

Jose Comblin : The Holy Spirit & Liberation

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Notes by Alison Morgan April 2006

Comblin is a Belgian theologian working in Latin America since 1958. Book written from within the perspective of Liberation theology, critical of past teaching of the church, interesting on the differences between the Roman, Eastern and Protestant churches, and clear on the need to develop a theology of the Holy Spirit. HS is referred to throughout as 'it'.

Summary p. 184-86

1. Christianity has two sources: the "Jesus event" and experience of the Spirit—Easter and Pentecost. The two events are intimately bound up in one another, but neither can absorb or reduce the other. The tradition of Western Christianity has never given enough importance to the Spirit. There was one Easter there are millions of Pentecosts.
2. The New Testament shows experience of the Spirit as the point of departure for the Christian event, above all in the teachings of St Paul. St Luke and St John. At the outset of Christianity the presence of the Spirit was always something experienced: faith was not separated from experience. This separation came after the second century till then, the Holy Spirit was the first thing known, an immediate reference to which Christians could appeal.
3. We are now witnessing an unforeseen renewal of experience of the Spirit: the Pentecostal phenomenon is the most noteworthy development in Christianity today. In its first phase, this laid much stress on certain spectacular phenomena, similar to those found in Corinth. With maturing experience in time, discernment of spiritual experience has come about, renewing the discernment enjoined by St Paul.
4. Among the signs of the times that allowed Vatican II to proclaim a new age for the church of God is the end of a rationalized, intellectualized and institutionalized Christianity modelled on great human organizations. The nation can no longer offer any model to a church living experience of the Spirit in thousands upon thousands of small groups.
5. In the struggle for liberation, experience of God is experience of the Holy Spirit: experience of action, freedom, word, community and life.
6. In Latin theology, the chain Father-Son-church took the place of the old patristic order Father-Son-Holy Spirit. Henceforth the Spirit was invoked only as a prop for everything the hierarchical church had already decided.
7. The Spirit has been at work in the world since its beginning, preparing it for a resurrection, for the kingdom of God, a new creation, the birth of a new humanity. Pentecost brought about a spiritual explosion, announcing the full and final realization. The first-fruits of eternal life are now present. Before Pentecost, however, the Spirit was already at work, just as it still continues at work in the midst of nations on which the Spirit has not yet been fully poured out.
8. The Holy Spirit lies at the root of the cry of the poor. The Spirit is the strength of those who have no strength. It leads the struggle for the emancipation and fulfilment of the people of the oppressed. The Spirit acts in history and through history. It does not take the place of history, but enters into history through men and women who carry the Spirit in themselves.
9. The signs of the action of the Spirit in the world are clear: the Spirit is present wherever the poor are awakening to action, to freedom, to speaking out, to community, to life.
10. Scripture and tradition endlessly repeat St Irenaeus' phrase: "Where the church is, there too is the Spirit of God." The Spirit "dwells" in the church. The presence of the Spirit does not exclude the material, institutional, historical aspects of the church. The Spirit is present in the human body— individual and social—to be as it were its "soul," as a traditional theological concept would put it.
11. The presence of the Spirit in the church means that the church starts with groups of people gathering in communities, is borne up by historical forces and subject to the rhythms and criteria of history. It is not dominated by the history its task is to transform, but neither can it rescind from it.
12. The Spirit is the source of the unity, catholicity, holiness and apostolicity of the church. None of these marks is the result of purely human forces, nor of a strategy' based on criteria drawn from human arts and sciences.
13. The Holy Spirit inspires the church in its three offices: it confers its strength and sheds its light on the office of the word, the liturgical office and the office of service to the community and the world.
14. Ministries, particularly those that include authority, are not outside the Spirit's sphere of action. The Spirit is present in them too, competing with psychological, sociological and anthropological tendencies.
15. A new spirituality is being born under the impulse of the Spirit, among elites placing themselves at the service of the poor, and among the poor themselves who are irrupting on to the stage of history. This spirituality includes a new form of contemplation, asceticism and prayer, whose first signs are already well apparent.

