

**“DO NOT STIFLE THE SPIRIT”:
KARL RAHNER, THE LEGACY OF VATICAN II,
AND ITS URGENCY FOR THEOLOGY TODAY**

INTRODUCTION

What is it that invites us, perhaps compels us, to think and to speak about the Spirit today? Theologians from whom I have learned the most, both ancient and modern, all warn against trying to comprehend the Spirit in a systematic way. When I think of all the ink that has been spilled on the so-called immanent Trinity, I certainly wish our professional tribe had observed that “honorable silence” recommended by those with a little more theological common sense. How can pneumatology avoid useless speculation and make us more acutely desirous of and sensitive to the Spirit?

My own reflections are driven by a few basic realities. First, there is an incredible interest today in the Spirit and in spirituality. People are paying attention to the spiritual dimension of their lives and often seem to be experiencing the Spirit in ways and places that often challenge traditional theologies and Church structures and sometimes have little connection with traditional religious practice. The Spirit is present and active beyond the official structures and ordained ministries of the Church. Second, it is impossible to ignore the religious or spiritual factor in many of the crisis areas of the world today. Work for genuine dialogue, mutual respect and understanding among the Churches and the religions of the world is an absolutely essential part of the work for peace and justice among the peoples of the world. Only in this way can the Church be a sacrament and an effective instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humankind (LG 1). Such dialogue, respect and understanding can only be based on a presumption that the Spirit of God is truly present and active everywhere, and not simply in one Church or religion.

Spiritual renewal within the Catholic Church and our recognition of the Spirit outside its boundaries is in large measure the fruit of the Second Vatican Council, often called the council of the Holy Spirit. At its convocation on Christmas Day of 1961, Pope John XXIII called upon the Divine Spirit, praying: “Renew Your wonders in our time, as though for a new Pentecost.” The council signaled a fundamental shift in the Church’s consciousness of itself in relationship to the world as a whole and to other religious traditions in particular. In many of its key documents, it embodied and encouraged a new attitude of openness, freedom, respect, dialogue and cooperation, both inside and outside the

Church. This is the great legacy of the council. Sadly, it is a legacy threatened in today's Church.

This evening, I shall focus these reflections on pneumatology on the legacy and challenge of this great council of the Holy Spirit in the context of Karl Rahner's theology. His theology, which is deeply pneumatological, was crucially formative during the council and enormously influential after it. It offers an insight into and a constant reminder of Vatican II's commitment to the workings of the Spirit in the Church and in the modern world. And it continues to challenge theology today to attend to the Spirit who blows where she wills.

In an address entitled "Do Not Stifle the Spirit," delivered a few months before the council opened, at a national "Catholic Day" in Austria, Rahner spoke passionately about the great possibilities and challenges facing the Church.¹ As I recently reread his address, I was struck by its timeliness almost thirty years later. Rahner warned that the Spirit who blows everywhere and in the most varied places "can never find adequate expression simply in the forms of what we call the Church's official life, her principles, sacramental system and teaching."² He saw the charismatic element of the Church in a perilous situation.

It is a situation dominated by a spirit which has been rather too hasty and too uncompromising in taking the dogmatic definition of the primacy of the pope in the Church as the bond of unity and the guarantee of truth, this attitude objectifying itself in a not inconsiderable degree of centralization of government in an ecclesiastical bureaucracy at Rome.³

In what he viewed as a "Church of officialdom"⁴ he heard Paul's words to the Thessalonians not simply as a timeless principle, but as an urgent imperative in the here and now. It is no less urgent today.

The fact that we can stifle the Spirit is obvious and painful. Thirty years after the "new Pentecost" of the council, there are ever increasing signs of retrenchment. Despite the enormous accomplishments of various consultations, the ecumenical movement seems to have lost its steam. We have not yet really begun to take seriously the issue of interreligious dialogue. The centralization that Rahner complained of lives on not only in specific directives from the Vatican, but even more seriously in the kinds of episcopal appointments we have seen over the last fifteen years or so. And, as theologians, we are all too aware of the kind of ideological centralization that has been taking place. How little room there seems to be left in the Church for free and respectful discussion, argument and, yes, even real disagreement.⁵

¹*Theological Investigations VII* (New York: Herder, 1971) 72-87.

²*Ibid.*, 75.

³*Ibid.*, 76.

⁴*Ibid.*, 78.

⁵What *Dignitatis humanae* said of conscience and religious liberty applies just as well

My students at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge are chiefly Jesuits and lay men and women preparing for ministry. I find it mildly amusing to realize that I, unlike many of them, was alive during the council! It is quite a challenge to familiarize them with the documents, and above all with the *spirit* of this great event, a spirit which has been increasingly stifled. Imagine their reactions when they read in *Gaudium et spes* how collaboration, consultation and interdisciplinary exchange should characterize theological formation and how "all the faithful, clerical and lay, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry and of thought, and the freedom to express their minds humbly and courageously about those matters in which they enjoy competence" (GS 62).

The Church has in some instances already advanced beyond the council. Nonetheless, it is sad commentary on the present that we must again go "back to the future" in Vatican II, to remind ourselves of basic shifts and developments that must not be lost and forgotten. A renewed pneumatology must begin with a conscious acknowledgment of the spirit of Vatican II and the new sensitivity to the Spirit that it called for.

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS AT VATICAN II

A forgetfulness of the Spirit, especially in Western theology, has been bemoaned for some time. A real breakthrough came with the council. A new pneumatological awareness characterizes many of its major documents and most significant texts, even though it did not present a systematically developed pneumatology. In the first four paragraphs of *Lumen gentium*, for example, we find a pneumatological perspective that widens the Christological focus of traditional ecclesiology and provides a new context for the Church's self-understanding. The Church is the work of the Spirit, who makes believers one in the unity of the triune God (LG 4). In a way remarkable for its time and still urgent for us today, the council insisted that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the People of God not only through the sacraments and Church ministries, but also through special charisms bestowed by the Spirit freely on all the faithful in a variety of ways. These gifts are to be acknowledged and received with thanksgiving for the upbuilding of the Church (LG 12). Believers have "the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of humankind and for the upbuilding of the Church" (AA 3).⁶ The authority of the hierarchy is affirmed in

to the theological ministries of the Church, both that of the academy and that of the magisterium. "The truth cannot impose itself except by virtue of its own truth" (DH 1). The real "splendor of the truth," it seems to me, is that it, unlike the appeal to authority, *does* have the power to persuade.

⁶The language of right seems quite remarkable. *Apostolicam actuositatem* went on to affirm that in "so doing, believers need to enjoy the freedom of the Holy Spirit who

terms of the responsibility it has to recognize and foster the charismatic gifts of the laity that come from the Spirit.⁷ In a striking formulation, the council insists that the "body of the faithful as a whole, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief" (LG 12).

