

HUMANITY WITH SPIRIT

by PAUL W. NEWMAN

IN the Christian literature about spirit one of the decisive questions that influences the interpretation of spirit at many points is whether all spirit is conceived to be divine or whether there are basically two kinds of spirit, human and divine. In Buber's understanding the spirit of love exists in the sphere 'between' and is participated in by humans rather than being produced by human will alone. Buber would thus come into the class of persons advocating that there is basically One Spirit.¹ Human spirit is seen to be in some way a response to or a sharing in the reality of the One Spirit. Paul Tillich, one of the greatest Christian students of Spirit, is somewhat unclear as to whether there are basically one or two kinds of spirit. On the one hand, he consistently uses two terms, 'human spirit' and 'Spiritual Presence', by which he means divine Spirit.² The use of these two terms would seem to indicate two kinds of spirit. Tillich describes at length these two kinds of spirit and speaks of their relationship as that of 'mutual immanence'.³ On the other hand, in his view of reality in the broadest perspective all spirit is an ontological reality that has its source in the trinitarian life of God.⁴ This suggests that there is only one Spirit after all. Tillich does a penetrating analysis of spirit as one of the dimensions of everything that exists and as the distinguishing feature of humanity, and at the same time he elaborates in great detail the activity of Divine Spirit as the actuality of God in relation to the universe and especially in relation to human beings. In the end one is left in some doubt about whether *all* spirit is somehow a product of the activity of Divine Spirit or whether there are actually two kinds of spirit that may coincide at times, resulting in human fulfilment, or may not coincide because human spirit takes the initiative to express itself

¹ See Buber, *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1970), p. 89; 'Spirit is not in the I but between I and You. It is not like the blood that circulates in you but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit when he is able to respond to his You.'

² Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (3 vols., New York: Harper & Row, 1967), III, p. 21.

³ *ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴ Tillich, *ST*, I, pp. 250-1.

in ways that are not compatible with Divine Spirit. I tend to think that Tillich comes out in the end with only one reality of spirit which can appear in the universe in many diverse forms, one of which is that form which we commonly call human spirit.

Nels F. S. Ferré was another great Christian student of spirit. In 1969 he published *The Universal Word*⁵ which was described by him as 'my lifework'.⁶ It is a significant treatment of what Ferré understood to be the three most fundamental categories of reality: Spirit, The Personal, and Love. Ferré had in earlier works explored these categories, most notably in an attempt to work out a Spirit Christology in *Christ and the Christian*⁷ and in *The Christian Understanding of God*.⁸ In *The Universal Word*, however, Ferré believed that he had found an approach to understanding reality which would make possible a universal faith. The three main categories mentioned above were hoped to be the concepts that would resolve the problems of understanding reality in terms of substance, as classical western philosophy has done. They would also resolve the problems of understanding reality in terms of process, as the followers of Alfred North Whitehead and some others have done. Furthermore, the understanding of spirit, as Ferré conceived it, would entail a new kind of logic called 'contrepletal logic',⁹ which represented the kind of thinking found in Far Eastern philosophies. Such logic can hold together the contrasting realities of *yin* and *yang* and thereby enable more profound insights into the complexities of life. It is without doubt a noble vision that inspired Ferré. His book, however, received generally indifferent, if not downright bad, reviews and has not received anything like the attention that it deserves. The reason for this, in my opinion, was that Ferré's writing style in this book verged at times on the ecstatic and incoherent.¹⁰ He seemed to be so enthused about his subject and the possibilities of contrepletal logic that ordinary inconsistencies¹¹ and *non sequiturs* did not

⁵ Nels F. S. Ferré, *The Universal Word* (London: Collins, 1970).

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷ Nels F. S. Ferré, *Christ and the Christian* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958).

⁸ Nels F. S. Ferré, *The Christian Understanding of God* (London: SCM Press, 1952).

⁹ Ferré, *The Universal Word*, p. 133.

