

SPIRIT PERSPECTIVES IN PAULINE WRITINGS

Joseph Pathrapankal cmi*

One of the most challenging narratives in the Gospels is the journey of Jesus from Jerusalem to Galilee through Samaria (Jn 4:4-42). Because of the long-standing enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans,¹ the Jews travelling between Galilee and Judea would not pass through the territory of Samaria; rather they crossed the river Jordan in the north and in the south and travelled through Trans-Jordan, which was a tedious and time-consuming exercise. But this custom was adhered to by all Jews during those times, precisely to demonstrate their antipathy towards the Samaritans. It is in the context of this unsympathetic atmosphere that we read about Jesus travelling through Samaria. John simply says: "He (Jesus) had to go through Samaria" (Jn 4:4). Through this statement John does not refer to the usual practice, rather he hints at the theological significance of this journey and the consequence of this bold exercise of Jesus transcending the conventions and customs in religious relationship, thereby creating a new atmosphere of inter-religious complementary thinking, a very important step in our journey towards fellowship in religious experience.

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* **Prof. Joseph Pathrapankal, cmi** is professor of theology and New Testament at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore and President of the Theological Publications of India (TPI).

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we try to develop an important stage in this story where Jesus speaks about religion and worship. When the Samaritan woman was asked to bring her husband to Jesus, she had to confess that she had no husband (Jn 4:16-19). Realizing that Jesus had a profound capacity to read into the inner realities of issues, the woman raised a theological problem, most probably to get out of her embarrassing situation, after she had to confess that she had no husband. But the question put by the woman was a very sophisticated and theological one, and many would feel like asking the same question when they see not only a diversity of religious worship but also antagonism and rivalry in various forms, not only between religions and religions but also sometimes within the same religion. The woman asked Jesus: "Our fathers worshipped on this mountain,² but you Jews say that the temple where God should be worshipped is in Jerusalem" (Jn 4:19-20). The answer of Jesus to this question should rank among the most important pronouncements of Jesus about religion and worship, not only in those remote times, when religious consciousness was gradually emerging, but also in our own present times with an added urgency and challenge, although we claim to live in a "world come of age" with a sober and mature way of religious thinking and living.

Jesus answered the question of the Samaritan woman: "Believe me, the time is coming when you will worship the *abba* (God understood as father and mother), neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship without knowing what you worship, while we worship what we know. It is from the Jews that salvation comes. But the time approaches, indeed it is already here, when those who are real worshippers will worship the *abba* in spirit and in truth. Such are the worshippers whom the *abba* wants. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:21-24). Jesus was a Jew and so he respected the beliefs of Judaism. He was not a renegade. He could see the healthy traditions Judaism had kept up during the many centuries of its growth through various critical events and vicissitudes. But he never remained a slave of his religion. He tried to transcend his religion

The reference is to mount Gerizim, where some time between the sixth and second century BCE the Samaritans built a temple, and in the Samaritan Pentateuch dating from tenth century CE Gerizim is defined as the Temple Mountain.

and thereby arrive at a better understanding of the very meaning of religion. What Jesus told the Samaritan woman could be summarised as follows: In the past the followers of various religious groups had their own ways of worshipping God. The Samaritans through their schism from the Jews and the setting up of the temple to Yahweh on Mount Gerizim tried to own Yahweh as their own, while the Jews did the same in their temple of Jerusalem. The only difference was that the majority of the Samaritans did not know about all these conflicts because they were all engineered by a few interested people in the past, while the Jews as a whole knew that they were worshipping Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, and so they had a specific role to play in the history of religions. But with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth and the inauguration of a new way of relating God to the humans and the humans among themselves, precisely within the framework of good news of the kingdom of God, religion itself and worship have to assume a new meaning. Worship is no more to be localized and monopolized by a few people who think that they are the privileged ones. It must be the exercise of the freedom of the spirit for all humans. All what happened in the past were expressions of rivalry and competition, one claiming superiority over the other, one condemning the other as false and illegitimate. They were all attempts construed by the spirit of falsehood and slavery. The time has now come for all to rise up from this enslavement and inaugurate a new era of worship with the power of the true and genuine operation of the Spirit of God encompassing the universe of faiths and religious traditions.