16. Traditional theology has not valued Jesus' Messiahship, preferring to define Jesus by the incarnation and from the moment of his conception. The new theology of the Spirit values his anointing by the Spirit and the progressive stages of Jesus' journey to his Father.
17. Spirit and word are in active collaboration. Classical theology failed to attach sufficient value to the actions of the Spirit because it was distorted by Greek intellectualism. Theologians thought in terms of immediate contact between us and Christ made through the purely human word handed on by tradition. They failed to understand that the word has meaning only from the activity of the Spirit, because all meaning is received starting from a praxis and within a praxis.
18. The Holy Spirit is God, equal to and consubstantial with the Father and the Son.
19. It is possible to see a way out of the quarrel between East and West concerning the relationship between the Son and the Holy Spirit within the Trinity.
20. All attributes of the Spirit denote movement: the Spirit is giving, loving, living. The Spirit comes at the end of movement in God, but the beginning of God's going-out to creation. It is at the start of creation's road back to the Father.

Introduction

The experience of God in the new Christian communities of Latin America can properly be called experience of the HS. Pneumatology in the Catholic church has been developing ever since Vatican II made it possible. Renewal of faith in the HS may provide the best meeting ground for ecumenism. In his view the church has spent a lot of time attacking atheism (eg Marxism) but is in fact what has brought atheism about, by identifying the work of the HS – through which our experience of God comes – with the hierarchy of the church. Without the HS Christianity doesn't work, he's saying.

1. Experience of the Holy Spirit

Christianity rests on experience of the HS. At the origins of Christianity are 2 events: the Jesus event and the Pentecost event. Both are necessary; but W theology has sought to play down the Pentecost event – by which Jesus is made to enter into human history. It's a mutilated theology – without experience of the HS he could never have moved people as he did, not even those who heard him and followed him. 'What can lead our contemporaries to Christ, except strong, convincing experience? Not words about Christ, only lived and felt realities, what we call experience of the Spirit.' 3

Paul

For the Corinthians experience of the HS was so strong that sometimes it came to overlay the experience which came from Jesus, and Paul has to reaffirm the link. *The experience of the HS is worked out in action, by which Christians and the whole community build up the church, and, through the church, a new world. The Spirit is known in the concrete activity of building a new world.* 4 It's an experience which includes the life of suffering and persecutions undergone by the early communities – it's joy in the midst of them. *Joy is the word that characterises the felt presence of the Spirit.*

Luke confirms the church did not come into being simply through the disciples who had known Jesus; it didn't spring from memory, but from a second coming of the Spirit. It came, at Pentecost. Doesn't matter how you describe it – what matters is that 'the experience of Pentecost was so graven on the memories of the communities as to become their unshakeable support in times of trial.' It was renewed several times (Acts 4,8,10,13). It doesn't turn people inwards, but launches them outwards into the world as though imbued with superhuman energy to tackle superhuman tasks.

John's writings relate to a community living an essentially spiritual experience, freed from Judaism/Law and living by the Spirit. It's not a matter of exceptional experiences as in Acts, or great upheavals as in Corinth, but a constant, continuous experience prolonged throughout life. It gives them the sense of having entered on a new life, been born again (Jn3.5-8). It was so strong they ran the risk of neglecting the memory of Jesus and the importance of practice over experience – John reasserts these.

Pentecostals often judged because of class of those involved, by those from the W modern culture of the ruling classes. But they are a jump backwards to the early church, and force us to stop glossing over the texts above.

