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**Wind of Liberty  
Fount of Life  
(In the Year of the Holy Spirit)**

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Notes

*It is the Holy Spirit Who renews the Church, teaches her, guides her with His gifts and rejuvenates her with the strength of the Gospel.(Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 4.)*

*The first obligation of the Church is to live always in Pentecost.(Paul VI)*

## **1. Jesus, Bearer of the Spirit**

By means of this modest essay, I would like to help Christians at the turn of the millennium to acquire a deeper and more transcendental consciousness of what the gift of the Spirit signifies. In 1999, in other booklets, Christianity and Justice will attempt to analyze some of the tasks that the Spirit proposes to the churches and to all mankind on the occasion of the change of the millennium. In order to understand these tasks, it is necessary to divest oneself of a sensationalist and marveling idea about the Spirit.

There are people with a curious apocalyptic mentality — fomented by sensationalist literature, including ecclesiastical publications — who seem to expect a special intervention of God at the end of the century to transform the Church and society.

I think that what we Christians must truly hope for is the fulfillment of Our Lord's promise: that He would send the Spirit to remain with us always, to enlighten and strengthen us during our journey. To transform the Church and society is necessary to pay attention to the message that the Holy Spirit communicates to the Churches, letting ourselves to be guided in the direction He indicates without misgivings or resistance.

Only with fidelity to the Spirit of God could our world be transformed and truly "saved."

### **1.1 "We have never even heard of the Holy Spirit."**

In the Acts of the Apostles one can read a curious episode: St. Paul, during his journeys, stopped at Ephesus one time and, finding some disciples, he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit. They answered sincerely "We have never even heard of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 19, 1—7). These disciples had only received the baptism of John the Baptist. St. Paul baptized them in the name of Jesus and then, after the laying on of the hands, the Holy Spirit manifested His gifts in them.

I wonder if a similar situation does not occur to many Catholics today. Perhaps few would say they have never heard of the Spirit because many Christians routinely repeat the Creed: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." But if we insist, asking "Who is the Spirit? What is His function? What does the Spirit mean in the individual's life and in the life of the Church?" surely there would be few who could answer appropriately.

Nevertheless faith in the existence of the Spirit and His action in the community of the faithful and in each individual Christian —and also in human history and in all men of good will— is absolutely central and essential in Christianity. It is as basic as faith in God the Father, the

Creator, and faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Many Christians may not be aware of this, or recognize its fundamental nature. For the majority it is truly important to affirm the first two articles of the Creed: belief in God the Father, the Creator who governs the universe, and belief in His Son, Jesus Christ, sent by the Father to save all men. The third article of the Creed, belief in the Holy Spirit, *the Lord and Giver of Life*, seems to be relegated to another level.

## **1.2 We do not live only by teachings and traditions.**

At times one hears the term "religions of the Book" and refers it principally to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Judaism and Islam perhaps efficiently characterized as "religions of the Book" — they are religions based on a revelation preserved in written texts. But in the case of Christianity one must be more explicit: Christianity is not based exclusively on *written texts*. It is also based on the action of the Spirit Who constantly revitalizes and actualizes divine revelation.

To forget this fact would be to ignore a very important part of the New Testament, especially the Pauline doctrine affirming that the Christian lives not only *according to the letter of the Law*, but *by the light and strength of the Spirit*.

Exclusive fidelity to the letter of the Law fossilizes the faith in anachronistic forms and leads to simple fundamentalism. Only attention to the Spirit as the Living Force of God, Who interprets His revelation and His will in every historic situation, can be the promise of life.

We Christians believe in a Creed containing three basic, equally essential articles: We believe in God the Father . . . and Jesus Christ, His Son . . . and in the Holy Spirit. . .

The God in Whom Christians believe is not simply God Who created heaven and earth according to an admirable project that was soon frustrated by sin. Neither is He simply God Who, reworking His plan of love, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, Who lived some years among us in order to leave us *marvelous doctrine and a stimulating example*, to the extreme of dying for us in a supreme testimony of love. We shall have understood practically nothing in the New Testament if we should think that it presents Jesus Christ only as a splendid, but ephemeral epiphany of God, Who lived among us for a few years, then leaving our world so that we in posterior generations could live with only a wonderful memory and a literal fulfillment of His precepts.

No, Jesus came to offer salvation by inaugurating the *Kingdom of God*, proposed as a new form of living together, a new way to understand and live responsibly the relationship of men and women with God and among themselves: a new situation born of a conversion, a profound transformation of attitudes that is capable of making us recognize ourselves truly as *children of God, the Father of all, in the experience of true brotherhood among those whom we acknowledge as children of the same Father*.

*Now, then this conversion and human transformation has to be the work of the Holy Spirit, the acting force of God*, Whom Jesus promised us would continue acting when He left this world and Whom His followers would experience as living, present and active.

For Christians, Jesus is not only a Teacher who left an unsurpassed doctrine (the great Teacher of morality whom the romantics, such as Renan, admired). Neither is He only a good man who left

a charming memory of generous love. If this were the case, Jesus would have been perhaps, as a new Moses promulgating a New Law, or as a new prophet in the line of the valiant ancient prophets.

The experience of the first followers of Jesus, reflected in the texts of the New Testament, shows that Jesus was different. He *inaugurated the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of the Spirit*. The principal mission of Jesus was really *to offer the Spirit to the world*. Jesus "saves" by making those who believe in Him really experience the strength of the Spirit in conquering sin and in being able to live a transformed existence. As St. Paul would say, with the Holy Spirit we can be capable of doing that which is impossible for us to do only with the Law. *If we do not live by the Spirit, we remain in judaism and we have no possibility of salvation. Jesus is the Savior because he offers the Spirit to the world, the Spirit Who is the Lord and Giver of Life*: that is, because He inaugurated a permanent and acting presence of God in the hearts of men, a transforming force which makes those who share in His life children of God.

### 1.3 The Spirit of Renewal

The Messiah, the Savior, is the *Bearer of the Spirit* Whom the prophets had announced. When the synoptic Gospels tell us that during Jesus' Baptism, the heavens opened, the apostles heard the voice of the Father and saw the Holy Spirit *hover over Him in the form of a dove*, what the Gospels want to tell us is that the Son of the carpenter of Nazareth, who appeared in public for the first time on the banks of the Jordan, is the Messiah Whom the people hoped for, the Promised One, the Bearer of the Spirit.

