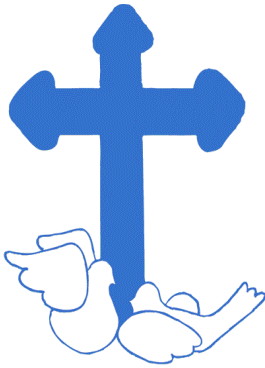


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Come, Holy Spirit

Eight conferences presented on the Internet during the Easter season, 2005

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1. OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATIONS

In planning these presentations, I plotted out many organizational schemes, most of them developing the topic in a rather logical, systematic manner. While it's certainly possible to present the material in this manner, after awhile it just didn't feel right. When I studied my reactions, what I noticed was that my own experience and education concerning the Holy Spirit has been anything but straightforward through the years. I was reminded of Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, where he states, "the wind blows where its pleasure takes it, and the sound of it comes to your ears, but you are unable to say where it comes from and where it goes; so it is with everyone whose birth is from the Spirit." (Jn. 3: 8)

What I've learned from this passage through the years is that the Spirit works with us on many levels at once, and that it's generally impossible to "organize" what's going on into systems and stages without considerably distorting the reality. That's kind of what it's felt like writing these conferences as well: inspirations and enthusiasm for one aspect of life in the Spirit would come at one point, then something seemingly unrelated would follow. Things just didn't flow in an orderly manner, so I finally quit trying to force things into that mold. If Jesus says that no one can predict where those born of the Spirit come from and where they go, then how much more the kinds of thought processes prompted by the Spirit?

This is not a bad thing, however, for while the Spirit doesn't seem to be opposed to reasoning and logical approaches, She's not especially enamored of them either. She (and I use the feminine pronoun as it resonates with several Old Testament references to the Spirit) seems to much prefer working on many levels at once, and of keeping one just a little off-balance in the process. Control is not a high priority for Her, but organization that enhances creativity is. Problem is, sometimes, we mistake the former for the latter and that's what I don't want to do in these conferences.

So I will jump around a bit—actually, a lot. If it doesn't hang together or seem to flow from one thing to the next, well, trust your perception, for it will be correct! Nevertheless, I am confident that, on the whole, we will cover the relevant topics and explore the important issues. If you find me negligent in an area, you can always bring it up on the discussion forum and, hopefully, find a helpful response there.

Opening Statement and Conclusions

This opening statement is a good example of what I was referring to above. It's an introduction to the topic and a concluding statement as well. Everything that follows in the conferences to come will elaborate on this opener, to some extent. In a way this is good, I think, for you'll know from the start where I'm coming from and where I'm going. You can relax and enjoy the process and the study the material; hopefully, you will also contribute by sharing your own thoughts and experiences on the forum. So here we go . . .

It's pretty clear from the witness of the New Testament that the gift of the Holy Spirit is what makes it possible to live a Christian life. The Christian "way" is never presented as a matter of learning Christ's teaching and using one's mind and will to conform to his values. Without the Holy Spirit, living the life that Christ taught through word and example is not considered possible.

Amazingly, it seems that the Christian life is often presented today as a kind of philosophy or system of values that Jesus modeled perfectly. Little mention is made of the Holy Spirit, or if it is, this is only understood symbolically—as in some kind of "spirit" of Christian love. A case in point, here, would be a conversation I had recently with the head of a religious community. We were talking about the meaning of the life of Christ and he said that, for him, the primary meaning was to reveal to us God's loving nature. That's true, of course, but when I asked if that was the main thing, to him, he said that it was. "What more do we need than to know

that God is love?" he stated, rhetorically.