¹⁰ For example: 'There is no incoming of what is outgoing apart from an outgoing of what is outgoing.' (p. 175.)

¹¹ For example: 'He (God) can be present and absent in the same man at the same time, ... without any contradiction in terms.' (p. 133.)

register with him the way they did with his readers. The concept he had of Spirit was also problematic, involving some horrendously tortuous distinctions, although there were very valuable insights as well. Finally, the fascination with reincarnation that occupied the latter part of the book could be regarded, especially by western readers, as a 'red herring' that detracted from the main thrust of the book.

These difficulties notwithstanding, Ferré's work on Spirit is still one of the most important in this century. He was a long-time acquaintance of Paul Tillich and was undoubtedly influenced by Tillich's work, although he was by no means an uncritical follower of Tillich.¹² His position on the question of one or two kinds of spirit was much like Tillich's. He divided the reality of Spirit somewhat in two, speaking of spirit and Spirit, but it is not always easy to see the distinction between the two. The former is a universal ontological category that functions much as 'substance' or 'process' do in other metaphysics. This reality of spirit was a 'neutral'¹³ capacity for identity, flexibility, inclusiveness, congruence, and integrity. It is the capacity that enables similarity and difference to coincide in a single entity. It is not, however, neutral in the sense of being completely inert or completely unformed. It has the power to create since it is the 'ground of being'.¹⁴ It is not simply energy but it 'produces, provides energy.' Again, it is not simply meaning but it is 'the fount of meaning'.¹⁵ This universal spirit is the 'indirect vehicle or carrier of the fuller original meaning or intention' (of Spirit).¹⁶

The Spirit of God includes all the reality, capacities, power, and meaning of spirit but is more than spirit in that it includes a distinctive 'coloration', namely, that of 'personal Purpose', and also in that it is motivated by Love. In spirit as 'the inclusive substrate of reality'¹⁷ the Spirit of Love works its personal Purpose. As is the case for Tillich, the Spirit of God ultimately has precedence for Ferré and is seen to be the origin and underlying

¹² Ferré's articles on Tillich's thought were sharply critical, claiming that Tillich's theology was fundamentally incompatible with genuine Christian faith. In one article Ferré passionately wrote: 'how I worked on that man (Tillich) and how I prayed for his being changed toward a fuller Christian message!' See 'Tillich and the Nature of Transcendence' in *Paul Tillich: Retrospect and Future* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 10.

¹³ Ferré, *The Universal Word*, p. 124.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 124.

reality of spirit throughout the universe. In the end there appears to be actually only one Spirit, although Ferré, with contrepleatal logic, asserts that 'Spirit is one and many. Reality is as much pluralism as monism.'¹⁸

It is worthwhile here to look further into Ferré's understanding of Spirit to see how Spirit relates to the various levels or dimensions of reality including the level of humanity. Divine Spirit has the 'capacity to become neutrally passive' as well as the capacity to be very active. In the lower levels of being, such as minerals or other inorganic materials, spirit is active in giving the forms which energy takes, but at these levels the personal Purpose and Love from Divine Spirit are only very indirectly present. As one progresses up the scale of beings to organic, vegetable, animal and, finally, human, the spirit becomes increasingly passive in order to allow increasingly active forms of energy to be expressed. In humans 'spirit is most passive since man is most active as a purposing or directing creature.'¹⁹

Humans have the capacity for responsible freedom of self-determination because Divine Spirit wills this in Love. As the ontological spirit, God as Spirit is deliberately passive in order to allow human energy and purpose to be actively expressed. Rocks are not given this freedom to the same degree and so can be said to be more indirectly related to the loving purpose of the Spirit of God.