The primitive Christian catechism, reflected in the text of the synoptic Gospels, wished to stress precisely this fact: with Jesus a new Presence and Action of God began in the world through his Spirit.

Jesus did not only receive the Spirit for Himself. He is the Bearer of the Spirit imparting and extending the Holy Spirit over the world, and thus renewing the world.

The prophet Ezechiel had expressed the renewal, that God wished to carry out in mankind through the Messiah, as an interior transformation carried out by the Spirit of God living in the hearts of men.

*"I shall give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit in you. I shall remove your heart of stone and I will give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my Spirit in you so that you can keep my Law." (Ez 36, 26—2)*

By the vision of a field full of dry bones, God showed the prophet the meaning of these words: God infused His breath, that is His Spirit, over the bones, and the bones stood up full of life. Thus would salvation come from God in Messianic times.

*"I shall never hide my face from them again because I shall pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, it is the word of the Lord.. (Ez 39, 29)*

The Spirit is presented as the loving face of the same God Who no longer remains hidden from His Chosen People because of their infidelities, but rather is present among them in the promised

Messiah.

The generous gift of the Spirit as abundant water is a way to insinuate that God wishes to offer a new life to our stone hearts, and transform a dry and sterile world into the living earth. John the Evangelist, in a passage we will comment on in the coming pages, would have Jesus say that in Himself the ancient promise is fulfilled: *If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. If anyone believes in Me, as Scripture say, from his breast shall flow fountains of living water.* The Evangelist adds *when saying this, He was referring to the Spirit Whom those who believe in Him would receive (John 7, 38-39).*

#### **1.4 The Spirit of Liberation**

Speaking of the renewal the Messiah would accomplish, Isaiah prophesied:

*"The Spirit of the Lord rests upon me, because He has anointed me. He has sent me to announce the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind the return of sight, to free the oppressed, to proclaim a year of favor of the Lord. (Is 61 Iss)*

Everyone recognizes this text which Luke presents as the words Jesus proclaimed when He inaugurated His public life in the synagogue of Nazareth. With this Luke wished to make known the precise character of the transformation of the world that Jesus had come carry out: the world has been destroyed because we have destroyed brotherhood and freedom with man's exploitation and oppression of man. Jesus has been anointed with the Spirit of the Lord so that men can restore brotherhood free of all exploitation and oppression.

## 2. The Spirit forms the Church of Jesus (The Acts of the Apostles)

The Acts of the Apostles; endeavoring to be the history of the early Church, begin with a curious episode.

The narrative opens with the last time the disciples saw Jesus. He orders them not to leave Jerusalem, because there they are to receive *the promise of the Father that I told you about. Just as John baptized with water, in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*

Apparently Jesus thought that further explanation of the point was not necessary, because He had already spoken about this matter with His disciples. But they do not seem to know what He is referring to, immediately asking ingeniously: *Lord, is it now that you will restore the Kingdom of Israel?*

The apostles, after having experienced so much adversity, only awaited the day when Jesus would finally sit on the throne of David; they could see themselves as his representatives. But Jesus disappointing them, answered *"It is not for you to know the time that the Father has decided. From above you will receive the strength of the Holy Spirit to be my witnesses. (Acts 1,4-8).*

### 2.1 The Kingdom of God —the New World— we must form with the Spirit

Jesus had come to inaugurate the new Kingdom of God. The Apostles expected the restoration of David's ancient glory. Jesus, during his farewell discourse said frankly: *the new Kingdom of God would not be a restoration of David's glory, rather it would be the active presence of the Spirit Who would make them capable of being His witnesses in the whole world.* Some students of the Bible have asked themselves why Jesus spoke frequently about the Kingdom of God in the Synoptic Gospels, while this concept practically disappears in the Acts of the Apostles and in the rest of the New Testament written by other authors, especially in the letters of St. Paul. The explanation could be, according to the last words attributed to Jesus, that the Kingdom of God is the fruit of the Spirit's action among men when they give witness of Jesus; that is, when they confirm with their lives what Jesus revealed: that God is the Father of all and He asks us that we all love one other as brothers and sisters.

**From this statement we draw important lessons:**

- One must abandon all nostalgia for a material kingdom: one must stop thinking of a Church supported by political power or formed according to plans in the line of political power. The Church's strength will grow from the vigorous conversion and the true communion the Spirit nurtures in her, not from privileges and worldly glories, or political manipulations<sup>1</sup>.
- We must stop awaiting a magical appearance of the Kingdom: we are inclined to hope

that a magic power of God—or of authorities that represent Him— may come to resolve problems. The Spirit can never be a magic solution that annuls our initiatives; rather He is the summoning force that prompts us to assume our responsibilities in history.

## 2.2 The Church was born in Pentecost

The Acts of the Apostles give special emphasis to the incident of the effusion of the Spirit on Pentecost. The author would like to present a splendid scene in which, at a glance, the birth of the Church is visible.

*They were all together in the one room, when suddenly they heard a powerful wind which came from heaven and filled the entire house . . . Tongues of fire appeared over the heads of each one. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in foreign languages. (Acts 2, 2 ff)*

It is not necessary that we ask ourselves what really happened that day. Reading between the lines of the narrative, we discover a reference to a very special experience of the first group of disciples: the author of the Acts tries to interpret and communicate it as well as he can with evident catechetical intentions.

The Spirit of God comes *as a wind* when all are gathered together; He manifests Himself as *tongues of fire* suspended over each person. The whole account has a deep symbolic meaning. The Spirit is given to each member of the community to form with them a new community of God, as St. Peter quickly explains. The wind and fire symbolize the new strength of God that will be present from now on. The fact that people from all the nations under the heavens were in Jerusalem at that time stresses, as St. Peter also remarks, the universality of the new gift that God offers for the good of all nations.

