

EDITORIAL

Spirit (*pneuma*) is the basic datum of religious experience in all religions. It is this foundational reality which makes possible for the humans to exercise their religious sense and elevate their self to the realm of the divine. Spirit is also one of the fundamental concepts in the history of philosophy. The philosophical concept of *pneuma* was first worked out in Greek thought, although there was no word as such which had all the connotations and nuances of what we understand by the word 'spirit' in our times. The word *pneuma* originally meant breath, movement of air and wind, and it came to be used as the breath of life in a human person. Modern developments of the notion of the spirit are characterized by a profusion of meanings with which the word spirit has been enriched in the course of history. Thus Descartes understood spirit as *res cogitans*, Leibniz as the *monad*, Kant as the *transcendental consciousness* and Fichte as *ego*. The climax of this development was reached in German idealism, which claimed to merge the history of the spirit into the absolute dialectics of being and spirit. Hence for Hegel, spirit is the loftiest concept and supreme definition of the absolute. This Hegelian concept was challenged by Kierkegaard, Marx and Dilthey. For Kierkegaard, a correct understanding of the spirit is possible only from biblical and Christian points of view, whereas Marx with his theory of dialectical materialism considered spirit as the reflection of material nature, and Dilthey tried to define the life of the spirit according to the concrete forms and contrast their special nature and methods with all natural phenomena.

The above survey shows how complex and confusing a notion spirit has. Spirit is what distinguishes humans from all other beings. Humans are not just one category of being among others. They are those who are divinized by the spirit. God is absolute spirit, not in the sense of an objectified changeless self-possession, remote from the world and history, but as the incalculable personal origin, to which the finite human spirit always feels itself referred, and to whose rule and claim it knows itself to be subject in its experience of thought and freedom. Hence the human spirit is the immediacy of the finite to the infinite, of the conditioned to the absolute, of the temporal to the eternal. Consequently, it is the spirit that creates the true selfhood of a

person. The most essential thing in humans is not a self-sufficient subjectivity, but a constant opening out beyond themselves, which we may call their being 'there', the presence of being disclosing itself historically as mystery. That spirit is that which immeasurably surpasses humans and also that which remains their most essential element.

But the human spirit has its concrete reality only in its relation to the body, which is not to be regarded merely as an extrinsic medium or instrument, but as its profound expression, its way of being here. This specifically human finiteness of the spirit is manifested in this concrete act of being with the body. Hence the spirit with its self-realisation effected in and through the body also implies an essential relationship to the material cosmos as a whole. The spirit is the self-presentation of being as the unlimited totality. There cannot therefore be anything outside the spirit. And since the spirit can only realize itself by means of material things, the cosmos is at once absorbed into the dialectics of the spirit, of which it is the extend embodiment. This does not mean that the human spirit is an immanent product of the evolution of the cosmos; rather it spans this history of the cosmos in as much as it can give meaning to the whole history of the cosmos. The history of the cosmos is always opened out to the spirit; indeed, it culminates in the spirit.

It is at the realm of this spirit that all religions open themselves and reach out to be related to other religions, where all other issues related to orthodoxy and orthopraxy recede into the background. "The letter kills; but the spirit gives life" is an adage that is applicable to all realms of religion. Spirit is the foundational and transcendental level on which all religions should meet and remain related. To the extent of our capacity to experience this spirit, we shall be authentic followers of the religion of our choice and practice. Hence, it is very important that serious discussions are to be held about the realm of the spirit both in philosophical as well as theological circles, and there is a growing awareness not only among philosophers and theologians of the need to reflect on the reality of the spirit in religion but also among common people who are more and more open to influence of the spirit in their day-to-day life and activities.

In the "Spiritual Exercises" Ignatius of Loyola outlines his classical "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits". These are supposed to function critically as exercitants attempt to respond to the influence of God directing their lives. The capacity for the discernment of spirits responds to a profound expectation and a pervasive temptation within humans. All humans who search for God want God to guide their lives. But it often happens that there is a real confusion with regard to the source of this influence, whether it is from God or from one's own selfishness. The discernment of spirits, while it is always necessary for an authentic life, becomes imperative with a new urgency and intensity in time of crisis like ours. The violent clash of contrasting ideas and ideologies, the trenchant criticism of social structures, the radical calling into question of life styles, a complete re-appraisal of ideals and priorities, the unrelenting re-examination of past commitments, and the new horizons of apparently unlimited possibilities have all become the air we breathe. Such an atmosphere is filled with tremendous potentialities for both good and evil, for the upbuilding of society or its total destruction. The outcome of the crisis depends in large part on the discernment of spirits. Since the mysterious voice of the spirit of God is not the only voice we hear but comes to us accompanied by the tumultuous sounds of our own conflicting impulses, it is essential for us to be able to discern the presence of the spirit of God in order to lead an authentic life.

This issue of the *Journal of Dharma* tries to analyze the various aspects and dynamics of the concept of spirit in World Religions. These studies are meant to highlight the very concept of the spirit in relation to other concepts as well as to fathom the depth and dimensions of the concept of the spirit in different religious traditions. The first article by Gopal Stavig is an attempt to compare and see the relationship between the *Advaita* philosophy of Shankara and the philosophy of absolute essence by Ibn al-'Arabi, a Spanish Sufi who maintained that mystical intuition was the main source of his writings. Mary John presents a study on the complementary dimensions of the concepts of *agni* and spirit in the Indian and Christian traditions through which the author tries to show how these two concepts refer to the innermost essence of these religions and enhance the fundamental unity of God-experience in all religions. Augustine Thottakara studies the Upanisadic concept of Brahman-

Atman under the aspect of *Antaryamin*, the inner Spirit and Controller, who vivifies and controls humans in their march towards ultimate liberation. Paul Kalluveettil analyzes the Old Testament vision of society as a spirit-energized movement, especially during the ministry of the prophets who were pneumatic conscientizers of society in the context of the troubled history of Israel, which reaches its climax in the promise of the new covenant as a spirit-energized event. Nkem L. Embeghara studies the Igbo concept of *Chi* as the Destiny Spirit in so far as it is understood as a productive force and as an agent of morality. The study tries to show that the Igbo concept of *Chi* contributes to the view that the human person is a being who operates through the aid of a force outside of him, which is at the same part of him, and thereby it comes very close to the Christian concept of the spirit. The last article of Joseph Pathrapankal concludes the studies analyzing the spirit perspectives in the writings of Paul, the great theologian of the early Church, for whom the spirit is at the same time a divinely given principle of life, but it needs to be empowered by the divine Spirit, which, according to him, takes place through the assistance of the Spirit of the Risen Christ in such a way that the divine Spirit assists not only the humans but also guides the entire process of the transformation of the material creation.

It is hoped that these studies will encourage further research into the meaning and mystery of the spirit found as operating in all religions. In the context of each religion claiming uniqueness and universality, it is imperative that religions come out of their centripetalistic attitudes and affirm the unity and convergence of all religions at the level of the spirit. This is particularly true of a country like India with its rich heritage of religious pluralism, which is not be seen as a burden but as the basis of a challenge and a privilege.

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