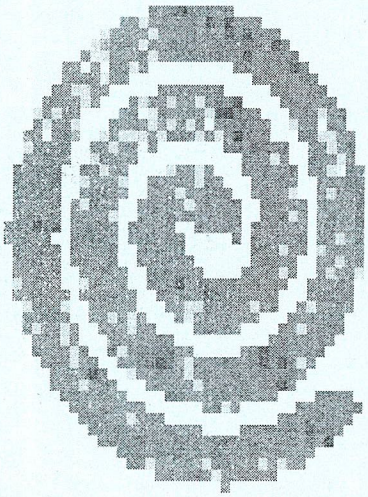
YR YSBRYD

The Spirit in a world of many faiths



Papers from the conference held at the University of Wales College Newport, Caerleon
14 – 17 July 2003

Churches Commission on Inter Faith Relations

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Yr Ysbryd: Where is the Spirit in a world of many faiths?

Michael Ipgrave

From 14th to 17th July 2003, around fifty people gathered at the University of Wales College Newport, in the ancient Roman settlement of Caerleon, to consider the ways in which the Spirit of God might be discerned by Christians engaged in inter faith encounter. The theme 'Where is the Spirit in a world of many faiths?' was a natural sequel to an earlier consultation organised at Swanwick in September 1999 which had looked at the Christological question: 'Who is Jesus Christ in a world of many faiths?' In both cases, the event was organised by the ecumenical Churches' Commission on Inter Faith Relations in partnership with the Church of England's Inter Faith Consultative Group, and participants were from several different countries.

The Caerleon conference was given a distinctive character by its Welsh context, which was marked in several ways. Participants were greeted in the opening worship by a choir from the Welsh Medium Comprehensive School in Gwent, arranged by Gethin Abraham-Williams, the General Secretary of CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales); subsequent worship sessions were led by members of a variety of Welsh churches Through the labours of Gethin and of James Harris CYTUN had been closely involved in organising the conference, which was chaired by Professor Christine Trevett of Cardiff University. In the middle of the programme, theological discussion was rooted in lived reality through a visit to nearby Newport – on one of the hottest days of the year, participants were welcomed to the Civic Centre to learn more of the history of this proud city, then spent time in the multi-faith area of Maindee, meeting pupils at the local primary school and mingling with local people of many different faiths in a multi-cultural tea at Community House Presbyterian Church. On the last evening, they were treated to an unforgettable series of Jewish jokes and stories presented by Alan Schwartz of the Cardiff Hebrew Congregation.

The most obvious Welsh, though, was of course the name, *Yr Ysbryd*. Finding the right title for the conference had not proved easy, and this reflected the complexity of the issues which were being explored. Were we taking as a datum the Holy Spirit, as that is attested in the Christian scriptures and known in Christian experience, and asking whether and where in the faiths of other communities similar concepts and experiences were to be found? Were we asking how that Holy Spirit, understood in Christian orthodoxy to be the third person of the Trinity, could help us to interpret theologically the plurality of religions and the interaction of religious believers? Were we taking as starting point language and realities in different faiths and tracing the ways in which these resonate with the mysterious presence which Christians call Spirit? Were we looking not primarily at faiths conceived of as distinct from one another, but rather at the process and dynamic of inter faith encounter, and analysing that in terms of the renewing activity of God known as Spirit? Here are at least four different methods, their underlying themes clustering together but yet distinguishable, as ways into asking our fundamental question: 'Where is the Spirit in a world of many faiths?' Not being sure where our discussion was likely to lead, we decided not to choose too restrictive a title for our conference, and so we adopted as our keyword the Welsh *Ysbryd*, meaning simply 'spirit' – though we did add to this the definite article *yr* to give some focus to our theme.

In fact, elements of all four methods can be traced in the papers which are presented here. Elizabeth Harris explicitly distinguishes between the third and the first of the points I have distinguished, asking first: 'Is there anything akin to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Buddhism?', and then: 'Can the work of the Holy Spirit be seen in Buddhism and Buddhists? From these two issues, which she describes respectively as phenomenological and theological, she then draws out the further question: 'What light can Buddhism shed on the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit?', which – she notes 'seeks a symbiotic relationship between religions'. Amos Yong's concerns are more definitely centred on theology: his account of the challenge of discerning the Spirit in Buddhism, and providing an adequate interpretive justification for this within the self-understanding of Christian faith, embraces my first and second themes. Colin Chapman's focus lies in these areas also, but he then moves into discussion of the fourth topic – that of the presence of the Spirit in the actual interaction of Christians and Muslims, which is a theme to which I also refer in my reflections on Tarek Mitri's paper. Mohammed Kazem Shaker in effect offers a mirror analysis to Chapman's from an Islamic point of view, which means that, like Harris', his material can also serve to shed light from Islam on the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

By way of explanation, it should be made clear that the papers are arranged, with some complications noted below, in the form of a two-part investigation of the question of the Spirit in relation to other faiths, the encounter with two very different religions – respectively, Buddhism and Islam – being the focus in successive parts. In the case of each interfaith encounter, two speakers from different parts of the Christian world (theologically and geographically) presented their reflections, and a Buddhist and a Muslim in turn responded from their own perspective. The complications arose from the conference being hit by an abnormally high incidence of sickness. This meant, first, that the scheduled Buddhist respondent, Andrew Skilton, was unable to attend. His place was taken at the last minute by his colleague Robert Morrison, who impressively engaged *ad lib* with the two preceding speakers. Secondly, Tarek Mitri, who was to speak on Christian-Muslim relations out of the context of his work with the World Council of Churches, was also prevented from attending. His paper was read in the form which it had reached before his illness intervened, and I added some further reflections on the specifically pneumatological implications which seemed to me to flow from his approach. The other four presentations offered here are papers on Christian engagement with by Amos Yong (an American-Asian Pentecostalist theologian who has been in dialogue with Mahāyāna) and Elizabeth Harris (English Methodist whose principal encounter is with Theravāda), a study on the Holy Spirit in relation to Islam by Colin Chapman (an Anglican priest with many years missionary and dialogical engagement with Muslims in Britain and the Middle East), and a Muslim response by Mohammed Kazem Shaker (a Shi'ite theologian from the University of Qom in Iran). In addition, there are texts of the stimulating bible studies on different images of the Spirit prepared by Georgiana Heskins, and some brief concluding reflections where I draw largely on material presented by Kirsteen Kim from a consultation on 'The Holy Spirit in a World of Many Faiths', held in Birmingham in February 2003.

A collection of papers, however stimulating they may be, can never do justice to the stimulus of meeting and sharing views which a conference enables. Still, I hope that these pages will give some sense of why those of us present really felt that *Yr Ysbryd* was a genuine encounter in the Spirit.

Discerning the Spirit in the Bible

Georgiana Heskins

I wish in these three short studies to make some connections between the Christian scriptures, the Spirit, and our experience of religious plurality. I do so out of my experience as a hospital chaplain in a richly multi-cultural area of south-east London.

First, I have to say that I think there is no such thing as a 'biblical pneumatology'. There are more understandings of Spirit than there are biblical writers. Sometimes, spirit seems to be one of freedom and adventure. Sometimes, spirit is understood to preserve the *status quo*, reminding us (for instance, the Paraclete in John's gospel) of all that Jesus has already taught.[1] It is worth remembering that in John the phrase 'the spirit will lead you into all truth'[2] is not about some expansive yet to be discovered truth, but rather is designed to recall the community to what they already know, and to preserve that. Sometimes spirit is the way in which we participate in God, and sometimes the focus is more on God's involvement with us. These different understandings of spirit reflect the very different contexts in which the biblical material was produced, and all these contexts are very different from our own. Even where there is some suggestion of 'inter faith'[3] it seems to me that it bears little comparison with our own context. And yet, of course, these are our formative texts. The Bible for us is not just a pious book. It both is familiar and has the capacity to come to us afresh, and it contains any amount of contrasting, not to say contradictory, material. The contradictions are precisely what force us to engage in a debate. The Bible is held together usually as witness to the one God who reveals godself, although the author of Ecclesiastes works the other way round: he begins with the sum total of human wisdom and with his own experience (real or imagined), and then moves from there towards attempting to understand God. So, given some kind of unity, the Bible's contradictions actually force us to engage in debate.

In these three studies, I shall reflect on the biblical images of breath, fire and oil; or, respectively, the themes of the spirit in our primordial past, in our present, and in our mysterious future. I would like to begin, not with holy scripture, but with a poem which brings together these three biblical images of breath, fire and oil.

> The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
> It will flame out like shining from shook foil;
> It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
> Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
> Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
> And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
> And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
> Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
>
> And for all this, nature is never spent;
> There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

1. This has been called (I think by Michael Goulder) 'the brake on the church'.
2. Jn 16.13.
3. Perhaps, for example, in the Acts of the Apostles – or perhaps not.

And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.[4]

Study 1: Spirit as breath and wind

Genesis 1.1–5; Ezekiel 37.1–14

Hopkins' imagery, 'The Holy Ghost over the bent world broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings', takes us to the beginning of Genesis, to the first day, when life begins out of the ominous dark and the waters of chaos. That very first verse, and indeed the first chapter, of Genesis begins to set out the whole fabric of the universe as an integrated whole. We human beings are part of the creation itself, bound into the fabric of the world, belonging to the same story as the planets, the plants, the fish and the animals. This is our created home. We are dependent on the earth and cannot escape our situation in it. I am told that this is what Buddhists would call 'conditional origination'.

Two readings of the Hebrew are possible in Gen 1.1. The more familiar translates: 'In the beginning God created', pointing to an absolute beginning. Another possible interpretation, though, is: 'When God began to create'.[5] In this reading, God's creation activity is not an absolute beginning point. Rather, it is the ordering of a chaos which is there, but about whose origins the text is not concerned. The chaos is simply there as a given. Certainly in either case there as a given is this God who has no point of origin. God is there to order, to form, to shape, to will, to decree and to summon an ordered potential life-space. God's active instrument is the wind or breath – the Hebrew is *ruaḥ*.

This first creation story in Genesis, usually called the Priestly account, is not dependent on any cosmology, either ancient or modern. Its purpose is to declare that everything is dependent for its existence and its meaning upon the sovereign God. God is not only a part or a process of his creation. His power holds creation in existence, and that power is the breath of Spirit. All creation is regarded as good: 'And God saw all that he had made and it was very good'.[6] The passage speaks of humanity's special role in creation, and we are now re-evaluating the relationship between human beings and other animals. Christians believe that they are called to share the work of bringing about the freeing of nature, called to be co-creators through Spirit. This already raises environmental issues, an area where people of all faiths can present a united witness.

In similar vein, the Psalm declares: 'By the word of the Lord were the heavens made and all the host of them by the breath (*ruaḥ*) of his mouth',[7] and the book of Job

4. Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur'.
5. Cf NRSV margin for Gen 1.1.
6. Gen 1.31.
7. Ps 33.6.

recalls the great Babylonian myth of Marduk slaying the water-dragon of chaos and making earth and sky out of her divided body.[8]

A familiar rendering for *ruaḥ* in the Genesis account[9] is 'spirit', the intrusive power for Life that only God can command. The wind that blows in Luke's Pentecost story is presumably the same wind, again making life wonderfully and inexplicably possible. Notice that the darkness in Genesis is not condemned or rejected, but named and valued.[10] This God values and administers both light and darkness, in a balanced, life-permitting order.

To envisage creation in terms of life-giving energy and inspiration is, for me, a more satisfying insight than the idea of God as one who remains outside and essentially separate. Like dialogue, which has its own life-giving energy, the Spirit is not outside the process but intimately embroiled in it, for the whole earth is full of his glory: 'The world is charged with the grandeur of God'. The essential feature of the doctrine of the Creator Spirit is that creation is still going on in ceaseless renewal and development. The spirit enables us to hold together both insights: that God is supreme and creation is dependent, and that God is also participant and to be found in the processes of creation. If in this way the biblical picture presents a Creator Spirit who is also in process of learning and yearning, and if we are in some sense co-creators with God's spirit, we should be able to identify shared pieces of inter-faith work (which might be intellectually creative or practical projects of some kind) where this creative spirit can be seen at work.

A second passage to consider in relation to spirit as 'breath' or 'wind' is Ezekiel's famous vision of the Valley of Dry Bones.[11] This is the most familiar passage from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, a priestly figure, whose book is dated (like Genesis) to the time of Babylonian captivity. He is directly concerned with God's righteous anger over the sins of his people, making specific reference to the presence and the departure of the Lord's glory in the Jerusalem temple. Ezekiel was the first prophet of the exile, contending with the absence of the temple and with separation from the holy land. His great vision at the outset proclaims a God who travels with his people – on wheels.

Ezekiel's moving passage about God's resurrection of the 'dry bones' of dead Israel through the breathing in of Spirit is read over the tomb of Christ at the great Saturday service of the Orthodox church, making a direct parallel with the resurrection of Jesus. The prophet is told to prophesy to the dry bones: he himself is to speak with the authority of God in a way that transforms the situation. He speaks to the bones as God commanded him, and all across the immense valley the bones start to tremble and to rattle, but as yet they have no breath, no spirit in them. So he is told: 'Mortal, prophesy to the spirit, to their very breath'.[12] Our forebears in exile, having lost the holy city, wondered whether they were still the people of God. The address, 'O my

8. Job 26.12–14. (Job 2.12-14) The word *ruaḥ* appears here also – 'by his wind the heavens were made fair' (26.13) – in a good example of the biblical creation story coming alongside other creation stories.
9. Gen 1.2.
10. Gen 1.5.
11. Ezek 37.1–14.
12. Ezek 37.9.

people',[13] is addressed to us all, and within the canon it functions as an encouragement. Where is the spirit moving now for us?

After years without writing, Hopkins broke his silence with this:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.[14]

Study 2: Fire of mission

Exodus 3.1–6; Acts 2.1–12

As someone who tries to treasure the New Testament I sometimes get impatient with theologians quarrying these amazing and ancient texts for answers to questions which the biblical writers never asked. Each has a unique perspective on the Spirit, and to attempt a so-called biblical overview is as unjust to our forebears in faith as is dialogue which uses the categories of one religious tradition to make crude comparisons with another. It is simply not possible. Nevertheless, w cannot simply leave the matter there. If our texts carry authority, we need to engage with them. Indeed, from within the scriptures we know how freely the people of Israel and the early Christians interpreted and reinterpreted these texts in the light of their experience. The images of breath, fire and oil, and others with them, weave and interweave through the biblical material, sometimes together, sometimes separately. If God's creative activity is described in the image of breath being breathed into the primordial past or in an ancient prophetic voice, there is a sense in which the image of fire moves into the present, in the judgement and the mission which is a sign of God's presence.

According to a marginal note, in Hopkins' first version of 'God's Grandeur' the line: 'It will flame out like shining from shook foil' originally read: 'It will flame out like lightning from shook foil'. For me, the electrical charge of the 'lightning' conjures a more violent creation narrative, and I am grateful for the insight that very often it is in unpromising struggles that the most creative things are possible. When the inter faith task seems hard, it can perhaps be encouraging to think of this flaming out 'like lightning'.

'Flame' is often associated in the biblical material with God's grandeur. In the book of Daniel, the prophet describes God's throne as being like 'the fiery flame'.[15] The command to Moses to remove the sandals from his feet, for the place on which he is standing is holy ground, asks him to be barefoot. To be barefoot is to feel and to

13. Ezek 37.12, 13.
14. Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.
15. Dan 7.9.

touch. That brings us to the question: 'What must we lose or leave behind for the sake of this journey?' Or, to put it another way, 'When in our inter faith encounters have we been most aware of being on holy ground?'

> I have seen the sun break through
> To illuminate a small field
> For a while, and gone my way
> And forgotten it. But that was the pearl
> Of great price, the one field that had
> The treasure in it. I realise now
> That I must give all that I have
> To possess it. Life is not hurrying
> On to a receding future, nor hankering after
> An imagined past. It is the turning
> Aside like Moses to the miracle
> Of the lit bush, to a brightness
> That seemed as transitory as your youth
> Once, but is the eternity that awaits you.[16]

A short passage from the very last book in the Old Testament canon is read in the Common Lectionary on the Second Sunday in Advent – an uncomfortable Sunday, associated with John the Baptist preaching a baptism of repentance in a dangerous, apparently barren place. Malachi describes the Lord as coming 'like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap'.[17] Purity may sometimes suggest a lack of courage, a lack of risk; it is associated with going back to inexperience and untaintedness. But that is hardly the baptism of repentance. John's baptism, humiliating as it is for those who have to bow to it, is the only way to strip down to essentials. That brings us back to the question: 'What must we lose or leave behind if the Spirit is leading us onto such holy ground?'

I suppose the saddest words in scripture are in Luke's account of the Road to Emmaus: 'we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel'.[18] Luke is such a wonderful story teller, and his narrative can speak directly to our own disillusionment – perhaps, for example, we in the churches had hoped for sufficient international trust and understanding to stave off war in Iraq. In any case, the fragile circle of Jesus' earliest followers had found themselves separated from him, and his absence threatened to become the crisis that would destroy the church. But at the same time as they experienced separation they also experienced his continued presence, and within a relatively short time this was interpreted in terms of the gift of the Spirit. This can be seen in the interpretation of the Spirit in John's Gospel or in the letters of Paul, but it is in Luke-Acts that the theme is developed with the most expansive interpretation, especially in the story of Pentecost.[19].

This narrative evokes the prophet Joel (as Peter's speech reminds us), Sinai, and the call of Isaiah.[20] It resonates with the myth of the tower of Babel myth, and, on a

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16. R. S. Thomas 'The Bright Field' in *Laboratories of the Spirit.*
17. Mal 3.1–4.
18. Lk 24.21.
19. Ac 2.1–21.
20. Joel 2.28ff; Ex 19; Is 6.1–8.

smaller scale, with the experience of Zechariah the priest at the beginning of the gospel of Luke[21] – the personal spirit-filling and tongue-loosing of a single Judaean priest after a period of judgment becomes in Acts spontaneous gifts lavished on the whole company of Galilean disciples, who suddenly begin speaking a wide range of regional languages. It is the Joel citation in Peter's speech which serves in Acts the same function as Jesus' Sabbath reading from Isaiah serves in Luke's gospel.[22] The role of the spirit is accentuated in the way in which the Joel source is adjusted in Peter's speech. We are all of us involved in a lifetime of listening to the scriptures proclaimed in the *ekklesia*, and of attending to Spirit recreating the world in our personal and communal depths.

Acts is full of wonderworking, and we may be embarrassed to find that magic worked wonders for the Lord: I particularly like the story of the sons of Sceva, where faith is not particularly stressed, but it is the power of the Name which is more striking.[23] It is important to see that what they do is not done in their own name but in the name of Jesus, and to remember that they are Jews; there is no extra-Jewish referent. Peter speaks within Judaism, fully identifying with Israel, and Jesus and the apostles are seen in the hard role of being Old Testament prophets, identifying with the people over against the leading establishment. In Peter's speech before the Jewish council, he particularly has the Holy Spirit assisting him[24] because he is bearing witness. He is not as such doing theology, and the proclamation that 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved'[25] is not at all a good basis for an absolute claim. It is rather, I think, a natural confession growing out of the experience and the awareness that the power belongs to God.

Of course we have to reflect how our different absolute claims somehow fit together in God's mysterious plan. That is the work of theology, but while in pursuing that task we may by all means look for clues in the biblical material, we cannot expect the Bible to do our work for us. In our day-to-day encounters with those who follow a different faith path, we have to ask if tensions between mission and dialogue become evident. If so, are we to resolve them or to hold them together? What are we to make of the notion that 'mission without mystery is always oppressive'? The Biblical material, and particularly Acts, suggests that both dialogue and mission manifest themselves in a meeting of hearts rather than of minds, and that we are dealing with a mystery. Our inter faith journeys, at the level of daily living and at the level of theology, are part and parcel of life, and part of the agenda of our churches. Christian theology needs dialogue, and dialogue presupposes commitment. We need to understand where we are coming from, and to be in some sense faithful to that: if we disparage our own faith, we cannot easily respect anyone else's faith. This is possible, I suggest, only if we take the Burning Bush story to heart. We are not moving into a void. The spirit of God always precedes us and is at work in ways that pass our understanding. The spirit accompanies us and comes towards us. We take off our shoes because the place we are treading is holy. Christian faith is a religion of grace

21. Gen 11.1–9; Lk 1.5–23, 57–80.
22. Is 61.1ff, cited in Lk 4.14–30.
23. Ac 19.11–20.
24. Ac 4.8.
25. Ac 4.12.

freely received, and repentance is about renewal, not about untaintedness. We are to bear witness to that experience in the best language we can find.

> It's a long way off but inside it
> There are quite different things going on:
> Festivals at which the poor man
> Is king and the consumptive is
> Healed; mirrors in which the blind look
> At themselves and love looks at them
> Back; and industry is for mending
> The bent bones and the minds fractured
> By life. It's a long way off, but to get
> There takes no time and admission
> Is free, if you will purge yourself
> Of desire, and present yourself with
> Your need only and the simple offering
> Of your faith, green as a leaf.[26]

Study 3: Oil of healing

1 Peter 2.9–10; Revelation 21–22

Since September 11th 2001, the interfaith enterprise has become central to the agenda of the secular world, and we all yearn for healing. At the local level, as a novice hospital chaplain, I have found hospital to be a place where patients and their families are also desperately looking for the generosity and the healing of God. The Spirit is no respecter of scale. I have learned how useful, to any minister, is the sacrament of anointing with oil. For those with a sense of following the Christian way, it is of course deeply scriptural and an ancient part of the ministry of the universal church. But 'If in doubt, anoint!' has become, in the last few months, a bit of a motto for me. Of course that is partly a symptom of inexperience. In awkward situations it is always easier to have something to 'do'. Any experienced hospital chaplain will tell you that 'being there, being present', listening and watching, listening for the spirit, learning to crack the code of other people's language, hearing the pain, feeling it even, is what counts. But I still anoint frequently. Occasionally, called to anoint a patient or a departed relative, I find myself anointing their partners or their parents as well. No one has to make a statement of faith or a confession of sin. If they ask for anointing they are welcome to it. This is for me increasingly a sign of God's overwhelming and immeasurable generosity. That points us to oil as a sign and symbol of the Spirit. In my kitchen I have a jar of Greek olive oil which I replenish from a can under the sink, and which I use quite a bit in cooking. The brand name is 'Elanthy', made in Greece by a company called 'Elais'. You do not have to have very good Greek to hear the similarity between *elais* for oil and the petition *Kyrie eleison*, 'Lord have mercy', of the liturgy. The link between oil and mercy is not indeed obvious in English, but in New Testament Greek the words sound almost the same.

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26. R.S. Thomas from 'The Kingdom' in *Collected Poems 1945-1990.*

Anointing with oil was used for the consecration of certain Old Testament people (prophets, priests and kings) and certain things (the Temple furnishings for instance) by God. The king becomes 'God's anointed one', *Christos*, and God's anointing always brings the Spirit – on Moses, Aaron, Saul and others. So in time God's chosen people began to realise that they too were God's anointed. Oil itself was so plentiful and so valued for its contribution to daily living (cooking, lighting, washing and cleansing) that it became a symbol of great gladness. It was linked closely with wine, that other symbol of joy and life as an indescribable gift.

The early chapters of Acts parallel the early chapters of Luke's gospel. Luke, whose focus on the spirit is the inevitable corollary of a very human Jesus, presents Jesus as the man of the spirit inheriting, focusing, God's spirit activity in the prophets, bringing in the Last Days which are then marked by the Pentecostal explosion in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy. This is a way of announcing the agenda for the whole Acts journey. The last line of Peter's citation, 'that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved',[27] raises the question of who or why anyone needs salvation. Balancing a high assessment of Jesus' honour, the most likely answer is that the fate of the Jewish nation is in the balance because they have rejected God's saving purpose. Jesus' crucifixion, which had been presented as a tragic watershed, has in fact had its place in God's plan from the beginning. Still, Israel's resistance can be overcome; still, God's saving call can be heard and accepted – this is Peter's message. Not a few commentators have suggested 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit' as an apt title for Luke's second volume. I am aware that many Christian believers find in Acts an inspired blueprint for authentic Christianity, 'getting back' to origins, but I am not sure that in our situation that is always helpful.

Respect for difference is commendable, but what then happens to all our absolutisms? What is the grand narrative? How can we maintain our familiar language of the consummation of all things – the New Jerusalem, the City of God with its rivers of healing – and still remain open to different visions contributed from other faith traditions? We tend to say that Christianity is a universal religion for everyone: Jew and Gentile, slave and free, gay and straight, and so on. But there is an obvious danger. If Christianity is a universal religion – and those claims have led to imperialism and to the Crusades – it is possible that those who do not see the world like this are somehow to be damned. It is easy to demonise those whose views seem narrow. For example, those who object strongly to gay sex are called 'prurient' and 'pusillanimous'. Liberal Christians can be odiously superior about those who do not see things way they do.

Judaism teaches us something significant about the particular and the peculiar. At least from the time of Second Isaiah, Israel is seen to have a universal mission. However, this mission is not concerned with making converts, but with being a faithful witness to God and to the moral order, a pointer towards the day of a mended creation, a light for the nations. This particularism within a universal perspective has led Jewish thinkers to be wonderfully generous in giving a positive role to other religions, even to religions hostile to Judaism. They are concerned not so much for

27. Joel 2.32, cited in Ac 2.21.

Israel or Judaism as such as for 'the kingdom'. This is the spirit of Eldad and Medad,[28] and it is echoed in Jesus' teaching.[29]

Membership of the church is based on faith in Jesus Christ. In him there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female.[30] But the church is from the beginning a minority community with a mission. Sometimes we have been tempted to see that mission as the Christianisation of the world, but that is not the witness of the New Testament. In the New Testament, the church is a new witnessing community whose witness God somehow needs within God's total mission.