In humans, however, the Divine Spirit is not only present passively as spirit, as the neutral capacity for identity and the underlying capacity for freedom; Divine Spirit can also *actively* encounter human beings to give them Love and to teach them how to love. This is like the concept of Spirit in the Bible and Christian tradition whose 'fruits' include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.²⁰ In the broadest perspective, then, there is for Ferré only one Spirit:

Spirit is and creates a pedagogical process, a cosmic environment from the lowliest beginnings of freedom through indirection, through a long process of inorganic evolution, through a long process of organic evolution, through a long process of what Teilhard de Chardin calls noogenesis, the

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁰ Gal. 5: 22-23.

evolution or birth and growth of mind, through the history of man and what lies beyond man. . . . Eternity as Love creates time as the condition for learning love.²¹

Human beings are the most advanced level that we can find of a cosmic process of 'spirits learning love through a history of freedom'. The process is created and directed by the Spirit of God who, for the sake of developing loving, free, personal spirits, deliberately holds back from imposing his Purpose of Love on all things in order that spirits might choose their own purpose and eventually learn to choose love above all other purposes.

Karl Rahner's first major work was entitled *Geist in Welt (Spirit in the World)*. This book is acknowledged to contain the basic foundations of thought from which Rahner's subsequent work consistently follows.²² It is by no means an easy book to summarise and I will not attempt to represent its entire contents but only speak to the question at hand, namely, should spirit be thought of as basically one (divine) or two (human and divine). The clue to Rahner's position on the matter can be seen in a quotation of his that is given in the Foreword to the book by Johannes B. Metz.

Anthropocentricity and theocentricity in theology are not contradictories but strictly one and the same thing seen from two different aspects, and each aspect is unintelligible without the other. That theology should be anthropocentric does not contradict it being most rigorously theocentric. . . . It is contrary to the view that it is possible to speak theologically about God without at the same time saying something about man, and vice versa. Speech about God and speech about man connect not only from the point of view of content, but also from the point of view of knowledge itself.²³

For Rahner, there are two kinds of spirit: Infinite Spirit, the Absolute Being of God himself, and finite spirit, the spirit of human beings. The two are closely related. Human spirit is spirit only because it is involved with the absolute being of God. In this book Rahner is concerned to study the involvement of human

²¹ Ferré, *The Universal Word*, p. 175.

²² See Johannes B. Metz, 'Foreword' in Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William Dyck, S.J. (New York; Herder and Herder, 1968), p. xvi.

²³ *ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

spirit and divine Spirit only in the areas of the dynamics of human knowledge, but the pattern of relationship discovered in this area is, he believes, the basic relationship of humans and God.²⁴ Rahner works out all his ideas and distinctions in direct relationship to Thomas Aquinas' theology, so his own position is highly similar to that of Aquinas. The human spirit knows God because it is created with the capacity to discern minimally the infinite being that is God. Fuller knowledge of God adequate for human fulfilment must come from God's self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. But the human capacity for knowledge of being as such, which is the minimal knowledge of God himself, should not be underrated. This capacity defines humanity as spirit. 'For spirit is the potentiality for the reception of all being and the active desire for it.'²⁵ Moreover, the 'end and goal of the spirit' is absolute being, God himself. The human spirit is free to make judgments, cogitate, and exercise imagination in its interaction with being. It is both agent and receiver in the knowing process but in the final analysis it predominantly receives. Its being as spirit comes from God and returns to God.

Rahner appears to be like Tillich and Ferré in using contrapuntal language of human spirit and divine Spirit; and like Tillich and Ferré the 'music', you might say, that embodies the counterpoint is the music of God. God's immanence is so much the origin of human spirit that there is a question of any human independence from God.

Karl Barth presents quite a marked contrast to the theologians mentioned thus far. He unequivocally holds that Spirit is 'of God'²⁶ and, therefore, it is proper to say that 'man *has* Spirit' not 'man *is* spirit.' For Barth as for Buber there is quite clearly only one kind of spirit.²⁷ The Divine Spirit, however, is very intimately involved in the being of humans, acting as the living 'basis'²⁸ for humanness through 'an ever new act of divine creation'²⁹ by God

²⁴ Rahner holds that 'the ontological constitution of man was disclosed in certain characteristics of human knowledge. . . . From the insight into the possibility of a judgmental, universal knowledge attaining to the in-itself (*Ansich*) of the object differentiated from the subject, we arrived at the essence of thought, and thereby, at the essence of man as spirit: *excessus* to *esse* absolutely; a form subsisting in itself.' (p. 239.)