Dei verbum also manifests a key shift of perspective relative to pneumatology and Church life. Moving away from an earlier, propositional understanding of revelation as divine truths about God, it views revelation in its most basic sense to be God's own *self*-communication to human beings through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, through whom humanity "comes to share in the divine nature" (DV 2).⁸ As a result, Scripture and tradition are understood to be divine revelation in a clearly derivative way; namely, insofar as they mediate God's personal self-communication in Jesus and the Spirit. In this way, the Church has taken a clearly pneumatological position against fundamentalism and literalism, whether of the biblical or dogmatic variety. Revelation is primarily the personal communication *of* the Spirit, that is, God's own life, not the disclosure of divinely privileged information *about* God. The ongoing history of theological reflection and expression of this experience (liturgical, theological and moral) is derivative of the experience and dependent upon the Spirit as the source and final norm of its adequacy.

It is hard to underestimate the significance of the Church's acknowledgment that the community of the saved cannot be identified with the Roman Catholic Church. Paragraphs 15 and 16 of *Lumen gentium* mark an astounding paradigm shift in the consciousness of the Church regarding salvation and its historical mediation.⁹ Non-Catholics, non-Christians, nonbelievers—anyone who strives to live a good life can be saved. It is significant that the language we find here is

'breathes where he wills.' At the same time, they must act in communion with their brothers and sisters in Christ, especially with their pastors."

⁷The bishops and priests are admonished that they must exercise appropriate judgment in a way that does not stifle the Spirit. This is highlighted in both *Lumen gentium* 30 and *Presbyterorum ordinis* 9, which make it clear that the bishops and priests do not dispense such charisms.

⁸The two approaches are not incompatible. Indeed, the council continued to speak of divinely revealed truths in a way quite reminiscent of Vatican I. But with one simple phrase, at the very beginning of its treatment on revelation, the council also set a new accent: "In His goodness and wisdom, God chose to reveal Himself . . ." (DV 2).

⁹After refusing simply to identify the Church of Christ with the Roman Catholic Church (LG 8), these paragraphs describe in an ordered way, the relationship of the Church to Jews, Muslims, all seekers of God and, finally, even those who, not having arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, nonetheless live according to the dictates of their consciences. The relationship is grounded precisely in the saving activity of God. While some of these groups share closer historical and religious association, what binds all of these groups together is the one God who wills the salvation of all, and whose providence denies no one the means of salvation.

chiefly the language of the Spirit.¹⁰ Here we have the beginnings of an ecclesiology that takes as its fundamental principle the fact that the Church is a *sacrament* of the Spirit. The Church cannot be identified with the Spirit. It is not the Church that saves but the Spirit, at work in the Church and beyond it, who saves.

This new understanding of the Church and of the presence and action of the Spirit in the world fostered profound shifts in attitudes toward other Christian denominations and toward other religions. The ecclesiological constriction exemplified in the famous axiom of Origen, Cyprian and others, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* was dramatically loosened. New life and enthusiasm for ecumenical and interreligious dialogue appeared. On the other hand, the council iterated the traditional teaching that the Church is necessary for salvation and that Christ himself, the one mediator and unique way of salvation, affirmed the necessity of faith and baptism (LG 14; AG 7). It insisted that the "many elements of sanctification and truth [that] can be found outside of her visible structure" are "gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ" and "possess an inner dynamism toward Catholic unity" (LG 8). Whatever truth and grace that is to be found among the nations will be healed, ennobled and perfected in the Church (AG 9). Reaffirming the importance of evangelization, the council described the work of the Spirit in the hearts of all men and women as a "preparation for the Gospel" (LG 16).

It would seem that the pneumatology of the council was still largely dominated by a Christological and, to a lesser extent, an ecclesiological focus. The Spirit who is universally present and active is precisely the Spirit of Christ, and as such always points and leads to the fullness of the Church of Christ. Perhaps one could say that an exclusivistic Christological and ecclesiological *constriction* gave way to a more inclusive view with a Christological and ecclesiological *focus*, precisely because of a turn to the Spirit. Yet, the twofold teaching about the universality of salvation and the necessity of the Church and baptism express a tension at the heart of the Church's understanding of itself and its mission.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF KARL RAHNER

This tension became a dominant focus in theology after the council, especially in the work of Karl Rahner. It was in this context that Rahner made his greatest contributions to the renewal of Catholic theology in general and to

¹⁰It is explicit in the context of the relationship between the Christian Churches, which are joined in "some real way by the Holy Spirit" whose power is active in them (LG 15). After mentioning the Church's relationship to the Jews and to the Muslims, it acknowledges that the God "who gives to all life and breath" is not far from anyone who seeks the unknown God. Even those who, in the absence of any explicit knowledge of God, simply follow their consciences and strive to lead a good life, do so by the very promptings of grace. All this is the work of the Spirit, "the One who enlightens all that they may finally have life" (LG 16).

pneumatology in particular. Indeed, I believe that no one in our century has contributed to the renewal of systematic theology through pneumatology in such a fundamental way.

This judgment may strike you as odd. One might think rather of the magisterial works of Yves Congar, Heribert Mühlen, Hans Urs von Balthasar or the multitude of fine studies which have appeared in the last ten or fifteen years.¹¹ Rahner wrote only a few essays on the Spirit, collected as a single volume in *Theological Investigations*.¹² And it is curious that one finds the Holy Spirit only once as a subtitle in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*. How central can the Spirit be in his theology?

Most of us think of theological anthropology when we hear the name Rahner. The specifically Christian way he developed the modern "turn to the subject," both formally as a transcendental method for theology and materially as he turned his attention to the different theological subdisciplines, is both central to understanding his work and so much contemporary Catholic theology dependent upon him. But this is precisely where he reflects on the mystery of the Spirit. And this pneumatologically oriented anthropology is the foundation of his whole theology. Let's consider this point.

Universal Transcendental Revelation in the Spirit

Addressing the tension between the universal saving action of the Spirit and the necessity of supernatural revelation and faith, Rahner concludes that such revelation and faith must occur in some way on a universal, transcendental level. His thesis is that God reveals Godself to every human person in the very experience of one's own finite, yet absolutely open-ended transcendence. God is the Holy Mystery who is the ground and horizon of human subjectivity. According to Rahner, any real experience of human transcendence or subjectivity always involves a real, if only implicit experience and consciousness of God as the absolute Spirit who is the ground and horizon of my spirituality.¹³ In light of

¹¹Among them: Yves Congar, *Je crois en l'Esprit Saint I-III* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1979-1980); Heribert Mühlen, *Der Heilige Geist als Person* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1963); idem, *Una Mystica Persona* (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1968); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1967); idem, *Pneuma und Institution* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1974); idem, *Theologik III: Geist der Wahrheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1987).

¹²*Theological Investigations XVI. Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Of course Rahner's first major work dealt with the human person as spirit: *Geist in Welt* (Innsbruck: Rauch, 1939) [ET: *Spirit in the World* (New York: Herder, 1968)].

¹³"Experience of Self," in *Theological Investigations XIII* (New York: Seabury, 1975) 122-32 at 125f. Interesting in this regard is the term "energy field" from physics, used by a number of contemporary theologians to describe the Spirit: W. Pannenberg, *Systema-*

the Christ event, Christian faith proclaims that the God who is our horizon is not ever-distant and unreachable but the One who has drawn intimately near. In Christ, our real humanity—Jesus' humanity—is revealed to be capable of and oriented toward real personal union with God in the Spirit, and in Jesus this union is historically and irrevocably achieved.