At the end of Romans, Paul reflects on how his mission to the Gentiles fits into God's total plan. This is a reflection on the dangers of thoughtless universalism; Paul's mature thought emphasises that mission without mystery becomes oppressive.[31] Perhaps he had been burned once by a religious zeal that took for granted that God wanted everyone to believe like him, as he had felt in his Damascus road experience, but now he realised that he was dealing with a mystery.

Today few Christians anywhere in the world find themselves in a situation where coexistence with other religionists in not part and parcel of their daily life. Whether we like it or not, all Christian theology is a theology of dialogue. We can no longer, if we ever could, do our theology in isolation from everyone else. But dialogue is only possible if we recognise that God's Spirit precedes us, accompanies us and approaches us. The Spirit calls us to repentance, to the healing of memories, to forgiveness and reconciliation. The Spirit renews and heals.

This does not mean we continue to preach 'the old, old story'. Conversion is not the joining of a community in order to procure 'eternal salvation'; it is rather a change in allegiance in which Christ is accepted as Lord. A Christian accepts the responsibility to serve God in this life and to promote God's reign in all its forms. Conversion involves personal cleansing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal in order to become a participant in the mighty work of God. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that are to us least expected

The Book of Revelation stands in the line of Old Testament prophecy. It is deeply subversive, written in code, and can give us a sense of the subversive Spirit. This Spirit is working underground, sometimes in code. It is the Spirit for whom we must listen and watch if we are to find the oil of healing really permeating the cracks. In a sense this appears to be the least dramatic of our three images. But we should not be deceived. The notion of the Spirit oiling the wheels of dialogue and the cracks of our most uncomfortable places – working in rather undramatic ways – that same Spirit is, in the words of the song, 'turning the world upside down'.

> Friend I have lost the way
> *The way leads on*
> Is there another way?

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28. Num 11.26–29.
29. E.g. Mk 10.38–41.
30. Gal 3.28.
31. Rom 9–11.

The way is one.
I must retrace the track.
It's lost and gone
Back I must travel back
None goes there none.
Then I'll make here my place
(the road leads on)
Stand still and set my face.
(the road leaps on)
Stay here forever stay
None stays here none.
I cannot find the way.
The way leads on.
Oh places I have passed
That journey's done
And what will come at last?
The road leads on.[32]

32. Edwin Muir, 'The Way' *in The Complete Poems.*

On the Christian discernment of Spirit(s) 'after' Buddhism

Amos Yong

Arguably, recent Christian theological reflection on religious pluralism and the world religious traditions has taken what might be called 'a pneumatological turn'.[33] This emerging conversation is itself an outgrowth of focused attention on both pneumatology and trinitarian theology during the last generation. Applied to the world of the religions, the turn to pneumatology has furthered discussion on theology of religious pluralism by introducing new categories and shifting directions of inquiry. So whereas previous thinking about the religions focused on whether or not they were or are salvific, a pneumatological theology of religions asks whether or not and how, if so, the religions are divinely providential instruments designed for various purposes. Further, while earlier debates focused on whether or not the religions were or are the results of common grace or of natural revelation, a pneumatological *theologia religionum* asks other kinds of questions such as: what is the relationship of religion and culture, or of religion and language? How does religion function to sustain life and community? What role does religion play via-à-vis the other dimensions and domains of life, whether it be the arts, politics, economics, etc.? Finally, previous theologies of religion bogged down on abstract intra-Christian issues as evident in the dominant categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism; a pneumatological theology of religions, on the other hand, attempts to push beyond these in-house categories by engaging religious others on their own terms.

In my previous explorations of such a pneumatological account, however, two central and related problematic questions repeatedly arise. Simply put, they have to do with how Christians can discern the Holy Spirit in the world of the religions and do so non-imperialistically in our postcolonial world. The Christian assumption is that besides the Holy Spirit of God, there are other spirits, perhaps unholy ones – human, institutional, even demonic – which are operative in the world in general and in the religions particularly. The biblical injunction to 'test the spirits to see whether they are from God' (1 Jn 4.1) is especially crucial for a pneumatological theology of religions. The Johannine account presents a criterion for discerning the Spirit which is christological: 'Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist ...' (1 Jn 4.3). The immediate goal in this case is to provide tools to discern Gnostic deformations of Christian faith within the Johannine community. In the present situation of encountering religious pluralism, however, the context is inter-religious rather than intra-Christian, and the task is complicated by the fact that other religious traditions may well have different definitions of the good, beautiful, true and holy, and different criteria to discern such.

The dilemma is this: if we discern the Spirit using Christian (e.g., biblical) criteria, we end up either 'christianising' the other insofar as we find the Spirit to be present, or 'demonising' the other insofar as we find the Spirit absent. In the former case, we appear to have allied ourselves with Rahner's idea of 'anonymous Christianity', and

33. For an overview of this emerging conversation, see Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), esp. ch. 3; and Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

thus opened ourselves up to all the difficult counter-questions generated by such a position, not the least of which is that we have imposed our own categories on religious others who are distinct from ourselves and have their own self-understandings. In the latter case, not only have we arrived at theologically charged rhetoric liable to be abused socially and politically, but we have also done so by declaring religious others void of certain goods and values as determined by criteria external to them. In fact, even to ask if the Spirit is present and active in other religions is to stand within a Christian framework – the Holy Spirit always being the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ – which is not assumed by other faiths. What is the alternative? Can Christians even attempt to discern the Holy Spirit using non-Christian (i.e., non-biblical) criteria or criteria derived from other faiths? Is not to do so result either in relativism or in reverse imperialism – whereby Christian self-understanding is judged by criteria external to Christian faith?

For this reason, some have insisted on the ultimate incommensurability of Christianity and other faiths. Heavy consequences, however, ensue. The Christian mission to those in other faiths might have to be abandoned if there remains no point of contact. The gospel would cease to be universally applicable because it would not be contextualisable in the terms and categories of other faiths. And most seriously for Christian theologians, the momentous claims to truth and the task of interreligious apologetics would be undermined if we cannot engage common questions with common categories and tools.

So while this is a difficult issue for theology of religions, I suggest that set within a robust trinitarian framework, a pneumatological theology of religions is able to navigate a *via media* between imperialism on the one side and relativism on the other; between Christian theology on the one side and theology *of religions* on the other; between discerning the Holy Spirit on the one side, and discerning other spirits on the other. This is because the human experience *of* the Holy Spirit is at the same time human experience *in* the Spirit. As such, a pneumatological epistemology emerges which is intersubjective and participatory on the one hand, even while preserving difference and distinctiveness on the other. The dominant metaphor operative here is that found on the Day of Pentecost when those on the streets of Jerusalem proclaimed: 'in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power' (Ac 2.11). In this account, the outpouring of the Spirit 'upon all flesh' (Ac 2.17) opens up the possibility of encountering otherness in all of its alterity even while avoiding or overcoming the radical incommensurability thesis (e.g., of the early Wittgenstein). Thus the miracle of Pentecost is to allow for intersubjective communication and inter-relational participation even amidst the preservation of otherness – linguistic, cultural, and even religious (I have argued elsewhere).[34]

In this paper, I propose to demonstrate this thesis in dialogue with Buddhism. More specifically, I hope to show the plausibility of developing a Christian criteriology of discernment in dialogue with Buddhism. The goal is to formulate an understanding of

34. Most recently in Yong, '"As the Spirit Gives Utterance ...": Pentecost, Intra-Christian Ecumenism, and the Wider *Oekumene*', *International Review of Mission* (forthcoming), and Yong, 'The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions', *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming). Both of these essays build on my more extensive comments on hermeneutics and theological method in *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Burlington, Vt, and Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002).

Christian discernment as emergent from the Christian-Buddhist encounter. Its guiding questions are: how might Christians discern the Holy Spirit as a result of encountering Buddhism? How does the Christian-Buddhist dialogue shape or inform Christian discernment? What might such a criteriology of discernment look like 'after' Buddhism – 'after' not in the sense of leaving Buddhism behind, but in the sense of having crossed over into the Buddhist tradition even while not having left Christian faith?

Of course, the key question here might concern the possibility of crossing over without authentic and radical conversion. I believe that conversion occurs variously in different contexts and with regard to different domains,[35] and that a pneumatological understanding both resists the kind of either/or assumed in this criticism and sustains in depth Christian engagement with religious otherness. A pneumatological approach to other faiths in general and to Buddhism in particular allows Christians to meet religious others and Buddhists on their own terms without abandoning their Christian perspectives and assumptions. The shape of any theology emergent from such encounter becomes then a kind of comparative theology structured by comparative categories sufficiently vague so as to allow vastly disparate symbols and ideas to be juxtaposed and so as to preserve meaningful signification of similarities and differences which capture what is important and valued in the traditions being compared from their own internal perspectives.[36] This discussion assumes just such an in depth engagement of Christians with Buddhism on its own terms,[37] even as it attempts to suggest what a criteriology of Christian discernment "after" Buddhism might look like.

Pneumatology and the criteriology of discernment 'after' Buddhism

Any Christian theology of discernment should take into account the biblical guidelines and the normative identity of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus. The following therefore examines the relationship of the Spirit and the Word, as well as the promise and challenge of discerning the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus, both in dialogue with Buddhism. Along the way, meta-criteriological questions will be raised requiring more extensive theological and philosophical reflection of the notion of truth.

35. E.g., Lewis Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Donald Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998).
36. This theory of comparison is important especially since comparative theologies of previous eras were erected on biased categories which not only privileged the home tradition but also were unable to give voice and presence to the perspectives and values of religious others; see Robert Cummings Neville, *Normative Cultures* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), esp. ch. 3. For application of the theory, see the three-volume Comparative Religious Ideas Project edited by Neville: vol. 1, *The Human Condition*, vol. 2, *Ultimate Realities*, vol. 3, *Religious Truth* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000).
37. See my 300-page manuscript tentatively titled, 'Does the Wind Blow through the Middle Way? Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue' (under review for publication with Orbis Books).

Discerning the Spirit and the Word

At one level, asking about how to discern the Holy Spirit in Buddhism is like asking how to discern the sweetness of a book or the softness of a piece of metal. Those who insist that categoreal confusion is behind such endeavors have got it partly right. The differences of both traditions need to be respected, and the systematic wholeness of their doctrinal articulations need to be understood as embedded within entirely different ritual, practical, and soteriological forms of life. And at this level, any 'conventional' comparisons of Christianity and Buddhism are always going to be ineffective.[38] After all, Christian discernment proceeds according to the name of Jesus, while Buddhist discernment and criteria are normed by the enlightenment experience itself.[39]

Yet at the same time, it is also fair to observe that the biblical and Christian traditions affirm the Spirit as the universal presence and activity of God. If that is the case, at least at this general level, the Spirit is present and active even in Buddhism to some extent. But how then do we go about discerning religious otherness in general and Buddhism more specifically with methodological neutrality and ethical propriety? My initial response as articulated in the hypothesis of this paper is: pneumatologically. Christian criteria for discernment will need to be guided by Scripture, but given pneumatic application by the Spirit who bestows gifts such as the capacity for discernment of spirits (1 Cor 12.10). This is important since, 'the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3.6b; cf Jn 6.63). The value of this Pauline saying can be seen at three levels. First, Scripture is itself God-breathed and, in that sense, inspired by the Spirit (2 Tim 3.16 and 2 Pet 1.21). Second, understanding (of Scripture) itself comes about through the Spirit (1 Cor 2.10–16). Finally, the meaning and application of Scripture is the result of life lived according to and in the Spirit. The combined force of this pneumatological framework results in the dynamic interplay of Spirit and Word such that mere propositionalism and wooden literalism will be insufficient for spiritual discernment. In short, discerning the Spirit(s) in Buddhism will require a dynamic hermeneutic able to read and understand not only the life and world views of Scripture and Buddhism in their various contexts, but then develop adequate comparative categories for both realities so as to determine their commensurability.

Hence the importance of the Christian-Buddhist dialogue. We can begin with Ninian Smart's talking about the 'kenosis of the Spirit' in terms of the Spirit's inspiring the Bible and accommodating truth to the biblical writers so that these texts can function soteriologically in any context.[40] More specifically, this 'self-emptying' of the Spirit is a pointing away from herself to the living Word of God. It enables a perspective about the living and dynamic quality of scripture itself as emergent from lived

38. Roger J. Corless, 'The Mutual Fulfillment of Buddhism and Christianity in Co-inherent Superconsciousness', in Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986), 115–36, esp. 133–4.
39. See, e.g., Tson-kha-pa, *Calming the Mind and Discerning the Real: Buddhist Meditation and the Middle View from the Lam rim chen mo of Tson-kha-pa*, trans. Alex Wayman (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), for an overview of how the latter proceeds.
40. Ninian Smart, *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 76. Donald Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991), ch. 4, also talks about the 'kenosis of the Spirit' in terms of sanctification.

experience. All Scripture is translations which refigure and represent original experiences that are dynamic, fluid, open, plural, multiple, multivocal, instable, etc. At one level, then, Scripture can be understood reflect the attempt to 'freeze' the living experience in language. Taken in this direction, such an attempt will always fail to represent the fullness of the original experience. Hence the temptation to reify and then absolutise language will always result in miscommunication and then dis-ease, what Buddhists call *dukkha*. But, at another level, that of the perspective of Buddhist *śūnyatā*, language (or scripture) understood to be empty can be seen as skilful means (*upāya*) with epistemic, pragmatic, and, most importantly, soteriological import. Similarly, from the vantage point of pneumatological theology, language taken conventionally is lifeless until animated by the Spirit. Taken ontologically, creation is itself emergent from the divine word ('And God said ...') and the divine breath ('... while *ruaḥ Elōhīm* swept over the face of the waters'; Gen 1.2). Taken christologically, Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth is the Christ precisely as anointed by the Spirit.

The whole point about language is, from the perspective of Buddhist *śūnyatā*, its function as a raft to get us across a particular river (situation), and to be released upon successful crossing. Jeff Humphreys' discussion of Buddhist sutras makes this point clear: texts are empty not only in the sense that all things are empty (of self being), but also in the more specific sense of making bare this emptiness precisely in pointing us through/beyond the text and inviting us to think and even live through them.[41] He suggests, in passages that bear reproduction at length, the following:

> The more self-aware literary experience becomes, the more it is capable of inducing insight into the true nature of reality (emptiness) ... In literary experience, the reader's consciousness becomes nondistinct from its object (the text), from the conceptual reality imputed by means of the text, and from the object reality outlined by the conceptual one ...
>
> All translation, and all reading, perfectly enact emptiness and dependent arising, whether or not they know it, and no matter how simple, crude, or obscure they may happen to be ... At the same time that they [texts] are objects of direct sense perception in the physical act of reading, they give rise to elaborate conceptual knowledge that suggests the emptiness of direct sense perception. By reading them, we come very close to a direct perception of the self's and the object's emptiness ... Every translation is a meditation on emptiness and a performance of dependent arising; every great translation is extremely, palpably so. We should not be surprised, either, that there is no such thing as a definitive translation ...
>
> Consciousness and text are essentially performances. They exist only as a succession of performances, of performative 'events'. Reading is a performance; so is translation and so is commentary. The latter two are like the 'original' text in that they can be 'performed' in turn. Writing itself is a performance. The beauty of writing ... is the immediacy, the *nondistinction* experienced in the instant of writing between the writer, the written, and the act. All are subsumed in performance. When the writing stops, that apparent nonduality also stops. A text unread is simply a physical object, paper and ink between two boards, glued together. Only in the act of reading or writing does a text exist as text, not latently but actually, and that existence is a function of its nondistinction from the reading or writing consciousness ...

41. See Jeff Humphries, *Reading Emptiness: Buddhism and Literature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), esp. ch. 3: 'The Karmic Text: Buddhism and Translation'.

> Beauty is the experience of nonduality, of emptiness and dependent arising as one. Beauty is then (latent) *bodhi*, or enlightenment. Weak readings, poor translations, wearisome, useless commentaries are ones that betray beauty in this sense: they reflect no (even latent) sense of nonduality within the dualism that is language and understanding. Readings and translations, when they are aesthetically strong, and reflect an enlightened sense of nondistinction, are meditations in which we directly experience both emptiness and dependent arising. In the instant of reading, consciousness and the text occur simultaneously, each perfectly, mutually dependent on the other ... An unread text is only an object, its textuality latent. It is only realized as a continuum of all previous 'performances', 'events' of writing and reading, when it is read by someone. When we read, the consciousness that we think of as our 'self' becomes nondistinct from that great continuum. So that no text is ever exactly the same twice....[42]

A few remarks inspired by and then (hopefully) extending this view of Buddhist emptiness and language from the perspective of pneumatological theology are in order.[43] First, the biblical text is itself an invitation for the reader to enter into and inhabit the biblical story by and through the Holy Spirit. Thus, for example, the inconclusive and open-ended character of the conclusion to the Acts of the Apostles has been perennially taken by interpreters to signify the ongoing acts of the Spirit in vivifying the *ecclesia* and enabling its members to participate in the narrative of God's dealings with the world through the Church.

Second, reading, reciting, liturgicising, interpreting, etc., biblical texts are thereby performances of faith by the faithful, seeking not only propositional / cognitive knowledge of 'what the Bible says', but, more importantly, the existential and soteriological transformation of heart and life in order to be shaped as a more faithful community.[44] In all of this, the retrieval of the biblical text is at the same time its repetition and reappropriation performed in the various places and times following the experiences of the earliest Christians. Thus, for example, to "be biblical" in terms of reliving the New Testament involves nothing less than a nondual experience of the Spirit of Jesus who raised him from the dead and who gives life to the mortal bodies of his disciples and followers.

Third, the vision of God is the personal and communal experience of God through the Word by the Spirit, an internalised union of body and spirit, of self and other, and of human spirits and the Holy Spirit. Hence the Spirit is poured out in and through Scripture upon those attempting to be faithful to and hear Scripture, those who are material, social and historical beings. Arguably, only such internalised re-enactment avoids both the extreme errors of either reader-response hermeneutics on the one side

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42. Humphries, *Reading Emptiness*, 73, 75, 76 and 77 respectively.
43. Some might object that Buddhist emptiness is itself ontologically empty, thus undermining efforts to engage Christian theological claims which are ontologically weighty. Without dismissing the severity of this objection, it should be noted that whether or not emptiness is merely epistemic is debated within the Buddhist tradition. On the other side, my claims in the remainder of this section are primarily hermeneutical, and hence, at least for present purposes, should not hinder the dialogue from proceeding.
44. The recent James W. McClendon, Jr, identifies the 'baptist vision' as informed by a 'this is that' hermeneutic wherein the present experience of Christians is that of the first Christians as preserved by the scriptural traditions; for an overview of McClendon's project, see Yong, 'The "Baptist Vision" of James William McClendon, Jr: A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Response', *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 37:2 (Fall 2002): 32–57.

or authorial-intentionality emphases on the other. This Middle Way between relativism and nihilism on the one hand and legalism and absolutism on the other can be accomplished only pneumatologically, whereby the same Spirit who vivifies the original experience is the Spirit who inspires the recording and translation of such experiences and later enables the re-enactment of these words by subsequent interpreters. Scripture here plays an essential role even as its non-absolutistic character leaves room, even requires, the mediational presence and activity of the Spirit.

Discerning the Spirit of Jesus

So far, so good. But to be more precise, Christian discernment of the Holy Spirit is normed finally by Jesus the Christ. The Spirit of God is, after all, confessed to be none other than the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Christ. Here, we arrive also at the heart of Christian faith. What else can and should we say at this juncture recognising both the apologetic imperative and the obligation to discern the Spirit(s) in the interreligious encounter with Buddhism?

One way forward is to shift the categories of christology from that of the dogmatic tradition to that of Buddhism. Joseph O'Leary thus proposes to overcome the headaches of traditional christology by moving from an Aristotelian and Greek metaphysics of substance to an Eastern metaphysics of relationality. For him, spirit is understood as 'unconditioned freedom, no longer bound by the letter of Scripture, the Law, the cults at Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim, or any other religious conventions that idolatrously take themselves to be ultimate'.[45] O'Leary goes on to champion the move beyond 'christological or christocentric dogma(tism)' toward pneumatological or pneumatocentric openness. Such a paradigm shift brings us to 'the empty realm of Spirit': God 'is destined to be converted into a rhetorical stratagem for unleashing the energy of religious awareness, or for tuning in to the creative, transforming energy of Spirit that all religious traditions have felt in one way or another'.[46] In this way, O'Leary suggests, the dogmatic christological definitions of Nicea and Chalcedon, dependent as they are on Greek metaphysical constructs, can be quietly laid to rest in light of Buddhist metaphysics of codependent origination.

Similarly, John Keenan's strategy is to talk about Christ as 'empty of essence' and dependently-co-arisen in his life, death and resurrection.[47] By this, Keenan calls attention not only to Jesus' saying that the one who wishes to gain his or her life must lose it, but also to his living out this injunction as a man-for-others precisely in giving his life as a ransom for many. In this way, Jesus clings not to his life, but realises its interdependence and interrelatedness with others and with the world. Yet while both of these are aspects of 'horizontal' christology, Keenan is also careful to preserve the 'vertical' aspect of Jesus' relationship to the Father. But on this point, rather than utilising the framework of Greek metaphysics to articulate this relationship, the patristic distinction between theology and economy is radicalised in a Mahāyāna direction such that the only content of this vertical dimension is the early Christian

45. Joseph S. O'Leary, 'Emptiness and Dogma', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 22 (2002): 163–79, quote from 172, referencing Jn 4.24.
46. O'Leary, 'Emptiness and Dogma', 177.
47. See John P. Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989).

claim that 'Jesus is Lord': '... the faith interpretation of Jesus as empty of essence and enmeshed in the contingent world does not imply a reductionist christology, for it is by understanding Jesus as empty and transparent that he is allowed to be Spirit-filled and to mediate the Spirit experience to others'.[48] In this way, Jesus' 'Abba, Father' experience is his embodied revelation of and commitment to the ineffable Father, personalised because of the depth of intimacy with and in which Jesus was grasped, yet beyond what personalist categories can actually express. Further, the Pentecost experience of the Spirit signifies the transformative power through which human beings and human societies are transformed into the image of Jesus, and the revelation of the unnameable Father leads us, through the Spirit, 'to act ethically and intelligently in the world of dependent co-arising'.[49]

I am much more comfortable with Keenan's approach than with O'Leary's. The latter's seems to be ultimately devoid of christological and theological content. The former, on the other hand, strives to retain some continuity with the biblical and dogmatic tradition in the context of this new encounter. My response is threefold. First, we need to build on approaches like Keenan's if the claim regarding the universality of the Christian message is taken seriously at all. The challenge is how to speak and retell the Christian message in other languages without compromising or betraying the convictions of the biblical and historical tradition.

This leads to my second point: my concern about disregarding completely the dogmatic tradition of Christianity. This is especially explicit in O'Leary's case, even if I am sympathetic to his pneumatological orientation. My rationale for this is pneumatologically motivated through and through. Precisely because the movement of Spirit is dynamic, every tradition needs to be interrogated for its truths and discerned for its falsities. The saying that the wheat of each tradition needs to be harvested and the chaff left behind is applicable also to the dogmatic tradition of Christianity. Wholesale rejection of the history of dogma because it is allegedly misguided by a Greek metaphysics of substance is simply too superficial. It cannot be a matter of discarding one metaphysical system in favour of another. Rather, when juxtaposed alongside each other, a Greek metaphysics of being and a Buddhist metaphysics of becoming seem complementary. Is the way forward a metaphysics of both/and, of substance and relations, of being and becoming, and of the one and the many? Things are certainly constituted by their relations. However, that they are things means that the relations have integrity as wholes. As such, things have integrity as unities of pluralities. Both are necessary, and without either, things are not.[50] Similarly, Christianity is the plurality of traditions, including that of the history of dogma, integrated into the unity we understand Christian faith to be. Christian identity today can therefore no more ignore the dogmatic tradition than I as a 38-year old man can ignore the fact that I am the son of Joseph and Irene Yong. The point cannot be to reject the dogmatic tradition wholesale, but rather to discern it afresh and anew for each new time and place.

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48. Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ*, 236.
49. Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ*, 263.
50. Thus things are what they are because they are harmonies of essential and conditional features – the latter being a thing's relationships, and the former what gives any thing its own integrity and unity; see Robert Cummings Neville, *Recovery of the Measure: Interpretation and Nature* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), ch 5.

Put concretely, even what appears to be a clear scriptural and dogmatic criterion, confessing the lordship of Jesus, cannot function absolutistically and dogmatically for discerning the Spirit in Buddhism. This is the case for a variety of reasons. First, take for example the Pauline guideline: 'no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 12.3); the criterion is directed explicitly toward discerning Jesus and the body of Christ gathered for worship, not toward Buddhism. Second, the criterion discerns the Lord Jesus by the Spirit and not the other way around; as such, it becomes circular to say that we discern the Spirit by discerning Jesus, but then we also discern Jesus by the Spirit. Third, even the confession of Jesus' lordship is necessarily tentative since 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven' (Mt 7.21). Having said all this does not mean that the criterion is completely useless for discerning the Spirit in Buddhism since the 'doing of the will of the Father' may still be invoked at some level to assess presence and activity of the divine.