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 283.

²⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), III, pt. 2, p. 356.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 358.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 344-66.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 348.

in man. Barth understands human beings to consist of body and soul inseparably held together as a living entity by the presence of God's Spirit. Thus, Spirit is never absent entirely from human beings. As Barth put it, 'Man is not God ... (but) man is not without God.'³⁰ God's Spirit continually works throughout all creation but distinctively in humans as 'the principle and power of the life of the whole man'.³¹ Spirit 'makes man into a subject' but 'does not merely become the subject of man.'³² Like Tillich, Ferré and Rahner, Barth affirms the extremely close and dependent relationship of humans to their Creator. Unlike the others, however, Barth refuses to identify spirit as human, preferring to say that wherever spirit occurs it is the Spirit of God. There is here, then, a clear alternative position on the question under consideration.

The question is then: should one speak of one Spirit only or can one speak of two or more kinds of spirit? As the heading for this essay indicates I believe it is more accurate to identify only one reality of Spirit and to use other terms for what is usually referred to as human spirit. The main reason for this is to preserve clearly a distinction between Creator and creature. If humans are identified as being essentially spirit in the way Tillich, Ferré and Rahner do, and human spirit is eventually identified with the Spirit of God, albeit with some qualifications, the result is a loss of real distinction between humans and God or between creature and Creator. Tillich and Ferré, if not Rahner, both subscribe to the term 'panentheism'. Both appeared to be very cautious about using the term, Tillich more so than Ferré. Tillich used the term only once in his three volume *Systematic Theology*, on the third last page of the last volume.³³ Ferré was not in favour of a panentheism of being but believed that if Love was one of the three ultimate categories of reality then 'panentheism becomes viable.'³⁴ Panentheism means 'God in everything; everything in God.' It differs from pantheism (God *is* everything; everything *is* God) by insisting that God is *more than* everything, 'transcending' the universe, as well as being *in* everything. The problem with using the term spirit to identify both humans and God and then holding that spirit in each case is really the same reality is that it is difficult to avoid the logical conclusion that human spirit *is* divine.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 344.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 363.

³² *ibid.*, p. 364.

³³ Tillich, *ST*. III, p. 421.

³⁴ Ferré, *The Universal Word*, p. 140.

Pantheism that includes the identifying of human spirit with the Spirit of God becomes virtually identical with pantheism. It says in the end that God's Spirit is the spirit that defines humanity and that the human spirit is the Spirit of God. The qualification that God's Spirit is more than the spirit of humanity or the spirit of the universe is little more than a courteous nod in the direction of any difference between Creator and creature. The essential identity of the Spirit of God and the spirit of creatures is the crucial affirmation that determines the idea of God, as well as the idea of humanity.

What is needed is a definition of humanity that takes account of the deep and universal involvement of the Spirit of God in humanity and the world but that also clearly maintains the distinction between humans and God or the world and God. Some definition other than 'humans are spirit' might clarify the reality of humanness and also the reality of the Spirit of God. It might correct the theological weaknesses inherent in pantheism³⁵ while not losing the valuable emphasis on God's immanence in the world.

Karl Barth saw the importance of saying unequivocally that all Spirit is of God. He maintained, further, that humans are 'not without God', thus affirming the close and universal involvement of the Spirit of God with humanity. How then did he define human beings? 'Man,' he said, 'is soul of his body.'³⁶ Like Jesus, every human being, in Barth's view, is 'one whole man, embodied soul and besouled body.'³⁷ Soul and body are united in an inseparable whole so that humans are more than soul alone or body alone. Soul, however, as the 'animating', 'rational', component has some priority in the wholeness of man.³⁸ To call human beings 'embodied souls' has some definite advantages but it also has theological disadvantages. The chief advantage is that humans are seen to have a basic identity that is clearly different from the identity of God as Spirit. The term 'soul' has the advantage of being biblical. In the story of human creation in Genesis 2:7 the first designation given to a human being is 'living

³⁵ The chief theological weakness in pantheism is confusion of the distinction between creature and Creator. On the one hand, the creature is divinised, and on the other hand, God is so much identified with the creation that his freedom as God becomes questionable.