The fact that *each one heard them speak in his own language* emphasizes the mission of the Spirit to form a communion from diversity. Here there can even be an allusion to the ancient story of the confusion of languages in Babel. The sin of egotistical pride had made living together impossible causing division among men. The Spirit poured out again, would make it possible to recover the communion of all who were divided before. *The Spirit makes a community from diversity.*

The new Community of God must be the result of an interior conversion, an existential transformation whose sign is Baptism. Baptism seals the reconciliation with God that Jesus Christ comes to offer to us and it is a manifestation of the strength of the Spirit, as St. Peter explains it in his first sermon on Pentecost.

*Repent, and each one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ to obtain pardon of your sins, and you will receive the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children, and also for those who are far away, for all those whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2, 38-39).*

- The mystery of the languages is the mystery of a truly catholic universality, a universality not born of an imposed uniformity, or an imposed direction or absorbing centralism which annuls differences; that could really be a degeneration and corruption of genuine Catholicism.
- Pentecost impels us to overcome all that is "not Catholic" in the Church: all that may be

imposed by a one individual tendency in opposition to legitimate differences. We may think, for example, of the from "above" imposition of pastors following some one-sided criteria, and giving little or no importance to the idiosyncrasies or the legitimate desires of the communities.

### **2.3 The Spirit prompts solidarity**

According to the Acts of the Apostles the formation and growth of the Christian community begins with the effusion of the Spirit on Pentecost. When St. Peter explained what had happened, *the people accepted his words and were baptized; that day three thousand persons were added to their number*

With the action of the Spirit the life of the community became vigorous: *All the believers lived together and placed everything in common: they sold their goods and properties in order to distribute the income according to the needs of each one* (Acts 2, 44 ff). The Spirit formed the community, not only a spiritual communion with internal bonds. In the new community of the Kingdom, the brotherhood of all those whom they recognized as children of the same God and Father was demonstrated by true solidarity in the use of all the goods, both spiritual and material<sup>2</sup>

- The practice of solidarity in the use of all their possessions and a true disposition to share will always be clear signs of living under the influence of the Spirit.
- Lack of sensitivity toward the needs of fellowmen and incapacity to share goods received will always be signs of sinful resistance in implementing a true community of the Kingdom under the influence of the Spirit.

### **2.4 The Spirit helps us to universality**

That the universality of the gift of the Saving Spirit began in the experience of Pentecost should be

evident. St. Peter had proclaimed that the prophesies were fulfilled that day: *I will pour out my Spirit over all mankind* (Acts 2, 17) Nevertheless individual tendencies among men are so strong that a "New Pentecost" was necessary so that the Spirit could be received without reservations. Men indoctrinated in the special election of Israel and educated in disdain and repugnance toward impure, idolatrous pagans, showed a great deal of resistance in admitting that pagans could also receive the promises and that in the future they would have to live together with them forming a single community of the children of God under the influence of the same Spirit.

At the beginning of the Church, those who joined the first disciples were Jews or the converts of the Diaspora, that is, converts to Judaism who had been circumcised and had adopted the Jewish life style.

This first community continued the segregation from the pagans, especially the basic taboo of not entering their homes or eating with them. The Spirit's decisive intervention with St. Peter as necessary in order to establish a new direction.

At this moment an essential issue was evident in Christianity: a decision as to whether the new Christian community would think of itself as a simple continuation of Judaism, as a new sect or private group according to the cultural-religious scheme of Judaism; on the contrary, the Christians would have to consider their community as something really new, which had transcended the parameters of Judaism, opening itself to a new way of life and to the values of other cultures.

### *The Pentecost of the pagans*

An decisive event in the home of Cornelius, the pagan centurion, resolved these problems. Before this event, while St. Peter was praying, he had a singular vision in which a celestial voice ordered him to have no misgivings about eating impure food. Then the Holy Spirit told St. Peter to go to the home of Cornelius, the centurion, where some people were meeting. On entering the house St. Peter felt he needed to justify himself:

*You know that a Jew is not permitted to have any contact with a foreigner or enter his home, but God has taught me not to consider anything as impure.*

(At Cornelius' request St. Peter taught him about Jesus of Nazareth.)

*While St. Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit descended upon all those who were listening. The circumcised faithful, who had accompanied St. Peter, were surprised to see that the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the pagans, whom they heard speaking in foreign tongues proclaiming the greatness of God. Then St. Peter said. "Who can prevent the baptism of those who have received the Spirit the same way we did. And all were baptized.(Acts 10, 22-48)*

Really it is a question of a second Pentecost with extraordinary events similar to the first one: it is the Pentecost of the pagans. But it was not easily accepted. When St. Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was criticized because *he had entered the house of an uncircumcised persons and had eaten with them*. St. Peter had to explain that he acted prompted by a celestial voice that he now recognized as the voice of the Spirit. *The Spirit told me to go to them without misgivings. (Acts 11, 12)*

*But the controversy continued.*

With this explanation the influential persons affirming the tendency to Jewish customs were satisfied. But the polemics had not finished. Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles informs us of one of the incidents —among the many that surely arose— provoked by this controversial question. St. Paul and St. Barnabas had established a flourishing Christian community in Antioch. Some representatives from Jerusalem arrived who *taught the brethren: if you are not circumcised. . . you can not be saved (Acts 15, 1)*. An important discussion took place: St. Paul and St. Barnabas had to go to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the Apostles. In the meeting, that some call the Council of Jerusalem, the opposing positions were contrasted. St. Peter stated the definitive argument, alluding to his experience in the home of Cornelius:

*God chose me in order that from my mouth the Gentiles would listen to the words of the Gospel and would believe. And God gave testimony of His favor, offering them the Holy Spirit in the same way He sent Him to us, so that there does not exist any distinction between them and us (Acts 15, 7-9).*

St. James, who acted as the representative of the Jewish cultural influences in the Church of

Jerusalem, recognized the reasoning and the authority of St. Peter (Acts 15, 13-20). They reached a certain compromise, reflected in solemn documents directed to the Gentiles:

*To the Holy Spirit and to us it seemed good not impose any burden, except to abstain from eating the flesh sacrificed to idols, from the blood of strangled animals, and from fornication (Acts 1, 28).*

A universal Pentecost overcoming a Jewish bias has to help us recognize the obligation of a legitimate incorporation of Christianity in all cultures today. Unfortunately, lacking a profound knowledge of the authentic Christian news which the Spirit offers, we could be imposing some forms of Christianity that only make sense in past Western Christian civilization. The great challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church will be to cease being an institution configured basically on the culture of the Occidental past in order to be the promise and means of salvation for men and women of the future including all cultures.