The spirit is often understood as God's enabling power, a mysterious power conceived of as the mode of God's activity, manifested both in creation and in other supernatural events. Humans and the cosmos as a whole continue to exist and operate within the orbit of God's power and action through this spirit. God is the creator of the cosmos who acts in every situation, whether in nature or in history, through his energizing spirit, often rendered by the Hebrew word *ruach*. The Hebrew word *ruach*, translated most often as *pneuma* into Greek by the LXX, can mean breath, air in motion,

breeze, wind, spirit in general and Spirit of God.⁴ The creation story of the book of Genesis is associated with this dynamic spirit of God as the context in which the entire creation takes place (Gen 1:2).⁵ The creation of the first human person as reaching its climax through God breathing into his nostrils the breath of life (Gen 2:7) is also an application of the power of God's spirit as extended to humankind. In fact, breathing as an ongoing process taking place in all human beings as well as other living beings on this earth, through which they exercise their close relationship to God as the source of their life, and thereby they assimilate the vital power of God into themselves and it is a marvellous exercise of divine and human closeness and solidarity. Hence the very breathing is one of the holiest exercise of human life. All living beings draw into themselves the vitality that is invested in this material creation through the life-giving spirit of God and their entire life and vitality depend on this power of God. It can be said that the easiest and the most important exercise through which humans can experience the presence of God is their process of breathing. It is this breathing power that makes humans aware of their close dependence on the Spirit of God. But the sad fact is that people seldom think about this lofty and divine exercise of life as they live on this planet earth.⁶

4 *Pneuma* means the elemental natural and vital force which acts as a stream of air in the blowing of the wind and the inhaling and exhaling of breath. In the macrocosm it is used in a physical sense for the breath of wind in its movement as a blowing force. It is both material and spiritual, natural and divine. In the microcosm of organic life, and especially in humans and animals, *pneuma* is physiologically the breath, either inhaled or exhaled in breathing. Cf. Schweizer, "pneuma": *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Fiedrich (ed), Vol. VI (Michigan: B. Eerdmans Publ. Com. 1968) pp. 334-335.

5 The *nach Elohim*, translated as "spirit of God", "a wind from God", "a strong wind" or "a divine wind" are all articulations of one and the same idea, namely, that the power of God was active in creation.

6 The newly developed methods of conscientizing people about the meaning of breathing in prayer and meditation exercises, such as *vipassana* and *Jesus prayer* are welcome signs of a new awareness about our becoming conscious of breathing as the most important exercise of our twin relationship to God and to the material world at the same time. It is within this larger exercise of the meaning of the spirit that we have to understand the specific meaning of the spirit in the realm of religion and spirituality.

This broader meaning of spirit is found in many books of the Old Testament. Job confesses: "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). So he is convinced that, "if God were to take back his spirit to himself and gather to himself his breath, all living beings would perish together and all mortals return to dust" (Job 34:14-15). The Psalmist also exclaims: "When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30). So he prays to God: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take away your Holy Spirit. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a generous spirit" (Ps 51:10-12). It all happens because "it is in God that we live and move and have our being", as Paul put it in his speech to the Athenians in Areopagus (cf. Acts 17:28). Filled with this all-encompassing Spirit of God, Jesus first of all went to the wilderness where he was tempted by the devil and with the power of the same Spirit Jesus conquered him (Lk 4:1-12). Once Jesus grew strong in the Spirit, he returned to Galilee where all heard about him and praised him (Lk 4:14-15). On a sabbath he went to a synagogue and there, citing from Is 61:1-2, he made a public announcement that the Spirit of God was upon him and that he had been anointed to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release to prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to let the broken victims go free and to proclaim the time of God's favour" (Lk 4:16-19). The public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth was precisely to inaugurate a new era of the Spirit as entirely different from the Jewish, especially Pharisaic, understanding of religion as controlled by the letter of the Torah, thereby making it possible for all humans to live an authentic life guided by the Spirit as their inner principle of life. Jesus promised the same Spirit to all those who accept him,⁷ and he demanded that his disciples, who were with him during his earthly

7 It is in the Gospel of John that we have five specific texts through which Jesus promised the Spirit to his disciples as a constant support in their future ministry. In 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-11 and 16:12-15. The assurance in Jn 16:13 is very important: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth (*pneuma altheita*)".

ministry and had experienced the mystery of his personality, should be his living witnesses throughout the world, once they were empowered by that same Spirit (Acts 1:8).