For Rahner, therefore, the human person is "the event of a free, unmerited and forgiving, and absolute self-communication of God".¹⁴ By "self-communication" he means to say that God makes her very own self the innermost constitutive element of the human person.¹⁵ *God's* self-communication is at once God's gracious communication to me of *my* self. Thus, for Rahner, human existence is characterized by a supernatural existential, where, of course, "supernatural" is simply a way of referring to the utter gratuity of the grace which constitutes human nature in its very essence.

This, for Rahner, is precisely the mystery of the Spirit. "God . . . has already communicated himself in his Holy Spirit always and everywhere and to every person as the innermost center of his existence."¹⁶ Human spirit and the desire which is its dynamism are elicited into being and final fulfillment by the divine Spirit, who is at once wholly other and wholly within. The Spirit draws human spiritual transcendence into existence, opens it up toward the immediacy of God and brings it to fulfillment not simply from without but from within.¹⁷ Thus, for Rahner, experience of self and experience of God constitute an original and ultimate unity.¹⁸ And it is precisely the notion of spirit which enables Rahner to make this connection.

Such experience, it should be noted, is not individualistic, inward-gazing reflection. To speak of spirit or transcendence is not to speak primarily of self-

tische Theologie I (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1988); M. Welker, *Gottes Geist: Theologie des Heiligen Geistes* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag, 1992); O. A. Dilschneider, *Geist als Vollender des Glaubens* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1978); Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Pneumatologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994).

¹⁴*Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978) 116.

¹⁵See also "Natural Science and Reasonable Faith," in *Theological Investigations XXI* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) 16-55 at 35f. There, in order to avoid pantheism, Rahner says that God is not an inner constitutive element of a created being, but God's own being is the quasi-formal cause of a determination of the finite being.

¹⁶*Foundations* 139.

¹⁷It is worthwhile noting how different this "anthropological turn" is from the modern notion of the autonomous self. For Rahner, the transcendence of human spirit is not so much an active movement from self-possession toward the outside world and God as much as it is a response to the presence and self-communication of the Other in which I first come to experience and possess my true self.

¹⁸"[W]ithout any experience of God, however nonthematic and nonreflexive in character, experience of the self is absolutely impossible. And hence it is, as we have said, that the personal development of experience of the self constitutes the personal development of the experience of God and *vice versa*" ("The Experience of Self," TI XIII 126).

presence or possession, but of being in relation with others. One can only be a "self" and come to an experience of one's "self" in dialogue and loving encounter with other persons. The experience of subjectivity that Rahner is really talking about is not the intellectual curiosity of an isolated subject, but the experience of transcendence in love. "The act of personal love for another human being is therefore the all-embracing basic act . . . which gives meaning, direction and measure to everything else."¹⁹

For this reason, Rahner insists that at its most basic level, our encounter with God takes place precisely in our encounters with other human beings. Experience of God, experience of neighbor, and experience of self constitute a fundamental unity.²⁰ In fact, for Rahner, genuine human transcendence in love is only possible because of the gracious self-communication of God in the Spirit.²¹ Such an encounter in love is truly love of God, whether one realizes this explicitly or not, and not simply some kind of preparation for or effect of the love of God.²² Thus, the most basic mode of divine revelation is in the human experience of love.

Categorical Mediation in the History of Religions

Such universal, transcendental experience of God in the Spirit does not obviate the significance or, indeed, the necessity of historical revelation and religion. In Rahner's judgment,

[t]his Spirit is always, everywhere, and from the outset the entelechy, the determining principle, of the history of revelation and salvation; and its communication and acceptance, by its very nature, never takes place in a merely abstract, transcendental form. It always comes about through the mediation of history.²³

Transcendental experience of the Spirit, insofar as it is personal, is oriented toward explicit, reflective awareness, even if such awareness can never completely capture the experience itself. Human beings need to reflect upon, name, and share experiences in order to be able to enter into them and appropriate them more fully. The history of revelation is precisely the history of such experience as it comes explicitly to consciousness and is expressed in the

¹⁹"Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations VI* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1969) 231-49 at 241.

²⁰"These relationships, on the contrary, are present, as a matter of necessity, all at once, and as mutually conditioning one another, in every act of the subject endowed with intellect and freedom" ("The Experience of Self," TI XIII 128). They do not simply exist side by side, as if the human person happened to encounter herself here, another human being there, and then again, occasionally, God.

²¹See "Unity of Love," TI VI 237ff. Also, Frans Jozef van Beeck, "Divine Revelation: Intervention or Self-Communication?," *Theological Studies* 52 (1991) 199-226.

²²"Unity of Love," TI VI 237.

²³"Jesus Christ in the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations XVII* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 39-50 at 46.

religious traditions of the world.²⁴ The history of revelation is essentially a "self-interpretation of the revelatory and transcendental experience of God," not as an adventitious movement from without, but rather as "the immanent power of this divine self-communication."²⁵ Religious traditions are in turn crucial in the mediation of transcendental experience of the Spirit. They form a context for such experience and play a critical role in its specific shape and character. There is a sense in which we can say that the symbols of religious traditions are revelatory, insofar as they play a mediatory role in the concrete process in which we become explicitly aware of and consciously respond to God's self-communication in the Spirit, which is revelation in the strict sense.

Contrary to the claims of some of his critics, Rahner is well aware of the irreducible particularity of human experience, especially in its religious depth. In Rahner's terminology, one might say that a transcendental analysis of the relationship between human spirit and God in the Holy Spirit forms the basis of an *existential* description of transcendental experience. The concrete particulars of such experience will in every case be different and specific, depending upon the *existentiell* situation of the persons involved. Hence the crucial importance of particular religious traditions. Rahner is not proposing that all people basically have the same "generic" experience of God, which is then just put into different words. But Rahner is convinced, precisely as a Christian monotheist, that the plurality of transcendental experience is ultimately grounded in the one and only God.

The Universality of the Spirit and the Normativity of Christ

In Rahner's view, therefore, all religious traditions potentially express truth about God's self-communication in the Spirit. Christians should not consider the other religions as merely "natural" human constructs as opposed to the "supernatural" mediations of divine self-communication in Christianity.²⁶ In principle, the other religions, not only as expressions of individual religious experience, but also in their social, cultural and institutional structures, may be considered "part of the history of revelation properly so-called."²⁷

This does not mean that all religious traditions express equally valid interpretations of divine self-revelation. On the contrary, one can presume that there is error to be found everywhere in religious history. The concrete history of all religious traditions involves the ongoing discernment regarding the truth and purity

²⁴See *Foundations*, 153-61.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 156.

²⁶For Rahner, no religion is simply "of human origin." See *Foundations*, 146.

