

# THE SPIRIT OF RESURRECTION

By MATTHEW O'CONNELL

PENTECOST marks a decisive date in the history of God's dealings with men. At this moment the incarnation reaches its full flowering; for the Christ, who came as redeemer, begins to exert the regal power he acquired at his resurrection.

## *The era of the Spirit*

For the New Testament itself, the essential difference between the long history of mankind before Pentecost and the present age between Pentecost and parousia is that before the resurrection of Christ and its manifestation in power 'the Spirit was not yet given'.<sup>1</sup> Like many statements of scripture, this one cannot afford to be isolated from its context within the scriptures as a whole. Evidently the Spirit had been given during Old Testament times, and he was given in surpassing measure to Christ himself during his earthly career. Yet, despite all the activity of the Spirit in the Old Testament, it is one of the major burdens of prophetic preaching that the 'last times', the time of God's definitive intervention in history, will be characterized by the outpouring of his Spirit. What the Spirit of God has failed to accomplish, if we may so speak, under the former covenant – that is, to form a people who would be God's kingdom, not only in outward seeming nor in a short-lived turning to him in distress nor in a remnant alone, but in the reality of the heart's attachment to God, in a fidelity proof against time and prosperity, and in a multitude no man might number – he would accomplish under the new covenant.

The Spirit in the Old Testament is an energizing, vitalizing power, creative and re-creative. He draws order out of chaos in the first creation,<sup>2</sup> and he breathes new life into the dry bones in the valley of the dead.<sup>3</sup> In the transition from the first covenant to the second, that is, in the incarnation understood in its concrete totality, the Spirit presides over two births which are in a special way two

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 7, 39.

<sup>2</sup> Gen 1, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Ezek 37, 1-14.

creative acts: the birth of the Word from Mary, in which the creative power of the Spirit affects the conception of Christ's very body;<sup>1</sup> and the birth of the Church from the group of disciples, where a life is given that has no ground in human loving and striving, but springs directly from the creative love of God. At the centre, between these two births, the paradox of life out of death reaches its most intense form: only if Christ goes, can another greater paraclete be given.<sup>2</sup> There is involved here more than a succession of paracletes: it is through death that Christ himself comes to newness of life, becomes a new man<sup>3</sup> and therefore a life-giving spirit.<sup>4</sup> He is glorified, that is, completely transformed by the energizing, vivifying power of God which is the holy Spirit; and as the risen Lord he sends his holy Spirit, who is his transforming energy at work in us.

At Pentecost and in the Church's life, at each individual's Pentecost (his re-birth and re-creation in the Spirit, which find their full sacramental expression in baptism and confirmation) and during his life, the Spirit of Christ the risen Lord is at work, grounding our lives in the unshakable Amen which is Christ, born, crucified, risen, reigning,<sup>5</sup> and, beyond Christ the mediator, in the groundless abyss of the fruitful fidelity of God.

*The Spirit's mission: to renew*

The Spirit's mission is summed up most succinctly in the eternal purpose of God in the incarnation: to make us 'conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren'.<sup>6</sup> Our configuration is to the risen Christ and has, therefore, its necessary stages. The Spirit is a dynamic power leading us to perfect conformity, and the way along which he leads us is the way along which Christ himself has first passed. If Christ dwells in us through faith, strengthening us through his Spirit,<sup>7</sup> it is in order 'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead'.<sup>8</sup> In all the work of the risen Christ and his Spirit, then, there is present the same pattern of life through death that characterized Christ's own redemptive mission. Over the whole new covenant there presides the image of 'God who gives life from the dead',<sup>9</sup> which marked so

<sup>1</sup> Lk 1, 35.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 15, 45.

<sup>7</sup> Eph 3, 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 14, 16, 26; 16, 7.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor 1, 20.

<sup>8</sup> Phil 3, 10-11.

<sup>3</sup> Eph 2, 15.

<sup>6</sup> Rom 8, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 4, 17.

deeply the imagination and thought of St. Paul.

