

# THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY MICHAEL WELKER

*"The one upon whom Yahweh's spirit rests is described as one who executes justice and righteousness in favor of the lowly and the poor, and who precisely in that manner acquires great power, who precisely in that manner builds strong loyal attachments."*

**T**HE Holy Spirit is perhaps the most difficult person of the Trinity to conceive. It is hard even to say what one is talking about when one speaks of the Holy Spirit. The identity of the Holy Spirit is elusive, to say the least. Is it even comprehensible?

The Nicene Creed, setting the standard for many other confessional writings, calls the Holy Spirit "the Lord . . . who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified." But what are the Creed and the doctrinal traditions which follow it referring to when they speak of the Holy Spirit as *personal*? How can we understand the Holy Spirit as personal if, in accordance with the leading contemporary doctrinal traditions, the Spirit is regarded as the bond of peace or the bond of love between the Father and the Son? How can we understand the Spirit as personal if we regard the Spirit, still more abstractly, as relation—relation between the other two persons of the Trinity and, likewise, between God and human beings?

The difficult question concerning the sense in which the Holy Spirit could be understood as personal becomes considerably more complicated when we recognize that insights into the identity of the Holy Spirit must at the same time give insights into the *realism* of God's presence. In the Holy Spirit, God becomes present to human beings. In the Holy Spirit, the communication of human beings with God becomes reality. Consequently, any doctrine of the Holy Spirit has the responsibility of comprehending the "effective presence of the triune God in the life of the congregation as well as in the life of the individual members."<sup>1</sup> Still more striking is Karl Barth's formulation in *Church Dogmatics* that "God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, . . . is God Himself, so far as He cannot

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<sup>1</sup>Thus Paul Jacobs, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften in Grundzügen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1959), p. 99.

only come to human beings, but be in them, and so open up human beings for Himself, make them ready and capable."<sup>2</sup> Oepke Noordmans has spoken explicitly of the "realism of the Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

How can we simultaneously comprehend the Holy Spirit as personal, as a relation or even a network of relations, *and* as condition and fulfillment of the realistic presence of God? This complex of problems poses considerable difficulties to our understanding. Once the challenge is made clear, it is no wonder if, in the end, the only determinate claim made about the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit is indeterminate. Who can complain if we simply fall back on John 3:8: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit."

But we shall not take refuge in such vagueness. Instead, we shall chart a path that enables us to recognize the increasing determinacy of the statements by which biblical traditions witness to the Holy Spirit. Moreover, we shall provide a way of *conceiving* the impossibility of stereotyping those who have been born of the Spirit. We shall not content ourselves with the sigh: "God is nigh/And hard to grasp."

New insights for systematic theology frequently arise from the traditions of both the New and the Old Testaments. Systematic homogeneity and unbroken continuity need not be attributed to the complex of biblical traditions, but there are systems of connections—even to the very boundaries of canon formation—that make it possible to understand the contents of faith in accord with their many-faceted richness. This approach also proves itself with regard to the task of comprehending the identity of the Holy Spirit.

We shall begin by unfolding Old Testament presuppositions, in whose perspectives the basic traits of the activity of the Spirit can be illuminated. On the basis of these insights, we turn to the forgiveness of sins, showing why this is one of the central themes of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Next, we shall seek to clarify the difficult phenomenon of the descent and outpouring of the Spirit. Finally, we will be ready to consider the personhood of the Spirit.

## I

Claus Westermann pointed out that we first encounter a "fixed, clearly defined, and abundantly attested use" of the word *ruah*, "spirit," in the Old Testament "in the time of Judges in the context of charismatic leadership."<sup>4</sup> Two texts clearly present the dynamic of the working of the spirit.

<sup>2</sup>*Church Dogmatics I/1*, p. 5f. (Retranslated to provide the inclusive language in the original.)

<sup>3</sup>*Das Evangelium des Geistes* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1960), p. 46ff. Cf. also Eduard Schweizer, *Heiliger Geist* (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1978), p. 16f. [*The Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980)].

<sup>4</sup>C. Westermann, "Geist im Alten Testament," *EvTh* 41 (1981), pp. 223ff., 225.

Judges 3:7ff. reports that Israel, after it has fallen away from Yahweh, comes under foreign domination. Judges 3:9f. says: "The Israelites cried out to the LORD, and the LORD raised a champion for the Israelites to deliver them: Othniel the Kenizzite, a younger kinsman of Caleb. The spirit of the LORD descended upon him and he became Israel's chieftain. He went out to war. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Yahweh gives the foreign king into Othniel's hands, and Israel has, as it says, "peace for forty years."