There has never, since the origins of Christianity, been such a radical change in the world as the one that is now taking place. For the church, this transformation is more radical than the transition from Israel to the Gentiles, more important than the establishment of the institutional church under Constantine or the Protestant Reformation: the present transformation forces it to a more radical reappraisal of itself and challenges many more aspects of it than have been challenged hitherto. 10

If people are to return to God we must show them Christ according to the Spirit – neither the Creator God nor the Christ of history will convince them. Only experience will do. Signs this is happening:

- People are again reading the Bible as spiritual exegesis, looking not for history or theology but for the voice which speaks to their contemporary situation. Reading the Bible is becoming an experience of the Spirit
- Prayer – people are praying not through traditional formulations but spontaneously; prayer is becoming a spiritual experience, as once it was when people prayed not through books but through their work in the fields
- There is a rebirth of celebration – sacraments were not experiences, and people now are abandoning them; they will never go back to this sort of liturgy, which suits only archaeologists and those who have a classical education. A celebration is the collective expression of a community.

W theology tended to start from God the Creator, a rational God. Biblical revelation was not a starting point, but was referred to in order to respond to questions raised by the religious understanding of the dominant culture. 'So one started from the God of that culture, then illustrated and enriched that God by referring to the Bible', 13. Nicene Creed works like this. This kind of theology leaves the Spirit out – God is the creator, the Son is incarnate in history, but the HS is left in a vacuum, becomes a literary device to express the actions of the one God. Anselm explains the redeeming work of Christ without mentioning the HS; the traditional theology of salvation has no room for the HS. In the Catholic church the pattern has been God-Christ-Church; God is revealed by Christ and Christ is made known by the church (hierarchy). The HS helps them... The church thus became identified with the institution; church-as-mystery, church as a supernatural reality, is separated off. In all this matter and spirit are divorced, when the HS should be the link between them. Mystical experiences were marginalised and regarded as superstitious.

All this is changing. Barth said at the end of his life that he suspected all his work lacked the perspective of the HS as a basis. Hegel and Schleiermacher knew that traditional W Christian theology led to atheism, because it offered a religion whose God was imposed from the outside. They looked to the Spirit as the starting-point for a re-reading of Christianity. Catholic theology has denied that the modern world existed as a problem; the result is theoretical or practical atheism throughout the W world. The traditional strategy of safeguarding Catholics from contamination by error no longer works: defensive strategy = suicide.

How then do we evangelise? *In its traditional form, Christianity is simply unintelligible to modern atheists.. Only a living experience can command attention and eventually convince.* 18. This is what has happened with the base communities. *We are now witnessing a return to experiences of the Spirit as described in the NT.. The new era of the church will be under the sign of the HS, and the aspect of experience will be valued far more highly than it has been since the second century.* 19.

Base communities

Experiences of the Spirit cannot be separated from positive action. This comes from the experience of transformation; people feel taken hold of by a new strength, and discover themselves to be protagonists of a history bigger than they are. This 'conversion' is expressed in action, freedom, speech, community and life. The communities cultivate not *having* more, but *being* more. *Political, economic and cultural changes.. will not transform the people who carry them out.. In this respect the experience of the politically, culturally and economically most developed nations has been a great disillusionment. It shows that the one-sided development of each of these dimensions does not produce life, but just consumption, excitement and satisfaction of desires, and above all isolation and individualism. This is not an experience of life.* 30. Perhaps the poorer nations were right all along – their experience of life is a spiritual experience.

Experience of the Spirit in the history of theology

From the outset the HS has produced anxiety/insecurity in the church → so the dominant theology played down its role and writings that invoked the Spirit have tended to be suppressed.

- NT: Peter saw authority of HS as paramount – Acts 10 he obeys it. Paul warns 'never try to suppress the Spirit' (1 Thess 5.19) – though he was worried by developments in Corinth.
- C2 many bishops were charismatic. Irenaeus: 'it is not possible to count the number of charisms which, through out the world, the church receives every day from God, in the name of Jesus Christ'. Montanists (esp Tertullian) saw a conflict between the institutional church and the church of the Spirit. Experience of the Spirit became much rarer in C3.
- C4 John Chrysostom said charisms were exceptionally given to the early church and the church no longer needed them.