If there is a single word in which this whole work of the Spirit can be crystallized, a single word in which the ceaseless dynamism of the death-life dialectic can be captured, it is the word 'newness'. The Spirit of the risen Christ is the Spirit who makes all things new and, above all, the heart of man.

'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature'.<sup>1</sup> In the great passage, which our incorporation into Christ was, we who had been dead were raised to life;<sup>2</sup> we who had been darkness were made light;<sup>3</sup> we who had been apart from Christ and in despair were given hope in Christ;<sup>4</sup> we who had once been slaves were freed.<sup>5</sup> All this was accomplished by the renewing Spirit of Christ.<sup>6</sup> By his power we put on a new man.<sup>7</sup> But – and here the dynamic reality bursts through – if we were made new in baptism, we are also being daily renewed,<sup>8</sup> and must take upon ourselves the glory and the burden of this daily renewal.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Renewal and knowledge*

The newness of life to which we rose in baptism and in which we are to walk daily<sup>10</sup> is closely associated, in St Paul, with knowledge and with the mind. But the 'transformation by the renewal of your mind',<sup>11</sup> the 'renewal of the depths of your understanding',<sup>12</sup> is a deep-going process, and possible only by the power of the Spirit within us. For the 'mind' here is the same as the biblical 'heart'. It is the centre of personality, the place where a man's fundamental orientation of mind and will, his basic moral and religious outlook, are decided; the place where he penetrates to the truth that concerns him as a person and adheres to it or rejects it; the place which Augustine would later speak of as 'my heart, where I am the kind of person I am'<sup>13</sup> and of which he would also say, speaking of himself before his conversion, 'my heart was grown gross and I had no clear understanding of myself'.<sup>14</sup> St Paul, then, is speaking of that centre of ourselves where we dispose of ourselves, where we make fundamental choices: not the purely rational and thus relatively superficial kind of choices we make when we take resolutions, when we consider our circumstances, our weak-

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 5, 17.

<sup>2</sup> Eph 2, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Eph 4, 24.

<sup>4</sup> Rom 6, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Conf. 10, 3, 4.

<sup>6</sup> Eph 2, 1–10.

<sup>7</sup> Tit 3, 3ff.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Cor 4, 16; Col 3, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Rom 12, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 1, 2.

<sup>11</sup> Eph 5, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Tit 3, 5; cf 1 Cor 6, 9–12.

<sup>13</sup> Eph 4, 23–24.

<sup>14</sup> Eph 4, 23.

nesses, our temptations, and determine that we shall act thus and so, but rather the radical choice of ends themselves, and thus the radical disposition of our lives.

The anomaly is that precisely because of the supra-rational character of such radical choices, we often make them – for good or for ill – in an obscure way, perhaps in a moment of exaltation, perhaps in a moment when we simply glimpse how deeply we are committing ourselves in a certain direction. Then the moment passes; the consciousness of the radical choice may be lost under the weight of routine, of distraction, of triviality. Yet the choice has been made and is, in greater or less measure, determining our lives. For this very reason, St Paul, with the gospel, warns so vigorously of the need for watchfulness, lest we be taken in by illusory desires, the unpurified desires whose basic deceit is to promise fulfilment while leading in fact to destruction.<sup>1</sup> It is, obviously, not easy to get down reflectively to this level of ourselves: to penetrate through the crust of custom, to get behind the conscious principles we pride ourselves on, to realize what really moves us and what our captivities are. It can be done only in the presence of God, as we pray with Augustine that God ‘would take us out from behind our own backs where we are hiding from ourselves’.<sup>2</sup> The saving thing is that these depths of ourselves are also the place where the renewing Spirit dwells; we, indeed, ‘do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words’.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, though the newness is radical and though the command to be daily renewed is not fulfilled by facile adherence to outward forms, the climate characteristic of christian life is nonetheless the climate of hope and of peace in the Lord. Our basic effort is not toward a worrisome and wearying search into ourselves lest illusory desires have, unnoticed, warped the bent of our hearts. It is rather simply to open ourselves to the Spirit from whom, at the centre of our being, new life ceaselessly springs, rescuing us from the staleness of our native selves and making us new creatures in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

### *Renewal: forgiveness and love*

‘Cleansed of our unregenerate selves’.<sup>5</sup> The newness of the new covenant is in no small measure that it is founded upon the forgive-

<sup>1</sup> Eph 4, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Postcommunion of Easter Wednesday.