The report in I Samuel 11 likewise takes as its starting point a situation of collective powerlessness. The Ammonites are laying siege to the East Jordanian city of Jabesh-Gilead. Its inhabitants are ready to undergo subjection to Ammon: "Make a pact with us, and we will serve you." In response, the king of the Ammonites informs them: "I will make a pact with you on this condition, that everyone's right eye be gouged out; I will make this a humiliation for all Israel." Horrified, the city sends out messengers in search of a deliverer. They come to Saul and tell him of their distress and of the threatening danger. At that point, I Sam. 11:6f. says: "When he heard these things, the spirit of God gripped Saul and his anger blazed up. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them into pieces, which he sent by messengers throughout the territory of Israel with the warning, 'Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul . . . into battle!' Terror from the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man." It seems almost unnecessary to call attention to the fact that Saul routs the Ammonites (I Sam. 11:11).

Both these as well as similar stories (cf. Judges 6:34 and 11:29) report the *descent of God's spirit*, which enables the people of Israel to regain its capacity for action in emergency situations. In dire straits, which are recognized but appear to be unavoidable, a particular person successfully *restores solidarity, loyalty, and capacity for common action* among the people. It is said of this person that the spirit of God came over him or fell upon him, or that he was clothed with the spirit of God. The bearer of the spirit leads Israel out of the situation of fear, lament, and despairing paralysis. The atmosphere is one of "run for your lives," but "they came out as one."

At the same time, the accounts insist that the person upon whom the spirit has come is and remains a human being, not some supernatural being. Mention is made of ancestral lineage and family relations, as well as of subsequent death. The process of securing loyalty may well involve a blatant threat ("Thus shall be done to the cattle of anyone who does not follow Saul into battle"). And the entire event which is bound up with the descent of the spirit can have personally painful consequences for the one upon whom the spirit comes. The spirit of God comes upon Jephthah, and he leads the Israelites to victory over the Ammonites.

<sup>5</sup>Except where otherwise noted, Old Testament citations are from Tanakh, while New Testament citations are from the RSV.

Connected with this event, however, he loses his only daughter (cf. Judges 11:30ff.).

Those upon whom the spirit comes restore public unity and the capacity to act in a situation of acute or chronic need among the people. In I Sam. 11, this restoration takes place by means of an armed contest, but it need not. The securing of public loyalty is effected more subtly in other stories. The most difficult of these are the Samson stories (Judges 13–16). They repeatedly emphasize that “the spirit of God fell upon Samson.” What is the spirit of God doing? It comes upon the hero of a series of fabulous stories—a hero who at one moment is presented as a strong and crafty escape artist and lion-tamer; at another, as an unsavory he-man and fomenter of unrest. The stories make no effort to present Samson as an attractive hero. He is a braggart and a provocateur. He alienates his parents by marrying a Philistine, who adheres to her own people rather than to him. He is apparently incapable of learning how to stay out of various scrapes, competitions, and deceitful tricks involving the Philistines, who, according to Judges 14:4b, are ruling over Israel at the time. Yet this very Samson, it is repeatedly said, was driven about by the spirit of Yahweh. The spirit of God came down upon him.

The Samson stories are reactions to the chronic danger posed to Israel by the Philistines. Siegfried Herrmann has provided a striking description. The taking of land by the Philistines

had preceded that of the Israelites. . . . On the west side of the Israelite territory, in its entire extension coming from the coastal plain, an organized power was gradually built up which pushed its outposts eastward all the way to the mountains. There they necessarily clashed with the Israelites. . . . The charismatic leadership was no longer equal to such a powerful and ongoing danger.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, how are we to understand the “fabulous” reaction of the Samson tradition, which arose “in the immediate environs of . . . Zora (today sar à, 23 km. west of Jerusalem)?”<sup>7</sup>

A military contest is not an option against the superior Philistines,<sup>8</sup> nor is a laissez-faire policy of assimilation. In this situation, the Samson stories present the *difficult dialectic of accommodation and distancing*. Samson’s life and his deeds become the official expression of Israel’s preservation of its identity until a time comes that would be more conducive to liberation. Samson mediates a double lesson: On the one hand, stay with your own people; do not get mixed up with the Philistines, who are devious and brutal. On the other hand, remember that the Philistine may be strong, but the Israelite is stronger; the Philistine is clever, but the Israelite is more so. The change of identity

<sup>6</sup>*Geschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit*, 2. Aufl. (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1973), p. 169f. [*A History of Israel in Old Testament Times*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981)].

<sup>7</sup>H. Gese, “Simson,” *RGG*, 3. Aufl., Bd. 6, pp. 41ff., 42.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *ibid.*

from Samson the simple-minded dupe to Samson the possessor of superior strength and cleverness goes along with the formation of a differentiated position of public distancing over against the Philistines: Steer clear of the Philistines, they are dangerous and cunning and are liable to kill. But if an encounter is unavoidable, do not be afraid of them. We are superior to them, if the spirit of God be with us. The ropes of their snares are but strings; one of us can take on a thousand of them.