Hence, third, the importance of the ethical moment. Discerning the Spirit of Jesus must include liberative praxis alongside doctrinal polemics. Here, Christian identity and Christian ethics must be understood as two sides of the same coin. At this level, the promise of the christological criterion is registered in its capacity to transform lives and communities. After all, the retrieval of Spirit-christology – Jesus as the Christ precisely because he is anointed by the Holy Spirit – entails not just a speculative hypothesis about the person of Christ, but focuses on the empowerment of the carpenter from Nazareth by the Spirit to accomplish the works of the kingdom. Re-engaging the biblical materials at this juncture points the way forward. 'Engaged Buddhist' readings of Luke's gospel, for example, are challenged by Jesus' social activism. As empowered by the Spirit, Jesus' way differs from the way of the bodhisattva in the former's forgiving the sins of others, embodying a prophetic voice, and embracing martyrdom.[51] His life suggests that the goal is not only spiritual salvation but historical transformation as well. Similarly, the final test for discerning the Spirit of Jesus on this side of the *eschaton* has to reside in religious praxis. We discern the Spirit not in Christianity and in Buddhism in the abstract, but in the concrete liturgies, rituals, and practices of these traditions. Thus George Lindbeck suggests that discerning the Spirit's presence and activity in the prayers of religious communities, hesychast ones, in his example, must touch down at some point, in the doing, the praying itself.[52] Put criteriologically, discerning the Spirit on the Eightfold Path requires entering the path itself. And, of course, once the Christian enters upon that path, will not Jesus be present at least then?

In the end, then, I suggest that the methodological, apologetic and dialogical questions on this side of the eschaton are all transformed into the practical question of 'How then can and should we live?' And the call for joint expressions of liberative action informed by Christian love and Buddhist compassion are especially urgent given the many problems life in this world presents us with. Christianity and Buddhism,

51. This is suggested by Judith Simmer-Brown, 'Suffering and Social Justice: A Buddhist Response to the Gospel of Luke', *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16 (1996): 99–112, even if it should be noted that there are some tales of the Buddha giving up his life for others as well.
52. See George A. Lindbeck, 'Hesychast Prayer and the Christianizing of Platonism: Some Protestant Reflections', ch. 8 of Lindbeck, *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J. Buckley (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).

separately and together, can and do inform responses to the difficult questions concerning social justice and the environment at their best moments. And at these moments, they provide moral criteria to govern human interaction, scientific inquiry, and the deliverances of science, all in order to advance the quality of human life. Of course, the truths confirmed pragmatically for the here and now may not be sufficient to adjudicate disagreements about claims regarding what ultimately concerns Christians and Buddhists, but we should neither denigrate nor dismiss the modicum of agreement which has been and can be achieved. Rather, we should work together from such common ground, whenever possible, for the betterment of the human condition and for the common good. This is especially the case when dealing with issues such as international debt, human rights, poverty and hunger, healthcare, waste disposal, the 'Greenhouse effect', etc. Problems of this magnitude cannot be addressed apart from sustained mutual engagement by those of all religious traditions, Christians and Buddhists included.

'The Spirit leads us into all truth'

But can the question about truth be reduced to that about praxis? After all, if theology, religion and science are all interested in the truth, and if (as Christians confess) the Spirit led us into the truth, what then about the differences between these two traditions?

I think there are several distinct questions here.[53] First, there is truth understood in its eschatological senses. From some religious perspectives, this is the most momentous of truth questions since it concerns the ultimate soteriological issues. Theology is not unconcerned with such issues, obviously, although they are finally confessional in nature. This is the case even if, as Pannenberg himself suggests, we argue to the truth of the final resurrection through a rigorous attempt to establish the veracity of the resurrection of Jesus as an historical event.[54] But, as his efforts demonstrate, such questions cannot be easily negotiated since they lie beyond what can be empirically determined. Thus the various eschatological scenarios in Christian traditions, the divergent visions of ultimate concern in the religions, and the contested notions of the fate of the universe in the far-off future among astrophysicists and cosmologists – each of these are, at present, anticipations only within certain frameworks of assumptions. In short, to use religious and theological language, eschatological truths are, by definition, confessional in nature.

But, second, even if there is no way to adjudicate these kinds of eschatological and transcendental claims, surely there can be a way to agree about the criteria for truth claims at a fundamental and methodological level? This is the issue of justification. My claim is that a pneumatological approach enables us to begin overcoming the widespread methodological disagreement. While Christians are divided between the *sola scriptura* of some Protestants and the 'great Tradition' of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, a pneumatological approach could affirm a *via media* (e.g., the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience) which creates space for what I call a 'shifting foundationalism', the willingness to check and balance

53. For explication, see Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, ch. 5, and 'The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth and the Religions', *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming).
54. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968).

theological insights with data derived from various sources. This requires the dialogue between theology and science and between the religions. In the former arena, while theoretical accounts of scientific method are divided between positivists on the one side and revisionists (like Kuhn and Feyerabend) on the other, a pneumatological paradigm could affirm the experimentalism of science and its pragmatic and empirical criteria. In the latter arena, let us say the Christian-Buddhist encounter, while Buddhists are divided between the radical empiricism of the Theravādins on the one side and the idealism of the Yogācārins on the other, a pneumatological account, as we have seen, could find some convergence with the Mādhyamika attempt to carve out a Middle Way so as to legitimise the ongoing conversation.

In a post- or non-foundationalist world, of course, the question of method cannot be resolved by obtaining some sort of neutral ahistorical vantage point from nowhere.[55] But neither can we either separate out the domains of science and theology or adopt a thoroughgoing Wittgensteinian understanding of theologies as no more than religious grammars shaping the community's experience.[56] The reality is that if interested in engaging the interreligious dialogue, Christians have to search for a common criteriology beyond their scriptural or commentarial traditions. Appropriately, the favourite strategy of more conservative Christians has been to resort to Aristotelian laws of logic with the assumption that contradictory claims to truth cannot be correct.[57] This is a more promising starting point than hurling scriptural proof texts. However, even this approach could be unprofitable. When set up against Buddhism's paradoxical use of language (Huayen) and notions like the 'absolutely contradictory self-identity' (Nishida), it would appear that the possibility of both thought and dialogue have been altogether undermined.

A closer inspection of this self-understanding, however, may be illuminating for the purposes of our pneumatological approach. Can we verify, for example, the Law of Identity (A=A) upon which Law of Non-contradiction is based? Logicians debate about whether this verification belongs with them or with philosophers since the axioms or postulates of a deductive systems are demonstrated or proven only from 'outside' the system. What about empirical evidence for these laws? Even if empirical evidence could be gathered, logicians would not admit them since they traffic entirely in *a priori* and analytical deductions and not in *a posteriori* inductive inferences. And the attempt to demonstrate A=A through correspondence-testing is either meaningless (since there can be no doubt otherwise) or is tautological (since this would be a process of *reaffirmation* rather than verification). The result is that the meaning or verification of A=A is existential intuition, not rational demonstration. But if A=A is an intuition, then how can other forms of intuition such as *A is not A, therefore A* be

55. See my 'The Demise of Foundationalism and the Retention of Truth: What Evangelicals Can Learn from C. S. Peirce', *Christian Scholar's Review* 29 (2000): 563–89; cf. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).
56. I argue against the Rortyean version of postmodernist non-realism in Yong, 'Pragmati(ci)st Trajectories for a Post/Modern Theology', *Modern Theology* (under review).
57. E.g., Winfred Corduan, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads between Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 215–17; Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 293–97; and Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), chs. 4–5.

rejected as rational suicide? This, as Garma Chang's study of Huayen Buddhism informs us, is the insight of the Prajñāpāramitas:

> The Law of Identity is perfectly true in the realm of mundane truth ... but it becomes insufficient and even erroneous when it is applied to the subject matter of higher dimensions. The Law of Conservation and the Law of Parity are perfectly true in classical physics, but they no longer hold true when applied to the realm of sub-atomic physics. In the same way, 'A is *not* A, therefore A' in Prajñāpāramita, is a more inclusive viewpoint than 'A is A because it exists as itself' from common sense. The Prajñāpāramita says that *A is A* not because it [*A*] exists as such, but because it has no Selfhood, or it is non-A.[58]

From this,

> The Principle of Contradiction (no statement can indeed be true and false) is also transcended. Something can indeed be both true and false at the same time, at least *in different dimensions* ... The paradoxical statements in Prajñāpāramita literature can thus be easily explained by allocating the different truth values to different dimensions in the Two Truths system of the Middle Way doctrine.[59]

From where I sit as a theologian, the Mādhyamika struggle to transcend the Law of Identity and articulate the two truths doctrine of the Middle Way illuminates the various conundrums encountered in the history of Christian thought's 'faith seeking understanding', whether it be the doctrine of the Trinity or Incarnation, the relationship of time and eternity, or the compatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom, among any number of other theological matters. I do not think, for example, that attempts to explain why Trinity (God as three and yet one) and incarnation (Christ as both divine and human) do not violate the laws of identity and non-contradiction are successful. Neither are attempts to defend a compatibilist view of freedom within the logic of Aristotelianism. Rather, each of these cases appears to me to be a counterpart in Christian theology to the moves made by Huayen thinkers regarding their use of paradox. So there is a sense in which I fully empathise with Chang's Buddhist claim that 'conceptual *śūnyatā* is vastly different from existential *śūnyatā*. We can create or construct a concept of *śūnyatā*, but we cannot directly perceive *śūnyatā* itself through conceptualisations'.[60] At this level, the triune God and the Incarnation are not abstract intellectual or propositional constructs, but expressions of our paradoxical encounters with reality.

The opening for me to embrace the paradoxical elements in Christian faith, however, is pneumatologically derivative from the experience of the Spirit – e.g., 'All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages [*heterais glōssais*, also, "other tongues"], as the Spirit gave them ability' (Ac 2.4) – wherein the mystery of transcendence opens up to immanence and vice versa. In this encounter, the self is confronted by the radically other without losing itself altogether: they spoke, even as enabled by the Spirit. Who speaks here? The 120 or the Spirit? The 'correct' answer is, of course, the paradoxical both/and. Here, the truth is inhabited

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58. Garma C. C. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality: The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism* (University Park, Penn., and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 105.
59. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 106.
60. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 117.

and recognised, even if precise conceptualisation of such truth evades articulation (cf. 2 Cor 12.4). Yet the truthful space opened up through experience of the Spirit may be parallel to the truthful space opened up through the experience of *śūnyatā*. In the former case, the Spirit leads us to experience the truth which sets us free to walk by faith which incorporates rather than is dominated by sight; in the latter case, *śūnyatā* liberates us to the truth that 'all relativities are transcended, all pairs and duals are demolished. A wondrous state of great freedom ... in which all polarities merge into one vast totality will be revealed. In this state of non-dual totality, one then fully realises the meaning of the "Emptiness is form and form is Emptiness" of the *Heart Sutra*'.[61] Note then that this liberative experience of *śūnyatā* which negates the laws of identity and of non-contradiction actually relies on them to achieve their salvific effect. Enlightenment derives from the destabilisation of the mind and its reorientation toward ultimate reality as it is.[62]

In the Christian and Pentecost-al case, of course, this glorious and liberative experience is of the Spirit of the triune God, the God who breaks through into and reorients our lives in radically new ways as we encounter the reality which "surpasses knowledge" (Eph 3.19), and which "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived" (1 Cor 2.9, quoting Is 64.4). Thus, I suggest, the proclamation of the gospel causes amazement and perplexity (Ac 2.12). Its results have turned the world upside down (Ac 17.6). This saying is not merely a figure of speech. Whatever might be the truth about the resurrection, the atonement, the deity of Christ, the Trinity, the last judgment, hell and heaven, etc., the gospel opens up to us a strange and even paradoxical new world. We have certainly domesticated its message. Perhaps our Buddhist interlocutors can help to discern, appreciate, and follow the strange paths of the Spirit's comings and goings – the Spirit's leading us into all truth – with fresh devotion and commitment.

This said, with certain forms of both Christian faith and Buddhist practice, we are dealing not only with paradoxes, but also with commitments which have led some devotees to embrace martyrdom. Clearly, then, genuine dialogue involves not only convergences, but also the identification of differences emanating from central convictions. In fact, in order for dialogue to be vigorous and fruitful, conversation partners need to come to the table anticipating civilised polemics and expecting to persuade the other. After all, the truth is at stake, and religious traditions are what they are because they do make exclusive claims to the truth. In short, interreligious encounter would be inauthentic without interreligious apologetics.[63] And my conviction is that genuine engagement with religious otherness even at this level assumes the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit which enables understanding and communication. In agreement with the Dutch Pentecostal theologian, Jean Jacques Suurmond, I would say that the outpouring of the Spirit is precisely what enables

61. Chang, *The Buddhist Teaching of Totality*, 108.
62. See Peter Fenner, *Reasoning to Reality: A System-Cybernetic Model and Therapeutic Interpretation of Buddhist Middle Path Analysis* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), ch. 2, esp. 31–66, and Dale S. Wright, 'The Significance of Paradoxical Language in Hua-yen Buddhism', *Philosophy East and West* 32:3 (1982): 325–38.
63. See Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991).

humans to encounter and engage others, including religious others, in deep and authentic ways.[64]

Transitional theses

Having said all this, it should be clear that I see this paper to be no more than a starting point both for discussing what it means to discern the Spirit in the religions in general and in Buddhism specifically, and for actually proceeding to discern the Spirit(s) concretely. As such, let me transition to this task by summarising the central points of my pneumatological theology of discerning the religions in five theses.

Thesis 1: Christian discernment should be guided by the biblical and ecclesial traditions.

A committed Christian approach cannot but begin, at least theoretically and normatively, with the scriptural and ecclesial traditions. This commitment, however, recognises the ongoing and fallible nature of scriptural interpretation as it emerges from various hermeneutical perspectives. It also understands that the ecclesial and dogmatic traditions are received by later generations in active processes of traditioning. As such, the task of retrieving, reappropriating and reenacting both the biblical and ecclesial traditions is of necessity pneumatologically enabled. It is both a gift of God and a responsibility Christians need to assume.

Thesis 2: Christian discernment should be normed by Jesus the Christ.

Here, the question of discerning the Spirit involves that of discerning Jesus the Christ. Christians thus seeking to discern Jesus the Christ have to find a via media between the Jesus of history and the Christ of existential faith; between the Jesus of the creeds/confessions and the eschatological/anticipated Christ; between the particularity of Jesus the Nazarene and the universality of the *logos spermatikos*, 'the true light, which enlightens everyone' (Jn 1.9). Herein lies the hermeneutical circle not only regarding Jesus the Christ, but also Jesus Christ as related to the Spirit. After all, we discern the Spirit by discerning the Christ, but then also discern the Christ by the Spirit.

Thesis 3: Christian discernment should be discerning also about its contexts of activity.

Building on the first two theses, all discernment proceeds in concrete or material historical, social, political, etc., circumstances. We neither read Scripture nor retrieve tradition nor discern Jesus the Christ in the abstract, but always in context. Further, the relevance and applicability of Scripture, tradition and the reality of Jesus Christ are to be found in the here and now of interpreting subjects. Discerning the Spirit(s) via Scripture, tradition, and the norm of Jesus Christ therefore requires discernment of the contexts wherein such activity occurs. To correctly discern such contexts contributes to discerning the spirits of such contexts, and by extension, to discern the relative presence, activity, or absence of the Holy Spirit. Of course, such discernment

64. Jean Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit at Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology*, trans. John Bowden (1994; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 201.

proceeds in both directions since the discerning of Spirit(s), like identifying anything, involves the positive definition of what it is and the negative definition of what it is not.

Thesis 4: Christian discernment should emerge from a dialogical, dialectical and dynamic criteriology.

Following from thesis 3, discerning the Spirit is especially difficult if we embrace the Spirit as the source of life, creativity and novelty. For then the challenge becomes that of negotiating the tension between continuity and discontinuity; between conservatism and novelty. The dilemma is this: how can we discern the Spirit's new works utilising old criteria on the one side, versus how the Spirit can bring about anything truly or radically new while retaining continuity of both identity and activity. A pneumatological approach, I suggest, would emphasise that even the criteria for discerning the Spirit needs to be to discerned and negotiated afresh at each juncture. Hence, it should be dialogical (with the others it engages), dialectical (with each new context), and dynamic (thus reflecting the nature of the Spirit). As such, it is only through the give-and-take of dialogical encounter that a criteriology for discerning the Spirit(s) can be formulated.

Thesis 5: Christian discernment should on this side of the eschaton be judged ethically and morally.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5.22–23). From a Christian perspective, can it be denied that the Spirit is present and active wherever such signs are present? Two concerns, however, are immediately raised. First, does not this ethical-moral criterion ultimately make it difficult to distinguish between religion and humanism, or to discern the Holy Spirit from mere human piety? Yet the notion of 'mere human piety' assumes such is possible apart from divine grace, and the idea of 'humanism' appears to be understood only naturalistically or dualistically apart from the divine. But, given that 'spirit' is a mediating category, both theologically and ontologically, religion is distinct but not disparate from humanism – in which case, the fruits of the Spirit are useful even if not ultimately definitive.

But, second, is the ethical criterion delineated here sufficient? Is it not possible, for example, that Buddhist exorcisms 'work' and the 'fruits' of moral deeds are manifest in those 'delivered' precisely because the devil uses these mechanisms to keep Buddhists from seeking out the truth and thereby find genuine freedom in Christ? Now this question is neither merely hypothetical nor rhetorical as it is assumed all too frequently in the Pentecostal communities I grew up in. But would not the former supposition also go against Jesus' own words when he said, 'If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?' (Mt 12.22–29, esp. 26; cf. Mk 3.20–27 and Lk 11.14–23). Thus even Buddhists acknowledge that the experience of genuine liberation leads beyond the worship of spirits, the veneration of ancestors, and even the need to negotiate life's way through world of ghosts.[65]

65. Shinran, founder of Jōdo Shinshū, wrote: 'Chi-lu asked, "Should one worship spirits?" Confucius said, "One should not worship spirits. Why should people worship spirits?"'; quoted in Sadami Takayama, *Shinran's Conversion in the Light of Paul's Conversion*, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 65 (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2000), 145.

So the 'correct' answer to the question, 'Is the Holy Spirit present and active in Buddhism?' must inevitably be: maybe yes, maybe not; maybe yes in this situation or context, maybe not in that. If so, is there then no 'final answer'? Rather than being disheartened and discouraged, however, recontextualising such a 'final answer' enables us to recognise the progress we have made. If we realise that our post-Christian situation is also postfoundationalistic, postcolonialistic, and post-imperialistic, then we recognise that a) all questions, including theological ones Christians are interested in, cannot be answered in *a priori* monologues; b) we are always already within the hermeneutical circle, with each answer resting not on any irrevocable starting point, but caught up within a framework or system which is not self-enclosed; c) criteriologies are applicable first and foremost to the self, and secondly, only with great temerity and hesitation, to others; and d) criteriologies are never only a private matter, but are always public to some degree both because they themselves are contextually emergent and because the phenomena they are applied to are different and thus answerable in some respects to their own sets of norms.

Yet having said this, given the self-defeating nature of relativism, a pneumatological approach enables the cultivation of some kind of normative stance within the interreligious encounter. While not all normative claims are equal (this would be relativism), a pneumatological account enables and even requires the dialogical negotiation of norms and standards at the criteriological level. This reflects the dynamic nature of the 'pneumatological imagination' which animates this project, even as it anticipates and hastens the day of the Lord, when the Spirit who knows fully will leads us to know the truth fully as well.[66]

66. I treat the idea of 'pneumatological imagination' extensively in *Spirit–Word–Community*, Part II. My thanks to Ken Jung, Peter Heltzel and Barry Linney for their comments on a previous draft of this paper, correcting me at points and ensuring readability. The errors remaining are my own, of course.

Discerning the Holy Spirit in encounter with Buddhism

Elizabeth J Harris

When I was in Japan in 1998 I went to the Sanjūsangen-dō (The Hall of thirty three bays) in Kyoto. It was a temple dedicated to the *bodhisattva* Kannon and dated back to 1164. A *bodhisattva*, in the Buddhist worldview, is a being who has vowed, out of compassion, not to move beyond the world of birth and rebirth until every being has found liberation. And Kannon or Kwan Yin, who is sometimes male, most often female, is particularly important, as an embodiment of absolute compassion. In Tibet, she becomes the male Avalokiteśvara. That Hall of thirty three bays was filled with 1001 images of Kannon. In the centre was a seated image. Surrounding it, stretched 1000 standing images, covered in gold leaf, each with twenty pairs of arms, each pair of which is believed to save twenty five worlds. As one enters the hall the images stretch as far as the eyes can see, heads framed with a halo-like structure.

This is what I wrote soon afterwards for a Buddhist journal published in Japan:

> It seemed to me as though the mind which had devised the hall had asked, 'How can the depth, breadth and height of the compassion at the heart of the many worlds within our universe be conveyed?' The effect this had on me is hard to describe. I was filled with peace and gratitude. For some visitors the hall was simply a museum. For me, it was a profound statement of faith and insight.[67]

I was sure that image hall was attempting to portray compassion at the heart of the universe, compassion reaching into every part of the cosmos, leaving nothing untouched, a vision that lies at the heart of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. And, with my Methodist conditioning, I was reminded of the hymns of Charles Wesley, not only the one echoed in the words I wrote about the temple,[68] but also verses such as this that speak of love in the universe:

> Its streams the whole creation reach,
> So plenteous is the store,
> Enough for all, enough for each,
> Enough for evermore.[69]

Overflowing compassion and overflowing love or grace are concepts that touch, that reach out towards each other, from two very different religions. In the New Testament, both qualities are linked with the Holy Spirit, compassion as a gift of the Holy Spirit, love as a fruit.[70] But can we, therefore, leap across religious world-views

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67. The visit to Japan had been arranged by the International Interfaith Centre in Oxford at the invitation of Risshō Kōsei Kai. Afterwards I was invited to write for Risshō Kōsei Kai's journal, *Dharma World* and used this experience. See *Dharma World*, Vol. 25, Nov/Dec 1998, pp. 7–10, here p. 7.
68. 'What shall I do my God to love, My loving God to praise, The length, and breadth, and height to prove, And depth of sovereign grace' (*Hymns and Psalms: A Methodist and Ecumenical Hymn Book*, London, Methodist Publishing House, 1983, No. 46).
69. *Hymns and Psalms*, Hymn No. 48, verse 4.
70. See Rom 12.8 where compassion is linked with the gifts of grace and Gal 5.22 where love is the first-mentioned fruit of the Spirit.

and say that the Holy Spirit is actively present in Buddhism or that Kannon, as embodiment of compassion, can teach us about the Holy Spirit?

Professor Hyun Kyung Chung of Korea tried the latter when she gave what became a divisively controversial presentation at the 1991 Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches. She said:

> For me the image of the Holy Spirit comes from the image of *Kwan Yin.* She is venerated as the goddess of compassion and wisdom by East Asian women's popular religiosity ... She waits and waits until the whole universe, people, trees, birds, mountains, air, water, become enlightened. They can then go to nirvana together where they can live collectively in eternal wisdom and compassion.[71]

Kwan Yin is far more than a goddess venerated by 'East Asian women's popular religiosity'. But whether she had got this right or wrong, the reaction to the whole presentation from church leaders in Korea would have been the same. 'What about the Spirit of God as Creator and the Lord of Judgement?' evangelical leaders in Korea asked. 'What about the Spirit as irrevocably linked to the Father and the Son and as the one who convicts us of Sin?'[72] Professor Chung appeared syncretistic to her accusers, more Buddhist than Christian.

I shall not be as controversial I hope. But the debate over Professor Kyung's presentation is a good example of the dangers of using the categories of one religion to throw light on another, in this case using the image of the *bodhisattva* to throw light on Christianity. A religion is a complex entity. Its diverse parts are interconnected. They form a 'web' of meaning, rather than a box of assortments. To extract one segment of that web and compare it with one segment of that which informs another religion risks doing an injustice to both religions through ripping the elements compared out of their context. Likewise, to use part of the 'web' of one's own religion to try to make sense of other religions, or make them acceptable, is also risky, although most people of faith do it. It has an imperial taste and can lead to distortion and misappropriation, a non-seeing of those aspects within the 'other' that have no direct parallel to one's own faith. It can also be an indirect form of self-gratification and self-justification.

So I would like to begin my paper with personal apologetic and a caution. My encounter with Buddhism over the last twenty years has not been through theology. I have studied it through its own categories, with Buddhists as my teachers and mentors, mainly in Sri Lanka and other Theravāda Buddhist countries. Inevitably I have brought my own Christian conditioning to the process, particularly an interest in Ignatian spirituality and a concern for social justice. It would have been impossible for me to have been an objective participant/observer – that is a myth that has rightly been exploded in our post-modern world. But I nevertheless attempted to enter Buddhism on its own terms rather than through the themes of the faith I brought to it,

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71. 'Come Holy Spirit – Renew The Whole Creation', Chung Hyun Kyung in Ed. Michael Kinnamen, *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report of the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, 1991*, Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1991, p. 46.
72. For instance see 'Theological Debates in Korea After Canberra', Bong Rin Ro, in Ed. Nicholls and Beng, *Beyond Canberra*, Regnum, 1993. I am indebted to Sebastian Kim for this reference.

Christianity. Such a path recognises, in the words of the Asian theologian, Aloysius Pieris, that each tradition has a 'distinctive paradigm within which each religion defines its identity and creates its own idiom'.[73] Such a method can demand near total immersion in 'the other', a true 'passing over', from which, I would argue, one never completely 'comes back'. Therefore, to reflect theologically on discerning the Holy Spirit in relation to Buddhism does not come easily to me.

I would be deceiving myself, however, if I did not realize that my chosen mode of engagement is possible for me as a Christian only because it is predicated on a theology that allows for such a mode in the first place. If I had been locked inside an exclusivist theology that saw no source of the holy outside the Christian Church, I could not have done it. A theology, on the other hand, that emphasises pneumatology and declares the work of the Spirit of God to be universal can envisage exploration without fear and the kind of encounter that expects discovery of the holy in 'the other'. It is through such a theology that I can declare that I believe it was the Holy Spirit as energiser and transformer that led me into engagement with Buddhism.

