitution and our insufficiency, and we have to invoke the Spirit's presence by the whole of our inmost being.

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Prayers addressed directly to the Holy Spirit do not appear too

¹ E. P. Siman, *L'expérience de l'Esprit par l'Église d'après la tradition syrienne d'Antioche*, Paris 1971,246.

often in the Eastern tradition. There is a certain paradox here. In spite of her peculiar sensibility to the presence and action of the Spirit, Oriental and Eastern Churches² direct their prayers primarily to the Father, to Christ or to the Holy Trinity. Predominantly they ask the Father and the Son to bestow the gift of the Holy Spirit, so that they can pray with the Spirit and in the Spirit. Thus this is not a direct prayer to the Spirit but rather it requests the Spirit's descent upon those who believe.

Let us take a closer look at the distinction between prayer to the Holy Spirit and that addressed to the Father and to the Son. In praying to the Father and to the Son, Eastern Christians always turn to them directly: "Our Father", "O Lord Jesus". There are many such prayers, while a direct invocation of the Holy Spirit appears only in some specific instances. A particularly striking example is the prayer of the epiclesis in the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. At first the priest prays inaudibly: "We ask and pray and supplicate: send down thy Holy Spirit upon us and upon these Gifts here presented". Then in the Orthodox Church of Slav countries the troparion (hymn) of the Third Hour is recited three times: "O Lord, who at the third hour didst send down upon thy apostles the Holy Spirit, take not the same from us, o Merciful One, but renew us also who now pray to Thee". The celebrant blesses the gifts of bread and wine with the words: "Changing them by thy Holy Spirit". Immediately after the consecration of the holy gifts there follows a litany asking God who loves people to accept them and to send down upon them in return his divine grace and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus the Eucharistic epiclesis is directed not to the Holy Spirit, but to the Father.

The Orthodox Church celebrates Pentecost as the feast of the Holy Trinity and calls the second Pentecostal day the feast of the Holy Spirit. This is the only day devoted to the Spirit as an extension of Pentecost³. The service of Pentecost does not contain any special prayers or hymns invoking the Holy Spirit directly, but only hymns addressed to the Holy Trinity, in which one can also find some short invocations of the Spirit. Here is one of them:

O Holy God, who by the Son didst make all things through
the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. O Holy Mighty One,
through whom we have known the Father, and through
whom the Holy Spirit came into the world. O Holy
Immortal One, the Spirit of Comfort, who proceedest from

² The Oriental Orthodox Churches, usually called pre-Chalcedonian (or not-Chalcedonian), should be distinguished from the family of the Eastern Orthodox Churches of Byzantine tradition.

³ At Vespers on Pentecost Sunday long prayers are read while all kneel (office of the genuflexion), but none of them contains a direct invocation of the Holy Spirit.

the Father, and resteth in the Son – O Holy Trinity, glory to Thee⁴.

The Syriac tradition presents a striking contrasting exception in this regard. The Spirit is the One to whom the Syrian Oriental Orthodox Church addresses her prayer. The liturgical texts of Pentecost convey a great richness of beautiful and profound prayers to the Holy Spirit as Creator, Sanctifier, Illuminator, Deificator and Consummator. These prayers are in most cases long, effusive, full of exultation and dogmatic connotations. They emphasize the divinity and sovereignty of the Spirit and the ineffable way in which God's grace and various gifts act in the human heart. Only a direct contact with these prayers conveys the freshness of the faith in the Holy Spirit, and in the unique role the Spirit has in the life of individual Christians and in the Church at large. As an example, consider a longer passage taken from one of the prayers of the Third Hour directed to the Spirit on Pentecost Sunday:

Glory to you, O Mighty Lord, Spirit-Comforter, generous Giver of plenteous gifts. You are equal to the Father and the Son. To you belong the greatness and the sovereignty. You are neither anterior to the Father nor posterior to the Son, but consubstantial, united and equal to both of them. All that belongs to the Father, belongs to you, except paternity; and all that belongs to the Son, belongs to yourself, except filiation and incarnation.

You are the pure Spirit, unconstrained by place, time, mode of being, quantity, impossible to fathom out and to search into. (...). You are light and the bearer of light. You are goodness and the source of all goodness. You are the Spirit who constitutes the prophets and perfects the Apostles. You give victory to martyrs and strength to confessors.

You make the ignorant wise. You lead those who err, you comfort the sad and strengthen the weak. You dress the wounded, you straighten those who have fallen and give courage to those who are pusillanimous. You calm the hasty, soften the hard-hearted, strengthen the faithful and guard the believers.

⁴ Cf. S. Boulgakov, *On Prayer to the Holy Spirit in the Holy Orthodox Church*, "The Journal of the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius" No. 23, March 1934, p. 25-28; also reproduced in: *Father Sergius Bulgakov (1871-1944: A Collection of articles by Fr. Bulgakov for the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius...to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the death of this great Ecumenist*, London (1969), 12-15.