Paul Fathoming the Inner Reality of the Spirit

It was Paul, the first and the most important New Testament writer, who through his many letters has tried to analyze and explain the many dimensions and nuances of the concept of the spirit and its role in the unfolding of human life. Paul's conversion itself was the climax experience of the intrusion of the Spirit into his life. It was a being grasped by Christ and by the Spirit. It was associated with a blinding, to make him aware of his past, and a regaining of his sight through Ananias, which is associated with the receiving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17). It was the light of the Holy Spirit through which Paul began to see things from a new perspective. The radical commitment Paul had developed in his life as a Pharisaic Jew, which prompted him to persecute the believers in Jesus Christ, still prompted him in his future life with the Spirit of Christ guiding and channeling it. The Spirit was Paul's energizer, a Spirit of power (1 Cor 2:4; Rom 15:13) that assisted him in his weakness. Paul's language was basically experiential, which explains his struggle to find a language suitable to express a reality freshly experienced, which lies behind the diversity of his imagery about the functioning of the Spirit.

In the following analysis we try to explain how, according to Paul, we have to understand the profound implications of a life which is guided by the Spirit of God. To arrive at this understanding of the inner reality of the Spirit, we have to look at the human reality as Paul has developed it in his theological reflection. The Greek word *pneuma*, translated spirit occurs 124 times in the Pauline corpus. But it is difficult to establish the full implications of this word because of Paul's fluid usage of the word *pneuma*, which can refer to the 'spirit' of humans, of the evil one, of abstract human

8 Cf. F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1977), pp. 69-72.

9 Cf. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 423.

qualities and so forth, as well as 'Spirit' of God and of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Although Paul speaks about these issues as related to the person and work of Christ and also as related to those who believe in Christ and follow his teaching, no attempt is made here to isolate the believers in Christ from those who do not directly believe in him and explicitly put his teaching into practice. The Christ event is at the same time a historical event as well as a trans-historical reality in whom and through whom God has revealed certain ultimate issues about humankind and its destiny. What is explained here from the perspective of Christian faith has universal dimensions as well as application.

Paul speaks about the humans as they live here on earth in this material world with their matter dimension of body. As such, humans are spirited matter, the spirit intimately united to matter and at the same time the spirit vivifying matter in a very sublime manner. The spirit in humans is a divine reality, created and limited, and through it the humans are raised to a totally new level of being in this material creation. The spirit, as such, belongs to the realm of the divine.¹¹ The human spirit is a participation of the divine uncreated Spirit, not as a separate reality multiplied in every human, but as the expression of the same, which may be distantly compared with the sun and its rays, both meaning one and the same but having two expressions.¹² The sun through its rays shares light, heat and energy which makes life possible on this planet earth. The spirit is the highest principle of human life and it operates through the mind and the will, both of them belonging to the world of the spirit. The power of the spirit is such that it can at the same time transcend matter and also control matter to unfold itself in a very healthy manner. Thereby all humans are supposed to lead an authentic and

10 Cf. Romano Penna, *Lo Spirito di Cristo: Cristologia e Pneumatologia secondo un'originale formulazione Paolina* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1976), pp. 163-301.
 11 According to Philo of Alexandria, *pneuma* is that which is of God, both in that God is its author and in that it is the essence of the divinity. It is precisely because of the incorporeal and moral nature of the spirit that it cannot remain a permanent possession of the humans, who are corporeal and sinful.