A two-fold theological movement, in fact, has been present in my encounter with Buddhism: theology as the inspiration and motivation to enter into inter faith encounter; theology as recipient of reflection following encounter. This paper is the fruit of both. But there is a third movement, one that seeks to cross-read religious traditions in what Aloysius Pieris has called a symbiotic way, a way that allows religions in their total integrity to shed light on one another, by further articulating meanings already present in each.[74] It is one, he explains, that is distinct from both syncretism, which he describes as making 'a cocktail in which the components change their flavour under their mutual influence', and synthesis, 'a process in which the components totally lose their identity ... in the creation of something altogether new'.[75] It is close to a path that I have linked in some of my writings to enrichment, challenge and self-interrogation.[76]

In this paper, therefore, I shall seek to reflect on three questions:

1. Is there anything akin to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in Buddhism? – a phenomenological question.
2. Can the work of the Holy Spirit be seen in Buddhism and Buddhists? – a theological question.
3. What light can Buddhism shed on the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit? – a question that seeks a symbiotic relationship between religions.

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73. 'Cross-Scripture Reading in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: A Search for the Right Method', Aloysius Pieris: forthcoming in a felicitation volume for Preman Niles.
74. Aloysius Pieris first articulated a typology to replace exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism that included the concept of symbiosis in 'Theology of Religions: an Asian Paradigm' in *Horizons,* Vol. 20 No. 1 (1993), pp. 106–14 (later re-published as 'Interreligious Dialogue and Theology of Religions: an Asian Paradigm' in *Fire and Water: Basic Issues in Asian Buddhism and Christianity*, Aloysius Pieris, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1996, pp. 154–61). Pieris has re-applied the typology to the cross-reading of scriptures in the paper mentioned in footnote 6.
75. *Ibid.*, p 229.
76. See Elizabeth J Harris, 'Avatāra, Bodhisattva or Prophet; Meeting Jesus through the eyes of other faiths' in *Dialogue* (NS) Vol. XXVIII, 2001, pp. 106–29, here p. 109, and (a revised version) Harris, *Jesus and Buddhists*, in *The Way*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (April 2003), pp. 117–34, here p. 117.

I will draw mainly on the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, the Southern tradition of Buddhism found principally in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand, that which Amos Yong has linked with a 'radical empiricism'.[77] It is a tradition that does not emphasise a number of the concepts that many in the West consider normative for Buddhism. My Buddhist teachers in Sri Lanka, in over seven years, for instance, did not mention the concepts of Buddha Nature or non-duality, and 'emptiness' had an implicit rather than an overarching import on doctrine. So my words will complement Yong's presentation, which drew much from Mahāyāna concepts, particularly those that entered Buddhism as it encountered Taoism in China and Japan.[78]

A concept of the Holy Spirit in Buddhism?

To turn to the first question: is there an equivalent to the concept of the Holy Spirit in Buddhism? If the concept of the Holy Spirit is seen as inseparable from the power of a creating and sustaining God, the answer must be No. For Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. There are gods, divine beings, and they are innumerable, but they lie below the Buddha and certainly have no creating function. In the Theravāda tradition, there are actually canonical texts that link belief in an all-knowing divine creator with delusion. The *Kevaddha Sutta* is one. In this *sutta* the Buddha weaves a parable of a monk who seeks an answer to the question, 'Where now do these four great elements – earth, water, fire and wind – pass away?' Through working himself into an ecstatic trance, this monk, according to the Buddha, is able to reach the worlds of the gods. In each world, he asks his question and is passed on to the next level for an answer. At last he is told to go to the highest level, the abode of Brahma, who is described as, 'the Conqueror, the Unconquered, the All-seeing, All-powerful, the Lord, the Maker and Creator, the Ruler, Appointer and Orderer ...'[79] He does so. Brahma is surrounded by his retinue and avoids answering the question in public. He eventually takes the questioner aside and says that he does not know the answer and that there is only one person who does: the Buddha. When the question is then put to the Buddha, the answer does not refer to metaphysics but to the purified mind of the one who has gained freedom from greed, hatred and delusion, and therefore from rebirth.

It must be remembered that the *Kevaddha Sutta* was commenting on the brahminical strand of religion in 5th century BCE India. It was not commenting on Judaism or the religions that would post-date Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. But there is no mistaking the message. The concept of a creating God is irrelevant to the most important task humans can undertake: that of plucking out greed, hatred and delusion from the heart and mind so that the elements that constitute *saṃsāra*, the round of birth and rebirth, have no foothold. In a recent interview I did for an educational project, this is how one Buddhist put it, Dr Hiroko Kawanami:

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77. Cf Yong, above, p.
78. See David Brazier, *A New Buddhism: A Rough Guide to a New Way of Life* (London: Robinson, 2001) for an analysis of Buddhist history that draws on the Critical Buddhism movement to suggest that doctrines such as non-duality and Buddha Nature were not part of the original message of the Buddha but entered under the influence of Taoism.
79. *Kevaddha Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*: 220 (translation taken from trans. Maurice Walsh, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1996, p. 178).

> When we are taught Buddhism as a child we never start with the beginning of the cosmos. It starts with the Buddha who is born as a human being and it is about his life story that starts a religious tradition ... It is not about God. It is not about something out there, a Creator who starts the cycle. It is about he human world. It is about the miseries and problems of this world and the Buddha was another human being who showed the way.[80]

Let me move to one of the metaphorical images of the Holy Spirit – fire. As with the idea of a creating God, there is again dissonance between Buddhism and Christianity rather than resonance. Fire in the New Testament is linked with destruction, judgement and hell.[81] Yet, it is also equated with the gift of the positive. To be baptised by Jesus, according to Matthew's rendering of John the Baptist's words, is to be baptised 'with the Holy Spirit and fire'.[82] On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit comes to the disciples as tongues of fire, and, according to the writer of Hebrews, God is a 'consuming fire'.[83] In contrast, listen to this passage from the Theravāda Canon:

> Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what, bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye-consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition – whether pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant – that too is burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, ageing, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair.[84]

Here fire is linked with that which binds us to ignorance and non-seeing, non-discernment. It is a synonym for the egotistical craving that Buddhism identifies as the major cause of suffering and rebirth. To be cooled is the metaphorical antidote. One who is cool is the one who is worthy of respect and a deep pool rather than fire would be a relevant metaphor.[85] The images of vibrant, fiery energy present in some accounts of the Holy Spirit's work are simply not present in Buddhism.

Therefore, if we are looking for similarities in metaphorical idiom or an inseparable link between Spirit and creating God, there would seem to be no parallel to the Holy Spirit in Buddhism. Does this question, therefore, bring us to a dead end? Not exactly, as the following suggests:

> Everyone has the Buddha Nature. I can quote the Buddha – the Truth is there, the *Dhamma* is there whether the Buddha is born or not. And the Buddha is anyone who can transform himself, herself, from a selfish being to a selfless being. That is how a

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80. From the text of a CD within *The Life We Share*, an educational pack jointly produced by the Methodist Church and the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (USPG), 2003.
81. See for example Mt 3.10 ('Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire'); Mt 18.9; Lk 3.17 ('but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire'): Jn 15.6 ('Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into fire, and burned').
82. Mt 3.11.
83. Heb 12:29; Ac 2:2–3.
84. From the *Saḷāyatanasaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya,* Part IV 28 (6) (translation from trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddhas,* Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2002, p. 1143.
85. See for example *Dhammapada* verse 82: 'Just as a deep pool is calm and clear, so, hearing the teachings, learned men are calm' (transl. K.R. Norman, *The Word of the Doctrine*, Oxford, Pali Text Society, 1997, p. 12).

person awakes. Once he or she awakes then knowledge becomes understanding and understanding becomes love.[86]

That was Sulak Sivaraksa, veteran socially engaged Buddhist from Siam – he avoids calling his home Thailand. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Buddhism that developed in India several centuries after the Buddha's death and then spread north to China, Japan, Vietnam and eventually Tibet, the view arose that each of us has within us the mind of the Buddha, the mind of enlightenment. It is not a gift from an outside power. It is simply there as part of the human being. The task is to uncover this, to realise it. Sulak, although a Theravāda Buddhist was drawing on this. One could argue that there is a touching point here with the Christian concept of the indwelling spirit, the indwelling potential for the holy.

My preference, however, is not to pursue the first question much further. For I do not think it should lie at the heart of this conference's quest. We are not primarily looking for a duplication of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in other faiths, although, if it could be found, it might be a starting point for dialogue. I believe we are seeking two things: ways of discerning the Holy Spirit at work in other faiths; and challenges or insights from other faiths that shed new light on the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It is a theological not a phenomenological task. So I would like to pass to my second question.

Can the work of the Holy Spirit be seen in Buddhism?

Important to me is that the Bible offers multiple witnesses to the work of the Spirit of God, in the Hebrew Bible, and the Holy Spirit, in the New Testament. Metaphorically the Spirit in the Bible is equated to fire, water and wind. It creates, regenerates, transforms, makes the desert fertile, completes, equips, strengthens, liberates, reveals Truth, and gives wisdom and peace. In these modes it is more like a verb than a noun. But it also 'is'. It is creative force, Truth, Wisdom and Peace.[87] Any answer to this question must recognise the sheer scope of this picture. For the purposes of this essay, however, selection is necessary. I intend to look at the question through two lenses: the Spirit as a force that breaks into a situation with inspiration and urgency; the Spirit's presence as producing the fruits mentioned in Galatians chapter 5.

I am indebted to Israel Selvanayagam for suggesting I look at the first of these themes. And I would answer it with a resounding 'Yes'. With the enlightenment experience of the Buddha and his subsequent teaching mission, over forty years long, a new energy most certainly entered the Indian religious scene. Nineteenth century orientalists were fascinated by the idea of the Buddha as a reformer of Brahmanism.[88] Strictly speaking, however, he was not. A reformer of a tradition usually works from within, or begins from within, the tradition. The Buddha was not part of Brahmanism. He was in a dialogical relationship with it as a member of the *samaṇa* tradition in

86. Sulak Sivaraksa, quoted in: Elizabeth J Harris, *What Buddhists Believe*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2001 (2nd edition), p. 32.
87. I am indebted to Kirsteen Kim for broadening my awareness of the breadth of biblical references on this.
88. The first orientalist whom I have found that referred to the Buddha as a reformer was Sir William Jones, who founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784.

India, the renunciant tradition from which both Buddhism and Jainism grew. It was through this dialogical relationship that the new broke in, as Brahmanism and other *samaṇa* traditions in turn responded to the Buddha. And just as the imagery used to describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament lies in continuity with how the activity of the Spirit of God is expressed in the Hebrew scriptures, what Buddhism brought to India lay in continuity with the *samaṇa* tradition that predated it.

The Buddha's basic message can be summed up as, 'One thing only do I teach: suffering and the cessation of suffering'.[89] In Peter Harvey's words, it was a 'come-see-ish' message[90] and it presented listeners with several challenges. I will mention three. The first was that people should test the path the Buddha taught against their experience of suffering and its causes. This challenged contemporary assumptions within the brahminical tradition concerning religious authority and epistemology. The *Canki Sutta*, another text from the Theravāda canon, illustrates this beautifully. In this, a Brahmin youth asks the Buddha what attitude should be taken to those who say of the brahmanic hymns and scriptural collections, 'Only this is true, anything else is wrong'. The Buddha's response is to ridicule such assertions. He points out that none of those who have said this, in the present or in the past, have claimed to know liberative Truth personally and directly. They have not claimed, 'I know this, I see this'. Thus, he continues, they are like a 'file of blind men each in touch with the next; the first one does not see, the middle one does not see, and the last one does not see'.[91] In contrast, he outlines a path that involves investigation, zeal, application of the will, scrutiny, striving and examination of the teachings. Authority is not dismissed. Far from it: the authority of an enlightened one, a Buddha, who has seen Truth for himself, is placed at the centre. It is the attitude towards that authority that is pushed along a new groove. Faith, *saddhā,* comes first, but from that point onwards examination and investigation enter. In Theravāda Buddhist tradition, this was further tuned into an appeal to four formal external authority sources, the *mahāpadesa*: the Buddha, an Order of monks together with an elder monk, a number of greatly learned elder monks and a single elder monk.[92] But appeal to investigation remained.

Firstly, therefore, there was a challenge to the sources of religious authority. Secondly, he mounted a challenge to the caste structure. Some Buddhist communities today, those in Sri Lanka for example, are not free of caste distinctions. But the evidence in the Theravāda Canon that the Buddha's initial message challenged caste consciousness is overwhelming. Deeds not birth were to be the criteria through which the worth of a person was to be judged. Numerous canonical discourses could be cited in illustration. The *Assalāyana Sutta,* for instance, shows a young Brahmin, Assalāyana, approaching the Buddha to contest the Buddha's view that all castes were

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89. This is a shortened form of the Four Noble Truths. In the *Cūḷamālunkya Sutta*, the Buddha is recorded as saying, "And what have I declared? 'This is suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the origin of suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the cessation of suffering' – I have declared. 'This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering' – I have declared." (*Majjhima Nikāya* Vol. II: 432, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, Wisdom Publications, 1995, p. 536).
90. Peter Harvey, ed., *Buddhism*, London and New York, Continuum, 2001, p. 3.
91. *Cankī Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya,* Vol. II, 167 (Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha,* Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1995, pp. 170–71).
92. See, for example, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya,* Vol. II, 123–24.

potentially pure.[93] The Buddha is seen to offer examples rooted in the Law of *Kamma*, the Law of Action. He asks questions such as, 'What would a Brahmin who killed living beings suffer after death? What would a merchant who did the same suffer? Would the Brahmin's birth save him from hell? Would the merchant's? Is it only a Brahmin that can develop a mind of loving kindness? Is it only a Brahmin that can take a loofah and bath powder, and go the river and wash?' Example after example is piled on to prove that it is a person's deeds that are important, not birth. And Assalāyana is led by rational argument into supporting the view that both good and bad, purity and corruption, are found in all the castes.

A similar method was taken in mounting my third example of challenge: the challenge towards religious ritual and sacrifice. 'Can washing in a river make you pure?' 'Can ritual prayers be salvific?' the Buddha was asked. On the evidence of the canonical Theravāda texts, the Buddha answered, 'No' to both. Only ethical living and mental culture could purify or ensure liberation. There is a section in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* of the Theravāda canon in which a Brahmin practice of directing a person upwards to heaven through prayers and praises is mentioned. The Buddha is asked whether this could work for someone who has broken precepts such as destroying life or taking what is not given and he gives this simile:

> Suppose, headman, a person would hurl a huge boulder into a deep pool of water. Then a great crowd of people would come together and assemble around it, and they would send up prayers and recite praises and circumambulate it making reverential salutations, saying, 'Emerge good boulder! Rise up, good boulder! Come up on high ground, good boulder!' What do you think, headman? Because of the prayers of the great crowd of people, because of their praise, because they circumambulate it making reverential salutations, would that boulder emerge, rise up, and come up on high ground?[94]

Further examples could be taken that show the Buddha urging respect for morality and action rather than ritual. In one important discourse, this takes the form of urging a ruler to improve the economic well-being of the people in preference to offering a sacrifice in the hope it would transform the lawlessness in the realm.[95]

Three principles emerge from these examples: tradition just because it is tradition is an uncertain guide to truth; a person's worth should be measured by deeds not status gained by birth; creating *economic* justice in society and developing moral awareness will produce more positive fruit than ritual and sacrifice. Each was a direct challenge to some strands of contemporary religious practice.

Could we, from our Christian perspective, say that this was the work of the Holy Spirit? Can we affirm that before the Common Era, before Jesus Christ, the Spirit was active in challenging abuses of religion through the Buddha? In most of the examples I have just mentioned, I have little difficulty in answering, 'Yes'. But what about those discourses that appear to contradict Jewish and Christian teaching, those concerning the existence of a creating God, for instance? Can the Spirit of God

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93. *Assalāyana Sutta, Majjhima Nikāya*, Vol. II, 147 (Nanamoli and Bodhi, 1995, p. 763).
94. *Gāmaṇisaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya,* Part IV, VIII, 6 (Bhikkhu Bodhi trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha,* Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2000, p. 1337).
95. See the *Kūtadanta Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya*, Vol. I, 127–49.

nurture contradictory truths, or truth not found in the Bible? There are no easy answers here.

To turn now to the fruits of the Spirit, in the gospel of Matthew there is this direct verse: 'Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.'[96] It comes after the parable of the vineyard and internal evidence suggests that it was directed at Jewish leaders. Yet, I believe it holds within it a biblical principle with wider application, namely that the existence of the 'fruits' of the kingdom is criteria enough for the kingdom of God or the Reign of God to be present. Within the gospel of Matthew, soon after the parable of the vineyard, the fruits of the kingdom are linked with justice, mercy, faith and non-greed.[97] They also involve for Matthew feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty and clothing the naked.[98] Above all they concern giving up the self.[99] The letter to the Galatians itemises the fruits of the Spirit as: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control[100] and goes on to plead, 'Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another'.[101]

It would be tedious for me to go through each of these 'fruits' and find parallels in Buddhism – in the texts, in the evolving tradition or in contemporary practice. However, I believe it could be done. Again I will restrict my examples. As I have previously emphasised, the key spiritual task outlined by the Buddha was the uprooting of greed, hatred and illusion *(lobha, dosa and moha)* from the mind and heart. In this process, developing the opposites of greed, hatred and delusion is central: non-greed or renunciation of acquisitiveness; non-hatred or, in its positive form, altruistic love; and wisdom. What is most significant is that the fruits of this practice, as described in the Theravāda texts, are almost identical to those mentioned in Galatians, even to the last sentence concerning competition. For, in the Theravāda Buddhist worldview, *māna,* pride or conceit, the tendency to measure oneself against others, is seen as one of the principal obstacles to enlightenment. It is one of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) binding beings to existence and one of the most difficult to eradicate.

The *brahmavihāras* or divine abidings can be used as one illustration of this rapprochement. These are four qualities that most Buddhists see as foundational to their spiritual life: loving kindness (*mettā*), compassion (*karunā*), sympathetic or appreciative joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).[102] *Mettā* can best be illustrated by one sentence that comes from an ancient Theravāda text, the *Mettā Sutta*:

> Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings.[103]

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96. Mt 21.43.
97. See Mt 23.23–25.
98. Mt 25.32–46.
99. Mt 10.39.
100. Gal 5.22–23.
101. Gal 5.26.
102. The qualities are itemised in the *Tevijja Sutta, Dīgha Nikāya,* Vol. I, 235–52. See particularly paragraphs 250–52.
103. *Mettā Sutta, Sutta Nipāta*: 143–52, here verse 149.

Compassion is seen as both an attitude of mind and a form of action that cuts through and destroys suffering in others.[104] As for *muditā,* I can do no better than to quote the words of a Sri Lankan Buddhist teacher of mine:

> When your neighbour's son has come out with first-class honours whilst your own son has failed the BA, can you rejoice over that? *Muditā* is that. It is the ability to appreciate and rejoice over the greatness of others.[105]

Upekkhā points to the mind that perceives clearly, that is not torn by greed and hatred, attachment and aversion, that can evaluate data without relating everything to self, a quality of mind revered by Christian mystics also.

A study of the *Brahmavihāras* alone suggest that what Christians would call the fruits of the Spirit are present in Buddhism. And again Christians can ask: Does that mean that, from a Christian point of view, the Spirit of God or the Spirit of Jesus is wholly present in Buddhism, a non-theistic religion? It must be remembered that this question would not be relevant to Buddhists, but Christians must ask it if they are to develop a responsible theology that takes religious plurality seriously.

What light can Buddhism shed on the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit?

To reflect on my last question is not an easy task and with the time limitations of this paper, only one example will be possible out of what I believe are many possible avenues of exploration. It is an example of the Buddhist tradition, from within its own integrity, throwing light on meanings present in the Christian tradition but often overlooked. The example concerns the dynamics of the task termed 'self-control' in most translations of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians. In our contemporary post-modern world, self-control has negative spin value. Christians become the 'No' brigade. They are those who repress choice, and stifle individual development and freedom of will. In the nineteenth century, exactly the same caricature was projected onto Buddhism by Christian orientalists. For example, one British civil servant in Sri Lanka translated a core verse from the Dhammapada, one that is often taken as summing up the message of Buddhism as: 'Abstain from all sin, acquire all virtue, repress thine own heart'.[106] This was in the 1830s and the translation stuck. Buddhism became saddled, in Christian missionary circles at least, with a repression paradigm: repression of desire, subjection of feeling, even repression of compassion.

The Dhammapada verse in Pali is this:

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104. Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, who travelled from India to Sri Lanka in the 5th Century CE and became one of the most famous interpreters of Theravāda Buddhism, wrote this of *karunā*: 'When there is suffering in others it causes good people's hearts to be moved, thus it is compassion. Or alternatively, it combats other's suffering, attacks and demolishes it, thus it is compassion. Or, alternatively, it is scattered upon those who suffer, it is extended to them by pervasion, thus it is compassion.' (*The Path of Purification*, Bhikkhu Nanamoli (transl.), Kandy, Sri Lanka, Buddhist Publication Society, 1991: 310 (IX, 92)).

105. Ven. Professor Dhammavihari as quoted in: Elizabeth J Harris, *What Buddhists Believe*, Oxford, Oneworld, 2000, pp. 53–54.

106. This version appears in a translation, by British civil servant Andrew Armour, for the 1835 Ceylon Almanac, of a treatise on Buddhism written by Ven. Kitalagama Devamitta, a Sri Lankan Buddhist monk.

Sabbapāpassa akaraṇam, kusalassa upasampadā,
Sacittapariyodapanam etam buddhāna sāsanam.

It is the verb *pariyodapeti* that has been translated as 'to repress'. The etymological meaning of the word, however, is to cleanse or to purify. It comes from the word *odāta,* meaning clean, white, pure. To cleanse became under the orientalist pen, to repress, a movement that echoes what those outside Christianity have projected onto Christian practice.

Can Buddhism help Christians to unravel this? I believe it can, but only if Christians shed two preconceptions. The first stems from Victorian optimism: that the mind and heart are easily directed if the right beliefs are held and moral discipline maintained. Some charismatic groups formulate this in another way: that qualities such as wisdom and compassion will follow an inflowing of the Holy Spirit automatically. The second is that anything to do with the Greek word, *gnōsis*, signifiying liberative knowledge, is antipathetic to a gospel of grace. For what Buddhism can give Christians concerns what self-understanding involves, the self-understanding that can lead to purifying the heart and mind – a concept, I believe, that is an ally of St Paul's 'self-control'.

History has shown that not all Christians who have claimed to have been led by the Holy Spirit have been discerning, compassionate or Christ-like. In fact, the history of Christianity is strewn with the brutal, the arrogant and the unloving. I would suggest that one reason for this is that Christians have resisted the hard, painful work of discernment, the work of uncovering the hidden greeds and prejudices, the conditioned reactions of aversion and attachment, that mould the perceptions of us all. The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola recognised this. In a twentieth century Ignatian manual, for instance, it is stated that among the things needful in those making an important decision are:

> An understanding of what it means to be spiritually free; an understanding of the necessity for coming to equilibrium, to indifference before I can discover what the Lord is calling me to.

And one of the actions recommended is:

> As I discover any disordered attachment involved in this decision I pray for the opposite.[107]

The language used touches the Buddhist emphasis on *upekkhā*, equanimity. Admittedly, it is placed in a theistic context that is different from the Buddhist. A later piece of advice is that this spiritual freedom is given by God, not worked for.[108] But the Ignatian tradition does recognise that the Christian path involves coming to an understanding of our minds and hearts.

Buddhists would say this is the work of meditation. And again there have been translation difficulties. At least two Pāli words have been translated as meditation – *bhāvanā* and *samādhi*. The first comes from the verb *bhāveti* which literally means 'to

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107.J Veltri SJ, *Orientations: a collection of helps for prayer* Vol. I, Loyola House, Guelph, Ontario, 1979, p. 99.
108.*Ibid.*, p. 99.

make to become'; the second means concentration or one-pointedness. Both imply vigorous activity, not the stereotypes that are often projected onto the activity such as making the mind blank, entering a trance and so on. The Buddhist meditation that I have come to know and value helps us to understand our minds and hearts. It helps us to see into our conditioned reactions through what some Buddhist teachers have called, 'bare attention'.[109] In other words, in silence, what arises in the mind and heart, and within the body, is watched and noted, but not clung to or judged. Permission for anything to arise from repressed depths is given. For the meditator it becomes obvious that what arises is not under the control of the individual. The practice of 'bare attention', however, can bring what drives us under scrutiny. And eventually scrutiny brings understanding and understanding brings transformation, as conditioned reactions lose their power. This is how one of my meditation teachers, Godwin Samararatne, put it – and I use material gained in an interview in 1995, since published in my book, *What Buddhists Believe*:

> In the context of mindfulness, a conditioned mind reacts mechanically, habitually and one may neither know it nor be conscious of it. Human beings are conditioned by their culture, by childhood experiences, by the teachings they have been exposed to. With such a reactive mind, as it is said in the *dhamma,* the result is the experience of suffering. So, in the context of meditation, it is really important to realize and come to know these conditionings, in whatever form they arise. The first step is to acknowledge them, to know how one is conditioned and how a conditioned mind functions and then, through that understanding, to develop insight, and through insight, gradually, one may be in a position to get a glimpse of what can be described as a mind that is unconditioned.

He also commented on the question of repressed feelings arising:

> People generally control, repress and deny things. They push away what they consider unpleasant. So in meditation, these things arise. When they arise, the practice of bare attention is extremely helpful because, if I may use psychological terms, this enables one to make one's unconscious conscious. This enables meditators to handle whatever they have been burying in their unconscious mind.[110]

Godwin Samararatne died a few years ago and so cannot develop this.

This then is the start of what Buddhism may be able to offer Christianity. Many Buddhists would go much further urging us to develop the mindfulness that can, at every moment, recognise the arising of greed, hatred and delusion.