Further developments:

a) The HS was reduced to the church. Irenaeus: 'where the church is, there too is the Spirit of God; where the Spirit of God is, there too is the church and all grace', 36. In the West, the church has been increasingly identified with the hierarchy. From the C11 the Spirit became tied to the church-institution and to the concept of power. By the C14th the Spirit was confined to sacraments, councils and the authority of the Pope. Writers pushing against this, eg Joachim, were marginalised, though lay movements embraced his teaching, not least the Friars Minor. Aquinas meanwhile announced that everything that could be expected of the HS had been given and was present in the church.

What is spiritual is ecclesiastical.

b) The HS was made masculine. From ruach → pneuma → spiritus. But the Bible uses both masculine and feminine terms to refer to God. We are, male and female, made in the image of God. The influence of Augustine was decisive in eliminating all feminine ref from theology and Christian imagery: according to Augustine only man is the image of God, not woman. Aquinas continued this trend; from then on there has been no place for femininity in theology of the Spirit, or in representations of God. The Spirit was absorbed by a religious framework that exalted power.

c) There is a connection between the triumph of atheism and the theology of the HS, or rather the absence of a theology and practice of the HS. **The prime source of atheism is the growing intellectualization of Christianity in the modern age. 40 The intellectualisation of the priests destroyed the religion of the people.** The other factor was the replacement of belief in the triune God by deism. The image of this God is power. Power produces a reaction of rejection. In the eyes of most people today, Christianity is a system of domination over their spirit.

'We are witnessing a resurgence of experience of the HS. If this is the case, it is a phenomenon unique in the history for the church since the third century. It is a complete inversion of the course the church in the West has followed since then.' - 41

My thesis is that this.. experience of the HS cannot ..be reduced to the charismatic manifestations so highly prized by the Corinthians. 41

Compared to the present crisis of the Western church, the Reformation of the C16th was child's play: the reformers left the basis of the W tradition intact. They changed the surface elements, but failed to reach the heart of the problem.

2. The Holy Spirit in the world

The HS was sent to the people of God. but this people exists for the sake of the world. The HS is sent to the whole world to bring about a new creation. 43.

The biblical message on the Spirit in the world revolves round 6 themes: resurrection, kingdom, new creation, new humanity, nations, the maternity of the Spirit.

- The HS is the present realisation of the kingdom of God; a pledge/sign that this kingdom of God is becoming a reality. According to Paul, the HS is the proper object of the gospel; his theology has no more than few allusions to the kingdom of God. His proclamation of the good news is about the HS: Romans 8 is about the HS. See also 2 Cor 1.22, Gal 5.5, Eph 1.13-14. The early Christians saw the gift of the Spirit as the actual presence of the promises made by God. They were focussed not on the future, but now on the present; they were certain the HS was among them.
- Creation – Gen 1.2, Judith 16.14, Ps 104, Wisdom 1.7. More emphasis in Eastern church, esp at Pentecost, which was a new creation.
- New humanity – John 3.5, being born again. Eph 4.23, 2.15-18
- The creation of a new humanity summons all the nations of the world; they do not lose their identity/language. The new humanity does not lose its diversity in its new unity. The calling of the nations was Paul's most consistent proclamation. The Latin theology of the 2nd millennium discerned the HS only in the church. Vatican II discerned the actions of the Spirit in the world and in temporal activities – in movements for social/political change, and in advances of science, technology, labour. Further, if the Spirit is at work in nations, it prepares cultures for Christ, working in them in advance of his proclamation.
- The feminine character of the HS was developed by Judeo-Christianity and Syriac Christianity – word Spirit is female. We should accept that this is what religions worshipping a mother goddess were feeling for. In the Catholic tradition, Mary took the place of the cult of the HS. But her motherhood does not reach into the being of God; it is not enough. The imbalance made Christianity (& Islam) into a religion of domination, authority and order, with no compensating feminine features.

Theology has paid little attention to history, the place in which the action of the Spirit is carried out (!).

