

# KING'S

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VINCENT, J.M., 1977. *Studien zur literarischen Eigenart und zur geistigen Heimat von Jesaja, Kap. 40-55* (BET 5. Peter Lang, Frankfurt, Bern, Las Vegas).

The two further studies: 'Theology of a Tradition' and 'Theology of a Prophet', will appear in the next two issues of the Review. The three studies were first given as the Annual Theological Lectures in the Queen's University of Belfast in February 1981.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CREATED ORDER

W.A. Whitehouse

This article was devised as the last prepared contribution to a conference on the theme of 'The Holy Spirit' convened by the Society for the Study of Theology. Four earlier contributions dealt with the New Testament matrix of belief in the Spirit, with Trinitarian theology, with 'The Charisms of Utterance in the Church' and with the Spirit and Culture. My commission was, so I supposed, to extend the range of enquiry beyond the realities of human fellowship in the Christian Church and beyond the pursuit of human culture in the activities of religion, politics, letters and visual arts, medicine and sciences, to that 'world about us' which is for us data not of our own making (though we do much to mould it), within which we are items set to be as we are and become what we may become. Mankind becomes informed—and misinformed—about this world through the attention given to it by 'natural philosophers', astrologists and alchemists, and, more recently and reliably, by modern 'natural scientists' and technologists. Mystagogues, poets and transcendental meditators also proffer information and, however difficult it may be to assess the validity of their insight, they cannot be entirely overlooked in a theological enquiry about 'The Spirit and the Created Order'. I have assumed that 'the Created Order' is a phrase intended to refer to 'the world about us'. The phrase was presented to me by Dr Colin Gunton and I discovered it in his own writings (*Becoming and Being* p.169) where he argues that 'the created order does not have to be understood statically . . . It can also be conceived as that which happens in response to the will and word of God'. This particular

piece of theological investigation seems to presuppose, and to be bound up with, another piece which investigates our right, in Christian faith, to appreciate the world about us as the creation of God and to use the clue of 'order' as one aid towards such appreciation. Our own particular topic is proposed, then, in declarations such as we find in *The Wisdom of Solomon* 1,7: 'the spirit of the Lord fills the whole earth, and that which holds all things together is well aware of what men say'. There the relevant declarations are incidental to the matter of human speech and the disposition from which it arises: 'Wisdom is a spirit devoted to man's good, and she will not hold a blasphemer blameless for his words, because God is a witness of his inmost being who sees clear into his heart and hears every word he says' (1,6). The incidental declaration is echoed in Christian prayer, as in Eastern Orthodoxy 'Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, who art everywhere and fillest all things, Treasury of Blessings, Giver of Life, come and dwell in us, cleanse us from all filth and save our souls'. This speech, like most of Christian speech about the Spirit, is speech informed by experience of him as God's gift of himself by way of personal presence in the lives of Christian believers, corporately and severally. This speech refers to God 'in his personal contact with personal beings . . .' (Lampe: *God as Spirit* p.61); 'Spirit' (in a typical phrase used by Lampe) is a concept which serves to 'articulate and express the human experience of being reached out to, addressed, inspired and indwelt by God's personal presence' (p.60). It is not, at first

sight, at all clear that a concept shaped and warranted for use in the context of human personal experience may have an extended application to articulate the hold we may believe God to have upon the created order without humanity. More precisely, there may be reason to think that use of this particular concept, properly disciplined in its application to the ways of God with mankind, is inept and perhaps misleading when our thought turns to his ways, as owner, with the world about us.

Undeterred by these hazards I will try to open up lines of constructive exploration, but I do so with an awareness of difficulty in this area of theology—difficulty which is not altogether peculiar to the modern scene but which seems to have inhibited theologians throughout the Church's history. Using the concept of 'Spirit' they have gestured towards the works and ways of God in the created order but the gestures are apt to be defective in content.