In teaching Christians this, Buddhists will not be bringing into Christianity anything that is completely new. It may help us to recover the Christian awareness that there is a two-fold movement surrounding 'self-control' or purification: that which comes from absolute openness to the work of the Holy Spirit as inflowing energy; and that which flows from nurturing self-understanding through introspection, through the work that we have to do for ourselves. Surely the Holy Spirit can be within this too, as indwelling Spirit, pushing us towards what John Wesley would call 'perfection'.

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109. One of the best accounts of the importance of this, I believe, can be found in 'The Power of Mindfulness' by Ven. Nyanaponika. This has been re-published in *The Vision of the Dhamma: Buddhist Writings of Nyanaponika Thera,* Bhikkhu Bodhi (ed.), Rider, 1986, pp. 69–116.
110. Elizabeth J Harris, *What Buddhists Believe,* 2000, p. 75

Conclusion

I have argued with Aloysius Pieris for a symbiotic cross-reading of traditions. My respect for the integrity of the Buddhist worldview and my conviction that face-to face Buddhist-Christian encounter is vitally important give me an uneasiness with my first two questions. For there is more to encountering Buddhism than seeking either for an equivalent of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit or for evidence of the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit, although I would add that my encounter with Buddhism has brought me into contact with more evidence of the gifts of the Spirit within Buddhists than this paper could ever encompass. What excites me is how one religious tradition, from within its own world-view, Buddhism in this case, can throw light on and challenge Christianity and its history. And this challenge is not simply good in itself. It must be instrumental – instrumental to furthering what Christians would call the Kingdom of God, the bringing about of a world where women and men are not bound by chains of injustice, where our own greed does not threaten the future of our planet, where renunciation of selfishness leads to liberation for all. These are also fruits of the Holy Spirit and I believe the task of bringing them to birth is more important than controversy over credal statements or right belief.

Discerning the Spirit in engagement with Islam

Colin Chapman

Some months ago I attended a meeting of representatives of theological colleges and seminaries (both Christian and Muslim) in Lebanon, held at the Maronite University of the Holy Spirit at Kaslik just north of Beirut. The chairman was from one of the Muslim seminaries and began the meeting by saying, 'Welcome to the University of *Jibril*, Gabriel'. He was making the obvious point that 'the spirit' in the Qur'an, the Holy Spirit, is generally understood by Muslims to be the archangel Gabriel. So he was taking the name of a Christian institution and giving it an Islamic interpretation. Since he said it with a smile and obviously he meant it as a joke, no one took offence. But I could not help wondering whether it was not slightly cheeky for a Muslim to come as a guest to a Christian institution and say in effect, 'What you Christians understand as Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is for us the angel Gabriel'.

This casual remark points to some of the special theological issues that Christians face when thinking about the Holy Spirit in relation to Islam. Since Muhammad and the first Muslims had a considerable amount of contact with Jews and Christians, we are dealing here with a faith that has much in common with the Judaeo-Christian tradition and is therefore very different from the eastern religions. Does the amount of common ground make the differences negligible and insignificant? Or does the common ground conceal very significant differences? Is it a case of 'so near and yet so far?'

In this paper I want to explore three different ways of attempting to discern the Spirit in engagement with Islam. The first is to start with Christian scripture and tradition and see how they relate specifically to what we find in Islam. The second is to start with the Qur'ān, trying to understand it as Muslims understand it and then to enter into dialogue with the Qur'ān. The first approach therefore starts with where we are while the second starts from where they are. The third approach is to start from our actual experience of dialogue in different situation. I suggest that all of these three approaches need to be adopted and taken together since none of them is adequate on its own. We cannot avoid engaging with our scriptures and theirs or reflecting on the experience of what happens when there is a real meeting of minds and hearts between Christians and Muslims in any particular context.

Starting from Christian scripture and tradition

If we begin by reminding ourselves of how Christians have generally thought about the work of the Holy Spirit and trying to relate these ideas to what we find in Islam, the following points will no doubt seem very obvious and predictable to some, and rather orthodox and traditional to others. But I believe that there is value in spelling them out in this way, if only to sharpen both the common ground and the differences between the two faiths and to make us aware of some of the issues. Encounter with another faith sometimes makes us see our own tradition in a new light and makes us appreciate aspects of it which we have taken for granted or which seem to have little relevance. It also makes us aware of aspects of our belief which create major problems for others.

1. A trinitarian understanding of God enables us to believe that God is love in his very nature; there has always been a relationship of love between the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

If, as the Apostle John says, 'God is love',[111] it must mean that love has been one aspect of his very being from eternity, and not that he became loving after the creation of the universe. When Jesus addresses the Father in prayer he says, 'You loved me before the foundation of the world',[112] and Christians assume that the Spirit is part of this eternal relationship which binds together the Father, the Son and the Spirit. This possibility of a relationship of love within the Godhead is beautifully expressed in Rublev's well-known icon of The Three Visitors. There is no possibility for Christians that the Spirit is less than personal or less than divine, that he might be a created being, like an angel. Many Christians therefore are reluctant to speak of the Holy Spirit with the impersonal 'it'.

As soon as we spell out this trinitarian understanding of God, we become aware of the problems that our belief creates for Muslims, for whom there can be no compromise over the oneness of God. The spirit for them can never be fully divine, God himself, the Spirit of God, and has to be a created being who acts as an intermediary between the Creator and his creatures. Some Muslims therefore regard Christians as *mushrikūn*, 'associators', because we think of Jesus and the Spirit as being fully divine and therefore seem to them to believe in three distinct gods. Others are prepared to accept Christians as monotheists of a kind. Clearly we are not going to resolve the question of the Trinity with Muslims overnight! But we may find that we have made some real progress if our Muslim friends accept us as monotheists rather than tritheists. The discussion can then go on to explore different ways of understanding the oneness of God.

2 The Spirit of God is at work throughout the universe, and every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. In spite of the Fall, humankind still bears the image of the triune God, Father, Son and Spirit.

The Spirit is at work throughout the material universe, but is also at work in the hearts of all human beings. The belief that God created humankind in his image and likeness is not widely accepted by Muslims, but is especially important in dialogue for two reasons. Firstly, if human beings are in some sense like God, he is not totally different from us and we have something in common with him. In spite of his transcendence there is no 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and humankind, and there is the real possibility of a personal relationship and meaningful communication with him. Secondly, the image of God in humankind makes the incarnation conceivable, since it makes it possible to believe that Godhead and human nature to come together in a single person. However much Muslims may want to safeguard the transcendence and majesty of God, there is no reason why Jesus could not be both fully human and fully divine. God is free to choose to reveal himself in this way if he so chooses, and we human beings are not in a position to tell God what he can do and what he cannot do by ruling out the idea of incarnation.

111.1 Jn 4.18.
112.Jn 17.24.

Mention of the Fall inevitably causes problems for Muslims who don't believe that Adam's sin had any consequences for the human race. According to the Qur'ān, Adam and Eve repented after they had sinned, and then went on to receive divine guidance. They were therefore the first Muslims, and Adam was the first prophet. Every child that has ever been born starts off in the same state of innocence that Adam and Eve enjoyed, without any tendency towards sin. If the idea of the Fall sounds like antiquated dogma to many Christians today, it becomes intensely relevant to discussion with Muslims as soon as we realise that we are dealing with two diagnoses of the human condition which are significantly different – perhaps even radically different from each other.

3. Since the Word of God was made flesh in Jesus, he has a vital role in revelation and redemption; the Spirit, who bears witness to Jesus is distinct from Jesus, but works in harmony with him.

Jesus says, 'The Spirit of truth will testify about me', '... will testify on my behalf'.[113] 'He will take what is mine and declare it to you'.[114] The work of the Spirit cannot therefore be separated from the work of Christ. If the incarnation of the eternal Son marks the climax of both revelation and redemption, the Spirit works in harmony with the Son, making available to all that the Son achieved in his incarnation. The Spirit is not likely to say or do things that are inconsistent with what Jesus said and did, and cannot work in a totally independent way that bears no relation to the work of Jesus.

4. The Spirit has a special role <u>within</u> the church and in the life of the individual believer.

If the Spirit is identified as the Spirit of Christ, it is understandable that he has a special role in the lives of all who profess to be Christ's followers. Jesus says, 'You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you' or 'among you'.[115] The Spirit enables believers to call God 'Father', *Abba*,[116] and makes the presence of the living Christ real in every individual believer.[117] He creates the awareness of our unity as members of the body of Christ,[118] and gives gifts for leadership and service.[119] Another important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit as described in Acts is that he enables Christians to communicate their faith. On the day of Pentecost the Apostles are able to communicate their message in words that people of many different languages and cultures are able to understand.[120] When shortly afterwards the Christian community has its back to the wall because the apostles have been imprisoned, they pray for boldness (*parrēsia*), and 'after they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly'.[121]

113.Jn 15.26, NIV and NRSV respectively.
114.Jn 16.14.
115.Jn 14.17.
116.Rom 8.15.
117.Eph 3.16–17.
118.Eph 4.1–6.
119.1 Cor 12.4–11.
120.Ac 2.
121.Ac 4.31.

5. The Spirit is at work outside the church; he 'makes Christ known in the world'.

This point needs to be emphasised whenever Christians give the impression that the Spirit of God works only within the church. While Jesus speaks of 'the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him',[122] he also speaks of the Spirit convincing the world 'about sin, righteousness and judgement'.[123] Limiting the work of the Spirit to the church and to individual Christians has unfortunately contributed to insularity, pride and arrogance. The conviction that the Spirit works outside the church has always been an important part of the tradition of eastern Christian theology, and Christians in the West in recent years have tried to recover this emphasis. They now want to associate the work of the Spirit with the ideas expressed for example by Paul at the Areopagus, that God's purpose in the creation of humankind was 'that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "in him we live and move and have our being"'.[124] Reclaiming these ideas should encourage Christians to believe that the Spirit is at work outside the community of faith as understood by Christians, and should make them eager to see evidence of his work in the most unlikely places.

If so much of the doctrinal controversy between Christians and Muslims over the centuries has revolved around Christology but led to a dead-end, should we now spend more time talking about the Spirit? If the Spirit is like the wind which 'blows where it chooses and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes',[125] can an emphasis on the Spirit help Christians to be much more open and prepared for surprises and unexpected things? We have no monopoly on the work of the Spirit and he is not limited to the church. If the Spirit, the Spirit of God, is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, he will be doing the things that Jesus did and continues to do. He will be producing Christ-like attitudes and character in people – even perhaps in some who have not heard the name of Jesus. He cannot, however, be working at cross purposes with Jesus; his work must be totally consistent and in harmony with the character and work of Jesus in his incarnate life.

Theologising about the work of the Spirit in other faiths in general and Islam in particular may therefore open up new possibilities for reflection and dialogue. But it is not likely to resolve the difficulties that Muslims find in the Christian understanding of the person and work of Christ. Sooner or later Christians and Muslims will be forced back to the question 'What do you think of the Christ?', and no amount of reflection on the work of the Spirit will enable us to evade the difficult questions about the one whom Christians see as the eternal Word and the eternal Son, and whom Muslims see as simply a human being and a prophet, created by the Word of God.

Starting from Islamic Scripture and Tradition

As we turn to the text of the Qur'ān, we are not trying to read Christian ideas into the Qur'ān or to find ammunition to use in argument with Muslims. We are trying – at

122.Jn 14.17.
123.Jn 16.7–11.
124.Ac 17.27–28.
125.Jn 3.8.

least at the beginning – to read it as Muslims read it. We are putting ourselves, as it were, into the shoes of Muslims and trying to understand it as they do. But because we cannot cease to be Christians and can see the similarities and differences between the Qur'ān and the Bible, inevitably we will have questions and will want to be able to discuss what we read with our Muslim friends.

The following are the main texts in the Qur'ān referring to 'the spirit', referred to in different verses as 'God's spirit', 'my spirit', 'our spirit', 'the Holy Spirit', or 'the Faithful Spirit'. After the first five which are more general in their reference, they are listed under the name of the person with whom the spirit is associated. The translation is that of N.J. Dawood.[126] It should be noted that this translation uses both 'spirit' (lower case) and 'Spirit' (capital), but without any explanation of the difference.

General

> They put questions to you about the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is at my Lord's command (*al-ruḥ min amri rabbi*). Little indeed is the knowledge vouchsafed to you.'[127]
>
> Exalted and throned on high, He lets the Spirit descend at His behest on those of His servants whom He chooses, that He may warn them of the day when they shall meet him.[128]
>
> By His will He sends down the angels with the Spirit (*bi-rruḥi*) to those among His servants whom He chooses, bidding them proclaim: 'There is no god but Me: therefore fear Me'.[129]
>
> God has inscribed the Faith in their very hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit of His own (*bi-ruḥin minhu*).[130]
>
> [Jacob speaking] Go, my sons, and seek news of Joseph and his brother. Do not despair of God's spirit; none but unbelievers despair of God's spirit.[131]

Note that the Qur'ānic text here is vocalised as *rawḥ* rather than *ruḥ*, which is the usual word meaning 'spirit'. While Dawood translates *rawḥ* as if it means the same as *ruḥ*, other translations interpret it as a different word altogether, meaning 'refreshment', 'grace' or 'mercy' and therefore close to the word *raḥma* (mercy). Yusuf Ali translates 'never give up hope of God's soothing mercy' and in a footnote explains: 'The word is *rawḥ*, not *ruḥ*, as some translators have mistakenly construed it. *Rawḥ* includes the idea of a Mercy that stills or calms our distracted state, and is particularly appropriate here in the mouth of Jacob'.[132]

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126. *The Koran*, Penguin Books, first edition 1956, latest edition 2000.
127. *The Night Journey*, 17.85–86.
128. *The Believer*, 40.15.
129. *The Bee*, 16.2.
130. *She Who Pleaded*, 58.22.
131. *Joseph*, 12.87.
132. *The Holy Qur'ān – Text, Translation and Commentary*, The Islamic Foundation, 1975, p. 582.

Adam

He first created man from clay, then made his offspring from a drop of humble fluid. He moulded him and breathed His Spirit into him (*nafakha fihi min ruḥihi*).[133]

Your Lord said to the angels: 'I am creating man from clay. When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him (*nafakhtu fihi min ruḥi*), kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him.'[134]

Jesus

We gave Jesus son of Mary veritable signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit (*ayyadnahu min ruḥ-ilqudus*).[135]

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was no more than God's Apostle and His Word which He cast to Mary (*kalimatahuu alqaha ila*); a spirit from Him (*ruḥun minhu*). So believe in God and His Apostle and do not say: 'Three'.[136]

Mary

We breathed into her of Our Spirit (*nafakhna fiha min ruḥina*), and made her and her son a sign to all mankind.[137]

And in Mary ... who reserved her chastity and into whose womb We breathed Our Spirit (*nafakhna fihi min ruḥina*).[138]

We sent to her Our spirit in the semblance of a full-grown man.[139]

Muhammad

Your Lord is the Mighty One, the Merciful. This is surely revealed by the Lord of the Universe. The faithful Spirit (*al-ruḥul-amin*) has brought it down into your heart, that you may give warning in eloquent Arabic speech.[140]

Thus have We inspired you with a spirit of Our will (*ruḥan min amrina*) when you knew nothing of faith or scripture.[141]

Say: 'The Holy Spirit (*ruḥu-lqudus*) brought it down from your Lord in truth to reassure the faithful, and to give guidance and good news to those that submit'.[142]

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133. *Adoration*, 32.9.
134. *Sad*, 38.72; cf. *al-Hijr*, 15.29.
135. *The Cow*, 2.87; 2.253 and 5.110.
136. *The Table*, 4.171.
137. *The Prophets*, 21.91.
138. *Prohibition*, 66.12.
139. *Mary*, 19.17.
140. *The Poets*, 26.191–5.
141. *Counsel*, 42.52.
142. *The Bee*, 16.102.

> On the day when the Spirit (*al-ruh*) and the angels stand up in their ranks, they shall not speak.[143]
>
> He is the Lord of the Ladders, by which the angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him in one day.[144]
>
> On that night (the Night of Power, *lailatu-lqadr*) the angels and the Spirit by their Lord's leave come down with each decree.[145]
>
> He does not speak out of his own fancy. This is an inspired revelation. He is taught by one who is powerful and mighty.[146]
>
> Say: 'Whoever is an enemy of Gabriel' (who has by God's grace revealed to you the Qur'ān as a guide and joyful tidings for the faithful, confirming previous scriptures) 'whoever is an enemy of God, His angels, or His Apostles, or of Gabriel and Michael, will surely find that God is the enemy of the unbelievers'.[147]
>
> God is his (Muhammad's) protector, and Gabriel ... The angels too are his helpers.[148]

If we were to summarise the ideas about the spirit in these verses, we could say that in addition to the references to the work of the spirit in supporting all believers, in several verses the spirit is closely associated with the angels, and is also active in the lives of certain individuals who have played significant roles in Gods work of revelation. The spirit was at work in the creation of Adam, in the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb, and in strengthening Jesus for his ministry. The spirit is associated in a special way with knowledge and revelation, equipping the prophets for their work. This is seen most clearly in the case of Muhammad who receives the revelation of the Qur'ān.

While the identification of the spirit with Gabriel is not clearly made in the Qur'ān, it is made explicit in three of the authoritative commentators, al-Tabari (d 923), al-Zamakhshari (d 1144) and al-Baydawi (d 1316). The enigmatic verses in *The Star* 53.1–8 are related to Muhammad's sighting of Gabriel, where he (Muhammad) 'became aware of a voice and of a figure that stood compellingly on every line of vision wherever he turned or walked. The figure was the angel Gabriel bearing the message of God'.[149] Further details are added by some of the commentators. We are told, for example, by al-Tabari that Gabriel and Michael purified the belly of Muhammad. Gabriel is said to have taught Muhammad to pray, guided him on his ascension to heaven, and in the incident of the so-called 'Satanic Verses', rebuked Muhammad for temporarily acknowledging the three Meccan goddesses. In Islamic tradition, therefore, Jibril/Gabriel, as the messenger of revelation, becomes the

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143. *The Tidings*, 78.38.
144. *The Ladders*, 70.4.
145. *Qadr*, 97.4.
146. *The Star*, 53.4–5.
147. *The Cow*, 2.97–98.
148. *Prohibitions*, 66.4.
149. Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the* Minaret, p. 69.

guarantee 'of the coherence of Islam and the two older religions ... Djibril is the messenger of God to every Prophet from Adam to Christ ... a helper and guide'.[150]

If this is a fair summary of the traditional Islamic understanding of the spirit/Spirit in the Qur'ān, what are the possibilities for dialogue between Christians and Muslims over the Qur'ānic text? Our first task must be to establish all the common ground that can be found between the Qur'ān and the Bible – especially the Hebrew Bible – since shared beliefs of this kind are highly significant and should not be passed over lightly. Thus we can note, for example, that apart from the term 'the faithful spirit' and 'our spirit', all the other terms used in the Qur'ān ('the spirit', 'God's spirit', 'my spirit', and 'the Holy Spirit') are found in the Bible and in early Jewish tradition. In Exodus, for example, the Spirit gives Bezalel 'skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts'.[151] In Daniel Gabriel is an angel who interprets the vision that Daniel has seen.[152] In Philo the Holy Spirit is an angel, and in post-biblical Judaism, Gabriel is often the Messenger of God to humankind.

Christians would inevitably go on to say, however, that while the concept of the spirit in the Qur'ān is very close to the concept of the Spirit in the Hebrew Bible, it lacks the later ideas developed in the New Testament. Thus Kenneth Cragg sums up an understandable Christian response when he says that 'the Qur'ān does not contain any articulated conception of God as Holy Spirit'.[153] When Christians read the Hebrew Bible they can hardly avoid reading into it a trinitarian understanding of God that is based on the New Testament, which they see as a later stage in the process of revelation that begins with the Hebrew Bible. Similarly it is hard for Christians to avoid seeing at least the potential for Christian ideas in certain expressions in the Qur'ān. Thus when the spirit is described as 'a spirit from him', *ruḥun minhu*, (i.e. from God, literally out of), Christians may wonder whether this could conceivably mean that the spirit might not be the spirit of God himself rather than a being created by God.

If Muslims recognise the similarities between the ideas of the spirit in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān they may perhaps be open at some stage to reflect on a Christian understanding of the process by which Christianity grew out of Judaism and how the Christian concept of the Spirit developed after the time of Christ. Christians might want to point out that the first disciples of Jesus were orthodox Jews, who believed as passionately in the oneness of God as Muslims have always done. But then their experience of Jesus led them to believe that he was more than just a prophet, and they interpreted the dramatic events on the day of Pentecost to mean that they had been filled with the Holy Spirit. They still thought of themselves as monotheists, never abandoning their convictions about the oneness of God, but came to understand the unity of God in a radically new way.

But where do we go from here? While Christians understand fully how Muslims think of the Qur'ān and how they try to interpret it, they cannot pretend that they approach the Qur'ān in exactly the same way as Muslims do, and cannot help reading it in something like the same way that they read the Bible, with an awareness of context, of

150. *Islamic Encyclopedia.*
151. Ex 35.30–31.
152. Dan 8.15–17; 9.21–23.
153. *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 37.

the meaning of language and of historical processes. Since Christian scholars for the last two hundred years have learned to think in terms of influences and sources, they want to recognise fully the newness and originality of the Qur'ān, but cannot avoid reading it in the light of the total context in which Muhammad lived. They can therefore hardly avoid asking further questions about the striking similarity between Gabriel as he appears in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish thought and Jibril, the bearer of the revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. We have to admit, however, that this is dangerous, almost forbidden territory for most Muslims, who believe that the contents of the Qur'ān came down to Muhammad's mind directly from God, and who therefore rule out from the start the idea that Muhammad might have taken over any of these ideas from human sources. This therefore is one of the most sensitive and difficult subjects for Muslims and Christians to discuss, and there are many situations where these questions cannot even be asked.

Those who have already exhausted the theme of the spirit in the Qur'ān may find further areas that can be explored in the writings of some of the Sufis. A chapter by Mike Shelly entitled 'Al-Ghazali's Benign Influence on Temple Gairdner' in the recent Festschrift for Kenneth Cragg describes how one scholar-missionary was profoundly affect by his study of the writings of Sufis. During a sabbatical from Egypt spent partly at Hartford Theological Seminary under Duncan Black Macdonald and partly in Budapest under the Hungarian Jewish scholar Ignaz Goldziher, he went through what he later described as 'my Grand Transformation Drama', in which he moved from a confrontational approach towards Islam, which relied heavily on apologetics, to a more irenic approach based on a sympathetic understanding of Islam. It was Gairdner's study of the Muslim theologian and mystic al-Ghazali (d. 1111) which contributed significantly to this development. Shelley summarises Gairdner's approach and his interest in Sufi ideas about the spirit as follows:

> Gairdner ... argued that, although the idea of the Holy Spirit is not fully developed in Islam, what is there is sufficient to offer a point on which the missionary can build. He contended that Muslim theologians have so fenced about the oneness of God that they have begged the question of the communicator of God's revelation to humanity. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, suggests a special, though mysterious, relationship between this communicator and God. Though acknowledging that the most common interpretation of the Qur'ānic teaching about the Spirit identifies it with one of the archangels, Gairdner opined that Christians will find that 'some of the best Muslim mystics' have suggested a nobler solution: 'the Spirit is a unique Being, above all creatures, related uniquely, intimately, and actively to the Lord of the Throne'. He admitted that this teaching may be rare among Muslims, but asserted that it is 'a part of what Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil'. In many respects, he said, the Spirit of the Qur'ān is the Holy Spirit of the Bible, and this is not surprising since the sources of this doctrine are the biblical teaching of the Spirit, 'imperfectly comprehended by Mohammed'. Thus these same sources must 'be invoked to clarify and vitalise the Islamic teaching about the Spirit'.[154]

Shelley is aware of certain limitations in Gairdner's approach: 'We doubt that he could have convinced Muslims that Muhammad had "imperfectly comprehended" the Biblical teaching of the Holy Spirit. We also wonder what evidence he would adduce to prove that the Bible was the source of the Qur'ānic conceptions.' In spite of this he recognises the significance of the development in Gairdner's thinking and agrees with

154. *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, Melisende, 2003, pp. 216–217.

Macdonald's observation that Gairdner 'passed from controversy to persuasion'. Gairdner therefore provides an instructive example of someone who refuses to accept differences between the two faiths as final and is determined to find ways of continuing respectful dialogue. Perhaps it is significant that it was the spirit/Spirit in the Qur'ān and in some Sufi reflection which provided the opening for this kind of creative thinking which reaches out to build bridges between the two communities.

Starting from the experience of dialogue

Every one of us at this conference could no doubt share our own story of engagement with Muslims in a variety of different contexts and reflect on how we have tried to discern the Spirit in these engagements. Here I want simply to describe my own recent experience of engagement with one particular group of Muslims in Beirut. In a solidly Shi'ite area of the southern suburbs of Beirut there is a study centre called *Ihsraq,* the Centre for Theosophical Theology. Its Director, Sheikh Muhammad, is a charismatic teacher who had a profound spiritual experience through contact with a similar group in Germany, and gave up his medical studies to devote himself to further study and reflection in these areas. Our contact with Sheikh Muhammad first came about through one of our students at the Near East School of Theology, and developed through further meetings at their centre, at our college and in local restaurants.

In March 2002 he and several of his students attended a lecture given by Kenneth Cragg at the first meeting of a new Muslim-Christian Forum which we were setting up in the college. They were so impressed with him as a person and as a scholar that they invited him to give a lecture at their centre. When this proved difficult, they offered to come to NEST to meet him there and to celebrate his 89th birthday. To our surprise a group of about thirty turned up and had more than two hours of discussion with him, partly in English and partly in Arabic.