A great temptation will be that a strict and influential group affirming Roman Catholic customs, similar to the first influential Jewish group, insists that in order to be a Christian, one must accept the mental and essential concepts which have configured our western way of thinking and living as a Christian. All that cultural background can have important consequences regarding the formulation of dogma, liturgy, ethics, canon law, ecclesiastical organization, the forms of the ministries, the place of women and lay persons in the Church . . . and many other questions which have only begun to appear.

Unfortunately, our world is characterized by numerous and strong attitudes which reject different religious, economic, social, ethnic, linguistic . . . groups. These exclusive postures are incompatible with the Spirit's fraternal gestures. If we have indicated that the Spirit requests respect for diversity and differences, we must add that obviously He also asks that no difference tries to convert itself in the reason for excluding other groups.

### **3. The Spirit poured out in our hearts.**

#### **(St. Paul)**

The events of the Acts of the Apostles that we have just commented, are centered especially on the social and public aspects of the Spirit's action as the collective principle and configuring force of a new community; the action which must be the seal of the new world according to the desire of God. In contrast, St. Paul's letters describe the way the Spirit acts interiorly in each one of the believers.

#### **3.1 The Spirit, strength of God in human impotence**

St. Paul, who felt himself converted by an extraordinary grace of the Spirit, has special knowledge of the profound interior transformation that one experiences on entering the new Nation of God, an experience that can only be the work of the same strength of God in man. We convert from being an enemy of God and our own selves to radically transformed men and women, capable of living as children of God and brothers among themselves.

This change, according to the Apostle, exceeds all that we are capable of achieving with only our own will. St. Paul himself had personal experience of this human limitation; he also knew the history of the infidelities of the nation of Israel. With only our own strength we cannot regain friendship with God, or live in joyful brotherhood among ourselves. Human nature has been altered and weakened as a consequence of the history of sin that weighs upon us. That is what the Apostle explains, principally, in the first two chapters of his letter to the Romans. Sin dominates everything and human nature remains reduced to impotence. It is necessary that God Himself comes to transform humanity and give it new strength. This is what Jesus will do, offering us the strength of His Spirit. This is the authentic "good news."

#### **3.2 The Spirit makes us children of God.**

St. Paul expresses the reconciliation with God that the Spirit effects in us, saying that the Spirit makes us children of God. With that he wishes to indicate that God, from Whom we have been alienated by sin, manifests Himself as a Father Who receives us again as children by sending us the Spirit of his Son, Jesus.

Even more, according to St. Paul, from now on, the Spirit strengthens us to be able to live as children of God, living and practicing a true brotherhood among ourselves. This is what St. Paul always remarks, especially in the letters to the Romans and the to Christians of Galacia. He writes to the Romans:

*Everyone who lets himself be guided by the Spirit is a child of God. Really, you have not received a spirit of slavery that makes you live again in fear; you have received the Spirit of adopted children that permits you to cry "Abba, Father." (Rm. 8, 14-17),*

In the Epistle to the Galatians, who had not understood what constituted the specific contribution

of Christianity to salvation, the Apostle wrote:

*The proof that we are sons of God is that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts: the Spirit Who cries "Abba, Father." Thus we are no longer slaves, but sons; and if we are sons, we are also heirs by the will of God (Ga. 4, 4-7)*

As we can see, St. Paul explains the Spirit's action in us in the context of the dialectic between slavery and liberty. We are slaves of sin, of our own selves and of the distractions of the world that surrounds us. We do not do what we really wish to do, but rather that which is externally imposed upon us by the structures of sin that dominate us.

In a unjust and disordered world, under the weight of contradicting influences of the media, at the service of unknown interests, bombarded by thousands of ads, manipulated we don't know by whom and also conscious of our own interior chaos and our own weakness, we could truly find ourselves in a state of anxiety and fear typical of slaves, of people not in possession of themselves.

The Spirit returns to us the capacity to be free persons and the joy of being children of God. In us the Spirit is the true manifestation of the gratuitous and pardoning love of God, the Father, and the interior strength to be able to live from now on as children in brotherhood.

### **3.3 The Spirit makes us free and responsible persons**

It is a untenable misinterpretation —although widely divulged and surely not completely inexplicable— to contend that belief in God is incompatible with assertion of a genuine human freedom. Naturally, all depends on the concept of God and human liberty that one has.

Unfortunately, perhaps certain traditional, and herein irresponsible, preachers only knew how to predicate the image of a God-Absolute Power. Evidently this God-Power is incompatible with human liberty; but this is a God Who has nothing to do with the God of Christian revelation. On the other hand, there are people who only appear to be able to conceive of freedom as freedom for irresponsible choice (to do as I like). It does not appear that this is the faculty that makes man superior to all other beings, more determined to work according to the law of necessity. As St. Augustine lucidly explains, liberty is the capacity to discern and to tend to one's own good, sought for by one's interior impulse and not by mere determination or external imposition. To be free does not consist in being able to do anything whatsoever, but to be able to love all that which I discover as good.

This is where one discovers the profoundness of St. Paul's doctrine about the Spirit. According to St. Paul, *God has placed the gift of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Co. 1, 22)* and also *the love of God has been poured into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us (Rm. 5, 5)*.

In the teaching of St. Paul, the God of Jesus is not presented to us as imposing a new extrinsic Law. On the contrary, the Christian experiences God as an interior strength that acts from his own being —from *the bottom of his heart*— helping him in the practice of his freedom. The Spirit is God existing in us and acting with us as the light and strength of our liberty. The Spirit is God, not as an external legislator Who demands obedience, but rather as an interior strength that offers us the possibility to overcome our own weakness and the conditioning that can choke

our freedom. *The Spirit Himself and our spirit bear united witness that we are children of God* (Rm 8, 16) *The Spirit comes as help for our weakness . . .*

For this, God Who makes Himself known, not with an imposed Law, but through the free gift of the Spirit, is not only compatible with human freedom, but He is the only Being Who guarantees the adequate practice of that freedom. The God-Spirit becomes personal: He makes us responsible persons and impels us beyond the false freedom of being able to do, irresponsibly, anything that occurs to us. The Spirit of God is the interpellation and stimulus toward a responsible freedom.