12 Cf. J. Pathrapankal, "Pneuma as Human and Divine in Christian Theology: A Critique" in *Self and Consciousness*, ed. A. Thottakara (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1989), pp. 206-219.

integrated life. In fact, the concept of the spirit is closely related to the concept of power (*dynamis*). Power in the strict sense is not any power, but power exerted by and through the spirit. But, as a matter of fact, the human body, which is the immediate medium of the human participation in material creation, has within itself certain vulnerable and sinful dimensions, which force the spirit not to listen to its controlling higher power and orientation, but rather to obey the selfish suggestions and inclinations of matter, which Paul calls the *flesh* (*sarx*). Paul may have developed this concept of the polarization between the spirit and the flesh from the Old Testament itself, with its first contrasting statement made by God about humans: "My spirit shall not abide in humans for ever, for they are flesh" (Gen 6:3). The context is one of God realizing that the humans are all prone to wickedness and that "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts are only evil continually" (Gen 6:5), and through which God tried to purify the sinful humankind by selecting a single family of Noah "who had found favour in the sight of the Lord" (Gen 6:8).

It all means that humans living in this world of matter cannot by themselves direct their lives according to the spirit, their higher principle of life, rather they are constantly being driven to lead a life according to the flesh, which is the lower than the spirit, but powerful enough to obstruct the working of the spirit, in the same way as a small cluster of clouds can obscure the rays of the sun. As such, this is not natural to humans, it is not enjoyed by them; all the same, most often they do it and not otherwise. It is what the philosopher, Ovid said: "I do what I hate". This polarization constitutes one of the most crucial areas of human psychology and spiritual imbalance. To his own beloved disciples, Peter, James and John, who were taken by Jesus in order to derive from them some concern and care during the critical moments of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane but were sleeping all through, he said: "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41). This polarized existence of humans on this earth is the immediate context of what we understand by sin under its various aspects. But sin is not something happening to the humans, rather they are to be owned by

humans in so far as they are responsible in the very exercise of their freedom.

This inner polarization in human existence can be further illustrated through the concepts of *individual* and *person* which all humans are. Whereas an individual means one who is undivided in oneself and divided from others on the basis of matter existence, a person means one who is reaching out to the others in view of a relationship with them. Possessing the spirit means to be in relationship, both vertically and horizontally. In the case of the individual the flesh is active whereas in the case of the person the spirit is active, the body as the visible and immediate medium of our sharing in the world of matter as common to both individual and person. The individual looks for its own selfish purpose and tries to make use of others for one's own advantage, the person tries to reach out to others through altruism and sharing. All that see around us in this world, whether at the political, social, economic, cultural and even religious levels is the inter-play of this basic polarization of human reality. While some people check their egoistic tendencies and allow their spirit to guide them and have genuine success in their life, many others are nurturing their selfishness and remain bound to themselves. Apparently they may be successful but basically they are unhappy. They go after the transitory values of society, such as power, authority, money and influence. But basically they are disintegrated and unauthentic.

The Spirit of the Risen Christ empowering the Human Spirit

It is precisely here that Paul explains what Christ through his resurrection is doing for each human person who accepts him in faith. Jesus of Nazareth was totally a man of the spirit, as we have seen above. For him it was natural and spontaneous to be guided by the divine Spirit during the entire period of his earthly ministry. He promised the same Spirit to his disciples as an advocate and counsellor (Jn 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:5-11; 16:12-15). After his resurrection Jesus breathed on the disciples and said to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). It was with the power of this Spirit that they had to carry out their mission in the wide world, which Luke understands as a bearing witness to Christ through the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8). Through his resurrection Christ rose

to the realm of a spirit-body as different from his flesh-body in such a way that he could now impart that extra power of the Spirit in him to all those who are related to him through faith. As a result, they are empowered to lead a more authentic life, a life according to the spirit both in their personal and also in their social life. Since the divine Spirit and the human spirit are both belonging to the realm of the divine and are homogeneous, this empowering is something which all humans are open to and also seeking for.

In the Pauline writings we have a detailed analysis of this close relationship and joint operation of the human spirit and the divine Spirit. Jesus Christ risen from the dead to the realm of the Spirit is one who has destroyed the power of sin, the slavery of the law and the tragedy of death. Sin, law and death are the threefold enemy of human life, sin as an inherent power driving us to remain at the level of individualism, pride and selfishness, law as a powerful agent of sin, and death as the final sealing of an unauthentic and disintegrated existence. What Jesus taught during his earthly ministry about an authentic life at its vertical and horizontal levels, he now enables his disciples to realize in their life through the power of the Spirit imparted to them. Through his several writings Paul was trying to make his readers aware of the profound significance of this new situation they were to elevated to. When the Christians in Galatia were going away from the correct understanding of the gospel, he reminded them about the experience of the Spirit they were given as a result of their listening to the preaching of the gospel through Paul. The experience of the Spirit of the risen Christ was a basic reality, to which Paul could always refer and from which he could derive several conclusions.