³⁶ Barth, *CD*, III, pt. 2, p. 352.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 327.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 365.

soul'. In Christian tradition the term 'soul' as applied to humans alone has been used much more than in recent times and more than the term 'human spirit'. Thomas Aquinas, for example, used the term 'soul' to define humanity more than Rahner does who prefers the terminology of 'spirit'.³⁹ Soul can be understood as the 'organ' of Spirit, the instrument by which God is mirrored or 'imaged'. As such it explains the close involvement of God with humanity.

The use of 'soul', however, tends to give a dualistic view of humans as being body and soul. Such a dualistic view is neither theologically nor scientifically sound. Theologians in recent times have taken great pains to affirm the essential wholeness of humans; hence, the widespread preference for 'spirit' over 'soul' as the definitive category of humanity. Barth was well aware of the need to avoid a dualistic view but could not use 'spirit' for the reasons we have already cited. His use of the term 'besouled body' as well as 'embodied soul' was intended to emphasize the wholeness of human being, and he explicitly stated that because humans *have* Spirit their being is not dualistic but has the wholeness of a more or less integrated 'subject'.⁴⁰ In spite of all the precautions and qualifications, however, the oblique insinuation of dualism persists when soul is held to be the distinguishing characteristic of humans.

Another disadvantage in using the term 'soul' is its utter incapacity to suggest any similarity between the essential being of human creatures and that of other creatures. Unless we take a highly romantic stance we cannot speak credibly about the souls of other animals or vegetables, not to mention inorganic entities. 'Spirit', as Tillich or Ferré uses it, has the very real advantage of suggesting some kind of common denominator in everything that is created without reducing the common denominator to 'flesh' or 'dust'⁴¹ and then introducing the dualistic idea of soul for humans alone. 'Soul' serves well for indicating the uniqueness of human beings but at the expense of not indicating any commonness with other creatures. Yet one of the facts that has emerged from the 'knowledge explosion' of the twentieth century is that human beings share many, many characteristics of the other creatures.

³⁹ Thomas Aquinas said, 'Man knows through the soul.' (Quoted by Rahner in *Spirit in the World*, p. 212.)

⁴⁰ Barth, *CD*, III, pt. 2, p. 390. ⁴¹ Cf. Gen. 2:7.

The solution that I would advocate for this cluster of theological problems centred around the nature of humans and God is to restrict the use of the term spirit to the Spirit of God and to hold that personality is the definitive and distinguishing category of humanity. Personality is the free and programmed expression of power and meaning with the possibility of integration by the Spirit. All created things and creatures can be said to express power and meaning in their being but only humans have personality in the strict sense of the word. This is chiefly because humans have a measure of freedom unlike other creatures. We say that God also is personal but it is clear in this case that God's kind of personalness is different from human personality which is inseparable from the programmes of the animal species and the inorganic world. To say that humans are personalities does not in any direct way suggest they are basically divine and it in no way supports a tendency toward pantheism.