In the Church, the Spirit asks that all Christians may be persons (cf CIC. 96): free men and women, responsible adults; that their rights be respected, but that they comply with their obligations, according to their state in life. This is valid for the entire Church: as much for the members of the hierarchy who must not act at their pleasure without counting on the faithful or respecting their rights, as for the faithful who also must not limit themselves to waiting for all that might be decided by the hierarchy<sup>3</sup>.

The Church is a communion in the same Spirit Who makes us all cry out: Abba, Father; a community in which, from all walks of life, we all must cooperate, with responsibility, in the formation of a realm of brotherhood of the children of the same Father. In general, the more all are implicated in the life of the Church, the closer we are to the ideal of the Kingdom; on the contrary, authoritarian, secret or elite positions will, in the long run damage a true communion; a communion without which the Church will degenerate into "salt which does not season."<sup>4</sup>

### **3.4 The paradox of Christian liberty: to serve for love**

The Spirit volunteers to make us children of a God–Father, not slaves of a dominating God–Power. God, when sending His Spirit to the bottom of our hearts, shows us that He expects from us free and total trust, not the fear of a slave. God is not a hostile power that we may have to placate with servile exertion and to Whom we must look with questioning misgivings. With the Spirit, God teaches us that He wants to be God–with–us; a God Who relates freely and lovingly. his filial relationship, far from leading us to an isolated practice of liberty understood as an individualistic form, must lead us to a loving and generous relationship with all men. We cannot truly consider ourselves children of God the Father if we do not try to live as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. St. Paul draws the final conclusion of the Master 's teachings in the accounts such as the parable of the Prodigal Son, the Pharise and the Publican, or the Good Samaritan.

*We have been called to freedom: only you may not use freedom as a pretext to impose your egotism; on the contrary it must lead you to make yourselves servants for the love of one another. In fact the whole Law is summarized in a single command: love your neighbor as yourself. On the other hand, if you live by destroying one another, you will finish by destroying the community.* (Ga. 5, 13-17)

We see a splendid paradox: the Spirit makes us free, but with a liberty that prompts us to *make ourselves servants of one another for love*. We can not attempt to live with an egotistical freedom that only leads to self-destruction. Recognizing one's existence only finds sense and value in relationship with God and others, *for the love of ourselves, the love of God and others*, we live in freedom disposed to make ourselves servants of God for the others.

The letter to the Christians of Galacia finishes with a precise and coherent exhortation of these principles:

*"If we live according to the Spirit, we must act according to the Spirit . . . All the acts which proceed from our own egotism are known; fornication, impurity, lewdness, hate, discord, envy, drunkenness . . . " In contrast "the fruits of the Spirit are love, peace, joy, patience, gentleness, good will, fidelity, non violence, sobriety . . . Against these virtues there can be no law." (Ga. 5, 19ff)*

The fruits of the Spirit lose this quality if they are the result of coercion or law. The basic principle of Christian practice is not "Do what is ordered," rather it is to discover and follow the prompting of the Spirit.

Genuine Christian liberty should be placed as a from servile law and intervening regulations as it is from disintegrating anarchy or the abandonment to each one's caprices, including those who are in authority. The ideal is placed on a line establishing necessary cohesion and maximum responsibility in a ministry of loving service in brotherhood. Contrary to what some may think, the progress of a community depends principally not on good regulations and control, but rather that the members live, always disposed to do what the Spirit may prompt in them<sup>5</sup>.

The Church must be the seal of a transformed world, since the Spirit comes to implement an original design of God for the world. The paradigms of freedom, responsibility, fraternity, mutual respect—in summary, the gifts of the Holy Spirit—must be the paradigms of humanity because they respond to the deepest impulses of a human being, created in the image of God.

### **3.5 A single Spirit in different gifts**

This proclamation of the freedom of the Spirit, will it not lead inevitably to a medley of opinions and positions that are incompatible among themselves? Would it not be better to proclaim, as a primary and single principle a strict rule and obedience of all to authority. Many have thought this way—as the Grand Inquisitor of Dostoyevsky—which would rely more on the efficacy of power by force than in the transforming power of God in people.

However . St. Paul did not seem to think in this way. That he did not suffer intensely from the chaos provoked by the supposed "spirituals" in the communities. But, faced with this problem, St Paul never yielded or tried to appeal again to laws to overcome the disagreements provoked by the supposed followers of the Spirit.

For St. Paul the solution is not a return to law; it is a rigorous discernment of the gifts of the Spirit, by the principle of *complementarity* of different gifts with the goal of *forming* the whole body of Christ. St. Paul particularly found the danger of charismatic anarchy in the community of Corinth. One only has to read chapters 12 – 14 of his first letter to that community to see how the Apostle was thinking about the way that he would have to overcome that danger. Facing the diversity of apparently contradictory charisms, St. Paul establishes the following principles: *Although the gifts are different, the Spirit is One (1 Co. 2, 14)*. There can not exist a contradiction between the gifts which come from a single Spirit. And if it exists, then there is something that is not from the Spirit. The second principle is, given that the Spirit is offered for the formation of the community, the gifts of the Spirit that each one receives must redound in the good of all (1Co. 12, 8).

The validity of the charisma must be judged from the perspective of the good of the whole community. A supposed gift which brings division and destruction to the community could not be considered as coming from the Holy Spirit. Even more, the value of the different gifts will be according to what they really bring to the progress of the community. The Corinthians appear to have prized unintelligible speech and absorbed ecstatic rapture very much. St. Paul wanted to free them from their error.