The answer to this question is what we need is POWER. It's not enough for us to know that Jesus was the incarnate Son of God who died for our sins and revealed to us the values that really matter. We need the power to live the kind of life he revealed and taught, and that's what the Spirit makes possible. In fact, it's not stretching things at all to say that one of the main reasons Jesus came was to bless us with the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's true that he also came to break the hold of evil and sin, but without the gift of the Holy Spirit, the human race would have fallen right back into its old ways. That is why Jesus said; "it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." (Jn. 16: 7). Certainly, it was good that Jesus came, but even Jesus says that it is better that he go so that he could send the Spirit. Somehow, his death, resurrection and ascension opened the way for the Spirit to be showered on the whole human race in a way that did not exist before his coming. (We will reflect more deeply on this mystery during a future conference.)

As breath is to the human body, regulating its operations and rhythms, so is the Holy Spirit to Christ's Mystical Body. The Spirit "breathes" the divine life into us and "engineers" a transformative process that changes us from cancer cells in the cosmos to living cells in the Body of Christ. This process—the spiritual journey—is nothing we could accomplish using our own will, intelligence and behavior; it is pure gift, and it is given to all people who belong to Christ either through implicit or explicit faith. All that the Spirit needs from us in order to accomplish this work is our ongoing cooperation in living a life of love and a commitment to spiritual discipline, especially prayer. The rest is a work of grace.

As cells in the Body of Christ, we each have a contribution to make unto growing and maintaining the life of the Body. To accomplish this, the Spirit blesses every individual with charisms, or spiritual gifts, to be used for the good of others. These gifts might be similar to what we can do with our natural talents, but often they are not. Some people, for example, can't really carry on a good conversation with others, but put them in a position to preach the Word of God and amazing things come from their lips! Through the exercising of spiritual charisms, we grow in the Spirit and we help to build up the Christian and human communities around the world. It seems to be the delight of the Spirit to move people to form communities and it seems to be our joy as well to belong to a Spirit-filled community. As we all know, however, finding such a community is sometimes difficult; the local Christian parish or congregation is often little different from any other kind of secular gathering, and I think this grieves the Spirit greatly.

We can grow in the Spirit and become more attuned to the Spirit's direction and influence in our lives. We can also learn to better identify and develop our spiritual gifts; we will address these possibilities in sessions to come. Finally, we can learn more about Who the Spirit Is and how She relates to Christ and the Father in the story of creation and redemption. That will be part of our study in the weeks ahead as well, and I think it can help us to come to a deeper love of God. As Frank Sheed once put it, the more we learn about God, the more reasons we have to love God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What kinds of thoughts and feelings were awakened in you from this conference? What questions?
2. What is it you hope to learn during this series?

We've mentioned Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit, so let's go a little deeper into that. Not all the Gospels have the same teachings, and some are relatively quiet when it comes to this topic. Nevertheless, the overall picture is one of Jesus ministering by the power of the Spirit and promising to bless his followers with the same Spirit after he had died and risen. As noted in our opening conference, he even says it's better for him to go so that he can send the Spirit to us in a new and powerful outpouring; otherwise, his followers will be left to their own resources, and will lack the power and wisdom that the Spirit brings.

Let's take a few passages to get an idea of how Scripture presents Jesus speaking of the Holy Spirit. There are many very helpful resources to choose from, here, but one of the best and simplest I've found is from the Internet. You can check it out yourself: http://www.msgr.ca/msgr/BIBLE_HOLY_SPIRIT_02.htm

I'll elaborate briefly on the main points, which are from John 14-16. Due to copyright restrictions, I will not reproduce the actual texts from Scripture, so you can look them up.

1st Teaching: Jn. 14: 15-17

The Spirit is . . .

- A. Another Advocate
- B. She will be with us forever
- C. She is knowable
- D. She abides with us
- E. And is in us

A. Another Advocate. An advocate is one who pleads the case of another. Jesus considered himself to be our advocate in that he interceded with the Father on our behalf. The Spirit will do the same; She is a coach and guide.

B. Forever. The gift of the Spirit will not be a one-shot affair, or a passing phenomenon. The gift to the human race is permanent. There is no less a gift of the Spirit now than there was in the early Church; this is one of the implications of Jesus teaching.