Without getting into the fantastic exaggerations of the Samson stories, the complex double identity of Samson as the spirit comes upon him provokes the recognition that the early testimonies to the activity of God's spirit are unclear and open to misunderstanding. Ambiguities persist even where a pattern of the spirit's activity can be distinguished. Thus, several texts simply reflect the fact that the witnesses are at a loss in the face of the bizarre transformations that affect a person clearly in the grasp of God's spirit (e.g., I Sam. 19).

The lack of clarity and the ambivalence in the accounts of the spirit's activity are, however, eventually removed. The activity attributed to the bearer of the spirit attains to clearer determinacy, and the spirit of God appears in a way that is definitive. The three most important texts that document this development are found in the Isaianic traditions.

But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse,  
A twig shall sprout from his stock.  
The spirit of the LORD shall alight upon him. . . .  
He shall not judge by what his eyes behold,  
Nor decide by what his ears perceive.  
Thus he shall judge the poor with equity  
And decide with justice for the lowly of the land (Isa. 11:1ff.).

The earliest of Israel's legal codes available to us today already perceived this preferential option for the poor and the lowly in the land as an element of the law. Along with regulations that serve the settlement of legal conflicts, and along with provisions concerning cultic practice, we also find in the law stipulations that have as their content a renunciation of claims for the sake of the poor and the weak. What comes into play here are those stipulations of the law that concern the practice of mercy.

Stipulations that concern legal practice, cultic life, and the practice of mercy together form the functional complex of God's law.<sup>9</sup> To practice mercy is to renounce, in favor of the weak and the disadvantaged, direct maximization of one's own concrete prosperity. As an element of the law, the practice of mercy is supposed to be withdrawn from the domain of merely individual and contingent attitudes. Mercy is to become routine. The result is to be the same as legal regulation is intended to accomplish for judicial process and cultic life.

<sup>9</sup>See M. Welker, "Security of Expectations: Reformulating the Theology of Law and Gospel," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986), p. 237ff.

The early writing prophets make clear that where mercy is lacking, the other elements of the law (the judicial and cultic elements) also degenerate. When Israel does not maintain its sensitivity with regard to the poor and the weak in its midst, it begins to misuse cultic life and to twist the judicial process. That leads to the disruption, collapse, and destruction of the entire society. By contrast, *that society grows stronger in all its functional aspects which allows its poor and its outsiders, with the help of the law of mercy, to reach the general level of the economic, social, and judicial processes of communication and exchange.*

The charismatic leaders, upon whom the spirit of God came, gathered Israel in a situation of *external danger*. They restored Israel's capacity for externally directed solidarity and action. The bearer of the spirit who figures in the accounts given by the texts that now concern us, the bearer of the spirit upon whom the spirit of Yahweh is supposed to rest, overcomes a situation of *internal danger* for Israel.

The danger consists in the open or creeping erosion of an order that does not continually regenerate itself with regard to the weak and the outsiders, and that does not continually procure fresh loyalty. The one upon whom Yahweh's spirit rests is described as one who executes justice and righteousness in favor of the lowly and the poor, and who precisely in that manner acquires great power, who precisely in that manner builds strong loyal attachments.

We find this same connection in Second and Third Isaiah. The spirit of Yahweh remains upon the one who powerfully extends and executes the justice of the law in favor of the poor and the weak.

This is My servant, whom I uphold.  
 My chosen one, in whom I delight.  
 I have put My spirit upon him. . . .  
 He shall teach the true way to the nations.  
 He shall not break even a bruised reed,  
 Or snuff out even a dim wick.  
 He shall bring forth the true way (Isa. 42:1, 3).

The text is explicit that the bearer of the spirit does not choose the usual strategies for obtaining political power and loyalty: "He shall not cry out or shout aloud, / Or make his voice heard in the streets" (Isa. 42:2).<sup>10</sup> The servant preserves the endangered and the vulnerable. For that very reason, his judgment is sought out and yearned for. Indeed, he attains universal attention; there is a universal readiness to accept him. He shall extend his judgment to the peoples and into the most remote corners of the world: "And the coastlands shall await his teaching" (Isa. 42:4).

In Isa. 61:1ff., we encounter for the third time talk of the spirit of

<sup>10</sup>I owe this most important insight to Patrick D. Miller, Jr., namely, that the text does not talk at all about the usual way of achieving public loyalty by a victim. The servant achieves universal loyalty without any reinforcement by any public as such (that is, without any support by a political or moral power-structure). This has far-reaching consequences for the emergence of the universal public that is centered on the servant and characterized by the freedom and sensitivity of its individual participants.