*Desire anxiously the truly important gifts. If I have the eloquence of men and angels, if I have the gift of prophecy, if I have faith so as to move mountains, but if I do not have charity, I am nothing. The most important gift is charity. (1 Co. 13, 1 ff)*

The Church must recognize and respect the diversity of gifts, trying to harmonize them, enlightened by the criteria of their contribution to the progress of the community. The most important and universal virtue will always be charity. The Spirit can only stimulate us to love more and better, that is, with good works and in truth. The love that comes from the Spirit has no boundaries because it is no other thing except the infinite love of God for the whole world. The Spirit, Who is God Himself, acting in the depths of our hearts, can prompt us to love as God loves: unconditionally, freely.

The Spirit opens to us the immense spaces of justice and love without limits. Above all the differences that can exist between men and women there must remain the sense of basic unity: the unity that we Christians express by saying God is the one Father of all and that, therefore, we must live with the sense of an unrenounceable membership in the one and same humanity.

## 4. The Spirit, Fount of Life (The Johannine Writings)

The Gospel of St. John is a text written at the end of the epoch of the composition of the New Testament. In it we find contemplation of a deep sense of the experience of Jesus. Accordingly we find in this text a profound meditation about what the gift of the Spirit signifies.

We may all quickly recall the important texts about the Paraclete that are found in the discourse of the Last Supper. But, in order to understand these verses, it is necessary to place them in context with many other things that John tells us about the Spirit, at times in a veiled manner.

### 4.1 The Spirit and the new life

The Orthodox theologian S. Boulgakov, describes allusions to the Spirit in the very beginning of the prolog of the Fourth Gospel: "In the Word was Life, and the Life was the Light of men (Jn. 1,4). Here, for the Russian theologian "the Life" refers to the life-giving Spirit, that rests eternally over Logos or the Word of God and thus, with the Incarnation, comes to give life to men.<sup>6</sup> In the same prolog we also read that the Law was given by Moses, but *grace and truth have come through Jesus Christ* (Jn. 1, 17). This gift and divine grace which comes from Jesus Christ and surmounts the Law of Moses is the gift of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

St. John's Gospel reminds us, the same as the Synoptic Gospels, that the Precursor announced the news of Jesus as that of One Who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Jesus would explain to Nicodemus that it is necessary *to be born from above*, to enter into a new life, in order to enter the Kingdom of God; and, because of the perplexity of his questioner, Jesus explained that it is a question of *being born of water and the Spirit, since only that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. The Spirit blows where He wishes and you hear, but you do not see where He comes from or where He goes. This happens with all who are born of the Spirit.* (Jn. 3, 3-8)

The theme of the new life that proceeds from the water and from the Spirit —Baptism— reappears again and again. It is insinuated in the promise to the Samaritan woman of *living water* that definitively satisfies thirst and leads to eternal life (Jn 4, 14). And it is the main element of the sermon of the feast of Tabernacles, when Jesus says:

*He who is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. If anyone believes in Me . . . from his breast shall spring forth fountains of living water . . . The Evangelist comments: He was referring to the Spirit Whom those who believed in Him would receive. The Spirit was not yet present because Jesus had not been glorified* (Jn. 7, 37-39).<sup>8</sup>

After the glorification, in the first appearance to the Apostles, Jesus tells them explicitly that He leaves them the Spirit, and He says in leaving them: *As the Father sent Me, I also send you.* And breathing over them Jesus added *Receive the Holy Spirit. Those whose sins you pardon, they are pardoned; those whose sins you retain, they are retained* (Jn. 21 21-23). Jesus had fulfilled his

mission: the Apostles have to continue it, not with their own strength, but with the power of the Spirit of Jesus, the Only One capable of purifying the world of sin. This new life that Jesus promises us by water and the Spirit comes into being as a life of communion with God in communion with brothers and sisters. The new life brings a new commandment overcoming the ancient Law:

*This is His commandment: that we believe in the Name of His Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as He has commanded us. Those who keep His commandment live in God; and God, in them And we know that He is in us by the Spirit that He gave us. (Cf. Jn. 14, 23)<sup>9</sup>.*

It is clear: the new life that Jesus comes to offer is to live in God, be in Him and that He may be in us. The condition for it is that we love one another. Now then, the principle and guarantee of this new life is the Spirit that He has offered to us. The Spirit prompts us to love ourselves and thus enter into communion with God Himself. It is necessary to remark that this communion with God Himself is that which Jesus asks in the sublime prayer of the last Supper:

*That they may be one, as Thou, Father, are in Me and I in Thee. That all may be with us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me (Jn. 17, 21)*

To be one with the Father and the Son —and consequently to be one with all — this is what the Spirit brings into being in us. St. John gives us the highest theological reason for this, expressed in a dense synthesis: only for love could we enter into communion with God Who is Love:

*Let us love one another, because love comes from God; all who love Him have been born of God and know God. He who does not love, does not know God, because God is Love.(1 Jn. 4, 7—8)*

The only criterion to know if we are living this new existence is a true love of the brothers and sisters, the capacity to compromise ourselves with them and for them as God Himself did in the Incarnation of His Son. Only with this criterion can the Church, private communities and individuals prove they really live by the prompting of the Spirit of God that is Love.

## **4.2 The Paraclete guides us to the complete truth**

The Gospel of St. John was written in peculiar circumstances. The memory of the historical Jesus began to fade away with the passing years, and communities had to face new situations and problems. Direct witnesses of the life and teaching of Jesus had practically disappeared. People appeared who tried to impose different actions in the name of Jesus: "If He were living, this is what He would do . . ."