Eg Francis and the movement of spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty threatened not just the church but the whole of society; there was a potential break between a spiritual church and a bodily (institutional) church. The HS acts through the poor in history; when the poor become agents in history, then the HS is at work. Theology has made no connection between the democratic revolutions and the advent in history of the Spirit through the poor – but should have done. The East developed a vision of a world transfigured and glorified by the Spirit, and was disinclined to take part in social and political action – what matters is to contemplate the Spirit in the world, not work to change it. Contributed to rise of atheism?

It is the role of the HS to promote reform in the church. **The history of Christianity is not an unbroken straight line, but more like a spiral. It is always in need of re-simplifying, going back to its origins, ridding itself for the excessive superstructure it has acquired through history. 60.**

The Spirit has been active in all peoples since the dawn of humanity.

Freedom comes from within, not without; it's the capacity to act on the level of the new humanity, in a fully human way, overcoming the resistance that comes to humanity through sin. **Basic freedom is what sets human beings free from**

what they find in themselves. 62 2Cor3.17 – where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. It's a gift from the Spirit. Our newness as Christians consists in that being free we nevertheless accept other necessary systems out of solidarity with an imperfect world, though we are not motivated by these systems. We act out of freedom and not out of constraint.

Freedom is not opposed to community; it is expressed through belonging to community. Gal 5.13- freedom is for service, not self-indulgence.

The churches have come up with systems for dominating people's consciences so as to deprive them of the freedom to sin – a moral code with punishments, a canon law that allows no room for sinners, and recourse to civil power to compel Christians to comply with moral and canonical laws. Augustine and Aquinas did not recognise the freedom to sin. The result: sin forced into clandestinity. Worse, the church has condemned freedom movements in the name of the moral and social order. Traditional theologians seem to fear sin more than they fear God. A paternalistic church has forgotten the motherhood of God.

ie to promote freedom the church develops laws. But it doesn't work. It should promote the activity of the HS within, who brings real (inner) freedom, rather than its outward appearance.

Speech – for Paul the power of the Spirit is shown in speech – the weaker and less eloquent the speaker, the stronger the word of the gospel. 1 Cor 2.4. In martyrdom the greatest weakness goes with the greatest strength.

Action – in the OT the Spirit does not appear as a person: it is a power, an energy. Isaiah 42.6-7, 61.1-2, Luke 4.18-19 the Spirit is on the servant of God, and its work is to refashion the people of God. The Spirit is a force for building, and the gifts which should be most prized are those which benefit the community – 1 Cor 14.

The works of the Spirit have no material grandeur: it does not produce the pyramids of Egypt or the towers of Babylon, but human realities, free people and free communities living in free association. The Spirit produces complete human beings. 70 It works to form a great charismatic community; and this gives rise to the church.

Life – everything the Spirit brings about in this world converges on the one end of life.

3. The Holy Spirit in the church

The HS was not sent to an already formed church; it was the sending of the HS that formed the church. so the action of the Spirit is not determined by the action of the church. The church is the instrument of the HS, not its master.

The relationship between the Spirit and the church

For Protestants, the church is formed by the word of God. For Catholics, the church is an organisation founded by Jesus and directed by the hierarchy who guarantee faithful execution of the functions defined by Jesus thanks to the powers received from him. Both in practice act as if the HS did not exist. Having decided on and carried out a course of action, they then attribute what they have decided and done to the HS, thereby conferring an authorisation that sanctifies and sacralises their basically human actions. 78

The Eastern church complains the W churches do not recognise the role of the Spirit in the church. they celebrate their liturgy as though they were taking part in a play directed by the Spirit rather than by themselves. The eucharist introduces humanity into the communion of the Trinity.

For Paul, thinking church means thinking community, and the community is brought together, inspired and guided by the Spirit. 1 Cor 12.13, 14.2, 2 Cor 3.3. He also sees the church as the universal people of God, spread throughout the world.

For Luke, the HS makes apostles, and through them communities, and in each community is the church.

The HS is not a stamp of approval put on a human process; the communities really are born from their experience of the Spirit, their members experiencing a new reality. A community is produced through people having an experience of the Spirit together. The church derives not from Christ but from the HS.