Yahweh resting upon the one who is sent to bring good news to the poor and to proclaim a year of liberation from slavery.<sup>11</sup> Compared with the other texts, there is a more explicit description here of the great power of the people in whom justice is established by the bearer of the spirit. This *justice receives its dynamic power from the practice of mercy*, and in turn empowers the people in a way that both radiates outward and attracts others to them. This people will be called “‘terebinths of saving justice,’/planted by Yahweh for the divine glory” (Isa. 61:3).<sup>12</sup> The social order of this people attracts foreign peoples, who, without compulsion, turn to the God of Israel (see Isa. 61:6). That leads to politically and even economically positive repercussions for that people which demonstrates exemplary justice, mediating judicial right and the practice of mercy.

By demonstrating a judicial order compatible with the practice of mercy—an order which, in fact, receives its dynamic power from the practice of mercy—a people enjoys more than just internal stability of great vitality and integrative capacity. It also radiates the glory of God externally. It wins the foreign peoples for itself and for its God. In this light, it is important to notice that this text, Isa. 61, is one that Jesus applies to himself in Lk. 4:16ff. And Mt. 12:18ff. explicitly connects Isa. 42 to Jesus and his activity. Jesus is the bearer of the spirit who, in the so-called messianic texts of the Isaianic traditions, still remains individually indeterminate. He is the one on whom the spirit of Yahweh rests and remains. What does that mean? Does Jesus prove to be a symbolic figure around which crystallize political or quasi-political programs that have undertaken to connect judicial right and morality and to build an exemplary social order? And is the bringing to life and carrying out of such a program—worthy of all honor, sympathetic support, and committed involvement—the work of the Holy Spirit?

## II

The way the early charismatic leaders restored loyalty, solidarity, and capacity for action among the people could in fact hardly be distinguished from the usual political and military strategies for procuring loyalty. The bearer of the spirit, on whom God’s spirit rests, explicitly distances himself from the traditional, accustomed forms for generating public attention and procuring political loyalty. Isa. 11:1ff. uses the picture of a chopped-down tree to describe the annihilation of the Davidic dynasty and the radical destruction of the previous constitution of political life. The text describes, that is, the historical and political break in the continuity of the life of the people. The bearer of the spirit must start anew, from the ground up, like the sprout which grows out of a stump after a forest has been leveled.

In explicit opposition to the expected political forms for procuring

<sup>11</sup>This would be the place to look for the first biblical foundations of a way of talking about the Holy Spirit in terms of liberation theology.

<sup>12</sup>*The New Jerusalem Bible*, trans. altered.

public attention and loyalty, Isa. 42 also specifies the power that radiates from the bearer of the spirit. A slave—not a king—brings judicial right to the peoples. In doing so, he explicitly renounces the customary ways of arousing and binding public attention. He does not “make his voice heard in the streets.” Mt. 12:18ff. makes clear reference to Isa. 42 in formulating Jesus’ repeated prohibition against making his identity publicly known. Measured by all standards of political success, Jesus fails. Only after his failure, only after even the last of those faithful to him have abandoned him, shall there be no boundaries to his identity becoming public. Only then shall his identity be known without limit throughout the public sphere.

What is behind this emphatic separation from strategies for procuring political and public loyalty? Why does the bearer of the spirit so sharply reject the implementation strategies of all movements of political and moral renewal? How are we to understand the presuppositions and the patterns of behavior that are defined in opposition to political success? What can we make of conceptions that seem to call into question the realistic quality of the activity of the spirit? The answer is that the activity of Jesus Christ, on whom God’s spirit rests, is directed toward the forgiveness of sins, redemption from the power of sin.

From the start, Jesus’ activity moves on a level and in a situation in which the requisite private and public conditions for establishing justice in all its glory are simply not given. It is a situation in which one cannot even presuppose an effective will for improvement. There is no solidarity, no readiness to demonstrate loyalty, no legal sensitivity.

A powerful sign of the great crisis of our culture, and of Christian faith and Christian theology, is the fact that we are no longer capable of understanding the phenomena of sin and the forgiveness of sin. We seem to live in a thoroughly moralized culture, which lumps all types of erroneous behavior together by making them the object of a process of universal moral perception and communication. Deeds are measured on a scale that runs from “evil” to “more evil,” from “bad” to “worse.” Those who do not wish to accept the limitations of that scale, who insist on specifying particular deeds and patterns of behavior as “sin,” cannot hold out against a public opinion formed and continually reformed in our universally moralized culture. Whoever talks about “sin” is suspected of being either a religious functionary who compulsively insists on denying that the world has come of age, or a self-proclaimed super-moralist. However, the battles with those parties have already been fought. As a rule, the expression “sinful” is used today mainly for the slightly excessive consumption of sweets or alcoholic beverages, which, on the basis of either general reasonableness or a doctor’s advice, one actually should have left off. That is, talk about sin has become incomprehensible and lost its function.