²⁷"On the Importance of the Non-Christian Religions for Salvation" in *Theological Investigations XVIII* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 288-95 at 290.

of its insight and practice.²⁸ To the extent that any religion, even though non-Christian, correctly interprets the fundamental, gracious self-communication of God to humanity in the Spirit, that religion may be understood as "positively willed and directed by God."²⁹

This brings us to the question of criteria. How does one distinguish a correct interpretation from a false one? Rahner clearly argues for the normativity and absoluteness of Christianity but offers a new interpretation of how the Christ event is the "cause" of the salvation of all the world in the Spirit. The life, death and resurrection of Christ are seen as the historical event in which God's universal, gracious self-communication in the Spirit and its acceptance have become irreversibly and victoriously manifest in history.³⁰ The "world is drawn to its spiritual fulfilment by the Spirit of God, who directs the whole history of the world in all its length and breadth towards its proper goal."³¹ This goal is at last achieved in an eschatological way in the Christ event, which has a

primary sacramental causality for the salvation of all . . . insofar as it mediates salvation by means of salvific grace which is universally operative in the world. It is the sign of this grace and of its victorious and irreversible activity in the world. The effectiveness of the cross is based on the fact that it is the primary sacramental sign of grace.³²

The Christ event is not the reason why God bestows herself in the Spirit, nor is it the inauguration of that divine self-gift. The Spirit is the reason, both the cause and the logic, of the Christ event. He is the one in whom this process, which takes place always and everywhere and coincides with the history of the world, is brought by God to its goal. In this sense, for Rahner, the Christ event is the *final cause* of the communication of the Spirit. One could say that "Jesus is the 'cause' of the Spirit, even if the reverse relationship is equally true."³³ This is Rahner's justification for calling the Spirit always and everywhere the Spirit of Christ.³⁴

²⁸Even so, he argues that "even false, and debased religious objectivity can be a way of mediating a genuine and grace-given transcendental" of the human person. "It is, for example, quite possible for a polytheist to act positively in regard to the true, absolute God, for whom in his objective, verbalized consciousness he finds a name from his polytheistic pantheon" (ibid., 294).

²⁹*Foundations*, 156.

³⁰"Christ in the Religions," TI XVII 46.

³¹"The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations XVI* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 199-224 at 204.

³²Ibid., 212.

³³"Christ in the Religions," TI XVII 46.

³⁴See the illuminating essay by William Thompson, "Word & Spirit, Hermeneutics & Transcendental Method: Exploring Their Connections in Karl Rahner," *Philosophy and Theology* 7/2 (Winter 1992) 185-212.

For Rahner, this mutuality is captured in the language of sacramental causality. The sign is both a cause of grace and itself caused by grace. Jesus is a real symbol brought forth by the Spirit, so that the divine self-communication in the Spirit achieves fulfilment.³⁵ We can say that for Rahner Jesus is the primary sacrament (*Ursakrament*) of the Spirit. Thus, the absoluteness of Christ and of Christianity have been reinterpreted in an inclusivistic way, precisely in view of the universal presence and action of the Spirit.

This is the foundation of Rahner's famous—and much criticized—theory about anonymous Christianity. He admitted that the terms "anonymous Christianity" and "anonymous Christian" might be problematic but continued to insist on the basic truth they sought to express.³⁶ He also moved away somewhat from earlier descriptions of other religions as debased, overtaken and obsolete—destined to progressive abrogation with the historical expansion of Christianity.³⁷ He began to speak of a "Christology of quest"³⁸ and a "seeking *memoria*," a kind of a priori principle of expectation.³⁹ He even suggested that on the whole, the non-Christian religions are in fact the ordinary ways of salvation for most human beings.⁴⁰ And in a rather extraordinary passage, he challenged those attempting a Christian theology of religions to attend in a kindly and precise way to other traditions, even where they speak of savior figures. From the dogmatic point of view, he insisted, "there is no reason to exclude such discoveries from the outset, or to write them off contemptuously, as if they stood in such contrast to faith in Jesus, as the eschatological, unsurpassable savior, that they can only be judged negatively."⁴¹

The Challenge of Interreligious Dialogue

Rahner tended to see the mission of the Church more in terms of fostering unity and love than in terms of the Great Commission to evangelize. *Nostra aetate*, he felt, encouraged a "patient and positive coexistence of the Church with the other religious communions" and "invites us to take seriously the non-Christian religions as such".⁴² Christianity cannot simply ignore what might be revealed in other religious traditions on the *a priori* grounds that the fullness of

³⁵Compare "Christ and Universality," TI 16 213, where Rahner uses the language of grace instead of Spirit.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 218ff.

³⁷See, e.g., "Church, Churches and Religions," in *Theological Investigations X* (New York: Herder, 1973) 30-49 at 47.

³⁸"Christ and Universality," TI XVI 220ff.

³⁹"Christ in the Religions," TI XVII 47ff.

⁴⁰"Importance of Non-Christian Religions," TI XVIII 293, 295.

⁴¹"Christ in the Religions," TI XVII 50.

⁴²"Importance of Non-Christian Religions," TI XVIII 289.

truth is already contained within Christianity. One cannot so easily say that the fullness of truth is contained in Christianity if one acknowledges that the Spirit is not contained by or restricted to Christianity.⁴³

This means that *outside of Christianity* there may well be insights and truths that have come to a reflective awareness, which have either been forgotten or never actually been achieved in Christianity, even though it is the "absolute" religion. This does not imply the insufficiency of Christianity as a way of salvation, or deny the normativity for Christians of the Christian experience of Jesus and the Spirit. Quite practically, however, it might mean that non-Christian religions, with the wisdom of their particular expressions of genuine experience of God in the Spirit, are not only genuine ways of salvation for their adherents but also necessary, revelatory elements in the ongoing history of Christianity's own understanding of the reality and meaning of God's self-communication through Jesus in the Spirit.⁴⁴ How often it has been the case that doctrinal, ritual, and moral development has been occasioned by the challenge of other perspectives and outside pressures. In any case, dialogue is imperative if the Church is to be attentive and obedient to the Spirit. As David Tracy points out, real

⁴³There can be no doubt that the council continues traditional affirmations concerning the fullness of truth or saving revelation in Christ and the Catholic Church. For example: "the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace" (*Unitatis redintegratio* 4); the "fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church" (*Unitatis redintegratio* 3); "she must ever proclaim Christ, 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life" (*Nostra aetate* 2). But it is also evident that the council is striving to understand such affirmations in a new, more nuanced and inclusivistic way, precisely because it acknowledges the truth of the Spirit's saving action outside the Church. Note the important nuance of *Lumen gentium* 8 on the relationship between "the Church" and "the Catholic Church."

⁴⁴This is a point that has been made effectively by Gavin d'Costa, whose work in this area owes quite a bit to Rahner (see, e.g., "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal," *Modern Theology* 1/2 [January 1985] 131-48 and *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). He proposes that "the church stands under the judgment of the Holy Spirit, and if the Holy Spirit is active in the world religions, then the world religions are vital to Christian faithfulness" ("Christ, The Trinity, and Religious Pluralism" in Gavin D'Costa [ed.], *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* [Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990] 16-29; here 22). It is incumbent upon the Church, he argues, to provide a space for attentive engagement with the narratives of other traditions. These include not only the narratives of holiness recognized within these traditions, but also the narratives of oppression, often experienced at the hands of Christians (19, 24ff).

