



Research article

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**THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This Paper is offered in a *biblical pastoral* context, to help foster a sound biblical spirituality for daily life as a Christian. Part 1 offers an INTRODUCTION about the unique power of the word of God. Part 2 focuses on the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. (In 2Cor.3:17, *for the very first time* in the Bible, the **divinity** of the Holy Spirit is explicitly stated!) Part 3 focuses on the unique role of Jesus in giving the Holy Spirit. (John 7:37-39 declares that Jesus' saving Death and Resurrection *was required* before the 'Holy Spirit,' the **Divine** Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, could be given to humanity!) Part 4 focuses on the main work of the Holy Spirit in making disciples holy.



## THE QUESTIONS OF THE FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

### Part 1: INTRODUCTION

The Bible, and *very especially the New Testament*, is a great treasure-chest that God has gifted to the Church, filled to the brim with spiritual power. Through its various texts, “*spirit, and life*” (Jn 6:63) are available to disciples who thirst for God-experience. A well-chosen text a day is the ‘daily bread’ that can nourish us in “*spirit, mind, and body*” (1Thes 5:23). Unlike other literature, the word of God has an in-built power; it is a dynamic, creative reality. It not only teaches but also effects what it proclaims: “***For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart***” (Heb.4:12).

This ability of God’s word to enter deep into our conscious and subconscious minds makes it an efficient *agent of Christian character-formation*. It is the favourite tool of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who seeks to mould and fashion disciples into the image and likeness of Jesus, their Brother and Lord (see 2Cor.3:17f).

Jesus declared, “***It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words I have spoken to you are spirit and life***” (Jn.6: 63). The New Testament contains these life-giving words of Jesus. As the Second Vatican Council assures Catholics and all Christians, scripture is a power-house

of grace for believers: “Such is the force and power of the word of God that it can serve the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life...”<sup>1</sup>

One grows in faith in proportion to one’s devotion to the word of God: “*Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ*” (Rom.10:17). Likewise, the word of God is a *potent weapon of spiritual warfare*. In times of temptation, the Holy Spirit provides disciples with a special sword with which to vanquish the Enemy: “*Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*” (Eph.6:17). In his temptations in the desert, Jesus gave us all a fine example of how to use this “sword” (see Lk.4).

A very important and necessary blessing from the word of God is INNER FREEDOM: it is Jesus himself who promised this: “*If you continue/abide in my word (= make my word your home - JB), you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*” (Jn.8:31f). By these words, the Lord promises that devotion to the scriptures will bring disciples a true “*inner healing*.” The hurts of life will not embitter or paralyze them for long, but they will experience in an ongoing way the freedom of the children of God.

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<sup>1</sup> *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Second Vatican Council, n.21



***“The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the division of soul (Greek “psyche”) and spirit... and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart”*** (Heb.4:12). This text reveals to us the special ability of God’s word to enter deep into our conscious, subconscious and unconscious minds (= Gk *psyche*), in order to transform our *thinking*, our *values* and our *relationships* so that they reflect Christ’s own way of thinking, feeling and acting. God’s word therefore is a most efficient agent of Christian character-formation and of our up-building in faith, hope, and love.

Though some influential Greek philosophers of old (Plato, Aristotle, etc) taught that the human person is made up of *body* and *soul*, St Paul and (modern psychology as well) include a third dimension called *spirit*: *“May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit (pneuma) and soul (psyche) and body (soma) be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1Thes 5:23).

Psychology also teaches that each human being has a vast subconscious and unconscious area within the mind (*psyche*) that contains all the memories (whether happy or painful) of one’s past life. In our text of Heb 4:12 above, therefore, the phrase, *“the division between soul and spirit”* (Heb.4:12), refers to the *subconscious and unconscious* area of the mind where the memories of the past are stored up (and in need of being healed or corrected); and the phrase, *“discern*

*the thoughts and intentions of the heart”* means that God’s word (which is inherently dynamic and active) is able to sift or separate the positive feelings/attitudes from the negative ones, thus setting the person free. Hence, Heb.4:12 is especially about receiving *“inner freedom”* from the therapeutic power contained in God’s word (*“My words are spirit and life”* – Jn 6:63).