According to the Biblical traditions, however, sin is not just any instance of an evil deed, and certainly not one which is as easy to regulate or to leave off as a piece of cream torte or a second glass of



liqueur. *Sin is, rather, any action or any spreading infection of the sinner's environment which, beyond any immediate wrong that it does, destroys the foundations for positive behavior and prospects for changes in behavior and in the way influence is exercised.* Sin perverts and destroys the forces that render possible a renewal of orientation, not only for the agent but also for the agent's environment.

This is why, according to the Bible, the fundamental form of sin is idolatry, which nullifies the relation with the living God. That means nothing other than that, through sin, human beings are cut off from the source of the renewal of the relations of human life. Through sin, human beings close themselves off to that source; and they block the access of others to it as well. Sin issues in *the destruction of the foundations of regeneration.* Thus, it is a deceitful power, from whose web one cannot be freed by one's own efforts. Because of this, it is senseless simply to bombard sinful human beings with moral appeals and sanctions. Sinful human beings must be seen in their situation of desperate need, a situation which each of us has admittedly helped to bring about, but which has gone out of control. The sinner is a human being who is suffering or threatened by suffering; if not subjectively, then at least objectively.

It may be that we can again become more sensitive to the phenomenon of sin. In ever more pressing and oppressing ways, we experience the fact that we have produced and continue to produce natural and cultural environments that have eminently negative repercussions.<sup>13</sup> Witness the destruction of the global climate by the clearing of the rain forests, and the long-term destruction of the social climate by unemployment, especially among black youth. Everyone shares responsibility for such developments, yet no one wants them; everyone laments them, yet no one thinks he or she can change them. Accordingly, they give us occasion to pose anew the question of the destructive logic of sin.

Liberation from sin is brought by the bearer of the spirit, Jesus Christ, who intercedes prior to the level of our capacity for betterment, be it moral or whatever. That liberation intercedes *before* the forces of public capacity for renewal can be put to the test—and fail. Concretely, Jesus acts to forgive sin by, in the first instance, healing the sick and driving out demons (that is, forces that impair a human being in individually and socially living out his or her life; forces that harm a human being and his or her comrades, endanger them and destroy them, but which neither the one possessed nor those nearby can avert). When Jesus cures the sick or drives out demons, he intercedes in situations in which we see ourselves condemned to helplessness and feel ourselves paralyzed; where

<sup>13</sup>Cf. N. Luhmann, *Ökologische Kommunikation. Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen?* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986); M. Welker, "The Self-Jeopardizing of Human Societies and Whitehead's Conception of Peace," *Soundings* LXX (1987), p. 309ff.; *Kirche ohne Kurs? Aus Anlass der EKD-Studie "Christsein gestalten"* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1987), esp. pp. 29ff. and 72ff.

patience is of no avail and time does not heal; where the empty phrases by which we seek to assuage and encourage stick in our throat; where one lives between a sense of powerlessness and apathy and outbreaks of anxiety and despair.

Yet, how can the actions of Jesus of Nazareth be more today than illustrations, at best, of the concreteness in which the forgiveness of sins would have to operate? And as for the provision and restoration of freedom and the capacity for action, do we not today most effectively call upon our systems of health care and education? Moreover, do we not still hold in readiness for the intellectually demanding a few utopian schemes and philosophies of "human freedom"? What concrete use do we have for the activity of the bearer of the spirit and for the activity of the Holy Spirit? To answer this question, we must reflect upon what it means for the spirit to be poured out and to descend "from on high."

### III

The statement that God's spirit is poured out from heaven upon all flesh seems to set the doctrine of the Holy Spirit worlds apart from contemporary notions of reality and from today's consciousness of truth.

The astrodome-model of the world, in which heaven is the dome that covers the earth, is for us one of the clearest pieces of evidence for the foolishness of the ancients and for the wonderful progress we have made since their time. We are so busy patting ourselves on the back that we easily overlook the fact that from antiquity onward, through all sorts of cultures, and most assuredly in the biblical traditions, the notion of heaven both distinguishes between and binds together several conceptual domains and several systems of reference.<sup>14</sup>

One does, indeed, find conceptions of the material constitution of heaven and earth in the theological tradition that cosmology and scientific research have in fact surpassed. Yet, heaven is not only characterized as that space which, from a human perspective, lies "over the earth," or as that which marks off or secures that space. Heaven is also conceived as a complex of powers and uncontrollable forces, as the realm that is not amenable to human measurement or arbitrary manipulation, but that at the same time decisively determines life on this earth. Heaven, for instance, supplies and withdraws light and water. Thus, heaven and earth stand in a nonreciprocal relation. The fact that we are dependent upon an incoming supply of light, air, warmth, and water is only one sign and expression of that relation and its lack of reciprocity.