Therefore we beseech you, O Spirit-Comforter, come down into the temples of our persons, as you have descended into the Cenacle of the mysteries. Vivify us by your divine beneficent gifts; kindle our hearts with the fire of your love. Give us your eternal wisdom, and let your resplendent light purify our hearts. We shall then know you by the true knowledge, you to whom solely belongs the sovereignty, with the Father and the Son. Finally, guide us so that we may praise you as it suits you, and that we adore you in purity, love and fear, together with the Father from whom you proceed and with the Son from whom you receive, now and for ever, world without end. Amen!⁵

The prayer of the Church to the Holy Spirit does not originate in a vacuum. It grows out of a long living experience of the Spirit's presence. The Syriac tradition bears witness to this fact with unmatched force. It abounds in unexpected invocations and expressions which add the depth of insight and long-sightedness of hope to prayer. The descent of the Holy Spirit in Pentecost is described as the baptism of Divine Fire for the whole Church. As earlier emphasized, the experience of the Spirit's presence and action is accessible to all, rather than just to the elect. Metaphorically speaking, the coming down of the Spirit has opened the gates of heaven to all of us. Passover and Pentecost form a single event of salvation. Those who truly accept Christ, accept also the Holy Spirit who introduces us in the world of resurrection. The universal resurrection will be the Spirit's work. One verse of a Syriac Vesper hymn of Pentecost Monday invites urgently the prophet of the resurrection: "Come Ezekiel, son of Buzi, great man of visions, unveil to us and explain, how the dead will come to life again in the day of resurrection!"⁶

Three special prayers of the same Vespers of the second day of Pentecost, the day devoted to the Holy Spirit, are not addressed to this Divine Person, but to the Father and the Son. An exception in this regard is found only in the Armenian liturgy. The Pentecostal worship of the so-called genuflexion embraces there the prayer to each of the three Persons. The prayer to the Holy Spirit supplicates for the eternal rest of all the departed and for preserving the faithful from sin.⁷

All these facts bear manifold witness to the striking discretion of the Church concerning the third Person of the Holy Trinity. As long as the pilgrimage of the People of God here on the earth goes on, the personal face of the Spirit will not be revealed or made fully manifest. While the grace of

⁵ Siman, *op. cit.*, 307. Translation is mine, W.H.

⁶ *Ibidem* 316-317. Cf. Ez 37:1-14.

⁷ Cf. A. Renou, *L'office de la génouflexion dans la tradition arménienne*, in: *Le Saint-Esprit dans la liturgie*, Rome 1977, 149-163, esp. 161-163.

the Holy Spirit is active all the time, the person of the Spirit is hidden and will remain so. The Spirit's face will be disclosed only in the kingdom of glory that is yet to come.

Against this background of Christian tradition one can appreciate the special significance of a short prayer *O King of Heaven* addressed in the Eastern Orthodox Church directly to the Holy Spirit. It is in fact the only prayer there directly addressed to the Spirit. The absence of other prayers of this sort emphasizes its significance even more. Here is its full text:

O King of Heaven, Thou Comforter, Spirit of Truth,
Who art everywhere and fillest all things,
Store of good gifts and Giver of Life.
Come and abide in us,
Cleanse us from all evil
And save our souls,
O gracious Lord.

Let us look at the theological and spiritual richness of this prayer. It consists of three parts. First the invocation contains some dogmatic teaching about the Spirit as true God, "the King of Heaven". All these definitions: "King of Heaven, Comforter, Spirit of Truth" apply in the first instance to the Holy Trinity in its immanent life. The Holy Spirit discloses the deepest spiritual reality of the Divine Persons – the mystery of one God as Tri-personal Spirit. The Comforter is often considered to be the personal Love between the Father and the Son. In his relationship to the Son who is the Word and the Truth, the Holy Spirit is also the Spirit of Truth in perfect reciprocity of communion and mission to the world. The invocations of the first part of the prayer remind us all the time that the Spirit fulfils the mission to the world as God, "the heavenly King, the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth" sent by the Father through the Son.

The second part of the prayer explains more precisely what this means: "Who art everywhere and fillest all things, Store of good gifts and Giver of Life". These words witness to the activity in the world of the omnipresent Spirit. God is omnipresent but every one of the divine Persons manifests a special form of this presence. The Father is the original will in the creation of the world, the Son is its foundation and Rescuer, the Holy Spirit – the active uncreated energy, all-penetrating and all-fulfilling. The Spirit is called the "Giver of Life", although the Trinity as a whole is Life eternal, the Creator and Giver of Life. This means that the third Person, the fulfilling One, is the effective power of life within all created reality. Life as such is a great gift and an admirable blessing! The Spirit is invoked as the "Store of good gifts". This includes not only the natural gift of life, but also all the supernatural gifts of grace bestowed on us by the Spirit. It is through the Spirit's acting power that the creatures can reach their ultimate goal and find their eschatological fulfilment, so that their existence is not reduced to nothingness.

The concluding section of the prayer refers to the human response to the Holy Spirit, i.e. to the personal salvation of every human being. Everything depends on our acceptance of the gifts of the Spirit. As weak and fragile creatures we invite the Stronger One to bring our destiny to its final fulfilment: "Come and abide in us, cleanse us from all evil, and save our souls". Saving our souls covers saving our whole being, both soul, body and spirit. Let us recall again that according to St. Seraphim of Sarov, Christian life consists "in acquiring the Holy Spirit". But the divine grace never does violence to anyone, and therefore human striving and effort are required in the acceptance of this gift. The words of the prayer "Come, and abide in us" express our sincere willingness to respond with gratitude to the Holy Spirit, in whom we discover the source of purification and inspiration for human creativity as a whole. As Christians we believe that the fire of the Holy Spirit can purify us from all sin. For this reason the Church prays: "cleanse us from all evil". In the last resort, the abiding of the Spirit in us is a sign of the kingdom of God and salvation, brought about in the inner sanctuary of human freedom.