As a way of following up this event and building on the relationships that were beginning to be established, I wrote a chapter for Bishop Cragg's Festschrift, which was published in March 2003 under the title *A Faithful Presence: Essays for Kenneth Cragg*, to coincide with his ninetieth birthday. The chapter is entitled 'An Agenda for Dialogue' and attempts to outline some of the issues that Christians and Muslims may need to talk about in one way or another in their different contexts. Assuming that there is a genuine personal relationship, there are three main areas which we may need to explore:

1 issues that arise out of our context (e.g. How have we responded to September 11th? How do Christians and Muslims understand the future of Lebanon? How do Christians and Muslims respond to Zionism and the Palestinian question? How do we respond to crucial issues in our society? How do we respond to the growing doubt and unbelief around us?);

2 issues relating to the history of Christian-Muslim relations (e.g. the first six centuries of Christianity, the early spread of Islam, the Crusades, the later empires of Islam, Western imperialism, Christianity and Islam as missionary movements, the establishment of the state of Israel, Christians in the Middle East and the Muslim world today, Muslims in the West, Islam and the West);

3 questions about belief.

In exploring questions of belief, I tried to move away from the polemics and even the apologetics of the past that focus on the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the crucifixion and the corruption of the Bible, the four major flash points. I used instead a very simple model of two overlapping circles, in which the area of overlap represents areas of common ground between the two faiths, summed up in seven simples propositions: God creates; God is one; God reveals; God loves; God judges; God forgives; God rules. Those who are familiar with Cragg's writing will realise that this model is inspired by the approach summed up in this memorable sentence of his: 'The question is not whether, but how?' In other words, the question between Christians and Muslims is not whether God is one or not, or whether he loves or does not love, but rather how, in what sense does God love? If Christians and Muslims, therefore, can begin by agreeing with these seven propositions, it ought to be possible to come closer to each other as we share our understanding and our experience of what they mean to us.

During this last semester I have been teaching a course on Muslim-Christian Relations in the Near East School of Theology. For five sessions In May and June we opened the class up in the late afternoon to people from the community and spent two hours each week with five different Muslim speakers – three men and two women, three Sunnis and two Shi'ites. Sheikh Muhammad was the first speaker, and the second was the Director of a network of Islamic educational institutions. Another was the Head Teacher of an Islamic primary school near our college, and the third was a doctoral student working on a feminist reading of the Qur'ānic *surah* of Mary. The last was Dr Mahmoud Ayoub, a well-known Lebanese Shi'ite scholar who has taught for many years in Canada and the US. In the first hour we asked the speakers to present whatever they wanted from their own area of expertise for thirty minutes and then answer questions. In the second hour we asked each speaker to respond to the chapter 'An Agenda for Dialogue' which I had given them beforehand. All the speakers were generally positive about the chapter and seemed to appreciate the general approach. These are a few observations about their responses.

All the speakers commented freely on the various contextual questions. There were clearly enough issues in the Lebanese context to keep us busy for a long time! One was quite upset with the question that I had raised: 'Was it a majority of Muslims who dissociated themselves from 11th September?' To him it was self-evident that the vast majority of Muslims all over the world had no sympathy whatsoever for Osama bin Laden.

There was a strange reluctance to engage with historical issues about relations between Christians and Muslims over fourteen hundred years. One speaker said emphatically 'Islam is never a warlike religion'. Dr Ayoub was the only one who addressed the question of imperialisms, Christian and Islamic. His response was that while there has certainly been such a thing as Islamic imperialism, it has never been so far-reaching and devastating in its effects as some examples of Western imperialism, as in Latin America.

Few of the speakers seemed able or willing to understand the feelings of Christians who have lived as minorities under Islamic rule for centuries. In their view the

dhimma system was an enlightened way of living with pluralism of religious belief and practice, and far in advance of anything developed in the Western Christian context before the modern period. They found it hard to believe that Armenians, or Christians from Iran and the Sudan could have had negative experiences of Islam.

Only two speakers addressed any of the issues concerning beliefs. One speaker said, 'Yes, Christians are monotheists'. But he also said about the incarnation, 'God could do it, but he did not do it'. One was prepared to accept that Jesus was crucified, but was still unwilling to accept any idea of atonement. . Sheikh Muhammad described the seven propositions about God as 'brilliant' and invited the whole group to his centre for an evening to continue the discussion.

How could we begin to discern the Spirit in this process? At the end of the series the whole class were excited to feel that something significant had been achieved. We had got well beyond the initial stages of compliments and polite formalities, and instead of simply talking about dialogue, we had actually been engaging in some serious dialogue covering a wide range of issues. Some misunderstandings had been removed – on both sides. Sometimes we felt that we were narrowing down the areas of difference between us, so that we weren't as far apart as we were at first. At other times the differences seemed as if they were even greater than they had been at the beginning. Alongside the sense of achievement, however, there was also the inevitable feeling of frustration. While there had been some real communication both ways, we couldn't help feeling that the dialogue had only just begun, and that we needed many more hours of meeting and conversation together to go deeper into all kinds of issues. The legacy of fourteen centuries of sometimes difficult relationships is not likely to be transformed overnight!

Conclusion

Does Pneumatology offer us a way out of the impasse that is created by Christology in Christian-Muslim dialogue? It certainly holds out some hope because of all the verses about the spirit/Spirit in the Qur'an, and no doubt provides new areas of discussion for those who have reached deadlock in the other familiar controversies. If Christians believe that the Spirit is at work outside the Christian community, and if he really is like the wind that blows where it wills, Christians should be eager to see and to feel every possible trace of that wind in their engagement with Muslims and with Islam. Sooner or later, however, we will have to come back to the difficult questions about Jesus, son of Mary. So while I wish with all my heart that the Spirit could offer us a way out or a way through, I am not sure that this way will be as significant and fruitful as some would hope. But in spite of this, I hope we've seen that we still have plenty to talk about – both with Muslims and among ourselves – as we try to discern the Spirit in our engagement with Islam.

Engaging with Muslims

Tarek Mitri

As we engage in a genuine dialogue with our Muslim neighbours we do not refrain, at times, from exercising or claiming the right to be wrong. But we learn to be more cautious with the right to be simplistic or ideological. For Christians approaching Islam and the realities of Muslims, there is nothing more hazardously simplistic than sensationalist images. Likewise, nothing is more deceptively ideological than culturalism and essentialism. Millions of uncritical consumers of information are made to see the world in the form of clear images, short stories and quotes. But undecoded images and texts little informed by context may conceal or blur, rather than unfold, the complexities of diverse and ever-changing situations.

For its part, the culturalist perception combines religious relativism and the superiority of the secular humanist culture. Medieval Christians defined their superiority over Muslims in religious terms. At present, many of their counterparts take pride in their precedence and outdistance over Muslims, on the course of religious scepticism and secularist inclination. A few decades ago, many people, not only sociologists and philosophers of religions, searched for an essence common to all religions. Without much embarrassment, they discredited the Christian claim to uniqueness. There was a widespread interest in similarities among religions. Today, the balance is in favour of those who do not see similarities but differences. It is not uncommon to see people rushing to explain terrorist violence in the light of what they perceive to be distinctive about Islam. Thus, they fail to see that such violence is not grounded in traditional Islamic values. But, quite the contrary, it is provoked by the loss of such values without a genuine compensation offered by modernity, often unaccomplished or imposed.

Expressions of essentialism: crude or subtle

The emphasis on distinctiveness and discontinuity draws heavily on essentialism. In many cases sociological realities of Muslims, the diversity of their cultural and political conditions are seen to be essentially the same. For those unable or unwilling to recognise their plurality, comparisons of national realities in the Muslim world turn into analogies, and specific situations that do not conform to the preconceived model are singled out as exceptions, which confirm the rule. Essentialism does not go unnoticed. It is likely to be challenged, even in times of war. Once identified and confronted with critical knowledge or life experience, its rudimentary expressions loose much of their credibility. But in its subtle and learned forms, essentialism remains influential. It confirms crude prejudices and stereotypes. At best, it softens them.

In a recent book, the orientalist Bernard Lewis attempts to identify the root causes behind the tragic fall of Islam from the intellectual and cultural grandeur it commanded in the Middle Ages. In proposing to answer the question 'what went wrong', he looks incisively into the various facets of western impact, from law to music, and the Ottoman response. Understandably, he privileges what he knows best. But he ends his perceptive historical inquiry with a gross generalisation. In his concluding chapter he deals with Islam as if it were one giant entity. Muslims of an

undifferentiated Middle East have the feeling, he asserts, that history somehow betrayed them. To the question 'What went wrong?' he suggests they substituted the question 'Who did this to us?' leading only to 'neurotic fantasies and conspiracy theories'. If the peoples of the Middle East continue on the present path, he adds as he hardly dissimulates the passion of an ideologue, 'the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity'.[155]

Another recurring ideological approach is exemplified by those who argue that the inferiority of Christians under Islamic rule is an embodiment of a transhistorical *dhimma* or covenant. Bat Ye'or, a widely quoted Israeli author, bestows an immutable character on being a subdued Christian, or Jew, under Islam. In her view, recent changes are of little relevance, as Islam is resurgent in the form of Islamism. No modern cultural or political movement achieved an irreversible improvement of their status of inferior minorities. In fact, she rebukes Christians from the Arab world for having believed that they could modernise Islam and reconcile it with their idea of a nation. She adds, in a reprehensive tone, that the patriotic discourse adopted by these Christians is the expression of an internalised *dhimmitude*.[156]

Unsurprisingly she looks for historical sources that seem to corroborate the unchanging model of majority-minority relations in the Islamic world. Consequently, she does not suggest any but the 'Israeli option' for Christians to pursue. Blaming them for not having dared to imitate the Jews, her concern for their fate is meant to argue for an essential intolerance of Islam. To be sure, her comparison between Christians and Jews 'under Islam' is an additional but not so common apologetic tool for portraying Zionism as a liberation project for oppressed Jews, not only in Europe, but also in the Islamic world. The anachronistic twist does not seem to embarrass her.

Historical realities: complexity and plurality

It is needless to say that the exclusive use of one hermeneutical key does not enable us to embrace the complexity of broader Christian-Muslim relations through history. At the global level, they have known rivalry and war. Feelings of contempt and superiority were strong on both sides but they were tempered, even in times of military confrontation as in the Crusades, with feelings of doubt, curiosity and even admiration. It is often forgotten that there were some rich and fertile encounters, in the realms of life and ideas alike. One of the features of our historical memories, as deplorable as it may be, has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and reproaches drown the voices of comprehension. In times of tensions and conflicts, a significant number of Christians demonstrate that they have passively inherited certain prejudices, mostly in the religious realm.

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155. Bernard Lewis – *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

156. Bat Ye'or – *The Dhimmi. Jews and Christians under Islam* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985); *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam. From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985); *Islam and Dhimmitude. Where Civilizations Collide* (Cranbury, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985).

Traditional universes were self-contained. Exclusivist and reductionist attitudes towards the religious other were prevailing. John of Damascus and many of his followers saw in Islam a Jewish-Christian heresy. Muslim religious scholars affirm that the Council of Nicea had corrupted the Gospel and associated Jesus with divinity: therefore, the Qur'anic revelation alone restores the truth of Christianity. Before the rise of Islam, Christianity had established categories for the religious other: Jew, pagan and heretic. When Christians encountered Muslims they perceived their religious otherness in terms of these categories. They did not use the words of Muslims and Islam. Instead they used ethnic terms such as Arabs or biblical such as Ishmaelite, Hagarean[157] and Saracen[158] – did not Sarah send Hagar away empty? The Muslim invaders were scourges sent by God to punish Christians for their sins. But this was no small gain to be rescued from Roman imperial oppression, writes the ninth century Syrian Christian chronicler Dionysius Tel Mahre.[159] Sebeos the Armenian[160] had written as early as 661 that that God granted to Arabs the lands he had promised to Abraham and gave them victory over the impious Byzantines. Also in the seventh century, we know of at least one mirror image of Sebeos views. Anastasios of Sinai[161] sees the Arab invasions as a punishment for the monophysitism of Heraclius.

The Muslim strength and unity coincided with Byzantine weakness. The swift early conquests of Muslims confirmed their belief that God was on their side. This self-assured sense of divine mission was certainly a key factor in the success and rapidity of subsequent conquests. They did not fight against Christians or force them to convert, but granted them freedom to practice their religion and offered protection under tutelage. The various *dhimma* pacts reflected this notion, with varying degrees and forms of Christian subordination. The guiding principle of the *dhimma* pact stated: 'to them belongs whatever belongs to us, and incumbent upon them is whatever is incumbent upon us'. A political allegiance, involving a certain form of submission, materialised in the paying of a poll tax, *jizya*.

Islamic early history bears witness, especially during the formative phase of Arab-Islamic civilisation, to a capability of inviting and consequently integrating the contribution that Christians were able, and eager, to offer. They had even an opportunity to influence the self-definition of the dominant community. They were instrumental, through transmission – but also creation – in the various fields of human knowledge, in the construction of a religiously rationalised non-Christian order. They posed many of the critical questions and provided much of the material and method with which Muslims could frame their own answers. But they were pushed toward the margin when the task was done.

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157. 'Hagarean', 'Ishmaelite' are Greek terms used by St John of Damascus (*De Haresibus* 100.1) and subsequent Christian writers to refer to Muslims, in the belief that they were descended from Ishmael, the son of Abraham by Hagar.
158. 'Saracen' was used originally to refer by pre-Islamic Christian authors to refer to desert Arabs, but subsequently applied by St John of Damascus (*De Haresibus* 100.1) and later writers (including Crusaders) to refer to Muslims. John allegorically derives its meaning as *Sara-kēnos*, from the narrative in Genesis 21.10–18 according to which Sarah sent Hagar away 'empty' (*kēnos*).
159. Syrian Orthodox (Monophysite) patriarch of Edessa from 818 to 845. The *Syriac Chronicle* of Zuqnin was pseudonymously attributed to him.
160. Seventh-century Armenian bishop; the *Armenian Chronicle* (661) is attributed to him.
161. Greek Orthodox (Melkite) monk at St Catherine's monastery, Sinai in the late seventh century, and popular writer on spiritual matters.

Even when still a numerical majority in many parts of the Muslim Empire, Christians turned inwards and closed upon themselves. Their creative urge and cultural achievement became confined largely to preservation. In addition, there were times where suspicion of, and pressure on, Christians accelerated a process of marginalisation. Christian communities, or fractions of them, identified, or were perceived to identify, with external enemies of the Muslim *ummah.* Distrust lead to the elaboration and enforcement of a more rigid code of *dhimmi* rights and obligations.

It is true that legal inferiority and occasional changes in political loyalties brought about an erosion of Christians' energies, but tolerance ensured their survival. They were still able to be a partner in dialogue, not only in the apologetic mode. Notwithstanding the many limitations imposed on social inter-action and equitable civil relationships, collaboration and exchange was possible. Genuine encounters occurred between persons. At the popular level, ways of life and sentiments were shared with an almost identical sense of transcendence, confidence in Divine Providence and humble submission to the will of God. Among intellectuals, a genuine dialogue was, parallel to apologetics, mediated through philosophy. Many spiritual figures were not immune to one another's influence. Christians were not insensitive to what was said about Jesus, the 'Muslim Jesus' as the title of a new book calls an anthology of Muslim texts.[162] The 'Seal of Holiness' as ibn Arabi[163] calls him, Jesus was markedly venerated by Muslim mystics.

Be that as it may, the concern for self-preservation and survival defined a circumscribed entity. The *dhimma* pact reached its most elaborate form of codification in the *millet* system under the Ottoman Empire. *Millets* were not nations, as often suggested, with the Empire being a sort of multinational association. They were multi-cultural and multi-lingual religious communities. The world *millet* comes from the Qur'anic Arabic word *milla*, which means creed or religious way. The millet system followed the *dhimma* principle of a contractual relationship. Religious communities had their own administrative and juridical institutions under the authority of the Churches' hierarchies. The Islamic central power exercised an overall control but did not interfere in the internal functioning of *millets* .

Very soon, it became evident that the non-territorial *millets* were not immune to foreign intervention. European support to different Christian communities modified gradually the balance of power within the Ottoman Empire. Projects of national revival and emancipation were at work among Christians. At the same time, their interests were an alibi for outsiders' interference. The cultural component of religious plurality was greatly affected. The diffusion of western education through missionary schools accentuated differences between communities. Christians were opened to a new type of culture to which Muslims had limited access. This acculturation provided the hitherto weaker Christians with a new means of self-affirmation. For them, Western influence was also frequently a source of economic prosperity and subtle forms of political power. Majority-minority relations were thus modified. New political opportunities permitted some Christian communities, or fractions of communities, to move rapidly, some would say abruptly, from passive acceptance of the *millet* system into a rather militant

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162. Tarif Khalidi – *The Muslim Jesus. Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).

163. Abū Bakr Muḥammad Muhyī-d-Din ibn al-'Arabī, Sufi mystical writer and practitioner from Andalucia (1165–1240).His teaching identified a spiritual state in which the mystic was joined to the spiritual nature of Jesus.

nationalist and separatist strategy. This sheds some light on the subsequent tragic massacres and deportations of Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks and others.

The modern pact of citizenship

But there were Christians who were opposed, sometimes passionately, to the separatist tendencies of their co-religionists. Some opted for modern and universalist ideologies. This enabled them to shake loose their minority identity that they thought to be to be retrogressive and artificially divisive. They emphasised their common ethno-cultural identity with Muslims as the basis of independence and modern nation building. The patriotic bond cemented opposition to the Ottoman central and oppressive power and later to dominating European powers. Thus in the struggle for, and achievement of, independence was established the pact of citizenship, superseding the former *dhimma* pact. In the case of Palestine, the pact of citizenship was affirmed as Christians and Muslims suffered together dispossession and expulsion and as they resist today against occupation, on their long and painful road to independence.

In the Arab world and beyond, it remains true that milletist attitudes did not fade away. In the search for independence and liberation, Islamic self-awareness was intensified. A sometimes-violent self-assertion gained visibility and appeal against the failure of modern, more or less secular independent and authoritarian governments. In some instances, this has led to anti-Christian feelings. It was said, and believed, that the colonial powers, and national governments later, gave a preferential treatment to Christians and used them to benefit their domination. No matter how questionable these perceptions, there will always be people, today like yesterday, who cannot, or do not dare, oppose those who make them angry. They look unconsciously for substitutes and often find them.

The globalisation of Christian-Muslim relations

In recent years, it is has become difficult to discard the resonating effects in many parts of the world of a discourse on the global confrontation between Christianity or the West and Islam, even if the contemporary western world has been largely self-defined as secular and Muslims gradually perceived it as such. Non-western Christians can be identified culturally and at times politically with the West, in spite of their often affirmed cultural and religious distinction.

In the Muslim world, ideological thought patterns represent the West as selfish, materialistic and dominating. In the West, the equivalent thought patterns perceive Islam as irrational, fanatical and expansionist. In the age of global communication and migration, these thought patterns, in the variety of their subtle and not-so-subtle expressions, foster antagonism. It is true that the issue of Islam and the West is more complex and more contingent upon contemporary concerns than either proponents or opponents of culturalist politics would imply. Many of the problems, such as foreign hegemony and intervention, terrorism and international threats, are confused and exaggerated. In fact, they are determined by the power politics of states and forces within different nations. But it remains true that the end of worldwide ideological confrontations has favoured the re-emergence of perceptions where Islam and the West exist as subjective, imaginary constructs, which influence the way each sees the other.

In addition to war-prone attitudes and fears that are fostered by the tendency to globalise Christian-Muslim relations, one could refer to the way in which are advocated, in the West, the rights of Christian minorities in predominantly Islamic countries. The logic of reciprocity, borrowed by religious communities from states, favours a world view opposing an Islamic *ummah* with Christendom, no matter if both are not historical realities in the present time, each having a ramification in the 'abode' of the other. Asymmetrically diverse, minorities are sometimes perceived as victims and not actors. Their ability to act as bridge-builders is severely jeopardised when they are forced into a condition of hostages. Such a role of mediation, that many of them continue nevertheless to play, is put at risk by when human rights violations are addressed selectively. Many of the interests of Christian minorities cannot be safeguarded and promoted except in conjunction with those of the Muslim majorities among whom they live. Upholding the rights of Christians in the Muslim world, in a way that that confirms the suspicion that minority protection serves the purposes of foreign intervention, reinforces the perception that they are alien in their own countries or disloyal to them. Defending the rights of Christians in opposition to their Muslim co-citizens and neighbours, with whom they share culture and national identity, aggravates the suspicion of majorities towards minorities seen as an instrument of a real or potential threat instigated by foreign and powerful forces

Affirming citizenship and de-globalising tensions

The universal principles of co-citizenship, equality, the rule of law and human rights need to be in the heart of the 'dialogue of life' between Christians and Muslims. Their universality is often affirmed notwithstanding differences in approaches and emphasis. Greater is the urgency of co-operation between Christians and Muslims in upholding together these values, in every region of the world. These issues need to be addressed, theoretically and practically, with renewed vigour all over the world. Co-citizenship is the encounter as equal actors in society and polity who, while influenced by culture, religion and ethnicity, cannot be reduced to the roles assigned to them in the name of communal identities, loyalties and perceived interests.

There are many Christians and Muslims who have become increasingly aware that human rights should not be implemented selectively. For people of faith, it is crucial to insist on the indivisibility of human rights, to reconcile individual rights with those of communities and to stand by the victims whatever their ethnic or religious identity. The protection of human rights should not be conditioned by confessional solidarity, no matter how legitimate. This needs to be equally true of advocacy and respect of international legality. The universality of ethical and political norms that sustain international law is recognised across the religious divide and invites consistency. But this is not the case. One striking example is the legitimating of the use of force against one country which does not comply with UN Security Council resolutions while another country in the same region is privileged with impunity while systematically ignoring resolutions of the same Council (there are 32 of them since 1967).

More than ever before, Christians and Muslims are called to defend a number of common universal values that draw them nearer to each other. In the name of these values they are called to join efforts in the context of communal tensions and conflicts that are exaggeratedly identified with religious difference. Some reflections on this responsibility are proposed by a study document drafted by a group of Muslim and

Christian partners in dialogue, and issued by the World Council of Churches. To be sure, Christianity and Islam carry, though in different ways that are region-specific, deep historical memories. They appeal, although variably, to universal loyalties. But they come to be seen as a cause of conflict while often they are not more than an intensifying feature of disputes whose main causes are outside religion. There are cases where a conflict in one place, with its local causes and character, is perceived and instrumentalised as part of a conflict in another, with its separate and specific causes and character. So enmities in one part of the world spill over into situations of tension in other regions. An act of violence in one place is used to confirm stereotypes of the 'enemy' in another place or even to provoke revenge attacks elsewhere in the world. What is otherwise a remote conflict becomes a local problem. Neighbours hold each other accountable for the wrongs attributed to their co-religionists elsewhere. Unless they are prepared to dissociate themselves publicly from those with whom they share a common faith, they are accused of complicity with them.

It is therefore crucial to offer a prospect counteracting processes that tend to globalise conflicts. Attention to specific local causes of conflicts helps in identifying solutions. This is not possible unless the leaders of both communities refuse to be drawn into others' conflicts on the basis of uncritical response to calls for solidarity among adherents to one faith. In affirming common principles of peace, justice and reconciliation, parties to local conflicts are helped to release Islam and Christianity from the burden of self-serving interpretations and sectional interests. Christian and Islamic convictions can then constitute a basis for critical engagement with human weakness and defective social and economic orders. Thus Muslims and Christians learn that Christianity and Islam are not two monolithic blocs confronting each other. In dialogue with each other 'they understand justice to be a universal value grounded in their faith and are called to take sides with the oppressed and marginalised irrespective of their religious identity. Justice is an expression of a religious commitment that extends beyond the boundaries of one's own religious community. Muslims and Christians uphold their own religious values and ideals when they take a common stand in solidarity with, or in defence, of the victims of oppression and exclusion'.[164]

164. World Council of Churches – *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001).

Pneumatological reflections on engaging with Muslims

Michael Ipgrave

Tarek Mitri's paper draws attention to the wide variety of patterns within which Christians and Muslims interact in our contemporary world and in history. He warns against essentialising and globalising attempts to simplify these patterns by reducing them to one type, and he identifies co-citizenship based on shared values as the most positive arena for Christian-Muslim encounter and the most fertile ground for dialogue. He does not explicitly go on to draw out the implications of his view for Christian theology in general, or for the discernment of the Spirit in particular. Nevertheless, the rich and diverse map he provides of Christian-Muslim relations suggests at least three pneumatological themes which can be cross-referenced with some of the biblical pointers to the Spirit's work. For this cross-referencing to have any validity, an initial premise which must be assumed is that the Spirit's operation is not to be limited solely to Christians, but must also be discerned within the world and particularly within the encounters of human history.

The Spirit and memory

Mitri rightly points out that 'one of the features of our historical memories ... has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and reproaches drown the voices of comprehension'. There has certainly been a tendency, in Western historiography at least, to conceptualise Christian-Muslim relations in terms of the confrontation of two competing and mutually exclusive religious blocs. Such a view in itself, though, involves selection of some experiences rather than others, and their interpretation according to a particular mental framework. The reality of interaction in history is far more complex than this, as David Kerr has pointed out: 'The European / Western history of Christian-Muslim relations is but one contextual experience. It is itself a varied experience, inspired by competing myths: the dominant notion of Christian-Muslim confrontation that focuses on external social aspects of Islam is counterpoised by the tradition of *convivencia* in which Christians have searched with Muslims, and Jews, for a common language of faith'.[165]

A corollary of taking seriously this diversity of historical encounters, and the role played by our own selective readings, is then a recognition of the degree of freedom that is given us, not to change the past itself, but to change the way in which the past is remembered in our present. The challenge here is to retrieve forgotten or neglected memories, and to integrate them into a re-imagined vision of the past which reinstates co-existence, co-operation and colloquy as genuine and actualised possibilities beside separation, conflict and dispute. Such a realignment of our memories will involve elements of repentance as well as celebration,[166] and may require a radical reorientation of our relations to our neighbours in Muslim or other communities.