<sup>14</sup>See M. Welker, *Universalität Gottes und Relativität der Welt. Theologische Kosmologie im Dialog mit dem amerikanischen Prozessdenken nach Whitehead*, 2., um ein Sachregister erw. Aufl. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), p. 203ff.; J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985) p. 158ff.; P. Miller, "Cosmology and World Order in the Old Testament: The Divine Council as Cosmic-Political Symbol," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 9 (1987) 2, p. 53ff.

Once one abandons the prejudice that ancient cultures were naive or even foolish, one recognizes that even so-called archaic thought makes use of procedures that merit the name of "scientific" in the best sense. Ancient cultures often take complex relations, which they have understood reasonably well, and reinvest them in contexts which they have not yet grasped, but which appear to be analogous. By so doing, they seek to gain insights into reality.

Specifically, knowledge about helpless dependencies upon natural forces and about ways of dealing with those dependencies is employed in order to unlock experiences with social forces to which one sees oneself delivered up. The advent of a windstorm, for example, is uncontrollable and its course and duration are unpredictable. Yet, it can be experienced with the senses. The situation is very similar with the social movements unleashed by the charismatic leaders upon whom God's spirit comes. As in the case of the wind, one wonders in vain why the movement could not be predicted. Why could not the people have been led together previously? How long will the solidarity last? Why does the unity of spirit dissolve again? Yet, the working of the combined social forces is as evident as the force of the wind: Israel goes out as one and defeats its enemies.

To look for analogous structures in these two sets of powers and to ascribe them to one reality shows penetrating systematic consistency. On the one hand, social and historically determinative powers are not subject to arbitrary control; on the other hand, neither are the physical powers of the forces of nature. The one reality to which both sets of powers are ascribed is heaven—which in this view is, of course, not to be understood in a merely naturalistic manner. Heaven is conceived as the location of natural and social powers. Very much in line with this conception, heaven is understood not only spatially, but also temporally, as well as in structures we are still far from being able rightly to decipher.

On the one hand, the biblical traditions can overcome a merely naturalistic understanding of heaven. On the other hand, they resist the typically religious divinization of heaven and its powers. This combination is a great theological and scientific achievement. Although heaven is the location from which issue great natural and social powers, heaven is created. And, we must emphasize, it is a natural and cultural creature. Heaven, too, is subject to passing away—though it is relatively permanent and invariant compared to the fleeting, transitory conditions of the natural and political world on earth. Heaven is a creature and no god. Yet, in an inconceivable way, it brings and maintains together forces which on earth are dispersed in space and time. That is, when improbable, inconceivable concentrations of powers and forces come about on earth, the biblical traditions regard what is going on as an activity "from heaven." In many cases, that does no more than give a code name to what is happening. In other cases, however, it opens the way to understanding. The story of the event of Pentecost in Acts and the

promise from Joel which is taken up there make this clear, each in its own way.

Joel 3 describes the pouring out of the spirit upon all flesh as the bestowal upon the whole people of the power to unlock the future, which is otherwise inaccessible to human beings.<sup>15</sup> Prophetic powers shall be given to all members of the people, not just to those to whom society normally listens and who determine what is normal, reasonable, and can realistically be expected. The spirit enables men and women, old and young, even slaves of both sexes, to unlock the future which God intends—and to do so with each other and for each other. Likewise, the event of Pentecost gives expression to the phenomenon of God's intentions and actions being made accessible to all human beings. Those who are filled with the Holy Spirit become capable of speaking in a way that can be understood in all the languages of that day. Without an abolishment of the difference of the languages, everybody is able to understand—as Acts puts it—"the mighty works of God."

On earth, human beings are distinguished and separated by languages, races, differences of sex and age, and social stratification. That the spirit is poured out "from heaven" means that such human beings, with each other and for each other, generate a trusting familiarity with God's will, and thus a trusting familiarity with the world, that they never achieve in their normal, finite, concrete perspectives. Although the Pentecost-event leads to a very complex awareness and understanding of the world, that does not mean that an indeterminate "fullness of the powers of heaven" has in some numinous way a numinous effect in human beings. Instead, human beings who are laid hold of and filled by the spirit are drawn into that trusting relation which Jesus Christ had to "God in heaven" (cf. Lk. 10f., John 14f.). They gain that trust in themselves and the world that is given by God, which the New Testament calls being God's "children." The condition of being God's children brings with it the advent of an "inheritance" which includes "earth and heaven." Thus, what is unthinkable in the concrete earthly perspectives of individual human beings, and of societies and cultural circles which are marked off against each other, actually happens here with regard to "the mighty works of God." Successful universal understanding and enrichment, with simultaneous preservation of the multiplicity and variegated nature of life as it is really lived in its concreteness and as it takes on culturally diverse character, is achieved.