In this way the prayer *O King of Heaven* sums up the Christian belief in the transforming and salvific power of God's Spirit. In the absence of any other direct invocations of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church this particular prayer has acquired an even greater and more privileged significance. One can be struck by the extent to which it is used in the worship of the Church and in the spiritual life of the faithful. With the exception of the Lord's Prayer this is used most frequently, and is the most important of all Orthodox prayers. It is quietly recited by the priest before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy: the Holy Spirit is invoked for the celebration of the Eucharist. This initial invocation constitutes a kind of initial epiclesis, although in its fully developed form the liturgical epiclesis takes place after the recitation of the words of institution. The "King of Heaven" is also invoked at the beginning of morning and evening prayers, and in a number of other liturgical offices of the Church, i.e. the Hours, Vespers and special services. It has become a constant source of inspiration for every sort of prayer and devotion. In the Eastern Church it is normally recited at the beginning of such actions as lessons, lectures, conferences, symposia, public meetings and other good works and initiatives.

There are specific occasions, however, when this prayer is excluded from the usual cycle of Church prayers, i.e. during the Easter Week and the following weeks leading to Pentecost. At these periods the Eastern Church stops addressing this prayer to the Holy Spirit. She believes that the Spirit is present and active in a particular way thanks to the resurrection of Christ. The invocation is then replaced, both at the beginning of the various offices and at the Divine Liturgy, by the Easter hymn: "Christ is risen from the dead..." This seems to suggest that during the Easter Week and the days following Christ's resurrection, we have been transferred from the kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory in which God is all in all, and everything is already permeated by the presence of the

Holy Spirit. No special invocation of the Spirit is necessary then. In consequence, this invocation is absent also during the ten days between Ascension and Pentecost. This should be regarded as a sort of fast in prayer, a privation required as a preparation for the coming down of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Therefore the singing of the prayer *O King of Heaven* at Pentecost itself, during matins and vespers, resounds again with great solemnity and fervour. From this day on the invocation of the Spirit comes to occupy its usual place in the life of the Eastern Church.

In this regard the frequent use made of this Orthodox prayer significantly differs from what is made of the corresponding Catholic hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, composed in 19th century. The use of the latter is quite restricted in the Church. It is sung at Pentecost, at the ordination of priests and bishops, at confirmation and the ceremony of wedding. This hymn is rarely recited in everyday prayer life, although exceptions can be found in the practice of individual persons and certain communities.

The Orthodox prayer can actually be compared with the short invocation *Veni, Sancte Spiritus* from the 12th century, most probably composed by the archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton (died 1228). It was originally used as an anthem of the first vespers of Pentecost, but in many Western communities, above all monastic ones, it subsequently acquired a popularity similar to the Orthodox prayer. Here is this prayer:

Come, O Holy Spirit,
 Fill the hearts of Thy faithful,
 And kindle in them the fire of Thy love.
 Thou, who through the variety of many languages
 Have gathered together the peoples in the unity of faith.

A characteristic mark of all prayers addressed to the Spirit is the supplication for the descent, visitation and coming. The most frequently repeated word is the invocation "Come!", a spontaneous cry of the human person for closeness of the Holy Spirit. Liturgical prayers directed to the Spirit also begin with that cry. There resounds forcefully in them the supplication for illumination, purification, vivification and transfiguration, reaching the very depths of the human being. Only the Spirit-Comforter can enable a Christian to follow Christ in peace and perseverance in order to achieve the fullness of salvation. The *Sequence* of Pentecost is very characteristic in this regard. Let us quote its ardent invocations:

Come, Thou Holy Spirit, come,
 And from Thy celestial home
 Shed a ray of light divine.
 Come, Thou Father of the poor,
 Come, Thou source of all our store,
 Come, within our bosom's shrine,
 Thou of comforters the best,

Thou the soul's delightful guest,
 Sweet refreshment here below.
 In our labour rest most sweet,
 Pleasant coolness in the heat,
 Solace in the midst of woe.
 O most blessed Light divine,
 Shine within these hearts of Thine,
 And our inmost being fill.
 Where Thou art not, man hath nought.
 Nothing good in deed and thought,
 Nothing free from taint of ill.
 Heal our wounds, our strength renew,
 On our dryness pour Thy dew,
 Wash the stains of guilt away.
 Bend the stubborn heart and will,
 Melt the frozen, warm the chill,
 Guide the steps that go astray.
 On Thy faithful who adore,
 And confess Thee evermore,
 In Thy sevenfold gifts descend.
 Give the virtue's sure reward,
 Give them Thy salvation, Lord,
 Give them joys that never end.
 Amen. Alleluia.⁸

The tradition of the Western Church has handed down a significant number of prayers addressed directly to the Holy Spirit. One of them is a profound invocation *Adsumus Domine, Sancte Spiritus* composed probably by St. Isidore of Seville (died 636), to be used during the second provincial council of that city in 619. This prayer (in Latin) was also used before every meeting of preparatory commissions and conciliar commissions of Vatican II.

We are here before you, O Holy Spirit, conscious of our innumerable sins, but united in a special way in Your Holy Name. Come and abide with us. Deign to penetrate our hearts.

Be the guide of our actions, indicate the path we should take, and show us what we must do so that, with Your help, our work may be in all things pleasing to You.

May You be our only inspiration and the overseer of our intentions, for You alone possess a glorious name together with the Father and the Son.

⁸ *The New Marian Missal*, by S. P. Juergens S.M., Leeds 1966, 479.

May You, who are infinite justice, never permit that we be disturbers of justice. Let not our ignorance induce us to evil, nor flattery sway us, nor moral and material interest corrupt us. But unite our hearts to You alone, and do it strongly, so that, with the gift of Your grace, we may be one in You and may in nothing depart from the truth.

Thus, united in Your name, may we in our every action follow the dictates of Your mercy and justice, so that today and always our judgments may not be alien to You and in eternity we may obtain the unending reward of our actions. Amen.⁹

When St. Symeon the New Theologian lived in the East¹⁰, very beautiful prayers addressed to the Holy Spirit originated also in the West. Some of them are similar in their content to the invocation of this Byzantine mystic already mentioned. Here is a fragment of one of them, coming from a prayer book of the second half of the 11th century.