At the end of his recent essay *The Via Negativa and the Foundations of Theology* (in *New Studies in Theology I*) R.G. Williams makes a pertinent observation about 'personalism' as a hallmark of the theological work done by the writer, Lossky, to whom his essay is devoted. He uses the term 'to indicate that the central and controlling idea of the system is that of the personal subject in the context of its relations with other subjects. In theology, it expresses a view which locates all dogmatic construction and reflection in the context of living personal experience, encounter with the personal God, in the Christian community' (p.112). Christian speech about 'the Spirit' takes shape within that matrix—God with human beings and human beings with God. Can it be reliably extended to a field of relationships where 'subjects' neither human nor divine are involved?

There are Biblical passages which oblige us to wrestle with this. 'The goal of divine action is to maintain and to create life; to achieve this aim Yahweh chiefly avails himself of two means which we encounter in varying intensities in all realms of his manifestation: the Spirit and the Word'. (E. Jacob. *Theology of the Old Testament* p.121). Their common origin, as apt theological indicators, is in the unfettered power and mystery displayed by *air*—in two forms, that of wind in nature and breath in living beings;

and for present purposes we do not need to say more about their complementarity. They provide models for thought about 'the instruments of God's action'. By instruments conceived in this analogy God 'gives life' to everything in the created order—an order of things and of happenings which, so we suspect, was apt to be thought of as 'animated' throughout, though Biblical tradition is distinguished (among other things) by a pervasive impetus to correct this 'animism' and provide initial warrant for minds, religious as well as secular, to view much in the world about us as inanimate 'things'. How, then do *we* appropriate passages of deep significance such as (to take only two) Hosea 2<sup>19-22</sup> and Romans 8<sup>19-21</sup>?

The Hosea passage declares with prophetic assurance that God is 'husband', not 'baal', to his human covenant-partners and will, in the end, 'betroth you to me for ever in righteousness (true conformity), justice (or established right), covenant loyalty and tenderness'. When that day comes an answer will pass (translators have difficulty in deciding which way) between Yahweh and the heavens, between the heavens and earth, between earth and its vegetation and between that vegetation (grain, wine and oil in particular) and Yahweh's 'new sowing in the land'—Jezreel. These answers, though there is no explicit mention of the point in the passages, require as their medium the 'breath' which is the form of God's presence with his creation. 'The Holy Spirit is God at work within his creation enabling it to respond to him' (H. Cunliffe-Jones). Is not this a case in point? Yet, given our understanding of the non-human and non-divine parties involved, what credence can we give to an expectation so formulated? We are not inclined to let it disturb our version of how those parties operate in 'physical autonomy' and we let it pass as 'poetic licence' which serves to give extra resonance to the prospect of life for mankind in completed covenant-fellowship with God.

Then does 'poetic licence' (or an unpurged residue of animism) serve to exonerate St Paul when he asks us to believe that.

the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in

hope; because the creation will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Some scholars, as Professor George Caird remarks, 'have wished to simplify Paul's thought at this point by restricting the word *ktisis* to humankind', but this will not do. Heavenly powers which have become 'world-rulers of this darkness' have established a situation where the subhuman creation has been 'subjected to futility', and for that subhuman creation there is now a basis for eschatological hope, affirmed in strict parallel with the hope for humanity founded upon the fact that now, through the Spirit, God does something that brings the *eschaton* into the present by way of 'adoption', in the 'now' but also 'not yet' so clearly expressed in the juxtaposition of verses 15 and 23 of Romans 8. Is the content of this hope for the subhuman creation to be interpreted by us, with our post-Pauline persuasions, wholly by reference to the bearing of renovated human activity upon the world about us?

The thrust of all Biblical passages which affirm the intimate presence of God to his creatures in their historical activity is to declare that when the Lord has his way with Israel, and beyond Israel with mankind, the whole created order will flourish as it was made to do. And now that the Lord *has* had his way with his representative Son of Man, this future is secured and is being anticipated. By the Spirit human beings are appropriated for God within his covenant, prepared for its future consummation, 'anointed' for the role of 'sonship'. The conflict between God's affirmation of his Son's obedient manhood and mankind's condemnation of it is a conflict which takes its course 'between the times'. Every anticipation of the glory to come is exposed to attack in that conflict—to external assault and discrediting, to internal corruption. Yet the Spirit which evokes these anticipations is powerfully present to sustain and to nourish them. Christians have learnt how to speak with responsible eloquence about what this meant for (persons, who can believe, repent, mend their ways and *move* of their own volition towards renewal and consummation. Theologians are prepared (with Berkhof, for instance in the section entitled *The Renewal of the World* in