The fruitfulness of such dialogue is evident in the new approach to comparative theology in the work of Francis X. Clooney SJ. See his *Theology after Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) and a recent review of pertinent literature: idem, "Comparative Theology: A Review of Recent Books 1989-1995," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 521-50.

conversation demands the willingness to risk all one's present self-understanding by facing the claim to attention of the other.⁴⁵

The value of such dialogue is clear. From a Christian point of view, it is a wonderful thing to see how closer, ongoing contact and dialogue with Asian religious traditions has helped bring about a profound renewal of Christian spirituality. I presume that the reverse may also be true. Might not the same happen on the theological level? And, the urgency of dialogue is clear as well. Our world is still gripped by prejudice, suspicion, animosity, and hatred that frequently have grown in the soil of ignorance, pride, and religious intolerance. Serious and sincere interreligious dialogue is a necessary part of the Church's work for peace and justice.

The Challenge of Ecumenism

A pneumatological perspective is also basic to Rahner's understanding of the Church and the relationship among the divided Churches. There is an ultimate unity that already exists among all Christians, a unity brought about and sustained by the Spirit of God, a unity that is real despite the disunity among the Churches that exists on the visible, social, and structural level.⁴⁶ All Christians "are truly justified by the Holy Pneuma of God, and are sharers in the divine nature."⁴⁷ In the Spirit "all of us 'know' something more simple, more true and more real than we can know or express at the level of our theological concepts."⁴⁸

But precisely because of this real unity in the Spirit, the work toward full expression of the unity of the Churches in the concrete is of paramount importance. Rahner himself stressed the urgency of ecumenical endeavors.⁴⁹ This requires a humble recognition of the presence of the Spirit in the divided Churches and a theological imagination that can conceive of appropriate models of union. If the action of the Spirit in the Churches is real, then reunion cannot mean the aban-

⁴⁵See *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 93.

⁴⁶"Church, Churches and Religions" TI X 42f; compare "Some Problems in Contemporary Ecumenism" in *Theological Investigations XIV* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976) 245-53 at 249-50.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 249. This requires the recognition "that the ultimate and innermost *testimonium spiritus* is present in all or must at least be presumed to be so, that the *illustratio et inspiratio*—concepts by means of which tradition seeks to clarify the movement of grace—that the wordless weeping and uttering of Abba by the Spirit in the depths of our hearts, that the Johannine anointing which instructs us, is present in us all even though this innermost reality of Spirit and faith is objectified and set forth verbally and conceptually in different forms in the individual confessions" (*ibid.*, 250).

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 251.

⁴⁹See H. Fries and K. Rahner, *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility* (New York: Paulist, 1985).

donment of what the Spirit has brought about in the traditions of the different Christian denominations. Reunion cannot mean submissive return to Rome. Only a model which appreciates and respects real union in difference, a model of a *communio* of Churches founded in the Spirit, could be adequate to the task.⁵⁰

Communio means a sharing of gifts, the gifts of the Spirit. Does the Roman Church really believe that the other Christian Churches have real gifts to share? The Spirit of God can manifest its presence in these Churches in objective ways that are not simply identical with life in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has something to learn from them.⁵¹

What it means in practice is that the truth which we are all called to seek is not something that can be sought only within our community. The familiar way that Vatican II continued to insist on the fullness of truth in the Roman Catholic Church while admitting the presence of truth outside it is no longer adequate. The fullness of truth is *not* present and realized in the Roman Catholic Church, at least in the sense that the Church is sinful and is not yet truly catholic.⁵²

This, it seems to me, means that the Roman Catholic Church should not act unilaterally on the grounds that it lacks nothing of the good present in the other Churches and is preserved from any error that may be present in them. For example, if it is the work of the Spirit in other Christian Churches that has brought about the ordination of women or a growing change in the positive way that gays and lesbians are recognized and welcomed, not only in congregations,

⁵⁰Rahner has suggested that since the Roman Catholic Church already recognizes several jurisdictions in the same territory, it must be possible for the Church to admit the existence of several "partner churches" with different histories and traditions that remain distinct within a living unity of faith and love. See "Ecumenical Togetherness Today" in *Theological Investigations XXII*, 84-93 at 89.

⁵¹"These objective manifestations do not have to be present in the Catholic Church with the same frequency, with an equal historical impact, or with the same clarity and power to convince the conscience. . . . To this extent the Catholic Church has something to learn from such genuine objective manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the non-Catholic Churches. They are, of their nature, a call and an incentive to watchfulness which the Spirit of God offers her because she herself, through the narrow-mindedness and sinfulness of her members, has not yet arrived at the full effectiveness of the part she has to play in human history or the full development of her own nature" ("Church, Churches, and Religions," TI X 45).

⁵²Commenting on "Mysterium Ecclesiae" [24 June 1973, Congregation for Doctrine: "What We Believe: Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church against Certain Errors of the Present Day], Rahner noted that "in the Catholic Church as it actually exists, the whole 'fullness' of what the Church contains is actually realized in its different parts and aspects to a very varying degree, and that much exists only potentially—especially if we compare merely potentially given elements of this kind with the degree in which they are realized in other Churches" ("Mysterium Ecclesiae" in *Theological Investigations XVII* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 139-55 at 141-42).

but also in ministry, then this should be a crucial datum for reflection within the Roman Catholic communion.

This does not mean that one can skip the necessary and arduous process of discerning the Spirit and say that whatever happens in another Church is the work of the Spirit, any more than a Catholic can sit back and say that whatever happens in the Catholic Church is the work of the Spirit. Indeed, these and other issues that face the Churches are the subject of intense debate and disagreement. But a recognition of the presence and action of the Spirit in the other denominations means that the discernment of these communities as they have struggled with important issues is of great theological significance and ought to have some real authority and weight for the Roman Catholic Church as it attempts to discern where the Spirit is leading it. Are we ready and willing to receive what the Spirit gives the whole Church through the Churches? As Margaret O'Gara has observed, "the ecumenical movement itself is a form of reception in which the divided communions within the one Church of Christ seek to receive gifts from each other in order to restore full visible unity."⁵³ At times the Roman Catholic Church seems much more willing to receive fellow Christians who are fleeing the changes in their own denominations.

The Charismatic Element of the Church

In order to conclude this survey of Rahner's development of key pneumatological themes of Vatican II, I would like to turn to the question of the charismatic dimension of the Church, especially as regards the interrelated issues of plurality, freedom, authority and dissent within the Roman Catholic Church. Fundamental to Rahner's conception of the Church is the conviction that the life of the Spirit is constitutive of the Church in a way more basic than its institutional structure.⁵⁴ The Church is primarily the "historical concretization of the charismatic as brought about by the Spirit of Christ."⁵⁵ The charismatic element refers not to a particular portion of or group within the Church; it refers to that fundamental life and unity of all believers in the Spirit and to the particular charisms given by the Spirit to each.⁵⁶

⁵³"Rethinking Infallibility in Ecumenical Dialogue: Epistemology, Ecclesiology, and the Issue of Reception," lecture at 13th International Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists (Boston College, 15 July 1994).