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165. David Kerr, 'Christian-Muslim relations: lessons from history', in Michael Ipgrave, ed., *The Road Ahead: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (London: Church House, 2002, p. 36).

166. Cf on this the important work of the Vatican's International Theological Commission on the 'purification of memory' within the church – one of the specific historical themes examined by the Commission was that of 'force in the service of truth', under which rubric they included *inter alia* the experience of the Crusades.

Repentance, celebration and reorientation can all be seen as signs of the Spirit's work, and the pneumatological theme of a recasting of memories becomes still clearer in, for example, the famous gospel passage describing Jesus' preaching in the synagogue of his home town of Nazareth.[167] Here, the Lord not only announces the present fulfilment of prophetic promises, but challenges his hearers' memories of their own nation's history as he draws out the implications of the stories of the prophets of old. It was to a widow of the Sidonian town of Zarephath, not to any Israelite widow, that Elijah was sent; and it was a Syrian leper, not any Israelite leper, whom Elisha healed. Jesus is here precisely challenging the received, exclusionary and confrontational, reading of history by pointing to the way in which God has worked through those outside the ethno-religiously defined community of Israel. Both the text which he reads and Luke's description of him as 'filled with the power of the Spirit'[168] make it clear that this re-telling of sacred history is to be seen as the Spirit's work – and, as may be expected from the Spirit's work, it generates intense opposition from those unwilling to adopt the new mental map Jesus offers. If we do accept the Spirit's message, though, the past can cease to be an oppressive force. As our memories are reshaped, we are set free to share with our neighbours new, and true, stories, of the richness of what we have been for one another; and as our imaginations are enlarged, we are given new glimpses of the fullness of what we could in future be for one another.

The Spirit and humanity

Mitri's paper emphasises 'co-citizenship' as the proper basis for Muslim-Christian relations. This seems to be presented as a shared alternative to conceptual frameworks which would propose fundamentally different approaches to treating with the 'other' in different situations – for example, Muslim minorities in 'Christendom' societies on the one hand, and Christian *dhimmi* communities in Muslim countries on the other. A recognition of the rights owed to another as citizens is thus the locally contextualised expression of an acknowledgement of the humanity that we share with one another. To ground our relationships in the sharing of our humanity is to resist the division of people according to their religious identities in such a way that we owe less responsibility to 'the other', or more responsibility to 'our own'. Moreover, this is experienced not as an abstract principle, but as an existential challenge meeting me in my fellow citizen.

One of the most powerful, yet at the same time elusive, episodes in the gospels expressing this sense of the transcendence of religious divisions is the dialogue of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well.[169] This is certainly a pneumatological text: it revolves around the theme of water, which is a sign of 'spirit' in the Fourth Gospel,[170] and at the pivotal point of his discourse Jesus declares: 'God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth'.[171] Viewed dialogically, the work of the Spirit can perhaps be identified on three levels. In the first place, that a dialogue is taking place at all – a fact which causes some consternation both to the

167. Lk 4.16–30.
168. Is 61.1; Lk 4.14.
169. Jn 4.7–26.
170. Cf especially Jn 7.39.
171. Jn 4.24.

woman herself and to Jesus' disciples[172] – is a sign of the enabling medium of the Spirit supporting a flow of communication through what would be considered a near impenetrable barrier. Secondly, within that dialogue, Jesus' affirmation that 'we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews'[173] constitute a definite acknowledgement of his rootedness in, and assent to, a given religious tradition. In other words, engaging in dialogue does not at all imply any weakening of the identity through which believers stand in a relationship with God. Thirdly, though, at the same time it is precisely through that relationship, the salvific significance of which is reaffirmed, that a wider sense of access and fellowship is opened up in the vision of a humanity in which Jews, Samaritans and others all have an equally secure place. The Spirit here thus works in some way to generate a universality which is grounded in a particular and contextual belonging.[174]

The Spirit and apostolate

Much Christian-Muslim dialogue takes as its starting point common figures of prophetic history – notably, Abraham and Jesus. These have in common – however differently their status is interpreted by Christians and Muslims – a vocation of apostolate, in the sense of being 'sent' by God to humanity. While Mitri reminds us of the rich traditions of the 'Muslim Jesus, as sketched by Tarif Khalidi,[175] and the 'Sufi Jesus' stemming from the school of ibn Arabi, it remains true on the one hand that honest engagement with the Qur'ānic, Biblical and traditional material discloses as much divergence as convergence in the ways these 'shared' figures are received by Christians and Muslims, while on the other hand the mission and significance of Muhammad remains to be taken seriously by most Christian theology.

Amidst the disputes of Christology, prophetology, and what might be called apostolology, is it possible to discern the work of the Spirit? Three questions can be distinguished here for Christians. The first two concern, respectively, Muslim interpretations of figures known from Christian tradition, particularly Jesus himself, and Christian responses to Muhammad. A key pneumatological criterion in both these regards is the statement that 'By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God'.[176] To interpret the significance of this, though, will require a detailed engagement with Muslim accounts of both Jesus and Muhammad. The third question relates not to the content of these dialogues but rather to this process of engagement: is it possible to discern the Spirit within the exploration of differences between Christians and Muslims in their understanding of these God-sent figures? Can the Spirit lead us into an honest and respectful appreciation of each other's faith, rather than into arid and repetitious disputes? Spirit as the medium, rather than the theme, of dialogue was perhaps one of our experiences of *Yr Ysbryd.*

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172. Jn 4.9, 27.
173. Jn 4.22.
174. A similar sense of universal humanity validated by a particular human reality (the resurrection of 'a man' appointed by God) can be found in Paul's Areopagus speech, Ac 17.22–31, though 'spirit' language is not explicitly used there.
175. Tarif Khalidi – *The Muslim Jesus. Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001).
176. 1 Jn 4.2

The Spirit of God in the Qur'ān and the Bible

Mohammad Kazem Shaker

The terms 'Spirit of God' and 'Holy Spirit' are common to several great religions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Bible frequently speaks of Spirit and a number of verses in the Qur'ān have been devoted to the Spirit and its role in life. This paper aims to present the meaning, reality and functions of the Holy Spirit through a comparative analysis between verses of the most popular sacred books – the holy Bible and the holy Qur'ān.

The paper consists of several parts. At the first stage, we examine the equivalent words of spirit in Arabic, Hebrew and Greek. Applications of the Spirit in the Qur'ān and analysing them is the next stage. The functions of the Spirit and its reality according to the Bible is the third step. Finally, some comparative studies such as 'levels of life', 'difference between man's spirit and his soul', and 'evil spirit' will be presented.

A lexicological survey

As the scope of this paper includes the Old and the New Testaments and the Qur'ān, it requires a brief look at the equivalent words of 'spirit' in Arabic, Hebrew and Greek.

Ruḥ *in Arabic*

The Arabic equivalent word of 'spirit' is *ruḥ*, consisting of three letters: *rā* (r), *wāw* (w), and *ḥā* (ḥ). *Ruḥ* has been derived from *riḥ*, and *riḥ* means 'wind'.[177] The various usages of *ruḥ* in Arabic texts, maybe categorized under three major headings: (i) material breath, (ii) vital force in animals, (iii) the immaterial part of humans (soul) – which dwells within the body during life, but after death is freed from it.[178]

Ruaḥ *in Hebrew*

The Hebrew equivalent word of 'spirit' is *ruaḥ*. *Ruaḥ* means vital breath, wind and air. *Ruaḥ* in Hebrew, and *ruḥ* in Arabic come from a Semitic root.[179]

Pneuma *in Greek*

The equivalent word of 'spirit' in Greek is *pneuma*. This word also originally, means wind, air, and breath.[180]

As can be seen, in Hebrew, Greek and Arabic languages the same word means both spirit and breath or wind. Therefore, it can be said that the above words originally, meant 'vital breath' and by extension, denote the vital principle and inner life in living bodies. And by more extension, they refer to a glorious appearance and manifestation of a delicate object. It can therefore, be said that 'spirit' is the manifestation of a

177.ibn Fāris, 1983.
178.ibn Manṣūr, 1983; Rāghib, 1970; Fīrūzābādī, 1986.
179.James Hastings, 1920.
180.James Hastings,1920.

gentle thing that comes into existence with blowing softly, in the same way as 'wind' and 'breath' move in space. In some Islamic traditions it has been said that 'spirit' is a pleasant and light breeze of the celestial world.[181]

Spirit in the Qur'ān

The word *ruḥ* is used in the holy Qur'ān twenty one times. The word does not refer to the same object in every case. Based on their contexts, however, these occurrences may be classified under seven headings as will be shown below:

(1) A heavenly being

Three verses of the Qur'ān indicate that *spirit* is a heavenly creature of God.

> Therein (in the night of power) come down the angels and the Spirit by God's permission, on every Errand.[182]
>
> The angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years.[183]
>
> The Day (the resurrection day) that the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by (God) Most Gracious, and He will say what is right.[184]

The juxtaposition of *angels* and *spirit* in the above verses implies that: (i) *spirit* is a sublime and immaterial existent being similar to an angel, and (ii) *spirit* is one of God's independent creations. Thus *spirit* essentially is differentiated from *angels*.

(2) Gabriel

In the two following verses the words 'trustworthy spirit' (*ruḥ al-amīn*) and 'holy spirit' (*ruḥ al-qudus*) mean 'Gabriel':

> With it came down the spirit of Faith and Truth, to thy heart and mind, that thou mayest admonish, in the perspicuous Arabic tongue.[185]
>
> Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord in Truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a Guide and Glad Tidings to Muslims.[186]

The 97th verse of *al-Baqarah* implies that none but Gabriel is intended by the two verses above. For it expresses:

> Say: Whosoever is an enemy to Gabriel – he it was that brought it (revelation) down upon thy heart.[187]

181.Kulaynī, 1980.
182.Q. 97.4.
183.Q. 70:.4.
184.Q. 78.38.
185.Q. 26.193–5.
186.Q. 16.102.
187.Q. 2.97.

Nevertheless, it would be possible that both the Holy Spirit and the archangel Gabriel have sent the revelation down upon the heart of the holy prophet of Islam.

(3) The immaterial origin of human life

Some verses indicate that after creating the human body, God breathed a special spirit of His own into it.

> When I have fashioned him (Adam) – in due proportion – and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him.[188]
>
> But He fashioned him (man) in due proportion, and breathed into him of His spirit.[189]
>
> And (remember) her (Mary) who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.[190]

It is interesting that the style of expression in each of the three verses is the same, although the first concerns Adam, created without a father or mother, the third concerns Jesus, created without a father, and the second is about others who were created via their parents. This similarity implies, perhaps, that there is no difference between Adam, Jesus and the others, as all of them are human, a mixture of both material and spiritual elements.

(4) The confirmer for prophets and believers

In some verses of the Qur'ān, *ruḥ* and *ruḥ al-qudus* mean a power by which God strengthens His prophets and those who truly believe in Him:

> We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the holy spirit.[191]
>
> For such -believers mentioned above- He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself.[192]

(5) Revelation

According to classical interpretations, *spirit* in the following verses refers to the act of revelation:

> By His Command doth He send the Spirit (of inspiration) to any of His servants he pleases, that it may warn (men) of the Day of Mutual Meeting.[193]
>
> And thus have We, by Our Command, sent a spirit (inspiration) to thee: thou knewest not (before) what was Revelation, and what was Faith; but We have made the

188.Q. 15.29; 38.72.
189.Q. 32.9.
190.Q. 21.91.
191.Q. 2.87.
192.Q. 58.22.
193.Q. 40.15.

(Qur'ān) a Light, wherewith We guide such of Our servants as We will; and verily thou dost guide (men) to the Straight Way.[194]

The commentators say that *spirit* in the first verse means revelation to the prophets and in the second it means the revelation to the Prophet, Muhammad, that has been manifested in the holy Qur'ān.[195]

(6) The messenger of God to Mary

The Qur'ān expresses that God sent his own *spirit* down in bodily form, like a man, unto Mary concerning the creation of Jesus via virgin birth.

> Then We sent her our spirit, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: 'I seek refuge from thee to (God) Most Gracious: (come not near) if thou dost fear God'. He said: 'Nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord, to give thee the gift of a holy son'. She said: 'How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?' He said: 'So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, "That is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us." It is a matter (so) decreed.'[196]

From the expression 'to give thee the gift of a holy son' can be inferred that the mission of the messenger of God to Mary was not only bringing the good news to her about her son, but that he himself was an important agent in bringing about the existence of Jesus. It should be noted that the Qur'ān uses the term 'good news' concerning John, Ishmael and Isaac when the angel informs their parents about their birth.[197]

According to Luke, the angel 'Gabriel' has brought the good news about John to Zechariah, and about Jesus to Mary, but in a different way concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing about the existence of Jesus.

> But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.' ... The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news'.[198]

> But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you'.[199]

194.Q. 42.52.
195.al-Tabarī, 1987; Ālūsī, 1984.
196.Q. 19.17–19.
197.Q. 37.101, 112; 11.71; 51.28; 19.7.
198.Lk 1.13–15, 19.
199.Lk 1.30–35.

(7) Jesus

In the following verse of the Qur'ān, God introduces Jesus as a spirit of Himself:

> The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a spirit from Him.[200]

Analysis of the reality of the Spirit in the Qur'ān

The classical commentators have failed to present a coherent interpretation of 'spirit' (*ruḥ*). For example, some eminent commentators like al-Tabarī, al-Tabarsī, Zamakhsharī and Alusī have related around fifteen interpretations of *ruḥ*. The focus of the commentators has been on exegetical *hadiths* which were mostly narrated by followers of the Prophet's companions.[201]

However, Muḥammad Hosayn Tabātabā'ī, the author of *al-Mīzan fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, presents the most coherent view in regard to the verses in which the word *ruḥ* is used. Tabātabā'ī holds that despite the various applications of the word to different topics such as Gabriel, Jesus, the vital force and so on, the word is used in its real and main meaning. In other words, wherever the Qur'ān has used this word, it means that the object to which the word has been applied has 'real life'.[202] A study of Tabātabā'ī's *al-Mīzan* concerning *ruḥ* reveals that Qur'ānic *ruḥ* passages can be divided into two groups: (i) the verses in which the word *ruḥ* is used in an absolute sense (*al-ruḥ*), namely without any other qualifying words; and (ii) the verses in which the word *ruḥ* is used in conjunction with another word that limits the meaning (*ruḥ al-amīn, ruḥī, ruḥun menh*, etc).[203] From the verses of the first group it can be inferred that the *ruḥ* is a self-subsisting and heavenly being (not an angel). The verses of the second group introduce some manifestations of *ruḥ* in other beings. It seems that *ruḥ* has gently been joined to other beings like humans and angels and united with them. Regarding the relationship between these two kinds of *ruḥ*, Tabātabā'i holds that all manifestations of *ruḥ* in the second group are in some way the effects of the absolute *ruḥ*. In other words, the relationship between them is similar to the linking between the sun and its rays. Thus, we can conceive of two aspects of *ruḥ*: (i) the main *ruḥ* (absolute *ruḥ*) and (ii) a subordinate *ruḥ* (its rays manifested in other beings).

According to this interpretation of *ruḥ*, due to the very special relationship between the Spirit of God (the main *ruḥ*) and prophets, the latter have a high degree of *ruḥ* bestowed upon them, by means of which they have a superior power and awareness. Therefore, they are able to know many things from the unseen and to perform many extraordinary deeds, like giving life to a dead being.
Amongst the angels, Gabriel has a special position. He is full of the Spirit of God and is a bearer of *ruḥ*.[204] God sends him down to His prophets in order to blow *ruḥ* into their hearts. This results in a new and superior life. And also due to a special connection between Jesus and *ruḥ al-qudus*, he was able to speak with people in

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200.Q. 4.171.
201.al-Tabarī, 1987; Ālūsī, 1984; al- Zamakhsharī, 1966.
202.Tabātabā'ī, 1972.
203.[Tabātabā'ī], 1972.
204.Tabātabā'ī, 1972, vol.13.

childhood; he made the figure of a bird and breathed into it, and it became a bird; and he breathed into dead men and they became alive.

The Spirit of God in the Bible

Usages of the word 'spirit' in the Bible

Both the Old and New Testaments used the word 'spirit' many times: an approximate statistic taken from the King James version is: 'Spirit', 523; 'Spirit of God', 128; 'Holy Spirit', 24. Other than application of the word 'spirit', in the case of 'Spirit of God' or 'Holy Spirit', the Bible uses the word in various other meanings such as the following:

As the opposite of 'flesh' –

> Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.[205]
>
> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.[206]

In the same way the Qur'ān, referring to sacrifices of pilgrimage to Mecca, says:

> It is not their meat nor their blood that reaches God: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify God for His Guidance to you and proclaim the good news to all who do right.[207]

A quality in man –

> Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the LORD.[208]
>
> For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.[209]
>
> When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down.[210]

It seems that in many cases, applications of the word 'spirit', in particular evil spirits, refer to psychological qualities of man.

Evil spirit –

According to the Bible, evil spirits (unclean spirits) act against the Holy Spirit and are controlled by Satan (the devil). The approximate statistics regarding them are as follows: 'evil spirit', 47; 'unclean spirit', 17; 'devil',106; 'Satan', 49.

205.Jn 3.6.
206.Jn 4.24.
207.Q. 22.37.
208.Hos 5.4.
209.2 Tim 1.7.
210.Ruth 3.7.

Functions of Holy Spirit in the Bible

Both the Old and the New Testaments introduce the Holy Spirit as the agent of many roles in the universe and human life. We shall have a brief look at them. Paying due attention to the functions of the Holy Spirit will help us to gain a better understanding of the reality of the Spirit. It will suffice to mention the titles of these functions, with some accompanying quotations of the Bible that refer to them.

Old Testament

(1) Creating the universe and man

> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.[211]
>
> By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.[212]

(2) Giving and sustaining life in living beings

> The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.[213]
>
> The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life.[214]
>
> When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.[215]

(3) Removing life from the living being

> (When) you take away their spirit (breath), they expire and return to their dust; (when) you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.[216]
>
> If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust.[217]
>
> The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever.[218]

According to Islamic beliefs, at the end of this world there will be two kinds of breath. With the first one all living beings will die, and with the other on the day of resurrection all dead men will rise for judgment in the presence of God. The following verses of the Qur'ān might refer to these two important events:

211.Gen 1.2.
212.Ps 33.6.
213.Gen 2.7.
214.Job 33.4.
215.Ps 104.30.
216.Ps 104.29–30.
217.Job 34.14–15.
218.Is 40.7–8.

> The angels and the spirit ascend unto him in a Day the measure whereof is (as) fifty thousand years.[219]

– with the first breath wherewith all living beings will die, and:

> The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by (God) Most Gracious, and He will say what is right.[220]

– with the second breath wherewith humans will live again.

(4) Empowering people in some cases

Some verses of the Bible indicate that the Spirit of God bestows a higher degree of life, including a higher level of authority and awareness, on some humans who are eligible to receive it. In other words, the spirit of God comes upon people to empower them for specific tasks:

> Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abiezrites to follow him.[221]

> Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, chief of the Thirty, and he said: "We are yours, O David! We are with you, O son of Jesse! Success, success to you, and success to those who help you, for your God will help you." So David received them and made them leaders of his raiding bands.[222]

(5) Prophecy

> The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.[223]

> And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.[224]

> Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ... Moses said: ... I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them![225]

219.Q. 70.4.
220.Q. 78.38.
221.Jg 6.34.
222.1 Chron 12.18.
223.1 Sam 10.6.
224.Joel 2.28–29.
225.Num 11.25–26, 29.

(6) Revelation

> Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon me, and he told me to say: 'This is what the LORD says: That is what you are saying, O house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind.'[226]

> Then the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and said, 'This is what God says: "Why do you disobey the LORD's commands? You will not prosper. Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you."'[227]

(7) Inspiration

> The Spirit of God came upon Azariah son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, 'Listen to me, Asa and all Judah and Benjamin. The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.'[228]

It should be noted that in revelation, the words of God are revealed to a man and he reports them to people, but in inspiration the heart of man is impressed by the spirit of God, and he reports the inspired subject by his own words.

(8) Interpretation of dreams

> So Pharaoh asked them, 'Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?'[229]

> Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.) I said, 'Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me.'[230]

> There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. King Nebuchadnezzar your father-your father the king, I say-appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. This man Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.[231]

(9) Specific skills

> Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, cut and set stones, work in wood, and engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.[232]

226.Ezek 11.5.
227.2 Chron 24.20.
228.2 Chron 15.1–2.
229.Gen 41.38.
230.Dan 4.8–9.
231.Dan 5.11–12.
232.Ex 31.1–5.

(10) Miraculous transportation

> The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood.[233]

> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones.[234]

> Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.[235]

> Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the gate of the house of the LORD that faces east. There at the entrance to the gate were twenty-five men, and I saw among them Jazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people.[236]

(11) A new social life

> I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.[237]

(12) Providing guidance on the straight path

> Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.[238]

> A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD - and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.[239]

(13) Helping people to remember God

> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.[240]

In the New Testament

The New Testament also notes more or less the same functions for the Holy Spirit. In addition to these, it introduces some others such as 'baptising' and 'healing'.

233.Ezek 8.3.
234.Ezek 37.1.
235.Ezek 43.5.
236.Ezek 11.1.
237.Ezek 37.1.
238.Ps 143.10.
239.Is 11.1–2.
240.Ps 51.10–11.

(1) Prophecy

> In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.[241]

> Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.[242]

(2) Empowering people in some cases

> 'Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.[243]

> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...., to another miraculous powers.[244]

(3) Revelation

> This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.[245]

(4) Inspiration

> And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.[246]

(5) Illumination

> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.[247]

(6) Giving people wisdom

> To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom.[248]

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241. Ac 2.17–18.
242. 2 Pet 1.20–21.
243. Ac 4.29–31.
244. 1 Cor 12.7–10.
245. 1Cor 2.13.
246. Ac 20.22–23.
247. Ac 7.55–56.
248. 1Cor 12.8.

(7) Giving people knowledge

> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit.[249]

(8) Creating the love of God in man's heart

> And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.[250]

(9) Praying for believers

> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.[251]

(10) Providing guidance on the straight path

> You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.[252]
>
> Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.[253]

(11) Giving hope

> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.[254]

(12) Bringing information from the unseen world

> However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.[255]

(13) Baptising

> I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.[256]

249.1Cor 12.7–9.
250.Rom 5.5.
251.Ac 8.26–27.
252.Ac 8.9.
253.Ac 8.14.
254.Rom 15.13.
255.1 Cor 2.9–12.
256.Mt 3.11.

> But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.[257]

(14) Speaking in tongues

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.[258]

(15) Driving out demons

> But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.[259]

(16) Healing

> ...to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.[260]

> And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.[261]

The reality of the Holy Spirit

Regarding the reality of the Spirit, we have to answer these questions: Is the Holy Spirit God? If not, does it have a personified existence like humans and angels, or not? If yes, is he one of the angels – for instance, is he the angel Gabriel or not?

Is the Holy Spirit God?

According to the Qur'ān, the answer is absolutely, No. Also a large number of verses of the Bible including the Old and New Testaments indicate that the Holy Spirit is sent down upon people by God. Some may argue that a number of verses of the Bible, such as the following, imply that the Holy Spirit is God:

> Then Peter said, 'Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Did it not belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, was not

257.2 Thess 2.13.
258.Ac 2.1–4.
259.Mt 12.28.
260.1Cor 12.9.
261.1Cor 12.28.

> the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.'[262]
>
> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.[263]
>
> And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.[264]

Some might consider that the Holy Spirit in the first verse refers to God, and in the second Jesus saw it fit to include the name of the Holy Spirit during baptism alongside the name of the Father, and in the third Jesus taught that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is so serious, it will not be forgiven. Therefore, they would argue, it seems that this kind of description of the Holy Spirit fits the description of God; thus, he must be God. Nevertheless, it must be understood that in any writing or book there are probably two kinds of statements: (i) explicit statements, and (ii) ambiguous statements. The logical and linguistic method requires that we interpret the ambiguous statements by using the explicit statements. Referring to this principle in the process of interpreting religious texts, the Qur'ān itself says:

> He it is who has revealed to you the Book in which are clear revelations (that is, verses whose meaning is immediately clear). They are the substance of the Book, and there are others which are allegorical.[265]

On the other hand, it is possible for one act to be attributed to more than one person. For instance, we can attribute a policy of a minister to the minister and also to the whole government. Therefore, lying to the Holy Spirit could indeed be seen as lying to God. In addition, it is possible that the Holy Spirit is described as 'God' in a metaphorical sense. Having explained the above, we can conclude that the Holy Spirit is not God.

Is the Holy Spirit the angel Gabriel?

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit and the angel Gabriel as two distinct persons:

> But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth' ... Zechariah asked the angel, 'How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.' The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.'[266]

It is clear that the angel Gabriel was not talking about himself when he announced that John the Baptist would be filled with the Holy Spirit from birth.

262.Ac 3.4.
263.Mt 28.19.
264.Mt 12.31.
265.Q. 3.7.
266.Lk 1.13–19.

> In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.' Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.' 'How will this be,' Mary asked the angel, 'since I am a virgin?' The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.'[267]

In the above verses, the angel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit are two distinct persons. As previously explained, the apparent meaning of some verses of the Qur'ān verifies this idea, although many classical commentators believe the Holy Spirit is Gabriel.

Is the Holy Spirit a person?