Till the C4, the HS was a gift received in the church; after then it became more personal, a person guiding the church rather than a gift living in it.

In the East, the church exists in liturgical celebration, which is a spiritual experience.

To distinguish between institution and Spirit is not helpful – all human entities are institutional. What matters is what changes the presence of the Spirit can bring to institutions.

Gifts – those who receive the Spirit are not acquiring a new property but a new capacity for action. 86 A gift in the Bible is a capacity to do something handed over.

The church comes into being when disciples come together to form a community; this is the creative work of the Spirit. we can only create from what we have inherited, and what we inherit is our culture. We can build our faith and religious life only on the basis of our previous religion; the HS does not break with the past. But the church springs up in an infinite variety of human situations.

What is spiritual in the church is the movement that takes it outwards – not to recruit but to share the gifts of the Spirit.

Western churches accentuate the ethical aspect and Eastern churches the aesthetic aspect of the experience of the HS. In the E the church is felt to be an experience of the Spirit. It's a celebration of victory which we need to recover in the W.

The first churches met in houses; when the church turns away from people's houses, the church becomes artificial, formalist, devoid of real content. Domestic communities are the basis of Christian faith and charity. The parish church demands monopoly in worship as though it were the temple of Jerusalem – and the poor have been alienated from church. The Spirit works by founding new base communities.

Unity comes from diversity; the Spirit unites diversity whilst respecting it [hence inappropriateness of universal liturgies, which assumes unity comes from top-down uniformity].

The word of God is not tied to any one literary form; the Spirit intervenes to make all forms of human language capable of communicating the word of God. to understand is to create meaning. The task of recreating the meaning of the word of God belongs to all Christians. As understanding leads to expressing the word, every Christian is a missionary.

The control of charisms by the clergy – as a general rule, the clergy have eliminated everything that did not originate with them or did not fit in with their plans – made without consulting the laity. 113. Parish priests abolish all the offices that existed before their arrival – wise women, healers, counsellors. They simplify, rationalise, cut down diversity. Bureaucracy hates variety.

4. The Holy Spirit in persons

The spiritual tradition of Latin America owes virtually everything to the C16th Spanish mystics – Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross – and to Ignatius and the Jesuit/Franciscan/Dominican reformers of the period. Latin American spirituality likewise grew up without theology and without the HS. It has had no vocabulary for developing its understanding. One way of presenting the HS came with the charismatic renewal movement.

Models for the work of the HS in individuals

- a) The Eastern model – the work of the HS is to divinise humankind. People are spiritualised as they take part in the liturgy, transformed into praying beings.
- b) The Western model – der Augustine. Starts from the experience of sin: humanity aspires to salvation from the sin that holds it prisoner. We cannot save ourselves; the Spirit is the source of liberation. In this model, the gospel message was 'save your soul', meaning save it from sin. It was an individual process. Like the E model, this needs to be absorbed into a more all-embracing model. In itself it is no longer viable. It is actually dead.

History teaches us that the HS inspires models that correspond to the basic aspirations of a culture. We cannot create a theoretical model for our times, but we can infer the probable ways of the Spirit from the culture of our times. Saints do not follow theological themes – life comes first, theory follows. Conditions for a new model:

- Alienation and liberation – the personality is attracted by, confused by and finally emptied of identity by the forces of the dominant culture, 125. Liberation from alienation is the great theme of modern times; the gospel of the age proclaims this can be done outside of religion – through science and technology, in a purely secular process. Spirituality is superfluous/harmful.

Christians trying to walk in the ways of the Spirit are questing in the dark. They fell that the old ways, the methodologies they once learned, no longer work. They sense that the old spiritualities are in decline. They can see that many give up through discouragement because they are disorientate and have lost confidence. There is a general impression that the old certainties no longer hold. 127 History teaches it's in just such situations that the HS is present. The experience of deprivation and incapacity is needed to hack out a new spiritual path. The sign of the presence of the Spirit is accepting this quest in the darkness, in insecurity; it is faithfulness to the quest even when its direction is unclear; it is persevering with confidence. 128.