Come then!
Come, O Good Comforter of the suffering soul,
Its help both in times of trial and of prosperity.
Come, you who purify what has been stained,
You, who cure wounds,
Come, strength of the weak, support of those who fall.
Come, instructor of the humble and vanquisher of the proud.
Come, tender Father of the bereaved,
Full of kindness Judge of widows.
Come, hope of the poor, refreshment of the weakening.
Come, star of the sailors and port of the shipwrecked people.
Come, great glory of all the living,
The sole salvation of those who stand on the threshold of death.
Come, O the Most Holy Spirit!
Come and show me your mercy. (...)
Incline to me with your graciousness,
So that my transience may find grace in the face of your greatness,
And my weakness in the face of your might,
According to your immense mercy,
Through Jesus Christ my Saviour...¹¹

⁹ Isidore of Seville, *Ordo de celebrando concilio*, 4. PLS 4, 1867-1868. The English text: *Prayer of the Council Fathers*, in: *The Documents of Vatican II*, London Dublin Melbourne 1967, XXII.

¹⁰ See the chapter: *Experience of the Holy Spirit in Eastern Christianity*.

¹¹ This prayer was initially ascribed to St. Augustine (PL 40, 901-902), then to St. Anselm (PL 158, 888). In fact it was composed by John, abbot of

By the selection of vocabulary, metaphors, comparisons and images this invocation differs from that composed by Symeon the New Theologian at the turn of the first and the second millennium. The basic content, however, remains very much the same. The experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit is basically identical both in the East and the West, although it tends to be expressed in different terms.

Let us consider the sequence to the Holy Spirit *O ignis Spiritus, Paraclite*, which is full of poetic exultation, composed by St Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). In this text one can see reflected a female sensitivity and intelligence of one of the first-rate brilliant figures of that time.

O fire of the Spirit, Comforter, who are the life of life of the whole creation,

Holy are you, who give the shape to life.

Holy are you, who put balm on hurtful fractures.

Holy are you, who bind up festering wounds.

O breath of holiness, o fire of love.

O mild taste in hearts, rain in souls sowing the fragrance of virtues.

O pure fountain in which one can see God gathering the unknown and finding the lost.

O protection of life, hope of uniting all people,

Shelter of beauty – save all that exists!

Guard those imprisoned by enemy, liberate those in chains,

Those whom the divine might desires to save.

O the surest way passing through all the places,

On summits, in valleys and precipices,

In order to bring closer and unite all that exists!

You make clouds flowing and air rising,

Stones getting wet and waters streaming,

And the earth issuing the greening saps.

It is you who always lead the wise

And fills them with joy of inspiration by your wisdom.

So glory to you who make the hymns of praise resounding

And who give joy to life.

Trust and adoration, and power to you who bring light!¹²

We cannot quote here longer texts of prayers addressed to the Holy Spirit. They were inspired by the living devotion of the faithful in past centuries. Let us only adduce two excerpts of the sequences composed by

Fécamp (ca. 995-1078), called Jeannelin. Around 1060 he prepared a special prayer book for empress Agnes, widow of emperor Henry. For this reason he called the Holy Spirit the “full of kindness judge of widows”. See Y. Arsène-Henry, *Les plus beaux textes sur le Saint-Esprit*, Paris 1968, 204, 363. Translation is mine, W.H.

¹² Arsène-Henry, op. cit., 206.

Adam of St. Victor (died ca. 1177). The first one is from the sequence *Qui procedis*:

If you teach, nothing remains in darkness.
If you are present in the soul, there is no impurity in it.
You bring to it joy and jubilation,
And the conscience purified by you tastes finally happiness.

The second comes from the sequence *Lux jucunda*:

Come then to us, O Holy Comforter!
Govern our languages, quieten our hearts.
Neither bitterness nor malice are reconcilable with your presence.
Without your grace there is neither joy nor salvation,
Neither serenity of the spirit, nor delicacy, nor fullness (...).¹³

John Henry Newman's Prayers to the Paraclete

Some long and profound prayers full of spiritual fervour and warmth to the Paraclete were written by cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890), beatified on September 19, 2010 by Benedict XVI. Let me end up this chapter with some fragments of these prayers. The first one comes from a prayer *The Paraclete, the Life of All Things*:

I adore Thee, my Lord, the Eternal Paraclete, co-equal with the Father and the Son. I adore Thee as the Life of all that live. Through Thee the whole material Universe hangs together and consists, remains in its place, and moves internally in the order and reciprocity of its several parts. (...) Through Thee, spring comes after winter and renews all things. That wonderful and beautiful, that irresistible burst into life again, in spite of all obstacles, that awful triumph of nature, is but Thy glorious Presence. (...) Thou art the life of the whole creation, O Eternal Paraclete (...). Through Thee our own dead souls are quickened to serve Thee. From Thee is every good thought and desire, every good purpose, every good effort, every good success. It is by Thee that sinners are turned into saints. It is by Thee the Church is refreshed and strengthened, and champions start forth, and martyrs are carried on to their crown. (...) I praise and adore Thee, my Sovereign Lord God, the Holy Ghost.