<sup>15</sup>After that,

I will pour out My spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy;  
Your old men shall dream dreams.  
And your young men shall see visions.  
I will even pour out My spirit  
Upon male and female slaves in those days" (Joel 3:1ff.).

W. Beyerlin, *We are Like Dreamers: Studies in Psalm 126* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), is very illuminating on the difficult expression "Your old men shall dream dreams."

Especially in the Pauline writings, we find a striking description of the way in which those who have been given the spirit work together in their poly-concreteness. The spirit apportions to each person his or her particular gift for the general benefit (cf. I Cor. 12). That initiates a plurality of processes of communication that is conducive to the good of the participants in many and various ways. In this process, participants both give and receive benefit. The process transcends all individual and socially objectified conceptions of what would be the optimal situation. For the individual human being, however, the pouring out of the spirit means that he or she stands in a force field, that he or she belongs and contributes to a force field, in which he or she is more and more filled with "the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). This is so whether or not it is clear to the person involved. In both manifest and hidden ways, "all things work together for good" for the person, and must do so. From the power of the forgiveness of sin, a continually revitalized life grows in the spirit.

This life is resistant to all experiences of failure, hindrance, and futility. It is supported and strengthened from all sides. It itself works benefits on all sides. And it is itself strengthened in return. From our concrete perspectives, experiences, and scope of expectations, we cannot adequately grasp the multifaceted, reciprocally strengthened and strengthening process of cooperation. Abstractions and the reduction to general principles cannot do justice to the pluralistic concreteness. What can we do in order to come up with equivalents for that to which theological discourse about "heaven" and powers "from on high" seeks to give conceptual expression? One would have to develop in the human sciences the ability to think in terms of field structures, and one would have to render that kind of thinking plausible. Alternatively, one would have to resort to artistic means of representation.

But what speaks against the suspicion that this force field of the spirit, instituted "from heaven," is nothing more than a striking, collective sort of Paul Bunyan story? How does the working of the spirit attain and maintain a weight and a dignity independent of our participation? We shall respond to these questions by turning to the problem of the personhood of the spirit.

#### IV

Whoever is capable of thinking and of conceiving of a person only as an individual-human center of action will have to come to terms with the fact that the personhood of the Holy Spirit will simply remain impenetrable. If one starts with that representational model, one must stick to those statements of the New Testament that identify the Holy Spirit as the spirit of Christ (e.g., Rom. 8). For if what is at issue is the Holy Spirit as a clearly determinable, individual center of action, if that is what personhood must mean, then one will not be able to point to anything but Jesus Christ. He is the individual-human center of action of the spirit. Supported by the Johannine texts, one will even have to

speak of a selflessness of the spirit, for the Holy Spirit does nothing other than give witness to Jesus Christ and direct attention to him: “the Holy Spirit . . . will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). The spirit of truth “will not speak on the spirit’s own authority, but whatever the spirit hears the spirit will speak, and the spirit will declare to you the things what are to come. The spirit will glorify me, for the spirit will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:13–14, trans. altered; cf. 15:26). A consideration of the Holy Spirit of that scope is, of course, not in itself mistaken. However, it offers only a reductionist presentation of the spirit. The reason for this reductionist presentation lies in the orientation on a conception of the person that is one-sided and simplistic.

Specifically, concentration on an autonomous agent who functions as a center of reference in no way provides a sufficient understanding of “person.” An individual center of action, even when it is self-referentially regulated and develops self-consciousness, does not yet form a person. Only through a constituted social environment and in exchange with that environment does an individual, self-conscious center of action become a person. One can go so far as to say that it is the unity of that constituted social sphere that makes a person out of a self-relational, autonomously active center of reference.

Following a suggestion of Niklas Luhmann, I should like to use the concept of *resonance* to characterize the social sphere.<sup>16</sup> Only through a domain of resonance does a center of action become a person. This idea calls for a brief explanation. If one does not let oneself be deceived by the ease of representation which is proper to the model of a center of action, one recognizes that a self-referentially regulated center of action can be a completely erratic or a robot-like phenomenon, which does not merit the designation “person.” Rather, human beings or autonomously acting centers of social reference only acquire traits of personhood by being formed in multiple webs of relationships, which they center on themselves. Persons, as a rule, to some extent shape these webs but they are not merely fruits of their own activity. We are, for example, persons by being children of our parents, friends of our friends, colleagues of our colleagues, and contemporaries of our contemporaries. We are persons by standing in interwoven patterns of resonance which we have a hand in shaping, just as we are marked by them. These patterns of resonance are only partially dependent upon our activity. Thus, we remain the child of our parents, regardless of how our attitude toward our family changes. We may, through our development, disappoint our friends, and they