The ultimate purpose of this empowering role of the Spirit is to make humans unfold their life and make it attuned to the vision of life Jesus has proposed during his earthly ministry. Consequently, Paul always recalls the need of his readers developing a Christ consciousness in their practical and ideological life. In fact, the entire theology of Paul controlled by his Christic thinking. It is from him that all those who believe in him have to learn the basic values of life. Whenever Paul had to instruct his readers about improving the quality of their life, he always referred to the person of Christ. As Paul realized that the Christians in Phillippi were not so ideal in

their inter-personal relationships, he exhorted them to have the "mind of Christ" in them and learn from him who emptied himself (Phil 2:1-11). In fact, from being a Pharisaic Jew strictly committed to the convictions and practices of Judaism, it was Paul's encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus that totally changed his world-vision and attitude to the members of other religions. He would go to the extent of saying: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20). The person of Christ completely changed him and made him think and live from a different perspective.

The ultimate purpose of Incarnation is the inclusion of humankind into the divine dynamism through which humans are empowered to lead a life corresponding to their inner nature as created in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26-27) and as having the divine breath in them (Gen 2:7). It is the power of the Spirit that energizes them and gives them a clear vision of the values and ideals Jesus stood for. Jesus' vision of the kingdom of God as an all-embracing reality, in which God is revealed as the *abba* of the whole of humankind and the entire creation, can be assimilated by us only with the energizing power of the Spirit. This vision enables humans to transcend the barriers and divisions between religions and see all others as brothers and sisters. It also inspires them to understand that the same Spirit is active in all religions because the Spirit blows where it wills (Jn 3:8). As Jesus saw the simple and profound faith of the centurion in Capernaum, he said: "Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith" (Mt 8:10). He could see the goodness of the Samaritan as something surpassing the legalistic attitude of his own people (Lk 10:30-37; 17:11-19). When the Greeks from Galilee made a request to meet Jesus, he revealed totally how he was not a slave of his own religion who could reach out to all others on the basis of their inner goodness.¹³

As we try to understand the manner in which the Spirit of Christ operates in humans, we have to evolve a more realistic and

anthropocentric approach in such a way that both the divine Spirit and the human spirit have their respective roles to play. The traditional interpretation of Pauline teaching about life according to the flesh and contrasted with life according to the spirit as a clear and unambiguous reference to the Holy Spirit has now been changed for a better understanding of the spirit as the divinely created human spirit which is always empowered by the divine Holy Spirit. This is not to lessen the importance of the Holy Spirit; but rather to emphasize the sense of responsibility and freedom all should have in their personal life and activities. Thus Paul's treatment of the contrast between life according to the flesh and the life according to the spirit is to be understood as a life that is guided by the human spirit which is at the same time inspired and strengthened by the divine Holy Spirit (Rom 8:5-13). Even the addressing of God as *abba* is understood by Paul as a joint-witnessing by human spirit and the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:14-17). Only divine Spirit can give the confidence and dynamism to address God as the *abba*. It is this Spirit of God that is enabling and empowering humans to pray in the right manner because by ourselves we cannot pray like children (Rom 8:26-27). It is a Spirit of adoption through which humans become the sons and daughters of God.