I adore Thee, O dread Lord, for what Thou hast done for my soul. I acknowledge and feel, not only as a

¹³ Ibidem, 205-206. Translation mine, W.H.

matter of faith but of experience, that I cannot have one good thought or do one good act without Thee. I know, that if I attempt anything good in my own strength, I shall to a certainty fail. I have bitter experience of this. My God, I am only safe when Thou dost breathe upon me. If Thou withdraw Thy breath, forthwith my three mortal enemies rush on me and overcome me. I am as weak as water, I am utterly impotent without Thee. (...) Of my good desires, whatever they may be, of my good aims, aspirations, attempts, successes, habits, practices, Thou art the sole cause and present continual source.¹⁴

The second excerpt comes from the prayer *The Paraclete, the Life of the Church*:

I adore Thee, O my Lord, the Third Person of the All-Blessed Trinity, that Thou hast set up in this world of sin a great light upon a hill. Thou hast founded the Church, Thou hast established and maintained it. Thou fillest it continually with Thy gifts, that men may see, and draw near, and take, and live. (..)

I adore Thee, O Almighty Lord, the Paraclete, because Thou in Thy infinite compassion hast brought me into this Church, the work of Thy supernatural power. I had no claim on Thee for so wonderful a favour over anyone else in the whole world. There were many men far better than I by nature, gifted with more pleasing natural gifts, and less stained with sin. Yet Thou, in Thy inscrutable love for me, has chosen me and brought me into Thy fold. Thou hast a reason for everything Thou dost. (...) I did nothing – I did everything against it. (...) And thus I owe all to Thy grace. (...) Ah, how I struggled to get free from Thee; but Thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed. I have not a word to say, but to bow down in awe before the depths of Thy love. (...) Now then give me this further grace, Lord, to use all this grace well, and to turn it to my salvation.¹⁵

These are very personal and effusive prayers worth pondering in the depth of one's own heart. They exude a great humility and confidence in the saving power of the Holy Spirit. One feels in them a sincere desire

¹⁴ J.H. Newman, *Prayers, Verses, and Devotions*, San Francisco 2000, 414-415. I owe this precious collection to Ron and Maria Day, my American Friends from Philadelphia.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 416-417.

for the salvation of all people. In the third prayer *The Paraclete, the Life of my Soul*, the author invokes the Spirit with the following words: "My God, I adore Thee for taking on Thee the charge of sinners; of those, who not only cannot profit Thee, but who continually grieve and profane Thee. Thou hast taken for thyself the office of a minister, and that for those who did not ask for it. I adore Thee for Thy incomprehensible condescension in ministering to me. I know and I feel, O my God, that Thou mightest have left me, as I wished to be left, to go my own way, to go straight forward in my wilfulness and self-trust to hell. Thou mightest have left me in that enmity to Thee which is in itself death. (...) But Thou, O Eternal Father, hast been kinder to me than I am to myself. Thou hast given me, Thou hast poured out upon me Thy grace, and thus I live".¹⁶

In the last prayer, entitled *The Paraclete, the Fount of Love*, Newman calls the Spirit the "Living Love, wherewith the Father and the Son love each other", "the Giver of that great gift, by which alone we are saved, supernatural love". It is by the Holy Spirit that "we make acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition". Therefore the final invocation implores the Spirit: "Increase in me this grace of love, in spite of all my unworthiness. It is more precious than anything else in the world. I accept it in place of all the world can give me. O give it to me! It is my life".¹⁷

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All prayers quoted in this chapter hand on a theology of the Holy Spirit which is very much alive. They teach Christian spirituality where a living experience of the presence and activity of the Spirit prevails and is one of its essential features.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 417-418.

¹⁷ Ibidem, 419-420.

EPILOGUE

THE SPIRIT WILL ACT WITH US

God has allowed us to live in times when more and more believers in different churches and denominations gradually open to the great and holy work of reconciliation. They manifest their readiness to learn from one another. Coming to know the richness of Eastern theology and liturgy we learn to understand the otherness of the Christian East in what constitutes the very core of its spirituality – in living the entire paschal mystery of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

It is in the death and resurrection of Christ that God has broken the historical mechanism of mutual enmity among people and introduced into the world a new energy of reconciliation. We are not doomed to live in alienation, antagonism and rivalry. The Gospel of Christ educates all of us to openness, benevolence and mutual understanding. The Christian Eucharist is a privileged place of the powerful divine pedagogy which transforms human life and creates new relationships between people. Liturgy can be an effective school of sensitivity to the richness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Thanks to this richness it is easier to maintain hope that the walls of separation do not reach to heaven and that God is for all, the truly ecumenical God.

The striking formulation of the Epilogue's title is taken from the Divine, i.e. the Eucharistic, Liturgy of the Eastern Church. It opens the eyes of our spirit to the presence of the saving power of the Spirit in our world. Through the witness of the Christian East we learn to discover the mystery of salvation in our daily lives. The Eastern tradition makes us sensitive to the continuing presence and action of the Holy Spirit. One of the texts after the so-called Great Entrance of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom reveals an unusual insight: "The same Spirit will act with us all the days of our life" (*Autó tó Pneûma sylleitourgēsei hēmin pásas tás hēméras tēs zōēs hēmōn*).

The word *syllleitourgēsei* could also be translated in the sense that the Spirit will "co-operate" with us, or that he will act and "minister" with us. This word is an expression of the great promise: the Divine Spirit will "celebrate together with us" also the liturgy of our daily lives. He will be present not only in the Eucharistic liturgy but also in our existence as a whole. It is he, as Scripture says, who comes to help us in our human weakness: "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Rom 8:26). The divine power of the Spirit makes present the whole mystery of our salvation. Thanks to him we do not forget about the Gospel of Christ which is our inestimable treasure and especially about the need to forgive and be reconciled. All this is a very characteristic feature of Christian spirituality.

The Forgotten God?