The mind (*psyche*) consists of five integrated parts: the *intellect*, the *memory*, the *imagination*, the *emotions* and the *will*. Psychology also explains that, like an iceberg which is only 1/8<sup>th</sup> above water and 7/8<sup>th</sup> below water, the mind too is *partly* conscious and *partly* subconscious and unconscious. This is one reason why, being influenced more by worldly thought-patterns, values and relationships, we act in ways that do not sufficiently reflect Gospel thought-patterns, values and relationships, nor do we experience the *“fruit of the Spirit”* (Gal 5:22) in a significant way.

[Examples of the collective unconscious influencing our attitudes/reactions are, first of all, our wrong ideas about God (!) as a hard, cruel, or judgmental Master, and our discriminatory feelings/thoughts about caste, apartheid, black-white relations; our gender biases, ethnic animosities, patriarchal orientations, etc. We picked them up subconsciously from our parents and teachers, they in turn got them from their parents/teachers, and so on from generation to



generation. Education and the progress of civilization is one ongoing remedy, but familiarity with the Bible is also needed.]

In this sense St Paul advised, “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds*” (Rom 12:2). Not only our conscious intellect but our subconscious memories, imagination, emotions and will are all part of the renewal of our “minds.” For this to happen, a daily *Lectio Divina* is an important, God-given way for disciples to be set free from fears, guilt, feelings of inferiority, and other negative things that bind them and make them “conformed to this world.”

We now comment, *in a biblical pastoral context*, on a few of the most dynamic, empowering Scripture texts which are absolutely fundamental for a Christian’s identity and daily practice of discipleship. In this article we can only look at the Person and work of the Holy Spirit.

## Part 2: THE DIVINITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

**2Cor.3:17,18:** “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*”

This text is of fundamental importance for Christian spirituality. *For the very first time* in the Bible, the *divinity* of the Holy Spirit is explicitly stated! St Paul

teaches that the Spirit is not an *impersonal force* sent by God to be a blessing to a few individuals (as understood till the Old Testament) but the Spirit is *God himself*, he is the *new Self-Gift of God* to us in Jesus Christ. About this Divine Spirit, Jesus himself had promised that the Father would give to be “*with you forever... because he dwells with you, and will be in you.*” The Holy Spirit is not a Transitory Guest, but a Permanent Resident!

In **Jn 14:16**, Jesus calls this Spirit “*another Paraclete*,” an unusual but highly significant title. The Greek verb *parakaleo* means “to call to one’s side,” and occurs often in the NT, especially in the letters of Paul; but the derived noun *parakletos* occurs only in John. *Outside* of the NT, *parakaleo* and *parakletos* are used in courtroom contexts, but *in* the NT, *in the sense that Jesus intended*, the more correct translation of *Paraclete* could be the **Encourager**, someone who stands by us to cheer us on, to exhort us to pray, and forgive, and carry the cross, and love like Jesus... (Advocate or Counsellor is an inadequate or even misleading translation because, after all, our lives are not all spent in a courtroom! Besides, Rom 8:31ff states categorically that a Christian has no need of more Advocates!)

When Jesus talks about “*another Paraclete*,” it means that he (Jesus) is himself the first (see 1John 2:1). In this context, the Catechism of the Catholic Church<sup>2</sup> teaches us that the sending of the Spirit is simultaneous with the sending of the Son, their’s is *a joint mission* in which the Son and the Spirit are distinct but *inseparable*. Their joint mission in us is to

<sup>2</sup> *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn.689,690



make us become more loving, like Jesus; hence Jesus' promise that while he must return to the Father, this other *Paraclete* "**will be with you forever,**" he is "**the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.**"

Coming back to our text, 2Cor 3:17f insists twice that "*the Lord is the Spirit*" (at the beginning and ending of the text), and goes on to explain that this Divine Spirit, whom Jesus called *Another Paraclete*, gifts us first with the tremendous gift of spiritual **freedom**. This "freedom" is not the same as *license* to do whatever one pleases, but *freedom* to live life in obedience to God: "*For you were called to freedom; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another*" (Gal 5:13). And again, "*God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-discipline*" (2Tim 1:7).