At the same time, the concept of personality fits, I believe, with the idea of humanity created in the 'image' of God. This idea of *imago dei* is indispensable for understanding humanity because it signifies the fundamental relatedness of humans and God without which humanity could have no real hope of fulfilment either individually or collectively. The 'image' properly understood is a dynamic process rather than a static condition or indelible mark put on humans by the Creator. 'Image' is a metaphor based on reflection, as in a mirror. There can be no reflection without a constant relationship between the 'original' and the 'image'. Hence the prime significance of the idea of the image of God in humans is the affirmation that humans are created with a distinctive capacity for relating dynamically with the Creator. Personality, understood as the whole more or less integrated expression of power and meaning through programme and freedom in humans, allows for the dynamic expression of the Spirit of God or the 'fruits' of the Spirit in human being without confusing the basic identity of humans with the Spirit of God. Personality can have the fruits of the Spirit because that, in part, is what personality means. Personality is, in part, the capacity to image or mirror by free and programmed expression the Spirit of God, the Creator, who is the ultimate Source of the personal and its essence, love.

One has to say that personality is only *in part* the capacity to

reflect personal Spirit because in fact it is more than this. Human personality can express many combinations of freedom and programme that are not by any means identifiable as the reflection of the Spirit of God. Thus, the term personality allows for all kinds of human expression without positing the existence of numerous evil spirits or even two kinds of spirit, human and divine. What may have been called evil spirits in ancient polytheistic societies can be more adequately described now in terms of our better understanding of the structures of society and of human biology and psychology. By not calling all human expression the expression of the human spirit, of which God's Spirit is the source, we avoid the terminological implication that God's Spirit is ultimately responsible for the often vicious, destructive manifestations of human beings. Unless our language about God and humanity clearly acknowledges the *distance* between creatures and Creator, as well as the closeness, it will be hard to avoid the implication that to some degree God should share the blame for what goes on in human history. As Emil Brunner and others have pointed out, the concept of creature inherently implies distance as well as interrelatedness.⁴² So does a dynamic concept of image in the sense of mirror. To conceive of humans as personalities with Spirit preserves the two connotations of distance and closeness better than does conceiving of humans simply as spirit.

There is another major advantage of adopting the terminology of personality. It opens up the possibility for mutual engagement of theology with the vast literature of the scientific study of humanity. Theologians should not continue largely to ignore what psychologists, sociologists, biologists, and other social scientists conclude 'in good faith' about humanity and the world. And should not the insights held by theologians 'in good faith' be considered more often in the deliberations of the human sciences? If the theologians of humanity used more consistently and explicitly the language of personality that is accepted in the human sciences there would be a better chance of theologians being heard by the scientists, as well as *vice versa*.

While it is desirable for the theology of human personality to relate to the human sciences, the biggest advantage could be that it relates more adequately to the biblical understanding of the

⁴² Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1942), p. 90.

Spirit of God. By conceiving of the Spirit of God primarily as an ontological principle that is equivalent to the being that is in everything, Tillich, Ferré and, to some extent, Rahner risk losing sight of the freedom of the Spirit of God that is an absolutely basic quality of the biblical understanding of Spirit. If the creature is given more 'distance' from the Creator, as well as closeness, then the freedom of both creature and Creator become more intelligible. The Spirit of God known to the scriptural writers was very much free, coming, as John 3:8 graphically portrays it, like the wind that blows where it wills. This concept of Spirit is somewhat at variance, at least terminologically, with a concept of Spirit that in the end is identical to human spirit.⁴³ Speaking of humans as personalities with Spirit avoids this anomaly and leaves the understanding of the freedom of God's Spirit uncompromised.

Needless to say, much more needs to be said about this subject. The concepts of personality, freedom, and programme, and the concept of divine Spirit need much further elaboration. However, any further discussion of humanity and spirit may benefit by clarification of the question of whether there are one or two kinds of spirit. The argument here contends that there is only one kind of Spirit, the Spirit of God. Other 'spiritual' realities are better designated by other terms.

⁴³ Eduard Schweizer comments on the understanding of Spirit in the Old Testament: 'Man is subject to this power (Spirit), but he is not identified with it; he is "flesh" and not "spirit."' See Eduard Schweizer and others, *Spirit of God* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1960), p. 2.

PAUL W. NEWMAN
St. Andrew's College
1121 College Drive
Saskatoon
Sask. S7N 0W3
Canada