⁵⁴TI 12 97. The charismatic element "does not merely stand in a dialectical relationship to the institutional factor as its opposite pole, existing on the same plane. Rather it is the first and the most ultimate among the formal characteristics inherent in the very nature of the Church as such" ("Observations of the Factor of the Charismatic in the Church" in *Theological Investigations XII* [New York: Seabury, 1974] 81-97 at 97).

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁶The various charisms are the concrete ways in which the Spirit, present in each and every believer, works for the upbuilding of the whole Church. The institutional element

The charismatic nature of the Church, founded in the sovereign action of the Spirit, who can neither be coerced or predicted, requires that we understand it as an "open system".⁵⁷ For Rahner, this means that the Church cannot be understood, defined or directed from a point within the Church itself. The history of the Church, its real development in doctrine and practice, is not simply the unfolding of an origin in which everything is already present. Such an understanding of the truth, identity and integrity of the Church is impossible for an historically conscious age.⁵⁸ Neither are the truth, identity, and integrity of the Church to be found simply in its highest office. The Church is not a monarchy, or an international corporation in which the word simply comes down from the top, from the position of supreme authority.

The dynamics of church life must be understood in terms of the dominion of God, who cannot simply be contained within the system.⁵⁹ For Rahner, it is the Spirit, who in utter freedom and ultimate incalculability, works in the heart of every believer and "ushers the Church as an open system into a future which he himself, and no one else, has arranged, and in a manner which can never adequately be planned for beforehand by any man or institution."⁶⁰ In every age, the Spirit has worked in unlikely individuals and groups to call the Church to what seems new and even shocking. The magisterium has "its own proper and necessary function, but it is not the whole and not really the most fundamental datum from which all the rest could be deduced".⁶¹ Rahner calls the magisterium the "event of perceptible unity concretely coming to be again and again in faith."⁶² This unity in its concrete historical diversity is "sustained, controlled, and freely governed by the Spirit of God and not in the last resort by the magisterium itself."⁶³ As John Thiel has put it recently: authority in the Church is the power of responsibility to the Spirit and "we should be ready to discern the

of the Church, especially as embodied in its official, ordained ministry, cannot create or dispense the gifts of the Spirit. It has an authoritative function of leadership and service with respect to the gifts that the Spirit alone gives. Pastors on all levels have the responsibility to be attentive in order to discern the free and surprising presence and action of the Spirit, whose impulses, as Rahner notes, "do not always or necessarily have to manifest themselves in and through the official institutions" (ibid., 87).

⁵⁷Ibid., 88.

⁵⁸See, e.g., "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow" in *Theological Investigations XVIII* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 3-34.

⁵⁹"Charismatic," TI XII 89.

⁶⁰Ibid., 97.

⁶¹"Magisterium and Theology" in *Theological Investigations XVIII* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 54-73 at 63. What is fundamental is the "power of the self-revealing Spirit of God".

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., 64.

Spirit who is the source of authority wherever, whenever, however, and in whomever the Spirit shows itself."⁶⁴

Because the Spirit is present and active in all believers, one should presume, and indeed history shows, that there will always be a great variety of gifts and traditions. Because the pastors and teachers of the official Church have the responsibility to discern the Spirit's gifts among the People of God and the authority to implement these gifts for service in the Church's ministry, these different gifts and traditions can be seen in their fundamental unity: tradition in traditions. But history shows the readiness of the institutional Church to acknowledge only the familiar and a correlative hesitancy to recognize the newness of the Spirit. There is a kind of institutional concupiscence directed toward its own uniformity and insensitive to the plurality of the Spirit.

In today's Church, Rahner insisted that plurality is more radical than ever before. There is no longer a common, unifying philosophical, anthropological or cultural foundation (if, indeed, there ever really was). We are more conscious of the significant differences which arise out of the very particularity of experience. Plurality, therefore, should no longer be viewed with immediate suspicion as heterodoxy.⁶⁵ The unity of the faith that is expressed in the creed cannot produce or demand theological, liturgical, or disciplinary uniformity. As Rahner insisted, Europe and Rome are no longer the center of the Church. The world-Church cannot "simply import and imitate the lifestyle, law, liturgy, and theology of the European church."⁶⁶ The implications of this insight have been developed in Robert Schreier's *Constructing Local Theologies*.⁶⁷ In particular, theological pluralism within a "community of creed" is not merely to be tolerated as a temporary condition. It has a positive right to exist.⁶⁸ From this perspective, one can

⁶⁴"Responsibility to the Spirit: Authority in the Catholic Tradition," *New Theology Review* 8 (1995) 53-68 at 66. René Laurentin has lamented the unfortunate tendency to transfer the ecclesiological function of the Spirit to the pope, so that obedience to the Spirit is simply equated with obedience to the pope. This is closely connected with an ecclesiology that views the Church uncritically as a continuation of the Incarnation, the pope simply as the Vicar of Christ and thereby falls into both a Christological monism and an ecclesiological monophysitism because it fails to take seriously the role of the Spirit in the broader humanity of the Church's faithful. See "La Redécouverte de l'Esprit Saint et des charismes dans l'Eglise actuelle" in R. Laurentin (ed.), *L'Esprit Saint* (Bruxelles: Publications des Facultés universitaires Saint-Louis, 1978) 16f. Laurentin refers extensively to Heribert Mühlen, *Una Mystica Persona* (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1968).

⁶⁵See, e.g., "Heresies in the Church Today?," in *Theological Investigations XII* (New York: Seabury, 1974) 117-41.

⁶⁶"The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations XX* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 103-14 at 110.

⁶⁷Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985.

⁶⁸"Pluralism in Theology and the Unity of the Creed in the Church," in *Theological Investigations XI* (New York: Seabury, 1974) 3-23 at 22.

only be grateful for that style of theological research and writing which presents the faith of the Church precisely in the real diversity of its historical and current expressions. Surely this is one of the great strengths of Richard McBrien's *Catholicism*, and one of the relative weaknesses of the new universal catechism.

The inherent plurality of experience of the Spirit and of its theological expression is an essential element in the development of the Church's understanding of the mystery of faith. Such development normally occurs over a long period of time.⁶⁹ One can view such a process as the way in which the Spirit, at work in the wealth of diverse theological imaginations and styles, leads us into the fullness of truth. It is only in such plurality that a *reductio in mysterium* can take place concretely.