Moreover, Paul insists that the continuing work of the Spirit is all for our **transformation into Christ**. By indwelling us 24 hours x 7, the Divine Spirit is busy "*changing us degree by degree into Jesus' likeness.*" Notice that this happens not all once but by degrees! Our "*spirit, psyche and body*" (1Thes 5:23) are complex, and much influenced by *subconscious* and *unconscious* resistances to Gospel ideas, values and behaviour patterns, so it will be our lifelong work to cooperate with the Spirit in his "changing us into Jesus." Thankfully, the Spirit will never give up trying! Notice the tense used here by St Paul is not the past tense, nor the future tense, but the *present*

*continuous* tense: "*we all are being changed!*" Paul expresses in other Letters too his complete confidence in the Spirit at work in us: "*What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit*" (1Cor.2:9f, see also Phil 2:13, Eph 3:20, 2Tm 1:12, etc).

The Holy Spirit has been at work with the Father and the Son from the beginning; but in these "end times," ushered in by the Son's redeeming incarnation, the Spirit is revealed and given, recognized and welcomed as a PERSON. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, singled out "communion/ fellowship" or "union of love" as the most characteristic blessing of the Spirit: "**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you!**" (2Cor.13:14).

In the Nicene Creed, all Christians profess: "*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets.*" Nevertheless, many Christians in practice consider the Spirit to be merely a gift *from God*, or a *nice blessing* of God, instead of *God himself*. Hence, in our own times, St John Paul II tried to re-focus the attention of God's People on this "neglected" Person of the Trinity, and asked every Christian to practise "a



vivid devotion”<sup>3</sup> to the Holy Spirit, pointing out that the Spirit is *God-in-action*, the self-gift of God to humanity.

### Part 3: THE SPIRIT MAKES US HOLY

**1Thes.4:7-8:** “*For God has called us for holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*”

The very name, *Holy Spirit*, indicates the function of the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. He is the Spirit of *holiness*, who *makes holy* all those who are open to his sanctifying action. The Holy Spirit is therefore at work among *all* God’s children, Christians and non-Christians. “The Spirit blows where it wills” (Jn.3:8), and makes every effort to influence all human beings, to draw them to eternal life. As Pope John Paul II wrote, “The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history.”<sup>4</sup>

Let it be understood that Christians *and* people of other faiths are *all* personally involved in spiritual warfare. The history of salvation shows that God’s coming close and

making Godself present to human beings *meets with resistance and opposition* in our human reality. This opposition becomes conflict and rebellion on the ethical plane, by reason of that *sin* which takes possession of the human heart, and about which St. Paul wrote so eloquently:

*“Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would”* (Gal.5:17).

*“I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate ...I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do”* (Rom.7:15-17).

St. Paul added that “*the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, licentiousness, drunkenness, and the like;*” there are also other “works of the flesh” like “*enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy*” (Gal.5:19ff). Pope St John Paul II elaborated: “Unfortunately, the resistance to the Holy Spirit, which St. Paul emphasizes in the interior and subjective dimension as tension, struggle and rebellion taking place in the human heart, finds in every period of history, and especially in the modern era, its *external dimension*, which takes concrete form as the content of culture and civilization, as a

<sup>3</sup> Encyclical on *The Lord and Giver of Life*, Pope John Paul II, n.51

<sup>4</sup> Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II, n.28



philosophical system, a program for action and for the shaping of human behavior. It reaches its clearest expression in *materialism*, both in its theoretical form: as a system of thought, and in its practical form: as a method of interpreting and evaluating facts, and likewise as a program of corresponding conduct... Materialism radically *excludes* the presence and action of God, who is spirit, above all in man... being a system that is essentially and systematically atheistic...”<sup>5</sup>

Human beings must not only fight evil *within* themselves as individuals, but there is a global, cosmic, *systemic sin* which humanity must fight against, in order to establish “the new creation.” All human persons, regardless of their religion, color, social status, etc., are involved in this fight:

**“We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”** (Eph.6:12).

But if *all* human beings must fight strenuously against the *Evil Spirit*, we can be confident that *all* human beings also enjoy the active help of the *Good Spirit*. Hence, John Paul II went on to point out the *Christian certainty* that the Spirit is at work in human beings and in the world, seeking to renew the face of the

earth; that if “the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit,” and that the *Spirit is taking many new and powerful initiatives* in our times to fight against evil, so that all of us can joyfully say, from personal experience, “*where evil abounded, grace abounded all the more*” (Rom.5:20).

## **BRIEF BIODATA**



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<sup>5</sup> *The Lord and Giver of Life*, n.56