The Spirit the Transformation of the Material Creation

According to Paul, the diffusion of the Spirit of the risen Christ has also repercussions on the entire material creation in so far as the Spirit of God is involved in its eschatological transformation.¹⁴ Paul writes: "The created universe waits with eager expectation for God's children to be glorified. It was made the victim of disintegration, not by its own choice, but because God made it so; yet there was hope, because the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God" (Rom 8:19-21). What God has effected through the resurrection of Christ has its impact not only for the humankind but also for the entire material creation. Hence it is waiting with eager

14 Cf. P. Parippankai, "The Spirit of Sonship in Romans 8:1-39" in *Christian Life: New Testament Perspectives* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1982), pp. 19-34.

expectation" for the final glorification of the children of God with the sure hope it also will have a share in that glory. The material creation, of which we are a part, is not a passive reality just for the sake of creating a platform for our existence and operation, rather it is also the object of God's ultimate concerns. It also will have a glorious future when it will be transformed not by automatic process of development through science and technology but through God's own mighty action, with cosmic meaning and cosmic dimensions.

But in the midst of this high expectation Paul sees creation engaged in a chorus of groaning. Before the final glory is revealed creation suffers like a woman who bears a child. Such a comparison was usual in speculations on the advent of the Messianic kingdom.¹⁶ In fact, the image suggests the preparation for a great joy, for the emergence of something altogether new through the crisis of acute and liberating sufferings. But faith alone can discern in these phenomena the secret movement which directing things towards a transcendent goal. In that sense Paul says "we know" (v. 22). It is a knowledge of faith and hope. If our modern knowledge of the material world yields a very different framework of thought regarding the future of the material universe, it matters little, provided that the essential arguments of Paul are discerned and assimilated. The main point is the emphasis on the solidarity binding together the humans and their environment, a solidarity which is neither a misfortune nor an accident. Consequently, Paul says that the humans also share this groaning because they are also still living in the flesh with its vulnerability and pain. For them this state of suffering and expectation constitutes a king of contradiction and tension, but a tension of highest significance. They have already received the first instalment of the Spirit, but they are not yet possessed by the Spirit. The divine Spirit within them is the anticipation of the new age, the reality of what is to come; and yet their bodies in which it dwells are mortal. The suffering by which this state of tension is manifested throws light on the new reality

¹⁶ The expectation of the creation is expressed through the Greek words *apokaradokia* and *apektecheiai* (v. 19), the former meaning "awaiting with outstretched head" and the latter meaning "concentrated waiting".

which travails in secret; it foreshadows the glory that is to come. Hence a state of patient expectancy is the present condition of all those who live in the midst of a world of travail, suffering and contradiction, where God also pursues his work with patience.

This movement, which draws the entire material creation and the whole humankind as the crown of creation towards their intrinsic goal, is gradually realising the plan of God. No obstacle offered by history and ecological problems will be able to check the work of redemptive re-creation undertaken by Christ and carried out through his Spirit. Neither the corruptibility of the material world and the accumulated ecological issues added to it with increasing velocity throughout world threatening the very existence of human life nor the ever-increasing ethical issues affecting humankind at a very radical level will prevent God from fulfilling his ultimate plan about his creation, which according to Paul was created in, through and for Christ. It is God who through his Spirit is in active control of things, and not that things will eventually straighten themselves out. God guides them, not with the objective of assuring the petty and selfish happiness of the bourgeois but with the certain plan of attaining that eschatological salvation and glorification will crown his work. This teleological process is being gradually worked out through the Spirit of the risen Christ.

The Harvest of a Spirit-guided Life

Paul writes to the Galatians: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided" by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25). The Spirit of Christ guiding humans has to effect a radical change in their life in all that they are and in all that they do. Paul brings in a contrast between those who are guided by the flesh and those who are guided by the Spirit: "Anyone can see the kind of behaviour that belongs to the flesh: fornication, impurity, indecency; idolatry and sorcery; quarrels, a contentious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, party intrigues and jealousies; drinking bouts, orgies, and the like" (Gal 5:19-20). Afterwards he analyses the qualities of the persons who are guided by the Spirit: "But the harvest of the Spirit is love,

joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22). Whereas the behavioral patterns of those who are guided by the flesh are confusing and sometimes contradictory, the spirit-guided persons are known for their consistent character from which flow all qualities which are ultimately based on love. They are the people who bring peace and who are instruments of peace for the whole humankind.