his *Christian Faith*) to explore the expectations with which we should deal with 'structures and systems' ingredient to our 'world'—taken in the sense of 'institutional manifestation and extension of what man himself is'. But 'world' in the sense of planet Earth, with its physical systems, and the universe within which it is set, and the possible 'occult' factors which may be pertinent to the functioning of all within that cosmos—about *this* we hesitate to speak, though human existence may not be properly conceived in abstraction from it and, in its present condition, seemingly 'far from God', it is 'a threat to itself and a threat to man' (Berkhof p.535). Berkhof is frank about this inhibition: 'While we know the mode of God's concern for man, we do not know the mode of his concern for nature' (p.536). Nevertheless, the name, 'Spirit', which denotes God's active presence to men in their experience, must be for us also the name which denotes his active presence to everything in the created order. And with that name, some kind of agenda is imposed for the faith, which is committed to seeking understanding.

In what follows I can offer no more than a selection of possible areas where reflection on elements in tradition and on current preoccupations may serve to bring such an agenda into view.

1. 'The one God reveals himself according to Scripture as the Redeemer, that is, as the Lord who sets us free. As such He is the Holy Spirit . . .' (Karl Barth CDI.1.§12). We can, perhaps, begin our reflections in an area where attention is directed essentially upon man and upon Christian man in particular. He is set free by the Holy Spirit to conceive his own identity as a *creature of God* and to conceive all worldly things with which he has to do in the same way, as creatures empowered to hold their own in the presence of their Creator.

The *locus classicus* in Western theology for this liberation may be found in Augustine's report of his last conversation with Monica (Conf.IX.x):

What we said went something like this: If to any man the tumult of the flesh were silenced; and the poles were silent

as well; indeed if the very soul grew silent to herself and went beyond herself by not thinking of herself, if fancies and imaginary revelations were silenced; if every tongue and every sign and every transient thing—for actually if man could hear them, all these would say ‘We did not create ourselves, but were created by Him who abides for ever’—and if, having uttered this, they too should be silent, having stirred our ears to hear him who created them; and if he then alone spoke, not through them but by himself, that we might hear *him*—him for whose sake we love these things—if we could hear him without these, as we two now strained ourselves to do, we then with rapid thought might touch on that Eternal Wisdom which abides over all... Would not *this* be the reality of the saying, ‘Enter into the joy of thy Lord’? But when shall such a thing be? Shall it not be when ‘we all shall rise again’ and shall it not be that ‘all things will be changed’?

Eastern theology speaks (in significantly different ways—see R.G. Williams in the article already cited) of the Holy Spirit’s work as ‘Mystagogue of the Apophatic Way’ which takes us through a new familiarity with creatures to God our Creator and theirs, and so into a rapport with the created order—a rapport in which intellection and feeling and capacity for correct participation are fused so as to lift humanity into a relationship with fellow-creatures richer than the ‘natural’ relationship in which they are obsessively preoccupied with technical mastery. Though this relationship is offered essentially by way of future promise it can be tasted already in obedient responses of faith and love and hope. We have opportunity to share God’s own appreciation of the created order which exists under his ownership. We have opportunity, in consequence, to address ourselves to life within the created order in ways which reflect this shared appreciation. There is work always to be done in the matter of discerning where and how these opportunities arise. (This area of reflection has important connections with another which I have distinguished from it and have chosen to explore in section 3).