This is what's happened in Latin America – liberation theology is an attempt to create a new model on top of an old one. What happens is that we go back to our origins – to the models of the NT, the disciples' following of Jesus and the early communities. Any new spirituality is based on a new reading of the Bible. The HS leads us back to the Bible first.

Components of the new spirituality:

- Contemplation – penetrating deeper into the secret of the words and deeds of Jesus – Jn 14.26, 1 Cor 2.9-12, Eph 3.4-5. It is not an intellectual barrier that stands in the way of Christian wisdom, but our instinctive, natural and culturally induced aversion to poverty.
- Asceticism – the struggle against the evil that dwells within a person. The goal of this struggle is liberty. Gal 5.13-22. It's not through our initiative this comes about, but through the work of the HS when we entrust ourselves to it.
- Prayer. We can't invent that either, it comes from the HS. Rom 8.26-7, Gal 4.6, Eph 5.18-20.

- Joy. Rom 14.17 'the kingdom of God means joy brought by the HS; 1 Thess 1.6 it was with the joy of the HS that you took to the gospel. Joy comes from certainty of future victory – Jn 15.11 I have told you this so that your joy may be complete.

The Spirit does all this in us; we have to go on guessing and following, step by step.

5. The two hands of God

Irenaeus – the Father works through his 2 hands, the Word and the HS. They work together, but are not identical; each has its own sphere of operations. Historically we have emphasised the mission of the Son, present in the word of the Bible (Protestants) or in the hierarchy (Catholics). But the mission of the HS is as important. The Son became incarnate in one perfect person, but the HS exists in the imperfection of countless individuals seeking light and liberation. The Son is incarnate in a person who is the end of this movement; towards him we make our way. The Spirit carries everyone and everything to him.

Even for Jesus, the Spirit came on him on a series of occasions, each corresponding to a new stage in his messianic mission – the HS formed him gradually through historical events; and we watch him change.

Stages of the coming of the Spirit on Jesus

- Anointing in baptism – his messianic activity began with what happened on that day
- After the resurrection Jesus received the HS in such a way he could pour it out – before, he could not do this. His interventions after the resurrection show he could not have the full anointing till he had gone back to the Father (Jn 20.17). Only at the end did the disciples understand that his life had been inspired by the HS.

Spirit and word

In the prophets spirit and word act together – Ps 33.6, Is 59.21, Ez 2.2.

In Synoptics there are few refs to the Spirit, but they are associated with words – Mk 13.11, Mt 10.19-20, Lk 12.11-12, Lk 1.41-2, Lk 4.18.

In John Spirit and word come together. Jn 3.34; 4.24; 6.63.

Paul also links them – 1 Thess 1.5, 1 Cor 2.4, Acts 1.8, 2.4.

The letters in Revelation proceed equally from Christ and the Spirit – Rev 2.1, 7 etc

All these texts say that the gospel on its own is not enough; what gives it power is the HS.

It was John Chrysostom who first asked that the HS be invoked before a sermon. The word has its own power, but needs to be pierced by the Spirit for those who hear to assimilate it. Calvin developed the doctrine of the need for inner enlightenment by the Spirit in order to understand the Bible.

The prophets – in them charism and institution came together. **Prophets have to be faithful to the word of him who sent them out to speak. But they are also profoundly personal, and in a sense recreate the word they have received.**

Prophets make the word of God a deeply personal and community word, a word capable of penetrating and convincing. Prophets are at once inventive, creative and totally obedient. They combine submission to the message they have received with a capacity to express this message in a comprehensible manner. They make the word of God be a real word for the human situation they are addressing. The word of Christ is really from Christ if it is both the same and different for every individual and every culture. 152.