In our thinking about God we should not be pusillanimous, shallow and narrow-minded. Already in the 4th century St Basil the Great warned believers of this danger. To him we owe a deep and wise encouragement addressed to those who want to speak about God:

In thinking about God do not be pusillanimous (*Me mikròn peri Theou phroneite*), but reflect with a great mind (*megále te dianoia*) on what concerns him, so speak of divine things (*theologeite*) that also those who are far from salvation can hear your word because of the perspicacity of your teaching.¹

These words come from Basil's commentary on the Book of Isaiah, through whom God conveyed a moving warning: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Is 55:8). In our religious thinking we tend to ascribe to God our own representations, images and ideas. We speak then about him in a very human way, often attributing to him what diminishes his greatness and love, or even insults him. In our thinking about God we need not only a great mind, but also a great heart. Narrow-mindedness and pusillanimity distort the face of God. Thanks to the perspicacity of our teaching we can also reach those who, as Basil says, are "far from salvation". How can we believe someone who has not been inwardly convinced? How can we believe not having encountered a convincing witness and deep spirituality in another believer?

All this is needed when we dare to speak about the presence and action of God's Spirit in the world. According to a common conviction, the Holy Spirit is indeed the most "Forgotten God". Some would even say that in our Western religiosity he still remains "the Cinderella of the Godhead". Many Christians miss out on God's presence and power through the Holy Spirit, who in fact desires so much to act in our daily lives. Christians cannot attain maturity without a life lived in and led by the Spirit. For this reason I did not intend to write this book only for theoretical and scholarly purposes. My aim was also to show the need of experiencing the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our human lives and in the world. Doctrine and life have to go hand in hand.

Christian tradition uses the word "mystery" (from the Greek: *mysterion*) not only in relation to what is enigmatic, hidden, secret and incomprehensible, but also to what has been revealed and given to our inner experience. What is mysterious cannot be fully and adequately understood. Mystery leads us into the depth of the ineffable reality of God. Our spiritual

¹ *Comment. in Isaiam prophetam* XII,253. PG 30,565.

eyes may be open, but they cannot grasp the invisible reality, and in this sense will remain closed (this expresses the Greek verb *myéō*, which means to initiate somebody into the secret of something while covering his eyes).²

Religious mystery is something amazing, astonishing, and worthy of admiration. It is beyond the realm of ordinary things known to us and comprehensible. It is precisely this lack of ordinariness, familiarity, and homeliness that makes us uncertain, surprised and astonished in the face of mystery. What fascinates us may at the same time shake and fill us with respect mixed with fear and wonder. That is why Rudolf Otto once spoke about *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. We can rationalize our experiences and try to explain the mystery, but we remain only partially successful. Our theories and explanations are only approximations. Their task is to encourage us to think for ourselves.

Belief in the force of human intellect and confidence in the unlimited possibilities of science make many of our contemporaries think that there is no place at all left for mystery and religious faith. But the hard fact is that faith must coexist with the shadow of its own mystery. Followers of aprioristic rationalism are unable to reconcile this fact. They can ill afford the needed modesty of the spirit which is proper to any genuine faith and spirituality. In actual fact we remain in large measure helpless when facing the richness and variety of reality surrounding the universe. We have to acknowledge the limits of our possibilities. The question is not to resign unwisely from any pursuit of the truth. Christian faith and spirituality teach us how to use our reason critically. But we should not a priori exclude the wise attitude of the *original trust* in the deep meaning of reality (Carl Gustav Jung rightly spoke about the *Urvertrauen*). This confidence goes hand in hand with the ability to wonder, to be astonished, to think and to contemplate.

Truth Related to Hope

The notion of faith and truth has a significant reference to the future. A Christian is not a person who has already reached "the fullness of truth". Every one of us is on the way to a greater and unknown reality which evades adequate comprehension. We live in a world of metaphors, comparisons and images. Therefore many questions arise. What we only partially experience is the promise of greater fulfillment.

This is the fundamental shape of faith, which did not change when Christ came into the world. His Spirit will guide believers „in all truth”, or, according to other codices, “into all the truth” (Jn 16: 13). Christians are not owners of the truth. We are all heading towards the revelation of Truth in

² In its more original meaning the verb *myéō* meant closing the eyes or mouth. It relates to the fact that in some religions those who had to be initiated were lead blindfold through a labyrinth of passages. Only later on could they see with their own eyes the secret symbols and cultic actions.

its ultimate fullness. By its very nature truth is related to hope. It is the truth of hope yearning for ultimate fulfillment. We can see this eschatological orientation of truth in Christ himself. He is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14: 6). Not accidentally the notion of truth has been juxtaposed here with the image of a way leading to a concrete destination. Christ is the promise of ever greater fulfillment. So too with the Holy Spirit: “But when the Spirit of truth comes he will lead you to the complete truth” (Jn 16:13). Truth carries on the promise and the warmth of hope. Its essential characteristic is openness towards a future greater than we can express with our imagination, words or ideas. His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I wrote recently:

Hope is essential for life. Just as the body cannot live without oxygen and the soul cannot live without faith, life cannot exist without hope. And there is always hope. Religious people know that hope is a divine gift. It is the affirmation of meaning in life and the resistance against despair. (...) Even when everything around us appears to contradict the hope that lies within us, by the grace of God, the sun will always rise and the depth of the night’s darkness will give way to the day’s sunlight.³

In the face of Ultimate Truth we are all equal. For we know „only partially” (1 Cor 13: 9.12). A part calls for the whole which here, on earth, can be expressed only in the language of hope. Therefore, truth has, so to speak, an “elpidic” character (Greek: *elpis* = hope). How much should we appreciate and enjoy this partial perception of truth if it is a promise and hope for greater fulfillment! We misuse religion by talking about already possessing the whole “fullness of truth”. For the sake of brotherhood in the Church and in ecumenical dialogue with other religions, let us be more modest and cautious! Coexistence of different ways of understanding and of expressing the truth is something beneficial to all of us. Diversity of human paths to God is a real blessing.