2. With attention still chiefly directed towards Christians (and to mankind in general) in their human subjectivity, it is appropriate in the second place to consider issues about *method* in our approach to the mystery of ‘The Spirit and the created order’. In a passage written nearly forty years ago, which he may now wish to modify or to disown (though I hope not), Professor Cunliffe-Jones apologised for the little space accorded in his book *The Holy Spirit* to ‘the activity of the Holy Spirit in the main areas of the world’s life’:

It is very important. But to understand it we must understand the Christian meaning of the Holy Spirit first. If we could take that for granted, on the basis of a deep and far-reaching Christian faith in the Holy Spirit, then the exploration of the presence of the Holy Spirit (discerned by faith) in the most unlikely places in all phases of human life is a fascinating and enriching undertaking. But if we are still looking for the meaning of the Holy Spirit, and hoping to find this is something wider, more greatly divine and more greatly human than Christian faith, then it must be said that this wider outlook is leading us away from the truth of God. (p.20)

Karl Barth provides a synoptic view of the Biblical affirmations which govern his Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit, Lord and Life-giver. His credal name evokes N.T. passages—John 6,63, II Cor. 3,6—and ‘in the first instance we have to regard the Life-giver *soteriologically*’. But behind those passages, he says, stands recollection of the significance assigned in O.T. passages to ‘spirit’ operative in the *regnum naturae*. He collects those passages and makes them point to the affirmation that ‘it is *His*, the *Lord’s* breath, by which the creature is created and without which it would forthwith vanish away’ (C.D.I.1. p.539).

‘Things created through the Word have their vital strength out of the Spirit from the Word’ (Athanasius, ad Serapion III 5).

‘Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to Paradise, our ascension to the Kingdom of God, our return to adoption as sons, our being made partners of Christ,

our being brought to all fulness of blessing both in this world and in the world to come' (Basil, DeSS36)

The method of proceeding from celebration of human salvation to affirmations concerning the *regnum naturae* may seem at times unduly to invite constriction and distortion in thought about the Spirit and the created order. Deeper reflection may reveal how method and substance fit each other and throw light on one another. Both have to do with the completing, perfecting (and the grateful acknowledgement) of divine ownership, fully established by grace in respect of all that is in the created order. And what is said then about life, as it has been and is and will be given to creatures, implies for those creatures effective renunciation of 'existing-for-onself' in all its forms. Is this a possibility conceivable to the minds of men who have not had its reality wrought into their own existence by the Word of God in Christ, sealed upon them by the Holy Spirit?

3. The cosmos of created order, objectively around us, is of interest to us only (as the word 'interest' implies) insofar as it impinges upon our human subjectivity. But if, through the Spirit, that human subjectivity has become subjectivity 'in Christ', our perception of what happens in it and our expectations may be altered in refreshing ways. Is the Spirit at work also in this wider environment and if so how? In particular, is there any evidence that what is happening there has any correspondence with human Christian experience of being 'enabled to respond to the ultimate purpose of God'? 'While we know the mode of God's concern for men, we do not know the mode of his concern for nature'. I am deeply disposed to settle for Berkhof's sober agnosticism (as I think Austin Farrer was disposed to do, in a more lively and resilient fashion)—but not without a struggle.

Human history is pervaded by instances of 'enthusiasm', rooted in 'spirituality', where those involved have been apparently released from the shackles of prudent self-willed humanity and have been admitted (re-admitted, they say) to a more sympathetic acquaintance with cosmic happenings and thereby invigorated. There is at present a considerable appetite for 'Spirituality as Alternative'. (Cf. the article with

that title by Michael Mildenberger in *Ecumenical Review*, 29, 3 July 1977). 'Spirituality is attempting to assemble all spiritual forces to help man'—and not only, or primarily, under Christian auspices. The cult of astrology, combined with elements of 'macrocosm-microcosm' anthroposophy developed in Stoicism, provided in ancient times a pseudo-science much easier to live with than is the science which shapes our current practice; and, in answer to deeply-felt needs, occult speculation has re-established itself in the modern world from which it was never, in fact, banished. We can perhaps move towards surer speech about the Spirit and the created order by asking about limits of tolerance for this kind of thing, but also by asking what may be said positively, with authentic Christian conviction, about cosmic correspondences which give support to mankind in its healthy aspiration.