In the ordinary life of the Church, such plurality is rarely harmonious. Plurality inevitably means conflict and real disagreement, even with authoritative Church teaching and practice.⁷⁰ For Rahner, critical opposition in the Church is not necessarily a stance of disloyalty; in fact it is required of us.⁷¹ Obedience in the Church must be reconceived in a way that respects not only the wisdom of the tradition but also the primacy of conscience and the nature of the Church as an open system.⁷² And, perhaps in our own time more than ever, there is need for a theology of loyal opposition, especially concerning those issues where the Church is in a situation of what John Thiel calls "dramatically developing doctrine."⁷³

The differences and conflicts give rise to a process of discernment that is not extrinsic and merely incidental to the act of revelation itself. It flows from the very historicity of revelation.⁷⁴ It is in the often tedious and sometimes painful process of listening and arguing that the truth comes to light. To short-circuit this

⁶⁹Rahner spoke of "changeable" and "unchangeable" factors in the Church, but noted that it is not always so easy to distinguish them. History shows that even the most central dogmatic expressions of the faith, the most basic elements of the Church's order, and the fundamental ethical norms upheld by the Church have undergone constant reinterpretation and are open to the future. See "Basic Observations on the Subject of Changeable and Unchangeable Factors in the Church" in *Theological Investigations XIV* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976) 3-23 and "Does The Church Offer any Ultimate Certainties?," in *Theological Investigations XIV* 47-65.

⁷⁰"Charismatic," TI XII 95; see also "Opposition in the Church," in *Theological Investigations XVII* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 127-38.

⁷¹"[T]he Church's self-understanding and its own faith do not merely permit the Catholic to have an oppositional relationship to the Church . . . or make it unavoidable. An attitude of this kind is actually required of us" ("Opposition in the Church," TI XVII 129).

⁷²"Charismatic," TI XII 95.

⁷³See "Tradition and Authoritative Reasoning: A Nonfoundationalist Perspective," *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 627-51.

⁷⁴"Magisterium and Theology," TI XVIII 69.

process simply by an appeal to authority is subversive of authority and quite possibly subversive of the truth.

Authentic discernment of the Spirit requires an atmosphere of freedom for inquiry and experimentation, an attitude of patience and a willingness to engage in ongoing dialogue, even in the wake of a decision by the magisterium.⁷⁵ Here pneumatology can play an important role in a renewed theology of *reception*. Such a theology would have to take more seriously the presence and action of the Spirit in all the faithful in its "supernatural sense of the faith" (LG 12) and strive to articulate more clearly than *Lumen gentium* did, the necessity of consulting the faithful and the role of the assent of the whole Church for the authentic exercise of magisterial authority.

THE CHALLENGE FOR TODAY

This evening we have reflected on the profoundly new awareness of the presence and action of the Spirit that characterizes the Church of Vatican II. In particular I have focused upon the work of Karl Rahner, whose vision was so formative at the council and whose theology has been so influential after it. His pneumatology, developed in the context of anthropology, provided a systematic theological foundation for and further development of the Church's new self-understanding, especially concerning the world religions, other Christian churches and the basic charismatic element of the Church. Fundamental to his pneumatology is an understanding of human persons as the event of God's own gracious self-communication in the Spirit. From this follows a vision of the universal saving presence and action of God's Spirit. This Spirit is mediated and expressed precisely in the unique particularities of human existence in history. Rahner's vision of the Spirit is not that of some universal "indirect lighting," which being always, already everywhere is really "nowhere in particular." While avoiding an interventionary understanding of God's presence and action, which reduces God's personality and agency to that of other innerworldly beings and thus must seem hopelessly mythological, Rahner presents an understanding of God's Spirit as present "everywhere in particular." Each particular human existence is the ongoing historical *event* of divine self-expression and communication in the Spirit. The Spirit is the one who *from within* is constitutive of human existence in its transcendentality. The history of the world is the history of God's gracious self-communication.

This basic pneumatological vision had profound consequences in Rahner's reflections upon the different areas of systematic theology. I have highlighted only a few: (1) *revelation* is understood primarily as God's personal self-communication, not the imparting of supernatural truths; (2) *salvation* is the bestowal

⁷⁵See "Changeable and Unchangeable," TI XIV 20ff and "Magisterium and Theology," TI XVIII 64ff, 70.

of God's own Spirit and its free acceptance by human beings; personal union with God, not merely a benefit received or an action done on our behalf; (3) *the Church* is the sacrament of the saving Spirit that is universally bestowed, not its delimited arena; and (4) *life in the Church* depends on the grateful and obedient acknowledgment of the particular charisms given freely by the Spirit to every believer.

Rahner's vision and the way he was able to bring it to bear on the important issues we have reflected upon remain crucial today, thirty years after the council, especially amid signs of retrenchment, centralization and authoritarianism.

Of course, it would be unrealistic to expect that Rahner's theology can, in every respect, adequately address these and other important issues as the Church moves into the future. Some of his most admiring disciples, especially Johannes Metz, have been able to concretize his transcendental turn to human experience more radically in various political and liberation theologies.⁷⁶

The way in which Rahner was able to understand the Spirit always and everywhere as the Spirit of Christ, the inclusive way in which he spoke of the absoluteness of Jesus Christ and Christianity, and the way he called all those who open their hearts in love "anonymous Christians" are not entirely satisfying. But others have taken up the crucial issue of religious pluralism, recognizing the importance of a pneumatological approach and the need to reflect more deeply on the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit. The recent collections edited by John Hick, Paul Knitter, and Gavin D'Costa from Orbis Books offer a good sample.⁷⁷ From a different perspective, the new approach to comparative theology of Frank Clooney and others has been quite impressive.⁷⁸ Clearly, the question concerning the nature and goal of the Church's mission to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ explicitly in the new context of post Vatican II universalism remains one of the most critical issues facing theology today.

The underlying issues are Christology and trinitarian theology. Rahner's Christology, though developed in the perspective of his basic anthropology and theology of grace, was still largely dominated by the classical conceptuality of

⁷⁶See, e.g., *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980). The collection Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ and Jon Sobrino, SJ (eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993) also gives a good sense of this.

⁷⁷John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds.), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987); Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990). Some more recent evaluations of Rahner (as typifying the "inclusivist" approach): Lucas Lamadrid, "Anonymous or Analogous Christians? Rahner and von Balthasar on Naming the Non-Christian," *Modern Theology* 11/3 (July 1995) 363-84; Joseph Wong, "Anonymous Christians: Karl Rahner's Pneuma-Christocentrism and an East-West Dialogue," *Theological Studies* 55 (December 1994) 609-37.

⁷⁸See n. 44 above.

the incarnation as the hypostatic union of the eternal Word and the humanity of Jesus. Since then, in a variety of ways, many others have developed Christology more explicitly from the point of view of the Spirit. One thinks especially of Walter Kasper, Piet Schoonenberg, Hans Urs von Balthasar, James D. G. Dunn, Geoffrey Lampe and Roger Haight.⁷⁹

Rahner's seminal work on the Trinity⁸⁰ offers a compelling way to understand the divine Word and Spirit as inseparable dimensions of God's one act of self-communication. His famous axiom has inspired at least two generations of theologians to rescue the doctrine of the Trinity from a one-sided fixation on the inner being of God and to speak of God from our experience of salvation in Jesus and the Spirit. The excellent work of William Hill and Walter Kasper, and most recently, the new directions set by Catherine LaCugna and Elizabeth Johnson have done so much to retrieve this central Christian doctrine from obscurity.⁸¹ Still, the challenge remains: how can we find ways of speaking of our triune experience of God that makes our belief in one God clearer?⁸² This is a crucial task, particularly in view of dialogue with Judaism and Islam.