<sup>16</sup>*Ökologische Kommunikation*, esp. p. 40ff. By “domain of resonance,” I understand a centered plurality of relations of resonance which, beyond their common centering, can be independent of one another and not necessarily in harmony with each other. Nor are they necessarily in harmony with their “center of resonance.” One and the same person can be simultaneously loved and hated, can in the same situation be understood, unintentionally misunderstood, and intentionally misunderstood. Moreover, the harmonized, objective picture of a person can differ from how she or he understands herself or himself or would like to be understood.

may even be totally of one mind in their estimation of our person as it has disappointed them—even when we see things very differently and make every effort to change the external perspectives on us in our favor.

The domain of resonance which constitutes our person is thus only partially under our control, even though it is centered upon us. This domain of resonance is only partially clear to us, even though we are the ones whom the whole thing is centrally about. We cannot fully assimilate the unity of perspectives on us that constitutes our “public” person, as that person is for our environment. On the other hand, we also repeatedly have the feeling that our person has been unjustly treated in this or that remark or demand.

If one wishes to understand the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the otherwise inexplicable biblical statements about the Spirit and the relation of the Spirit and Christ, one must observe the difference between a self-conscious center of action and that personal unity which we are in the *external perspectives* on us (that personal unity which we are in the unity of the domain of resonance which is centered upon us).<sup>17</sup>

The Holy Spirit is to be understood as the multiform unity of perspectives on Jesus Christ, a unity in which we participate and which we help to constitute. The Holy Spirit is thus *Christ's domain of resonance*. The Spirit is the public person who corresponds to the individual Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, one cannot treat the person of Christ and the person of the Spirit as an indissoluble unity.<sup>19</sup> If one fixes upon the crucified Christ, abandoned by all the world and parted with all resonance, one will have to emphasize the *difference* between the person of Christ and the person of the Spirit. With regard to the crucified Christ, it thus becomes clear that there is no access to God that we can produce and make happen. *God* gives God's Spirit; *God* builds God's church, without the requisite conditions, where the requisite conditions are beyond our control (cf. Rom 8:27). Indeed, God seeks out our destruction and perversion of all the requisite conditions as the precise location in which to build the church.

The forgiveness of sins is the process that creates the requisite conditions for the unity of human beings with God where those conditions do not exist. On the basis of the forgiveness of sins, the unity of Christ which Calvin so strikingly described comes into effect.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Cf. the instructive discussion of the use of the concept of “person” in Alasdair Heron, *The Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit in the Bible, the History of Christian Thought, and Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. p. 167ff.

<sup>18</sup>See the comparative listing of New Testament expressions in Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983); also the reflections on the “ecclesiological ‘we’” in Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person. In der Trinität, bei der Inkarnation und im Gnadenbund: Ich-Du-Wir*. 3. Aufl. (Münster: Aschendorff, 1966), p. 190ff.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. H. Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 19, 28f.

<sup>20</sup>See W. Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1957), p. 365ff.

Human beings who are freed from sin and the self-destruction to which it leads do not merely passively participate through the Spirit in that event which brings fullness of life to this earth. In the Spirit, they are members and bearers of this event. In the truest sense of the word, they are full of God's power.

These human beings, mutually strengthening each other, constitute the field of Christ's power in the most diverse contexts and situations of life. This power is twofold: it both radiates outward and attracts others to its source. To be one with Christ, to be of Christ's spirit, to be in Christ, to bear Christ's spirit in us—these expressions from the Bible each illuminate one aspect of this differentiated, creative relation of unity. What one sees here is a relation of trusting intimacy with God—indeed, a participation in God—which, at the same time, takes seriously our concreteness and finitude, our frailty and fragility.

The Holy Spirit does not work in a way that bypasses finite human beings, but rather in and with our earthly existence. Precisely because the Spirit works in and through life as it is really lived in its concrete multiformity, it is difficult to distinguish those who are born of the Spirit. They live from the forgiveness of sins. They know that they depend continually upon preservation from the injury and disorientation that they themselves cause. But they are heterogeneous, with a multiformity which characterizes life as it is really lived. They reflect the powers of the heavenly fullness in a way that must appear simply incomprehensible, indeed chaotically lively, to those who are wedded to the world's homogenizing power-codes. Those who have been seized by God's spirit and who have their orientation in Jesus Christ know that they themselves present an absence of requisite conditions and a lively diversity which, indeed, seems bizarre. But precisely in this condition, they become the vital force field that the third article of the Apostles' Creed sketches in just a few words. They present that force field for which the promise is intended: "and they will be called 'terebinths of saving justice,' planted by Yahweh for the divine glory."





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