<sup>2</sup> Cf Conf. 8, 1, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Rom 8, 26.

ness of sins, whereby the heart of man is changed toward God. 'I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people . . . They shall all know me . . . for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more'.<sup>1</sup> Such was the promise. 'Receive you the holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven'.<sup>2</sup> Such was, in part, the fulfilment. But the forgiving and purifying Spirit is always at work, for 'He himself is the forgiveness of all sins'.<sup>3</sup>

'Living fountain, fire of love, pure anointing from above'.<sup>4</sup> In more positive fashion the newness is expressed in what is both a gift and a command: the gift of divine love which the Spirit pours into our hearts,<sup>5</sup> the command to love which he alone makes possible of fulfilment and wherein he conforms us to Christ. The Spirit of charity, who initiates us into the mystery of Christ's passage to the Father, makes us to be of one heart with each other<sup>6</sup> and leads us to perfect freedom,<sup>7</sup> as he daily makes us whole in Christ.<sup>8</sup>

Mention was made earlier of how closely renewal is associated in St Paul with the 'mind' and with 'knowledge', and of the special character of this knowledge. In similar fashion, Christ describes the coming Spirit as the 'Spirit of truth, who will guide you into all the truth'.<sup>9</sup> 'Truth' here, it need hardly be said, refers to more than the understanding of doctrine. 'Truth' is man's genuine relationship to God through Christ, a reality into which man enters by 'doing the truth';<sup>10</sup> it is in man the correlate of the divine 'truth', that is, of the divine love and fidelity which have been given a human face in Christ. We can understand, then, how the Pentecost liturgy can find such a wealth of content in the idea of the 'light' of the holy Spirit, itself symbolized by the fire of the Pentecostal descent. The Spirit, 'light of God's light', 'radiance of the divine glory',<sup>11</sup> cleanses our hearts with his light,<sup>12</sup> illumines them,<sup>13</sup> stabilizes them,<sup>14</sup> gives wisdom (the instinct for what is right) and consolation.<sup>15</sup> The same Spirit (the 'light' image is not expressed but we are within the ambiance created by it) brings faith and peace

<sup>1</sup> Jer 31, 31-34; cf Ezek 36, 22-31.

<sup>3</sup> Postcommunion of Pentecost Wednesday.

<sup>5</sup> Rom 5, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Prayer of Easter Monday.

<sup>9</sup> Jn 16, 13.

<sup>11</sup> Prayer of Vigil of Pentecost.

<sup>13</sup> First prayer of Pentecost Wednesday.

<sup>15</sup> Prayer of Pentecost Sunday.

<sup>2</sup> Jn 20, 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Hymn *Veni, creator Spiritus*.

<sup>6</sup> Postcommunion of Easter Sunday.

<sup>8</sup> Secret of Easter Saturday.

<sup>10</sup> Jn 3, 23; cf Eph 4, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Secret of Vigil of Pentecost.

<sup>14</sup> Prayer of Vigil of Pentecost.

in the faith,<sup>1</sup> fecundates,<sup>2</sup> and makes an 'eternal oblation'<sup>3</sup> of the 'church gathered together by the holy Spirit'.<sup>4</sup>

*The Spirit who bears witness*

Within the wide range of the Spirit's activity in both the Old and the New Testaments, one kind of activity stands out. In the Old Testament it is the activity of the Spirit in the work of the prophets; in the New Testament promises and in their fulfilment (as recounted in Acts), it is again the activity of the prophetic Spirit who makes men witnesses to Christ. And in the transition from the old Israel to the new which takes place in the life-work of Christ, himself the fulfilment of the Old Testament promises, and mediator-model of the New Testament promises and of their fulfilment, the prophetic Spirit plays a dominant part.