Finally, Rahner's own theological vision was clearly anthropological in its focus. The larger, cosmic dimension of God's creating and saving work in the Spirit, while not absent from his writings, is largely undeveloped. The ramifications for a theology of nature are beginning to be explored in some current

⁷⁹Walter Kasper, *Jesus der Christus* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1974); Piet Schoonenberg, *Hij is een God van Mensen* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1969); idem, *De Geest het Woord en de Zoon: Theologische overdenkingen over Geest-christologie, Logos-christologie en drieënhedenleer* (Averbode: Altiora, 1991); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theodramatik I-IV* (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1973-83); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975); idem, *Christology in the Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980); G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977) and Roger Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53 (1992) 257-87.

⁸⁰"Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte," in *Mysterium Salutis II* (Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1967) 317-401.

⁸¹William Hill, *The Three-Personed God* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1982); Walter Kasper, *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1982); Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

⁸²There remains much to be done. There seem to be good and valid reasons, especially in view of what we learn from other religious traditions, to avoid simply identifying the "Spirit of God" and the "Spirit of Christ." Moreover, the trinitarian notion of person remains problematic. Can one follow the suggestion of Lampe, who refers to "God as Spirit" rather than to "God the Holy Spirit" while doing justice to the divinity of Jesus? Personally, I am quite sympathetic to the less radical approach of Piet Schoonenberg, who rejects (correctly, in my view) "social," "communitarian" or "dialogical" models of the immanent Trinity, suggesting instead that the divine hypostases are something like personalizing principles in God that become persons (or personal) in the Christ event.

pneumatology, especially in the work of Jürgen Moltmann, Sallie McFague, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Elizabeth Johnson.⁸³

Theology in Pneumatological Perspective

After a long period of "forgetfulness," the Spirit has become an important subject of theological reflection. For this we can be grateful. Rahner's theology and the work of many theologians after him show the impact of a renewed pneumatology in the different areas of systematic theology. As I now draw to a close, I would like to single out six basic characteristics of Spirit-oriented theology that are noteworthy.

(1) *Immanence*. Thinking about the Spirit of God (or God as Spirit) brings our awareness of God's intimate presence within reality to the fore. It tends toward an pantheistic model of God's relationship with the world and insists upon the graced "nature" of all reality.

(2) *Universality*. The Spirit, by its very nature, is that which cannot be bounded. Thinking about God chiefly from the point of view of Spirit makes us more attentive to the universality of God's presence and action.

(3) *Particularity*. Rahner's thesis concerning the fundamental unity of experience of God and the experience of self understands the universal self-communication of God in the Spirit as the ever unique constitution of human selves. In the abiding mystery of personhood which characterizes each human being, we can see the irreducible particularity and variety of the Spirit in its historical expression.

(4) *Plurality*. Such an appreciation of the Spirit leads to an attitude which expects but cannot predict or control a real plurality. Whether one holds Jesus to be normative or even constitutive of the Spirit's expressions, one cannot maintain that Jesus is exhaustive of the Spirit's expression. Plurality, not uniformity, is a sign of the Spirit.

(5) *Unity*. As we have seen, for Rahner, spirit, whether human or divine, is the capacity for transcendence, being-toward (and we might add, "from") the other. Understood in this way, a focus upon the Spirit leads to a more adequate understanding of unity as union in real difference. Unity, not uniformity, is a sign of the Spirit. The Spirit is the One in whom we discover that God never is simply an "I" vis-à-vis the world, but always a "We" with the world. The Spirit is the One in whom we find the power to say and live, ever more deeply, "We" instead of merely "I."

⁸³Jürgen Moltmann, *Der Geist des Lebens: Eine ganzheitliche Pneumatologie* (München: Kaiser, 1991); idem, *Gott in der Schöpfung: Ökologische Schöpfungslehre* (München: Kaiser, 1985); Sallie McFague, *The Body of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Wolfhart Pannenberg *Toward a Theology of Nature* (Louisville: Westminster, 1993); Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

(6) *Freedom*. Traditionally, the Spirit has been understood as an expression of the utter freedom and sovereignty of God. We cannot simply deduce from the past the theology or the concrete forms of Church life necessary for the future. For that, there is need of a truly creative and imaginative process. The Christian imagination is an expression of the creative inspiration and freedom of the Spirit. A theology which takes seriously the Spirit may discover in its own dynamics an experience of the creative freedom of the Spirit. In other words, theology is never simply about the Spirit, it is something done in the Spirit and by the Spirit.

Being Open to the Spirit Today

This last remark brings me full circle, and—I am sure you will be happy to hear—to my concluding comments. In that remarkable speech on the eve of the council, Rahner proposed how we can be open to the Spirit. He called first for a new imagination, a keener awareness of the Spirit whose "inspiration is not merely confined to the official pronouncements and directives of the Church, or to the holders of official positions" in it.⁸⁴ Next, we must take risks and learn experimentally.⁸⁵ Third, we need "a true and bold interpretation of what *obedience* to the Church really means."⁸⁶ Fourth, we need the courage to argue and to endure differences and antagonisms. Finally, Rahner exhorted his listeners to pray, to have the courage to accept such tensions and conflicts, to acknowledge the plurality of gifts and charisms so that the inevitable struggle within the

⁸⁴"Do Not Stifle the Spirit," TI VII 80.

⁸⁵Regarding the ecumenical movement (and, I might add, interreligious dialogue), e.g., he insisted that we ask not "How far *must* we go?" but "How far *can* we go . . . can we create, in every conceivable way, the conditions which make possible a fruitful encounter . . . provided only that the measures which we take are reasonable, and are in any way reconcilable with the Christian and Catholic conscience" (ibid., 81)?

⁸⁶For this, "it is important to recognize the truth that the work of the Spirit in the Church takes effect not only through . . . official ministers, but through those over whom they preside as well; that his influence also extends in the inverse direction, from the ministered to the ministers" (ibid., 82). No one person has a monopoly on the charisms of the Spirit. Neither can the official Church claim any real authority to dispense or control them. He proposed quite a startling norm: "The principle which is given to the Church as a concomitant of the love she has to preserve in all her actions lays down that everyone in the Church must follow his own spirit, so long as it is not established beyond all doubt that he is in fact following a pseudospirit" (ibid., 83). This means that there "are actions which, are under God's will, demanded by the conscience of the individual even before the starting signal has been given by the authorities, and furthermore the directions in which these actions tend may be such as are not already approved or established in any positive sense by those authorities" (ibid., 85). It also means that we have the courage to say "No!" as members of the Church to particular tendencies or outlooks. This can be a means of "rousing the official Church to perform its function" (ibid., 84).

Church could be transformed into the "strivings of love," a process in which the Spirit is set free rather than stifled.⁸⁷

Let us both think and pray these days. And may we, in all our differences and agreements remain open to the Spirit, eager to welcome Holy Wisdom and ready to accept her yoke. For she is that refreshing breath of divine power who passes into every heart and makes us all friends of God.

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⁸⁷Ibid.