This relation between truth and hope is one of the forgotten pages of the Gospel. We often forget the eschatological distance between our perception of truth and its relation to ultimate fullness. Here I can see the basic reason for doctrinairism in the Church, which poisons or even destroys the atmosphere of brotherhood and mutual trust. When Jesus says of himself that He is the Truth, He means that God’s Truth itself seizes us and communicates with us. He calls us and leads us to Himself. Moreover, He creates relations between persons. He is a normative truth for personal relationships and human brotherhood.

³ Bartholomew I, *Encountering the Mystery: Perennial Values of the Orthodox Church*, New York 2008, p. 230,236.

The Holy Spirit and the Ecumenical Desiderata

Christian churches are not free from doctrinarian tendencies, which lead to a phenomenon that one Protestant bishop has called a "captivity of doctrine"⁴. This results in a religious doctrine that causes deep conflicts of conscience, limits and paralyses the possibility to act for the well-being of others. The parable of the Good Samaritan is not only a warning about the lack of compassion for a human being in need. It is also a warning about enslavement to countless norms and regulations. Sticking firmly to a doctrine may overshadow some more important matters. Let us assume that a priest and a Levite traveled to the temple in Jerusalem to exercise their religious ministry. A wounded man by the road might give no sign of life. He could have been taken for a dead person. Approaching him meant contracting a ritual impurity and excluded the possibility of performing any religious duties for seven days until purification. These were the Old Testament prescriptions (see Lev 21:1; Num 5:2-3; Ez 44:25-26).

It was not so much the priest or the Levite who were guilty of negligence towards the wounded man. The religious system was also to blame for putting them in conflict with their conscience: whether to hurry along to perform their duties in the temple or to stop and help the man and go through a seven day purification rite, thus excluding them from the possibility of performing their official functions. Being faithful to their doctrines and precepts, they preferred to stay away from the man in need. It was a Samaritan, perceived by the Jews as an apostate and heretic, who showed mercy. In many cases this is a forgotten chapter of the Gospel.

We become prisoners of our denominational doctrines, differences and divergences. I do not hesitate to think that in the course of past centuries Christianity was becoming more and more doctrinaire. Doctrinairism is born out of a narrow and apprehensive understanding of truth and out of a mistrust of the presence of God's Spirit in the world. The very spirit of Christ's Gospel was often blinded by a concern to remain faithful to a particular doctrine. Is it not proved by the continuous conflicts and disputes about the possibility of salvation among particular denominational churches? Let us add to this the continuous controversies about truth and power in the Church, and we will get the picture of a dramatic situation in which the Christian faith in the world is often marked by the hostility and hatred of Christ's followers. Uncompromising adherence to a doctrine and its requirements may overshadow the most important things in religious life. A good example of this is the controversial issue of the *Filioque* to which a special attention was paid in our reflections.

Having become more and more doctrinaire Christianity drifted away from a doxological understanding of dogma in the early Church.

⁴ Bp Z. Tranda. *W niewoli doktryny*. „Gazeta Wyborcza” (3), 4-5 January, 1997, p. 17.

Some ecclesiastical doctrines require a significant correction. At the turn of the second and third millennia, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, it was often said that the need to confess sins related to errors in the past is inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel. Pope John Paul II wrote with regret in his apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994) about painful chapters in history to which the Church “must return with a spirit of repentance”. One of such chapters is “the acquiescence given, especially in certain centuries, to intolerance and even the use of violence in the service of truth” (35). It was an appeal directed to all believers to “purify themselves, through repentance, of past errors and instances of infidelity, inconsistency, and negligence”. This appeal originated in a conviction that “acknowledging the weaknesses of the past is an act of honesty and courage which helps us to strengthen our faith” (33). There were sins which “have been detrimental to the unity willed by God for his People” (34). Painful experiences of the past were to become „a lesson drawn for the future” (35), and a call for an examination of conscience today.

It cannot be forgotten that many wrong attitudes were based on doctrinal principles and presuppositions. They have to undergo a profound and critical reflection to correct our attitude towards other churches, beliefs and different cultures, towards women and the right of all people to freedom and dignity. Many traditional interpretations set up claims for a monopoly on truth. They wanted to be regarded as the only correct ones in presenting the necessary means of salvation. Today we have to rethink the predominant theological trends used in the past to justify the right to invade, to conquer other peoples and to destroy their “pagan” religions. For many centuries Christian theology was a powerful ideological support to Western colonialism. It understood the mission of the Church as a concern about the salvation of “infidels”, achieved by converting them to the Church also with help of colonial conquerors.

I am convinced that raising such issues can be a sign of a well understood loyalty to the Church, inspired by faith in the action of the Holy Spirit and trust in God. The most painful questions should be answered clearly and calmly. Meanwhile all present efforts related to the necessary “purification” and conversion of the Church remain in the sphere of ethics broadly understood. They do not concern ecclesial doctrine as such. It is obvious that ethically oriented self-criticism is a significant step indeed, but it is not enough for the work of reconciliation. Ecclesial doctrines require correction and rectification. This postulate belongs today to ecumenical *desiderata*. It indicates the important task of ecumenical hermeneutics. As long as self-criticism and self-purification are limited only to the ethical sphere, they will remain partial and insufficient, deprived of decisive influence on the development of ecumenism.