In his letter to the Romans Paul specifies the nature of a person who is basically guided by the Spirit: "My brothers and sisters, I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to God as a living sacrifice, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the real" worship that you should offer. Do not conform yourselves to the values of this passing world; rather let God transform you through a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to discern what is good, what is acceptable and what is mature" (Rom 12:1-2). Those who have accepted Christ through faith have to offer their whole self as a living sacrifice. For Paul, this is real worship. In other words, life itself is the best worship, provided it is lived in the proper manner. Any form of worship in a place of worship has relevance only in so far as it gives a challenge and dynamism to unfold one's own life as an ongoing worship sacrificing oneself. The human person is the best sanctuary; there all have to meet God and his plans about the world. Looking around us, we see hundreds and thousands of such sanctuaries, not built by human hands, and the dedication and commitment we make to relate ourselves to them is the real worship. Taking refuge in places and rubrics of worship in the hope of finding in them the essence of religious worship is a myth which has no meaning and hence no relevance for life.¹⁹

18 The Greek word *logike* translated as 'spiritual' does not bring out the true meaning. Here it is question what is *real* as different from what is juridically important.

19 The words of Tagore are still full of meaning: "Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before you! He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and the path-maker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!" (*Gitanjali* XI).

Then Paul goes on to explain how this authentic form of life as worship can be developed among those who believe in Christ and are thereby open to the Spirit of Christ. They should not conform themselves to the standards and value systems of this passing world,²⁰ such as power, influence and money which have no lasting value because they come and go. Rather they should allow the Spirit of God to transform them inwardly through a radical *metanoia*²¹ in such a way that they will be able to discern what is the will of God, what is good, what is acceptable and what is mature. Only the power of God can effect an inner transformation of humans, and the requirement on the human side is their readiness to be totally converted through a radical change for the better. Jesus started his preaching of the gospel with the same call to conversion which he demanded from all because all humans have their own inhibited and inherited thought-patterns and value systems which are sometimes totally opposed to the values of the spirit (Mk 1:14-15). To discern the will of God, to discover what is good, acceptable and mature in themselves is a painful process and only people who are guided by the spirit can make this discernment. It is such transformed people who have to form transformed communities and societies at the social, political and religious levels.

Spirit-guided persons are also basically altruistic persons, who are more concerned about others than about themselves. They make it easier for others to live in society because they are ready to recognize the importance of others. While exhorting the readers in Rome, Paul refers to the need for this altruism as an important quality of the readers. He writes: "Some believe in eating anything, while the weak in faith eat only vegetables... Some judge one day to be better than another while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honour of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honour of the Lord,

²⁰ The Greek word *aiōn* refers to the passing aspect of this material creation, which are the most conspicuous and hence the most attractive for all those who are living and moving about in this world.

²¹ *Metanoia* is often understood as repentance and this is a very imperfect one. It means a total change of thinking, a radical re-thinking about all things within and also around us. Jesus started his ministry inviting the people to a radical *metanoia* (Mk 1:14-15; Mt 4:17).

It is not only in the realm of religions that the power of the Spirit should be emphasized. Equally important is the realm of politics, between North and South politics as well as East politics, in areas related to culture and monopoly of power and economy. Even as humankind as a whole is engaged in developing a global village

attitude to religions.

superior to other religions, could we arrive at this transcendent which invites us to consider our own religion and religious beliefs as the extent of our rejecting the demands of our self-centred thinking, only with the help of the divine Spirit active in all religions. Only to understanding of religion and religious realities. This could be done order to learn from them and thereby to enrich their own world of religious thinking and to reach out to other religions in need for the followers of all religions in our times to transcend their religious identity through the power of the Spirit, there is an urgent established and the given in order to arrive at the greater heights of Jesus revealed the need of transcendence from the local, the reference to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, in which be brought to our times with their powerful insights into human and cultural limitations, can still have their abiding relevance and can should prompt us to have some corresponding reflections in our of his society and within the framework of his own religious thinking guided life for his readers during the first century of CE in the context

What Paul has formulated about the perspectives of a spirit-

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supreme quality of human personality.