Today we are beginning again to give the name of prophet to those who are able to hand on the word of Christ in human language endowed with real meaning. Prophets may be members of the hierarchy, but more often are not. They have a special gift which enables them to find contemporary human words which better convey the meaning of the gospel words to an audience conditioned by history and geography. The ideal would be to have prophets among the bishops.

Today we are returning to a more biblical concept of the word. The word is found in action. The eternal Word became human word through acting in our history. 155. Those who do not follow Jesus cannot understand him. We cannot understand Jesus' words if we start with them alone, using a dictionary, a grammar and the tools of literary criticism. We understand his words by taking part in the action to which the words refer. 155. It would be ingenuous to think that we could translate the discourse of the NT into today's language through literary or purely intellectual disciplines. The lesson of 200 years of 'scientific' exegesis is that the intellectual road leads to a Christian archaeology. 156.

The church is charismatic because everything that really happens in it derives from the gifts of the Spirit. If these gifts are not recognized and respected, life leaves the church and the institution is left hollow. This is what is happening today. Those churches that still have a rigid institutional system complain that their followers are deserting them. At the same time, however, thousands of new movements are growing from the grassroots, charismatic communities fearful of being manipulated by powerful systems. 158

Anthropologists see any form of Christian mission as a renewal of colonialism; because it tends to destroy ancestral religions, replacing them with one under Western and white control. Answers:

- Communicate the gospel through deeds not words
- Evangelism should be replaced with dialogue
- Meeting between religions should come through a joint practice of liberation.

[why not just point to the growing flow of missionaries coming from these cultures to the W?]

6. The Holy Spirit and the Trinity

The HS was sent to lead us to Christ, and Christ leads us to the Father. Some in C4th denied the divinity of the HS. The Cappadocian Fathers took up the cause, and so the creed came to say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father – the words used are designed to teach that Father, Son and Spirit are equal. Athanasius had argued that if the HS is not God, it cannot transform us according to the image of the Son so as to unite us to the Father. If the Spirit is not God, it cannot divinize us. Eastern formulation – the HS gathers men and women into the Body of Christ who is one with the Father.

Filioque

Complete history! The word was added at the command of the Visigoth King Recaredo, converted from Arianism; it was approved in 633 as a refutation of Arianism, because if the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son that proves the equality between them.

Essence and Energy

C14th Eastern monk Gregory Palamas distinguished between divine essence and divine energy. The essence of God is the incommunicable, inaccessible part of God, the energies the accessible part. In divinization it is not the essence of God that is communicated, but the energies of the Father, through the Son in the HS.

Spirit as love

Augustine said God is love in 3 forms: 'there is the love of one who loves him to whom he gave being, the love of one for the one from whom he received his being, and there is this very love in itself' – De Trinitate VI,5,7. Developed by Richard of St Victor and Bonaventure. Bonaventure said the HS is the mutual love between the Father and the Son; the title 'love' is especially appropriate to the Holy Spirit.

Spirit as gift

Acts 2.38, 10.45, John 4.10, 8.20 all refer to the HS as a gift; in many other places it's the complement to the verbs give/receive. Augustine made 'Gift' the proper name of the HS. What is given in the HS is God in the form of gift.

Spirit as life

The attribute of life is the proper name of the Spirit in the tradition of the Syriac church. John Chrysostom said the Spirit is life because the church cannot live without it. The biblical symbols of breath, water and fire all refer to life.

Conclusion

In Mary the HS brought about unity between humanity and the word of God. Mary is the new Eve, mother of the human species renewed and integrated into Christ. The whole history of humanity comes to a head in her; the HS was present in the peoples of the earth from the beginning, preparing them to receive their saviour.

At present we are witnessing the death of an old church of Christendom. This church must die so that the new communities can have space to breathe and live. The Spirit arranges physical links between the new communities, marking the end of one type of society and one type of church, and bringing in another.

1 Thess 5.19-20 : *never try to suppress the Spirit, or treat the gift of prophecy with contempt; think before you do anything – hold on to what is good.*

Alison Morgan

www.alisonmorgan.co.uk

www.resource-arm.net