It can, of course, be argued that Spirit-empowered perception cleanses from the vision of self-willed men fantasies which they have conjured up as factors in the created order. Prudent rationality, rooted nowadays in modern science, has cosmic support; but so, it is claimed, has the 'enthusiasm' which goes beyond and perhaps against prudent rationality. The problem, as ever, is how to steer a middle course between the Scylla of Apollonian rationalism and the Charybdis of Dionysiac-Orphic enthusiasm.

Against the 'positivism' associated with modern science (though not native to its expert practitioners), which leaves us with a cosmos seemingly impervious to God at work as Spirit, we are tempted to talk, with Lossky and the Cappadocians about 'the unknowable depth of things, that which constitutes their true indefinable essence' (R.G. Williams, article cited p.107). But left like that, this anti-positivist gesture simply lays us open to the charge of indulging in vacuous mystification. Against the expectations and excesses of enthusiasm, we must draw attention to the discipline imposed by the 'not yet' element in the passage from Augustine quoted in an earlier section. But is there no content for the 'now' element?

4. Christian theologians, particularly in modern times, have been disposed, in effect, to renounce

any claim to self-sufficiency in this matter. They have welcomed as collaborators the more congenial poets and philosophers, whose secularised versions of 'Spirit' as God at work in the world about us have been derived in ways other than those of Christian theology. Wordsworthian 'nature-mysticism' speaks in its own way, as does dialectical Idealism and the philosophy of 'Process and Reality', from

a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused

.....

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls (somewhat drunkenly?) through all things.

For such alliances there is perhaps no more and no less justification than there is for alliance with dialectical materialists, whose version of 'something far more deeply interfused' is less congenial to the bourgeois mind but conceivably more pertinent.

It is instructive to see this process at work in the cultural history of Russia—in my case through a book with that title by Joel Carmichael which has a 'coffee-table' format but is not to be despised. In a climate created by Orthodoxy deriving from the Greek Fathers, a new intellectual universe was born when, after flirtations with the French Enlightenment, Russian thinkers plunged into the headwaters of German romantic philosophy and found, notably in Schelling, an antidote to the shallow mechanistic philosophy of the eighteenth century—since in Schelling's version of the organic unity of all nature and its creative world-soul, there was 'a place for both the beauty and the variety of the organic world, to say nothing of incontestable phenomena like mesmerism, telepathy, occult apparitions and so on' (p.142 ff.). Method for circumventing what the author calls 'the craggy realities of contemporary Russian society' seemed also to be on offer within this philosophy. 'Schelling may thus be regarded as a sort of half-way house between the occultism of Jacob Boehme and the

rounded all-encompassing philosophical systems of Hegel and Marx'.

A Christian theologian, attracted towards these collaborators, knows that he must question the propriety of their gestures, made in human philosophy, towards the immanent presence of God in his creation, and he must do so by reference to his Christian instruction about the way taken by the Spirit as Lord and Life-giver. This instruction does not, however, provide esoteric knowledge about how the Spirit is active in the wider cosmos, preparing the whole order of creation for its consummation in ways corresponding to those he takes through Christ with humanity. Such glimpses as the Christian may have that this may be so, and how it is so, will occur within the texture of experience shared by all mankind. They will occur, if and when they do, to the mind which has been prepared by Christian faith to look for them with confident but patient expectation, and to distinguish between what is genuinely of God and what is an accident of nature readily but mistakenly accepted as nourishment for self-willed wishful thinking.

To round off this sequence of inconclusive reflections let me offer an elementary prescription for the kind of occurrence in which all this reflection is related. In the rapport between what goes on in the world about us and what we do in response to its stimuli—the rapport which constitutes for us the texture of our existence—we are able to *express* the reality which is happening in the created order. At times, this expression (done with words, with concepts, with sounds, with shapes and colours, with social acts and institutional devices) has an exciting quality and an invigorating effect. It is done, as we say, with 'inspiration'. Is there, beyond the human and the non-human agents involved in such happening, a transcendent divine agent who so holds together stimulus and response as to produce expressions of the underlying reality which are also expressions of 'spirit'? And is this 'spirit' recognisable as the Spirit whose way with his creatures has become familiar to us in our fellowship with God through Jesus Christ?