altruistic persons because it costs them every time they exercise this Only those who are open to the guidance of the Spirit can become Bonhoeffer refers to the person of Christ as "the Man for Others", because the very personality of Christ was altruistic. That is why D. altruism that has to characterize the life of all who believe in Christ, ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves" (Rom 14:2, 5-7). It is this since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honour of the Lord and give thanks to God. We do not live to

through the great achievements of science and technology, there is a growing fear among many, especially in the developing countries, that a new threat is being engineered by the economically powerful nations through their globalization to plunder the growing economy of these poor nations, which is nothing less than the danger of ancient colonialization which these same countries were practising over many centuries. Here again a new conscientization is required to make people realize that this is the work of the flesh that is to be opposed, rejected and destroyed.²² The age-old slogan that "might is right" cannot be justified any more for the simple fact that it is the abuse of might by those powerful nations, often with blessings from religious circles, that has resulted in the disproportionate distribution of human and natural resources, whereby the gap between the haves and the have-nots is increasing day-by-day and the Spirit of God cannot justify this phenomenon any more. There is an urgent need for spirit-guided persons who could inspire society not only at the religious but also at the social, cultural, economic and political levels.

A third area in which a new and healthy awakening of the spirit is required seems to be the very practice of religion which in our times is very much being influenced by religious fundamentalism and emotionalism both in religious thinking and practices, a problem which is very much present in many world religions. Since the realm of religion is considered as sacrosanct, any critical approach to the various phenomena are considered as a violation of the sacred. First of all, religious fundamentalism and emotional re-awakening through old and modern techniques are not solutions to the problems facing humanity in our times. John wrote to his community: "Do not believe every spirit; but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1). Testing the spirit is a delicate and difficult exercise because very often selfish motivations can be projected under the disguise of genuineness.²³ It takes time for people to realize the difference between what is

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Cf. F. Wilfrid, "Church's Commitment to the Poor in the Age of Globalization" *Viduyot* 62 (1998) 79-95; Cf. also the documents on two International Seminars on Globalization in *Viduyot* 62 (1998) 200-205.

23

Cf. Jacques Guillet, "Paul on the Discernment of Spirits" in *A Companion to Paul*, ed. Michael J. Taylor (New York: Alba House, 1975), pp. 165-173.

prompted by the divine Spirit and what is dictated by the desire to dominate and exploit others. The words of Jesus are still very relevant: "You will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:20). The claims made by modern society that the "world has come of age" and that it can afford to manage itself without any direct dependence on God and things divine are still very evasive and at times contradictory. Only with the help of the Spirit of God can mankind reach to the great heights destined for it. Paul, one of the earliest theologians who reflected on what Christ has done for mankind and for the whole creation, has provided us with a correct understanding of the relationship between the Spirit of God and the human spirit and thereby he invites the whole of mankind to enjoy the meaning and charm of a spirit-guided life which will add beauty and challenge to life at the personal and interpersonal levels.

THE IGBO CONCEPT OF CHI: THE DESTINY SPIRIT

◆ Nkhem L. Emeghara

1. Introduction

Among the philosophical concepts of the Igbos of Nigeria, *Chi* is, perhaps, the most important and attractive one. This is because of the following reasons:

Firstly, it is a concept, which can hardly be neglected by any enlightened mind as it affects the totality of a human being.

Secondly, it appears to be a universal concept. Most, if not every race, has a counterpart of *Chi*, which readily suggests itself whenever the Igbo concept of *Chi* is expressed. For example, it has been likened to the Egyptian *Ka*, which is regarded as the image or genius of a person, an ancestral aspect, which acts as a guide and protector of people during their lifetime¹. It has also been likened to the Hebrew *ruach* which the Hebrews believed would enable the anointed servant to fulfil his destiny.² Igbo *Chi* can also be compared to the Chinese concept of *Chi*.³

◆ Dr. Nkhem L. Emeghara, lecturer of History and Comparative Phenomenology at the University of Jos, Nigeria.

1 See C.K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.55-57.

2 Isaiah 61: See the writers Ph.D Thesis titled, 'Death and the Afterlife among the Ancient Hebrews and the Ngor Opala Owerri Peoples of Nigeria', (University of Jos, 1994).

3 See the article by Peter Le, on "Dancing Chi, and the Holy Spirit" in *Ching Feng, A Journal on Christianity and Chinese Religion and Culture*, vol.34, no.3 (September 1991), pp.134-153, see also the present writer's article on this comparison soon to be published.