The Spirit of God in the Old Testament had been given to many men in quite different circumstances, but usually for some public role demanding determination, strength, and courage. He was given to the 'judges', charismatic warriors such as Gideon and Samson, to the kings with David as the type, of whom the Spirit of God took possession from the day when Samuel anointed him;<sup>5</sup> above all, to the prophets, lonely men who must bear witness to God before a people who would refuse to hear. In their sufferings, their struggle, their rejection, the prophets were sustained by the Spirit, the prophetic Spirit who would be poured out with the fulness of his gifts upon the Messiah.<sup>6</sup>

In Luke's gospel (and Acts will be very much in continuity with it), the Spirit who descends on Christ at his baptism is interpreted as primarily the prophetic Spirit. After the baptism Jesus is first led by the Spirit into the desert to bear witness before the great adversary, who then leaves him until a more propitious moment;<sup>7</sup> the more propitious moment will be the passion, 'the hour of the power of darkness'.<sup>8</sup> Under the influence of the Spirit Jesus then goes from the desert to preach to men;<sup>9</sup> in the synagogue of Nazareth he explains the Spirit in him as the prophetic Spirit given to the Messiah,<sup>10</sup> and at a later point he is filled with exultant joy by the holy Spirit as he contemplates the Father's revelatory action through him.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prayer of Pentecost Monday.

<sup>2</sup> Secret of Pentecost Monday.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Sam 16, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Isai 11, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Lk 22, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Lk 4, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Postcommunion of Vigil of Pentecost.

<sup>8</sup> Prayer of Pentecost Friday.

<sup>9</sup> Lk 4, 1-13.

<sup>10</sup> Lk 4, 16ff, citing Isai 61, 1-2 and 58, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Lk 10, 21.

Other books of the New Testament also know of the witnessing to God by Christ. It is a primary motif of the fourth gospel. It is used by St Paul in his attempts to explain the meaning of Christ's suffering and death: Christ bore witness before Pilate,<sup>1</sup> and in his death gave testimony to God's saving will.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern was thus given by which the disciples' own role as witnesses was to be interpreted. They had been witnesses of Christ's redemptive work and would be clothed with the power of the holy Spirit so as to be witnesses in turn.<sup>3</sup> Indeed it was the Spirit himself who would bear witness to Christ through them.<sup>4</sup> And as Christ's prophetic activity had required courage and strength, and had led to rejection, to suffering, even to death, so would theirs.

On Pentecost this whole history of the Spirit's activity is brought to focus on the moment when the new Israel, the people of the new covenant, is formed.<sup>5</sup> For, symbolized outwardly in the violent wind which fills the house and in the tongues of fire, the Spirit fills the disciples with himself and his power, and, as a sign of their foremost mission, makes them speak in alien tongues.

From the nature of the events recounted in Acts (in the interests of showing how, from Pentecost onwards, the Church spread by the power of the Spirit), it is inevitable that the witnessing to Christ should take the form primarily of preaching or of confessing the faith before hostile audiences and tribunals. The exotic phenomena, such as glossolalia, seem to have subsided rather quickly; in any event, the centre of interest is in the witness borne to Christ. But it is notable that all levels of the community share in the privilege and the burden of bearing witness. The apostles, of course, are a class apart, because they were with Jesus during his earthly ministry and were witnesses to the resurrection. Other men, singled out for special tasks in the community, are also witnesses. Stephen is 'the Lord's witness';<sup>6</sup> significantly, he had been at the time of his appointment as steward, a man 'full of faith and the holy Spirit',<sup>7</sup> and was, during the time of his ministry, 'full of grace and power'.<sup>8</sup> But, in addition to the apostles and to such men as Stephen, the whole community is filled with the holy Spirit and speaks the word of God with 'boldness'.<sup>9</sup> The word here translated 'boldness', *parrhesia*, means a speaking out plainly, undeterred by inner timidity, with

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim 6, 13.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim 2, 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> Lk 24, 44-49; Acts 1, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Jn 15, 26-27; cf Mt 10, 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2, 1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 22, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 6, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 6, 8; the 'power' is that promised by Christ in Acts 1, 8.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 4, 31.

an openness that wells up from within; it is used in Acts primarily in connection with preaching Christ, and, since the openness is almost always an openness before a hostile audience, the idea of courageous speech is usually present.