With a close look at the functions of the Holy Spirit, we may understand that the Spirit of God is a manifestation of the power and will of God. In other words, the Spirit is the word of God's life which God gives to whom He pleases. People also may receive the spirit of God in proportion to their faith and righteousness. This can be illustrated with an example: when we are happy, we can transmit our happiness to others and consequently, they also become happy, but it is clear that 'happiness' is not a person, although it is a truth, but unites with man's spirit. God is a real, personal being with infinite glories and beautiful qualities; he is omnipresent and has power over all things, therefore whenever He wishes, he is able to give His gifts to whomsoever He wants, but His gifts are not persons *per se*. Of course, some angels such as Gabriel and some prophets such as Jesus, due to being filled with the word (power) of the Lord, might be perfect manifestations of the Spirit of God. It can probably be said that, according to the Bible, God gives His Spirit to some limitedly, and to others unlimitedly. The latter 'become' the Holy Spirit *per se*. Hence, the Qur'ān calls Gabriel and Jesus the Spirit of God. Likewise, the Bible remarks concerning Jesus:

> For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.[268]

And Paul says:

> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of

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267.Lk 1.26–35.
268.Jn 3.34.

> tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.[269]

However, some verses of the Bible do imply that the Holy Spirit is a person.

> We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.[270]

> The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.[271]

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.[272]

> The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.[273]

> In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.[274]

> But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.[275]

Some who believe that the spirit of God is a person might use the verses quoted above to reinforce their idea. As previously explained, we need to interpret the ambiguous verses by using explicit verses. In addition, it might be said that the Bible uses the language of personification when talking about abstract things. For example, the Bible uses this language regarding 'wisdom', 'sin' and 'death'.[276]

The levels of life

According to the Qur'ān, Allah has bestowed real life upon all creatures. For the Qur'ān says:

> The seven heavens and the earth, and all beings therein, declare His glory: there is not a thing but celebrates His praise; And yet ye understand not how they declare His glory![277]

It is obvious that to praise God without any consciousness is impossible. Therefore, all beings, including inanimate beings, even an atom, have a kind of life and awareness. Referring to this question, the Qur'ān asserts:

269.1 Cor 12.5–11.
270.Ac 5.32.
271.Rom 8.16.
272.Eph 4.30.
273.1 Tim 4.1.
274.Rom 8.26–27.
275.Jn 16.13.
276.E.g. Prov 9.1, Rom 5.21, and Rev 6.8 respectively.
277.Q. 17.44.

> Each one – all beings in the heavens and on earth – knows its own (mode of) prayer and praise. And God knows well all that they do.[278]

All beings are divided into two categories; material beings and immaterial beings. The most important source of material life is water. Thus God says:

> We made from water every living thing.[279]

By contrast, the origin of life in immaterial things is the spirit of God; therefore, these beings such as angels are called 'spiritual beings'. The human being is the compound of material and spirit, as demonstrated by Jesus' words recorded by John:

> I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit(by spirit) gives birth to spirit.[280]

Spiritual life in humans in general can be divided, into two kinds: (i) that which all human beings possess, which can be called the 'inspired spirit'; and (ii) that which only the true believers, particularly the prophets and messengers of God. possess – this kind of spirit can be called the 'strengthening spirit'. Referring to the first, the Qur'ān says:

> When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall ye down in obeisance unto him.[281]

> And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.[282]

> But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him of His Spirit.[283]

Referring to the strengthening spirit, the Qur'ān says about a group of true believers:

> He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with a spirit from Himself.[284]

And about Jesus it says:

> We gave Jesus the son of Mary Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.[285]

This kind of spirit gives man a new life. In other verses the holy Qur'ān clearly speaks of this life:

278.Q. 24.41.
279.Q. 21.30.
280.Jn 3.5–6.
281.Q. 15.29.
282.Q. 21.9.
283.Q. 32.9.
284.Q. 58.22.
285.Q. 2.87.

> Whosoever does righteousness, male or female, and has Faith, verily, to him will We give a new life, and life that is good and pure.[286]

> Can he who was dead, to whom We gave life, and a light whereby he can walk amongst men, be like him who is in the depths of darkness, from which he can never come out?[287]

As can be seen in the latter verse one who has not yet gained a 'new life' is considered as a dead man, even while he is still alive! Therefore, there is another life and also another spirit. The holy Bible also clearly speaks of this new life. In the Gospel according to St. John we read:

> There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.' In reply Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (born from above).' 'How can a man be born when he is old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!' Jesus answered, 'I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit (by spirit) gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'[288]

The levels of spiritual life are unlimited. However high you ascend, there is always a higher level. For it depends upon two agents: faith, and righteousness, and these can always be increased. As the reality of spirit is 'life', and life requires 'power' and 'awareness', the more you gain the spirit, the more you become powerful and knowledgeable. Prophets have been bestowed with a high level of spirit insofar as some of them, such as Jesus, were able, by the permission of God, to revive the dead or to create a living being. Finally, Jesus ascends to God and stands at the right hand of God:

> God raised him up unto Himself; and God is Exalted in Power, Wise.[289]

> But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.[290]

The Prophet Muhammad, likewise, could move from Mecca to Jerusalem in one night – and then to Heaven, where he reached a position beyond which none may go:

> Glory to (God) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things).[291]

286.Q. 16.97.
287.Q. 6.122.
288.Jn 3.1–8.
289.Q. 4.58.
290.Ac 7.55.
291.Q. 17.1.

> For indeed he saw him at a second descent, Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass: Near it is the Garden of Abode. Behold, the Lote-tree was shrouded (in mystery unspeakable!) (His) sight never swerved, nor did it go wrong! For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest![292]

Admittedly, the prophets had a higher degree of spirit; however, others also can be blessed and strengthened by the spirit, in as much as they can receive divine knowledge and perform a number of extraordinary deeds such as healing the sick. They can also enter the Kingdom of God and settle in His Presence. The Qur'ān says:

> As to the Righteous, they will be in the midst of Gardens and Rivers, In an Assembly of Truth, in the Presence of a Sovereign Omnipotent.[293]

In conclusion, the theme of "levels of life" is summarized in a quotation of *Mathnawi*, the masterpiece of Rumi:

> O pious ones, slay the cow (of lust),
> If ye desire true life of soul and spirit!
> I died as inanimate matter and arose a plant,
> I died as a plant and rose again an animal.
> I died as an animal and arose a man.
> Why then should I fear to become less by dying?
> I shall die once again as a man
> To rise an angel perfect from head to foot!
> Again when I suffer dissolution as an angel,
> I shall become what passes the conception of man!
> Let me then become non-existent, for non-existence
> Sings to me in organ tones, 'To him shall we return.[294]

The difference between ruḥ, 'spirit', and nafs, 'soul'

In some Arabic texts and Islamic *ḥadiths* the word *ruḥ*, by extension, was used to denote the *nafs* or 'soul'.[295] However, this meaning (application) is not found in the Qur'ān. In fact, in the Qur'ān it appears that the human being is composed of three elements: body, spirit and soul. In the beginning, the body is created.[296] In the second stage, *ruḥ* is breathed into it.[297] In Qur'ānic usage, 'spirit' in human beings is merely the force of life. Before being joined to matter, spirit is immaterial and formless, but after that it takes on a form. Therefore, it can be said that *nafs* or 'soul' is a personified spirit. Indeed, the substance of the soul is thus spirit and not just a physical form – not a physical substance itself. When a person dies, it is his soul that separates from his body, not merely his spirit. The holy Qur'ān in various verses describing the creating of humans uses the expression 'breathing the spirit into the body',[298] while in a number of verses it describes human death using the expression 'departing of the soul from the body':

292.Q. 53:13–18.
293.Q. 54.54–55.
294.Rumi, 1996.
295.Khalīl ibn Ahmad, 1993; ibn Manṣūr, 1983.
296.Q. 32.7.
297.Q. 32.9.
298.Q. 15.29; 38.72; 32.9; 21.91; 66.12.

> If thou couldst but see how the wicked (do fare) in the agonies of death! The angels stretch forth their hands, (saying), 'Yield up your souls: this day shall ye receive your reward – a penalty of disgrace, for that ye used to tell lies against Allah, and scornfully to reject of His Signs!'[299]
>
> It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death; and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed. Verily in this are Signs for those who reflect.[300]
>
> To the righteous soul will be said: 'O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back thou to the Lord – well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter thou, then, among my devotees! Yea, enter thou My Heaven!'[301]

As can be seen, the Qur'ān holds that the life of soul after death is similar to the life of the soul in a dream. In a dream, you see yourself in a shape and you may have experiences of moving, travelling, tasting, drinking, eating, etc. In your dream, you not only feel just like you are awake, but also sometimes your feeling is stronger. But all activities in adream are done by the soul, not by the body, although sometimes the body impressed by the soul and reacts against it.

'Abdullah Jawadi, a prominent contemporary Shiite scholar in Iran, has reported two interesting dreaming experiences from his instructor, Mohammad Taqi Amuli, a famous philosopher in his age, indicating the relationship between body and soul. He said:

> One day I was in a bad mood with my wife. In this very night, I saw a rabid dog assailing with me. Then the dog bit my hand. Due to the severe pain suddenly I woke up and I saw that it was I who is biting my hand with my teeth!

He also said:

> One night I dreamed that someone was fighting me as my enemy. Meanwhile he clawed my eye and wanted to bring my eye out of its place! Suddenly, I woke up and saw that it was I who was clawing my eye!

It can, in short, be said that the *nafs* (soul) is the vehicle of the *ruḥ* (spirit), and the body is the vehicle of both of them. After death it is the soul that remains alive and receives the punishments of sin or the rewards of salvation. According to the Qur'ān, on the Day of Resurrection souls will again join up with bodies and remain eternal.

It appears that the Bible also distinguishes between *ruḥ*, 'spirit', and *nafs*, 'soul'. In the Bible, the word 'soul' comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh* and its Greek equivalent *psyche* (denoting the breath, or the breath of life). The Bible employs the word 'soul' many times. Some applications of the word in the Bible refer to the doctrine of immortal soul, the separate being outside of the body. As we can see in the following quotations, the word 'soul' is employed for an immortal aspect of humans, other than the body or merely the spirit of God:

299.Q. 6.93.
300.Q. 39.42.
301.Q. 89.27–30.

> And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul (*nephesh*).[302]
>
> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.[303]
>
> May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.[304]
>
> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.[305]

Some scholars declare that the Bible does not use the word soul to immortal being that can separate from body. They claim that 'soul' refers to the essence of life, the act of breathing, 'taking a breath'. But it should be understood that application of a word in its literal meaning in some cases does not contradict its application in other meaning by extension and by implication. The quotations mentioned above show that by the word soul the Bible has intended the immortal aspect of the human being. It can be said that the original and main meaning of the word 'soul' is, simply, 'I'. What do you mean when you say, 'I'? In other words, it refers to an individual existence. But the word has been employed in both the Qur'ān and the Bible, by extension, in various applications, yet still has one main meaning. Understanding the precise meaning of the word depends on the context in which it is used. For example, the ways through which this word is applied in the Qur'ān come up to seven. Applying the word in a certain meaning is not a reason for applying the word in other positions in the same meaning. Anyway, the verses of the Qur'ān clearly, and the Bible also to some extent, imply that at the time of death the human soul departs from the body and remains alive.

Evil spirits

With even a short glance at the subjects such as Satan, devil, unclean spirit or evil spirit in the Old and New Testament and the Qur'ān, we realise that the language of religions in this field is symbolic, and even to some extent mythological. For instance, according to Matthew, Jesus says:

> When an evil (unclean) spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it

302.Gen 2.7.
303.Mt 10.28.
304.1 Thess 5.23.
305.Rev 20.4–6.

> arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.[306]

It is difficult to accept the literal meaning of this passage, and so many other passages like it in the New Testament.

According to the Bible, Satan tries to mislead mankind; he has been able to get in touch with the prophets of God and tempt them.[307] He has succeeded in misguiding one of the apostles of Jesus:

> As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.[308]

The Bible states that the evil spirits are controlled by Satan,[309] but nevertheless it would possible for all evil spirits to submit themselves to the Holy Spirit[310] if the Spirit of God lives in a man.[311] Therefore, though Satan is a strong enemy to man, the Spirit of God is able to give man authority to overcome all the powers of the enemy and his forces and to drive them out from his house (heart).[312] Man can gain this authority through believing in God and the Lord.

Although the Qur'ān does not speak of evil spirits, it does extensively introduce Satan as the biggest and the most dangerous enemy of mankind. According to the Qur'ān, Satan or Iblis was basically one of the Jinns. He broke the command of his Lord, for he did not bow down to Adam.[313] He then was rejected and accursed by God.[314] He asked God to sustain him until the day of resurrection and swore that he attempted to do his best to mislead all humans.[315] On that very day, he whispered evil to Adam and told him:

> O Adam! Shall I lead thee to the Tree of Eternity and to a kingdom that never decays?[316]

At the first stage, he succeeded in getting Adam and his wife out of the Garden. Referring to this event, God addresses humans and says:

> O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you, in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden.[317]

The Qur'ān frequently warns man concerning Satan, mentioning that he is to man an avowed enemy, and that his plans are to excite enmity and hatred between humans, to sow dissension among them, and to threaten them with poverty to prevent them from

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306.Mt 12.43–45.
307.Mt 4.1.
308.Jn 13.27.
309.Lk 10.18, 20; Mk 3.23–27.
310.Lk 10.20.
311.Rom 8.9.
312.Lk 10.18–19
313.Q. 18.50.
314.Q. 15.34.
315.Q. 38.82.
316.Q. 20.120.
317.Q. 7.27.

helping the poor.[318] The Qur'ān asserts that Satan has a big tribe and party, who watch all of us from a position where we cannot see them.[319] They always whisper into the hearts of Mankind, even of the prophets of God.[320] Nevertheless, Satan has no authority over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord.[321] Therefore, we can only deliver ourselves from the mischief of Satan and his tribe with true faith, and when we become the sincere and purified servants of our Lord.[322]

However, it should be noted that both the Qur'ān and the Bible attribute the mission of Satan and the evil spirits and their works to God. The Bible states that:

> God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the citizens of Shechem, who acted treacherously against Abimelech,[323]

and in the case of Saul in the Old Testament we read:

> Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. (1 Sam 16.14–16),

and:

> Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. (Mt 4.1)

Therefore, generally, the teachings of the Bible and the Qur'ān in this respect are similar. From the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Bible, we realise that God created the human soul with a mixture of two dimensions: a sinful nature and a pure nature. Maybe we can call them in Islamic terms the thesis of intellect versus desire (*al-'aql* and *al-nafs*) The sinful nature is controlled by Satan and the pure nature is controlled by the Holy Spirit.[324] We can perhaps liken the position of human natures to two receiving sets (radio receivers) and the Holy Spirit and Satan to two powerful satellite transmitters. Somebody such as Jesus and the other prominent prophets receive the spiritual waves only from the Holy Spirit, and consequently they are infallible. Ordinary people may arrange their receivers with the Holy Spirit or they may arrange them with Satan. Therefore it is man who decides by which one to be controlled. On the other hand, God has given man the ability of distinguishing between right and wrong thought. The Qur'ān says:

> By the Soul, and the proportion and order given to it, and its enlightenment as to its wrong and its right – truly he succeeds that purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it.[325]

Of course, both the Bible and the Qur'ān stress that it would be possible that, due to a continuing relationship with evil spirits, the human being could reach a position in which he can not understand the truth –

318.Q. 12.5; 5.91; 17.53; 2.268.
319.Q. 7.27.
320.Q. 114.5; 6.112.
321.Q. 16.99.
322.Q. 38.82.
323.Jg 9.23.
324.Rom 8.1, 4, 9.
325.Q. 91.7–10.

> as it is written: 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day'.[326]
>
> They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle – nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning).[327]

According to the Qur'ān, Satan is able to change man's heart and mind insofar as he comes to see his wrong deeds as right ones:

> Their hearts became hardened, and Satan made their (sinful) acts seem alluring to them.[328]
>
> Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life, while they thought that they were acquiring good by their works![329]

Therefore, we can say that such a system for creating humans, the Holy Spirit and Satan and evil spirits was intended by God. Both the Bible and the Qur'ān state that the examination of humans was the purpose of this plan. If man can overcome Satan and his evil spirits and submit them to the Holy Spirit, it can surely be said that he has entered a new life and proved his superiority over the angels, and then he can come to meet the Lord and stand at His right hand.

Conclusion

The following points can be clarified:

(1) The words *ruḥ* in Arabic and *ruahā* Hebrew are, etymologically and in meaning, the same. The word in both languages is derived from a root that indicating 'blowing' and 'breathing'.

(2) The equivalents of 'spirit' in some other languages such as Greek, Latin and Persian are derived from words which mean 'to breathe'. In Greek *pneuma*, in Latin *spiritus* and in Persian, *rawan* correspond with 'spirit'.

(3) 'Holy Spirit' is neither God nor a person, but the word of God's life the source of authority and awareness, which can be manifested and personified in the form of an angel or a human.

(4) The reality of spirit is 'life'; it is the source of power and awareness in living beings. Spirit, and consequently life, have varying amounts and qualifies in diverse beings from plants to angels.

326.Rom 11.8.
327.Q. 7.179.
328.Q. 6.43.
329.Q. 18.104.

(5) Prophets have been bestowed with a high level of spirit insofar as some of them, such as Jesus, were able by the permission of God to revive the dead or create a living being.

(6) Admittedly, the prophets had a higher degree of spirit; nevertheless, others also can be blessed and strengthened by the spirit, in as much as they can receive divine knowledge and perform a number of extraordinary deeds such as healing the sick.

(7) Blessing and confirmation by the spirit is bestowed only on those who have a genuine belief in God and who perform good deeds.

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Yr Ysbryd: More questions and some answers

Kirsteen Kim / Michael Ipgrave

Note: These reflections are based on points presented to *Yr Ysbryd* conference by Dr Kirsteen Kim following an earlier consultation on 'The Holy Spirit in a world of many faiths', held at the United College of the Ascension, Birmingham in February 2004. The implications drawn from these points, however, are my responsibility, not Dr Kim's.

As we were aware during our initial planning for *Yr Ysbryd*, there are a number of overlapping, yet distinguishable, questions concerning the Spirit in the encounter of Christians with people of different faiths. In what follows, reflections are offered on four of these. First, there is the general question of the Spirit's presence and activity in other faiths. Secondly, there is a more specific question about the Christian discernment of the Spirit of Christ among other spirits. Thirdly, from within Christian theology, there is a question about the dispensation of the Spirit as a resource to building relationships. Fourthly, there is the question of cross-referencing the ideas and experiences of 'spirit' in other faiths with those of Christians in order to stimulate inter faith discussion. As will be seen, other themes could also have been identified, but these four already cover a wide range, embracing many of the areas on which the earlier papers have touched in more detail.

Where and how is the Spirit present in other faiths?

There is a broad acceptance in most contemporary ecumenical theology of the general principle that the Spirit of God is not restricted to the Church or to Christians, but is present and active within the wider world. This in itself involves an interpretation of the scriptural data within the light of experience: there are biblical texts which speak of a universal presence, but there are also others which indicate a narrower operation among the faithful. Some pneumatological strategies would seek to reconcile these different emphases by proposing different modes of the Spirit in different contexts – for example, guidance, inspiration, indwelling, sanctification – but this does not affect the fundamental recognition of the Spirit's unrestricted presence in some form.

Within the structured lives of other faiths, there can then be recognised a number of different dimensions within which the Spirit can manifest himself or herself. Most clearly, the Spirit might be seen within elements of the core teachings, values or ideals accepted within the religion concerned. The Spirit may by contrast be apparent within movements of reform or transformation that challenge the established patterns of the faith. More basically, the Spirit may be recognised through the human lives and interactions of individuals, families and communities. The first of these possibilities clearly in some sense identifies the specifically religious character of other faiths which enables the Spirit's presence, and so immediately raises questions of the theological interpretation of religious plurality. On the other hand, the third (human) level leaves open the question of whether religion as such, or any religion in particular, is qualified by virtue of its religious character to be a vehicle of the Spirit. In other words, while there may be a general acceptance of the point that 'other faiths' can be sites of the Spirit's operation, there is not a similar consensus as to whether there are in any way privileged over other, 'secular' sites.

In general terms, the kind of pointers or evidence by which Christians might expect to recognise the presence of the Spirit in the world would be supplied by such features as the 'fruits of the Spirit' within individuals, or the 'gifts of the Spirit' in communities, or a sense of 'Christlikeness' in the ideals and values towards which people aspire in different faiths. These cannot be listed as externally or quantifiably discernible 'outputs' of other faiths, though; they can only be apprehended through the building of dialogical relationships which make it possible to experience individuals and communities in some measure 'from the inside'.

How can the Spirit of Christ be discerned among the many spirits of the world?

The Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of God, is not the only 'spiritual' entity which can be recognised within the world. In common English parlance today, we speak often of the 'spirit' of a person, or a place, or an institution, or of more abstract realities. In the New Testament world, there is a strong emphasis on the existence and activity of a host of different spirits, of varying degrees of strength and importance, and of differing attitudes to the Spirit of God. While some modern Christians may seek to read the scriptures' spirit language in psychological or reductionist terms, others – particularly those influenced by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements – will treat these phenomena in much more realistic terms. Whatever interpretive approach is applied, however, it remains the case that the spiritual is, by virtue of its intangibility and unobservability, intrinsically ambiguous, or at least not immediately self-evident, in its orientation. Some spirits are good, we may suppose, some bad, and some different; but all need testing or discerning to see if they are of God.

Some general principles can be affirmed with confidence, although they will the need to be applied through particular discernments in the specific contexts of actual interactions with people of different faiths. In the first place, the unity of the scriptures attests the truth that Spirit which inspired the Hebrew prophets, and the Spirit which generated order in creation, are identical with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God. There is here therefore both a disrupting, challenging dimension to the work of the true Spirit, and an ordering, creative dimension also.

In terms of the transformation of human beings and the flourishing of human communities, spirits can be discerned according to whether they affirm life and produce good fruit. The Spirit of Christ brings love, peace, healing, reconciliation, right relationships, justice and joy – and brings these things bound together, not with an unbalanced emphasis on one quality rather than another. In relationship to the divine, the Spirit directs people's focus away from themselves towards God, and so enables them to grow in holiness; and so all spirits can be tested in the same way by the degree to which they lead people out of self-centredness into a concern for the other. At a communal level, this leads to the deep fellowship and unity in diversity which Christians call *koinonia*; so spirits are to be discerned according to their building up or breaking down of cohesive yet free communities. There is also a cognitive and an ethical criteriology of the spiritual: the Holy Spirit reveals the truth, exposes evil, and convicts of sin, and so all spirits are to be judged as to whether they lead people into confrontation with reality or comfort them with falsity and illusion. Through these and similar marks, it will be possible to discern between the spirits – always recognising that it is the Holy Spirit himself who enables our judgement.

Can the theology of the Holy Spirit help Christians overcome barriers to dialogue with people of other faiths?

One of the pressing needs in the Church today is to find an adequate theology to motivate Christians for inter faith dialogue and to help them interpret their involvement in such dialogue. It is widely felt that – though many factors may come into play in creating barriers between people of different faiths – the inadequacies of some Christian theologies of religion and dialogue have played a part in maintaining or even heightening barriers between people. There are several reasons which could be advanced for a Spirit-based theology as a way of overcoming such barriers.

One of the inhibiting factors in dialogue can be too narrow or exclusive focus on that which is not shared – for Christians, in particular, the divine figure of Jesus Christ as he is confessed within the Church. While Christological foundations will remain central, an emphasis on the Spirit as a complement to this will help to place these within a Trinitarian framework which restores a balance of the particular and exclusive with the universal and exclusive – the shared experience of relatedness and inter-dependence. Likewise, when a dualistic view of the world, or of the other, is exercising an adverse effect on dialogue, the Spirit can open up engagement by reminding us of our sharing in a divine creation, teaching the precious values of life, shared human growth and development.

The negative stereotypes of people in other communities which many Christians hold can be shattered by recognition of the way in which the Spirit leads our neighbours into holiness through bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit. For ourselves too, the Spirit encourages us to grow and develop in spirituality through taking risks. It is the Spirit which kindles our love for our neighbours, which reveals thee truth of particular situations to us, and which motivates us to get involved through building up our confidence to meet with the other in friendship and trust.

It is easy also at times to feel that theology itself may become a barrier to dialogue – particularly the kind of theology which relies on precise verbal expression and categorisation. As against this, the Spirit shows a less conceptualised way of meeting people, a way in which prayer, love for the neighbour, and a commitment to dialogue are central. The Spirit seems to play a particularly important in the so-called 'fourth form' of dialogue, that which concerns the mutual exploration of religious experience. One significant strand of this may involve Christians and people of other faiths in simply spending time in silence together, It would be possible to see such a context as one which it is particularly appropriate to describe as enabled by the Spirit; on the other hand, some Christians would think of Spirit-filled worship first of all in terms of exuberance and noise!

Can concepts and experiences of spirit in other faiths provide a starting point for inter faith discussions with Christians?

The wealth and diversity of the material involved make it difficult to generalise in answering a question like this. In addition to the examples of Buddhism and Islam presented in some detail in the papers above, it might be noted that Hinduism speaks of the *antaryamin* or innermost Spirit which gifts creation to humanity, while for Judaism the Holy Spirit is of course a central theme of the Hebrew scriptures.

The experience of dialogue is that the Spirit within me speaks to the Spirit within the other – not only so, but that dialogue with the other also is built on and leads to an internal dialogue of God with myself. This means that the Spirit is not only recognised by 'learning about other faiths', but also by meeting people in other faiths, experiencing their faith in its relation to them, and seeing how it gives them life. Echoing Jewish beliefs in the presence of the divine glory (*shekhinah*) among those who study Torah, one participant declared: 'When people of different faiths come together to talk about God, the Holy Spirit is there present.' And another said, in words which summed up the feel of *Yr Ysbryd*, 'In this troubled world, in the strength of the Holy Spirit we can together be signs of hope for our world and for one another.'