In the time of St. John a problem arose that continues to be real today: namely, adapting to new situations, while keeping the necessary fidelity to a unique and unrenounceable origin. The Gospel of St. John developed as the Gospel of continuity between the experience of the historical Jesus and the newness of the Spirit that comes to our encounter in new circumstances. The texts relative to the Paraclete respond to this situation: *I must tell you many things, but now you cannot bear them. When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you to the full truth (Jn 16, 13)*. The revelation of Jesus is, in itself, definitive and total: He has manifested all that He had heard from the Father. But the adequate comprehension, the complete truth of the revelation must be the work of the Spirit in every new circumstance of the Church, and in the existential situation of each believer. The Church must maintain itself faithful to Jesus. For this *the Paraclete, the Holy*

*Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My Name will remind you of all that I have said (Jn. 14, 26) and He will make you understand. In the same sense: The Spirit of the Truth, Who proceeds from the Father, and Whom I will send you from the Father, will bear witness of Me (Jn. 15, 26).*

The Spirit is neither independent of Jesus, nor does He add anything to the experience of Jesus. He makes the experience contemporary for us, (He reminds us of it ), He helps us to penetrate in the deepest sense and makes us see how it affects us in each new situation. Only with permanent attention to the continual renewing action of the Spirit can one overcome the tension between the literal and sterile tradition and destructive innovation. The Church lives on the "memory" of Jesus, but it must be a memory refreshed by the Spirit, not a dead tradition in which there is no principle except "it has always been done this way." The Church can not endeavor to live only with "frozen truth or mummified success. (K. Rahner).

The Spirit only show us what Jesus had already manifested; there is no place for "new revelations", as the Gnostics of all ages, not excluding our own, contend. Jesus is the full revelation; but this revelation has to be made significant to the men and women in every era, it must bring to responsibility about actual fact: —according to the well-known idea of I. Ellacuria— in order to act in them according to God's wish.

The Spirit "Giver of Life" not only urges us to not destroy or attenuate any life, but also to respect the system of life (biosystem) that is our planet. Abusive and inconsiderate exploitation of resources by certain groups in another form of violence against the possibilities of life for other human beings, actual or future, who have the same right to enjoy the goods of creation. The correct statement and solution of ecological problems will be one of the great challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As Christians, besides the general reasons that we can defend, we must also contribute an answer based faith in God, Creator and Savior of the world. A sin against the earth is also a sin against the Spirit of God.<sup>10</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

The Church must live of the Spirit "Who is the Lord and offers life." Pope John XXIII is said to have shared with his family that his greatest concern was to remain attentive to what the Spirit could ask of the Church. This should be the greatest concern, not only of the hierarchy, but of every Christian in his own life.

### 5.1 The Spirit in the Church

At times one has the idea that the Spirit acts only or principally on the hierarchy, guaranteeing their teaching and inspiring initiatives in the members. This idea, although widespread, is simply false; the faithful adopt the idea easily because it furthers a natural tendency to passivity and indolence. The hierarchy frequently favors the idea more or less unconsciously because it strengthens their authority and avoids problems. K. Rahner expressed it in a text written at the summons of Vatican II:

*"One may have the impression that all the Church's sanctifying action is carried by God exclusively through the hierarchy. This would be a totalitarian concept of the Church which does not correspond to the Catholic faith., although it is echoed in many minds. It would be a simple misbelief to uphold that God acts in Christ and in His Church exclusively through the actions of the hierarchy. God has not resigned from His Church in favor of the hierarchy.*

*"The Spirit does not inspire in such a manner that His action always begins with the highest ecclesiastical authorities. There exist charismatic effects of the Spirit consisting in new knowledge and new forms of Christian life oriented toward new decisions on which the advance of the Kingdom of God depends. They are effects of the Spirit that appear in the Church where the Spirit wishes. He may also assign a larger or smaller task for the Kingdom of God to the poor and to the young, to women and to children, to anyone of the faithful who is not a member of the hierarchy of the Church.*

*"Certainly the members of the hierarchy must examine the work of the Spirit in the charismatics by means of the charisma of discerning spirits (and, we add, that of governing).*

*They must regulate and orient it for the usefulness of the Church. But the hierarchy must never, neither implicitly nor explicitly, hint that it possess the Spirit in an independent and exclusive form, and that the members of the faithful are only to follow the orders and prompting that come from the hierarchy and only from the hierarchy.*

*"The Church is not a totalitarian state in the religious sphere. Neither is it correct to insinuate that all would function optimally in the Church if everything were maximally institutionalized or if obedience were the virtue which may substitute fully for all others, including personal initiative, personal quest for the prompting of the Spirit, personal responsibility and, in a word, a personal charisma received directly from God."<sup>1</sup>*

Evidently the question is not to deprecate the role pertaining to the hierarchy, which is absolutely necessary and decisive by the will of Christ and the Spirit. But the hierarchy should not annul all the other functions of the Church. It is a question of preserving and developing, as St. Paul

wished, the different gifts which, with the correct coordination, subordination and complementarity, are necessary for full vigor in the life of the community. Neither should the faithful yield to the temptation to evade responsibility which fidelity to the Spirit may require, nor should the hierarchy consent to the temptation to avoid problems by suffocating all that which is not in line with their projects or prejudices.

As we have said, in the time of St. Paul conflicting charisms were an acute problem. But St. Paul's solution was not authoritarian; rather it was to stimulate a serene discernment by humility and desire of fidelity to the same Spirit Who could not contradict Himself. The possible excesses of presumed charismatics or anarchists do not authorize us to inaugurate authoritarian and exclusive attitudes which close the door to the live-giving and renewing action of the Spirit.

At times one has the impression that the lassitude of the Christian life in communities originates, at least in part, in the fact that the hierarchy and the faithful have not made fidelity to the Spirit a priority in continuous humble discernment, sacrificing, patient and free of prejudice. The conviction that the Spirit continues may show us ways to invigorate the life of the Church should open us to a creative attitude of mind.

## **5.2 The Spirit and Christian hope**

He who believes in the Spirit can not abandon himself to passive resignation or hopelessness, not even in the most negative circumstances. To say it in the beautiful words of Cardinal Suenens:

*"I am a man of hope because I believe that God is new every morning. Because I believe that He creates the world in this same instant. He did not create it a long time ago nor has He lost sight of it since then. He creates it now: it is necessary, then, that we are disposed to expect the unexpected from God. Habitually, the ways of Providence are surprising. We are neither prisoners of some determinism, nor of the somber prognoses of sociologists. God is here, near us, unpredictable and loving.*

*"I am a man of hope, not for human reasons or natural optimism, but simply because I believe that the Holy Spirit acts in the Church and in the world, including in places where He is ignored..*

*"I am a man of hope because I believe that the Holy Spirit is always a Spirit–Creator. Every morning He gives a new freedom, a new provision of joy and confidence to the person who knows how to make use of them..*