Docta Spes Futuri

Reflection on the presence of God's Spirit in the world directs our hope towards the future of Christianity. The question of the future stimulates our mind, heart and imagination. Memory puts before our eyes the image of a past millennium with its greatest divisions still not cured. The century of ecumenism ventured a persistent attempt to put an end to the process of disintegration. The second millennium has handed down to the third the difficult task of reconciling Christians. Many important steps have been made, "fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit".⁵ The slow historical process of integrating Christian consciousness and overcoming confessional barriers has been initiated. Dialogue, a method unknown in the past or completely ignored, has become an irreplaceable instrument of understanding and reconciliation. We learn to live by the spiritual experience of all Christianity, both West and East. The ecumenical process of exchanging spiritual gifts is only in its initial stages. The spirituality of mutual recognition and reception of spiritual values has become one of the greatest ecumenical imperatives.

Christian East and West constitute divided parts of one spiritual world which long ago was just one *orbis christianus*, one Christian *oikoumene*. When we remain alien to each other, we only enlarge the extent of our division within ourselves. Diversity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, thanks to which we may enrich our own understanding of the Gospel of Christ. The future of Christian faith and spirituality requires a new mystagogy, open to the spiritual universalism of the Gospel. This is a mystagogy which reflects the paschal wisdom of Christ's kenosis and constantly reminds us of the need for epiclesis of the Spirit. The universalism of the Gospel manifests the universalism of the Kingdom of God which is open to everyone and stirs up in all of us a longing for harmony and reconciliation.

The Christianity of tomorrow will depend in large measure on the course and quality of the development of ecumenical dialogue. It seems that we are making our way towards greater simplicity and concentration on the essentials – on what is most important in the Christian experience of God, the human person, the Church and the world. Unknown are the shapes of that ecumenical synthesis which the future will bring to the Church of Christ and to his Spirit. It is a laborious task for many generations.

History has deeply ploughed the soil of our churches. We have been enriched by new, very often painful, experiences. We are not anymore in the period of the incessant separation of denominations. The century of ecumenism has implanted a sincere desire for reconciliation. Thanks to ecumenism we overcome slowly, and not without resistance, the feeling of mutual alienation which grew throughout centuries of division. There is more and more interest in the spiritual world of other Christians and other

⁵ The Second Vatican Council, *Decree on Ecumenism*, 1.

religions. We want to know how others live, pray, search for God on their journey to him, how they invoke him with thanksgiving or in need, how they praise him. We come to know new horizons in order to participate more fully in what constitutes the greatness and spiritual beauty of our faith.

In spite of all obstacles and inconsistencies, ecumenical aspirations change gradually the historical image of Christianity. We have become more aware of the need to mutually acknowledge otherness and diversity in religious life. We also learn to appreciate openness and tolerance as modern virtues. Because of ecumenism, many today have already become, even without their knowing it, Christians of the future. But nobody is able to discern today the face of Christianity in the forthcoming centuries of the third millennium. Faith does not give us such a prophetic vision. We have to rely on the witness of hope which suggests, amidst uncertainties and fears, certain thoughts and expectations. This is, however, only a "learned hope" for a better future (*docta spes futuri*) that goes hand in hand with a "learned ignorance of the future" (*docta ignoratia futuri*).

Facing the future we all feel a certain helplessness, uneasiness, and perplexity. The distant future cannot be foreseen, gotten under control and realized according to our wishes. There is in it something that evades human expectations, calculations and plans. In some measure, the present day is already a preparation for tomorrow, and sometimes even its anticipation. But in fact the future as such does not allow us to have it at our disposal. It is mysterious, evasive, imperceptible and full of surprises in the unexpected development of events. It is a future entrusted to our human freedom which, in the past proved so often irresponsible and unpredictable. But we believe and hope that history is in the hands of God and his Spirit, who have the last word.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Dr. **Waclaw Hryniewicz** OMI, born on July 23, 1936 in Lomazy near Biala Podlaska (Eastern Poland); 1960 ordained priest in the Congregation of Oblate Fathers; 1966 doctor's degree in dogmatic theology at the Catholic University of Lublin (CUL), dissertation: *Soteriological Significance of the Resurrection of Christ in the Teaching of Contemporary Catholic Theologians*; 1968-1970 scientific research in Louvain, Paris, London and Rome; 1974 post-graduate promotion ("Habilitation") on the basis of a study on *The Role of Tradition in Theological Interpretation*. One of the founders of the Ecumenical Institute at CUL, since 1983 head of the Department of Orthodox Theology at this Institute; 1980-2005 member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church; since 1988 member of the European Society for Ecumenical Research "Societas Oecumenica"; 1997-2005 director of the Ecumenical Institute at CUL; for many years member of the advisory board of "Eastern Churches Journal" (Fairfax, Virginia, USA). 1998-2000 he was a member of the drafting committee preparing the text of the *Charta Oecumenica: Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among the Churches in Europe*, officially signed by the Presidents of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and of the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) in Strasbourg on April 22, 2001.

Lectures abroad: in Switzerland, Germany, France, Austria, United States and Belgium. He has participated in, and organized many international symposia and ecumenical conferences.

Research work on Christian paschal theology, theology of hope, universalism of salvation, Old-Russian theology and ecumenical issues. Inspired by the tradition of Eastern Christianity he has been developing an ecumenical theology open to other Christian denominations and other religions, a theology looking for ways of reconciliation of Churches, nations and cultures.

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Waclaw Hryniewicz has also published more than nine hundred articles in professional journals and collective studies, most of them in Polish, and more than 170 in foreign languages.

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THE COUNCIL FOR RESEARCH IN VALUES AND PHILOSOPHY

PURPOSE

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Studies in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

PROJECTS

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. *Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life*. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. *Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues*. This series of 10 week crosscultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. *Joint-Colloquia* with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. *Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development*. A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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