What is the abiding significance, for us, of the narration, in Acts, of the Spirit at work in the early Church? Pentecost is meant for everyone, as Acts makes clear<sup>1</sup> and as we are reminded in the final prayer of our brief confirmation rite. The Spirit of resurrection, the Spirit of baptismal and daily renewal, is the Spirit by whose power we too are to bear witness to the risen Christ. This is a fundamental aspect of christian existence, which, by the action of the risen Christ in our incorporation into him, is turned to God with Christ in worship and 'spiritual sacrifice', but also turned with Christ to the world of men who are to be drawn into the movement of man to God in Christ.

Our mission, if witness to men, then, is not exhausted by what may be called a negative kind of witnessing: standing up 'before governors and kings'<sup>2</sup> in confession, even unto suffering and death, of the name of Christ. This is not to deny the privileged character of such witnessing. It has won the name of 'witnessing' par excellence (martyr-dom), and rightly so, for here the power of the Spirit is most evidently at work in the weakness of man, here the promise is most strikingly fulfilled: 'It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you'.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in the idea of christian witnessing as testimony before enemies, and of confirmation as the 'sacrament of martyrs', a permanently valid insight is expressed. The christian continues to live in a fallen world, and the line of demarcation is not simply between monastery and city, nor between christian and non-christian, but between a man and those of his own household; and, indeed, it runs through the divided heart of man. The 'world', in the scriptural sense, is a permanent reality, not to be talked away by theological rhetoric; and this 'world is everywhere and it judges us always'.<sup>4</sup>

Nonetheless, our witness to the risen Christ is a positive and comprehensive reality. It comprehends, ideally, nothing less than the whole of our lives, and it is the testimony rendered by a life shot through with faith, hope, and charity. For the 'faith' that we attest, while indeed the acceptance of God's revelation, is primarily the

<sup>1</sup> Acts 2, 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> Mt 10, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Mt 10, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Mouroux, Jean, *I Believe: The Personal Structure of Faith* (New York, 1960), p. 91.



acceptance of the great mystery of salvation: that God loves us and wills to save us. Our acceptance of God's word is thus the answer to, and the inspiration of, a great hope, and is vitalized by love. Our faith is a confident and loving response to the God who has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The christian's life in its whole texture becomes a witness to Christ insofar as he is interiorly docile to the movement of the holy Spirit who guides him to the fulfilment of the law of Christ as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and summed up in the double commandment of charity. This is the testimony, in the sober words of St Peter, of 'your good conduct among the gentiles';<sup>1</sup> in the more exhilarating words of Christ, which also recall us to our responsibility, 'you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world'.<sup>2</sup>

This witness of personal response to God in Christ in the whole quality of our life and action, a witness inseparable from being a christian in full reality and not just in name or in minimal fashion, is in many respects the great witness to Christ. In the time between Pentecost and parousia, as the body of Christ seeks that full stature which God has determined for it, men are drawn to Christ, in the normal course of events, by the testimony of lives in which God as Lord and Saviour is a reality; in which the christian hope is clearly supreme over the fragile hopes of men; in which God is so loved that every human being is illumined by his radiance. This kind of testimony is a matter of deeds, not of words. It is powerful beyond any preaching. For in it a man becomes a living testimony to the action and presence of God in his life. He becomes one in whom God bears witness to himself before those who in his mercy have eyes to see and ears to hear.

The Spirit of resurrection, the Spirit of newness and renewal, the Spirit who bears witness and makes men be witnesses – these are one and the same Spirit: the Spirit of the risen Christ, with whom we are already seated in the heavens,<sup>4</sup> yet in whose company we still walk the streets of the earthly city, longing indeed for that more lasting city that is to come, but effecting meanwhile, by the power of his Spirit, that transformation in ourselves and in our world which makes ready for his coming.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet 2, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Mt 5, 13-16.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet 2, 12; cf Phil 2, 14-16.

<sup>4</sup> Eph 2, 6.