*"I believe in the surprises of the Holy Spirit. The Council was one, and Pope John, also. He was someone we did not expect. Who would venture to say that God's imagination and love are exhausted? To hope is a duty, not a luxury. To hope is not to dream. It is the way to transform dreams into reality. Happy are those who, having the audacity to dream, are disposed to pay the price so that their dreams may become true in the history of man." (Cardinal Suenens, *Toward a new Pentecost? Bilbao, 1968*)*

Jon Sobrino shows the profound reason of Christian hope writing about the tragic situation of death in El Salvador. The belief that the Spirit is in the Church, he says, is the way to affirm that the history of men is the History of God, and that the history of God is the history of men."<sup>12</sup>

### 5.3 The Spirit wishes to save the world

To believe in the Spirit is to believe in a God Who cannot resign Himself to abandoning this world to its disgrace and Who does not limit Himself to acting in it in some privileged moment such as Creation or the Incarnation. God does not look at the world from afar; rather He is always acting in it, sanctifying through the action of his Spirit in the hearts of men.

Faith in the presence and action of the Spirit the given of life, obliges us to think of salvation not as something that will be carried out at the end of the world, but rather as something being carried out now as a deliverance of men in time. We believe in the word of Jesus: He says that the Spirit offers Himself to us *right here* in this world. "Divine grace" is a sanctifying reality now in time and not only a future promise.

If there would not exist real and powerful indices of salvation and liberation in our own history, we would either conclude that the Spirit had not come, or that it is impossible for Him to save the world—an unacceptable fact from point of view of Christian faith—: or that we have closed ourselves to the action of the Spirit, that is to say—we are "sinning against the Holy Spirit." And we leave no possibility of salvation.

As stated on page 3, all our Booklets in 1999 are dedicated to some of the challenges appearing in themes the Spirit sets forth for the Churches today (cf Apoc. 2,7.11.17.99 . . .)

Here is a probable index:

"The Poor, a Challenge for the Church and the World."

"An Ecological Crossroads"

"Equality: Pending Task and Indicator of Genuine Humanity"

"Appreciation of the Spirit in an Aggressive and Violent Culture"

"Education: Perennial Task, always New"

" The Third Millennium as a Challenge for the Churches"

Christianity and Justice

## Notes

1. Cardinal J. Ratzinger affirmed in the Bologna Eucharistic Congress (September 25, 1997) when speaking of the revision of Giordano Bruno's condemnation: *We must be conscious that the Church as an institution experiences the temptation to transform itself in a state that persecutes its enemies.*

Some of the faithful were scandalized by these words and the Catholic newspapers did not publish them. Some people believe that one can not recognize that the Church makes a mistake; certainly the Church does not make a mistake in matters essential for salvation, but churchmen, as well as all the faithful— can make mistakes in judgment and concrete decisions. We all must be disposed to recognize and repair errors, whenever it is possible. (Cf. El Pais, November 5, 1997, p.11).

2. Some people hold that the Acts of the Apostles proposed a true communism *avant la lettre* negating all right to private prosperity. In primitive communities it seems that this right was not explicitly denied; what it was required was the effective availability in the use of all goods in favor of the most needy.

3. Regarding this theme it is worth re-reading the *Decree on the Apostolate of Laymen* of Vatican II.

We see, for example, what is said in No. 3 "*the Holy Spirit . . . also offers personal gifts to the faithful, distributing them to each one, one by one, as He wishes.*" (1 Cor. 12, 11) . . . *By the fact of having received one of these gifts, even most humble, one can deduce for each of the faithful the right and the need to make use of it in the Church and in the world, for the good of men and the formation of the Church, in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. "Who blows where He wishes" (Jn 3,8), and in constant communion with his brothers in Christ, especially with the pastors, whose competency is to judge the authenticity of these gifts and their ordered use; it is not a question of annihilating the Spirit, but of examining the fruits and keeping what is good. (cf 1 Thes. 5, 12-21).*

4. Regarding this theme it is good to re-read Y. M. Conger 's book *If You are My Witness*, Barcelona, Estela, 1960.

5. Msgr. J. R. Quinn, emeritus archbishop of San Francisco, says it in this way: " Who can contradict the fact that in our Church the preoccupation for discipline prevails over the need for discernment? Does not there exist a lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit?" Cf. Documents d'Església, No. 674 (15.04.97) p. 254.

6. See parallel texts Jn 5, 26: *Thus as the Father has life in Himself, He also has given the Son life in Himself.* Jn 6,63. At the end of the discourse on the Bread of Life: *It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh has nothing to offer. The word which I have spoken are Spirit and Life.*

7. cf. S. Boulgakov, *Le Paraclète*, Paris 1946, pp 155-156.

8. We also see at the end: *He Whom God has sent, pronounces words of God because God gives His Spirit to Him without measure. The Father loves the Son and He puts all in His hands. He Who believes in the Son has eternal life.*

9. cf. Jn. 14,23 *He who loves Me, will keep my word, and My Father will love him and We shall*

*remain in him*. The expression *remain* is what the Spirit of the Father and the Son carries out in us. Regarding this theme, we can consider the lucid contribution of L. Boff in his recent work *Grito de los pobres, grito de la tierra*.

10. *Teología del Concilio* according to the version of *Selecciones de Teología*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (1962) p. 135. In the same number p. 41, an analogous text of Y. de Montcheuil is quoted: "The recognized initiative of the Christian is not a mere concession to his necessity for independence . . . It is something required. It is necessary that one be at the service of Christ with initiatives, or with dependence. If there is a fault in not obeying orders, there is also a fault in not initiating in the Church and for the Church that which we are capable of doing. It is easier to remain in obedience when one awaits passively without trying anything than to renounce, at the request of authority what one has begun. The initiative of Christian is a normal element in the life of the Church. What it is lacking, there is something that does not function correctly and the action of the hierarchy, attentive as it may be, can not supply it.

11. J. Sobrino in AA.VV. *Cruz y Resurrección Mexico*, CRT 1978, p. 153.

12. Cf. A. Gonzalez, *Trinidad y Liberación*, San Salvador UCA 1994 pp. 92-93.

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