C. Knowable. Biblical knowledge is experiential. We will know the Spirit not through abstract conceptualization, but through actually participating in the life She brings. Philosophers call this connatural knowledge. The Spirit will be intimate with us, communicating Her presence in the depths of our being.

D. Abides. This is such a lovely word and refers to the Spirit's continuing presence among us. One dictionary definition even mentions "expectant waiting" and "bearing patiently" in reference to this word. Such is the attitude of the Spirit toward us. She waits for our response expectantly and patiently and is quick to assist us when we do turn Her way.

E. Dwells within. It's a tricky thing, talking about inside and outside a person. This reference to interiority means that the Spirit is not "out there" beyond our person but is more deeply present to us that we are to ourselves.

Pause awhile and reflect on these points. What part(s) are speaking to you? What is your response?

Second Teachings: Jn. 14: 22-30

The Spirit . . .

- A. Is sent in Jesus' name
- B. She will teach us everything
- C. She will remind us of Jesus' teaching

A. *Sent in Jesus' name.* The usage of name here refers to "person." To be sent in someone's name means to be sent in behalf of their person, or as their representative. Jesus is saying that the Spirit will have a reference to Him. This is one of the ways to tell if something is coming from the Spirit rather than another source-the reference it has to Jesus.

B. *To teach us everything.* Yes, you read correctly-the Spirit will teach us about all sorts of things, not just religious and Churchy topics. That is because the Spirit, acting on Jesus' behalf, wants us to live life to the full (Jn. 10: 10) just as Jesus does. As our ever-present Coach, She guides our words and actions in all areas of life.

C. *To remind us of Jesus' teachings.* As the ending of John's Gospel notes, if everything about Jesus were written down, it is doubtful that all the books in the world could contain them. It is the Spirit who brings to mind what we once heard but now need to remember in order to accomplish what the present moment calls forth from us. She knows all of Jesus' teachings and can whisper them into our mind and will as needed. This doesn't mean that we need not study the Bible or theology, however, only that we can trust the Spirit to help us remember what we need.

How do you experience yourself being sent and taught by the Spirit? Take a few moments to reflect on this.

Third teachings: John 15:20

- A. Jesus will send the Advocate from the Father
- B. She is the Spirit of truth
- C. She will testify on Jesus' behalf

The Spirit is . . .

A. *Sent from the Father.* This grouping of teachings is a little more theological. Jesus notes that the Spirit proceeds from the Father, just as he notes elsewhere that he was sent by the Father. This is an important point as he is establishing a parallel between his mission and that of the Spirit. The two missions are both willed by the Father for the good of the human race; both are necessary to accomplish the Father's will on earth as in heaven.

B. *The Spirit of Truth.* The Spirit is about Truth, not pretense. When we are willing to really get at the truth of an issue, we can be sure that calling on the Spirit will bring results. It doesn't matter if we are dealing with religious truth or searching for answers in other areas of life. The Spirit of Truth desires that Truth be extolled and will help us find our way.

C. *To testify on Jesus' behalf.* Here again the meaning of the words used are important. To testify is to give witness-even in a solemn manner-and to do so in Jesus' behalf means to do so in support or defense of him. Christians can be assured that when Christ's good name and teaching is being misrepresented or defiled, the Spirit will rise in the heart of the believer, prompting one to take a stand for Jesus. The Spirit will also give one the right words and approach to take.

When have you been moved to "testify on Jesus' behalf?" How does it feel to be used by the Spirit during such times?

Fourth Teachings: Jn. 16: 7-8

The Spirit will . . .

- A. prove the world wrong about sin
- B. prove the world wrong about righteousness
- C. prove the world wrong about judgment

A. *Wrong about sin.* Here we see the contrast between the Spirit of Truth and the spirit of the

world, which rationalizes sin and has enculturated sinful practices in many ways. The entire thrust of the Spirit is diametrically opposed to the ways of sin and exposes such whenever it comes upon them. Believers will notice this direction in their own hearts as they feel an aversion to sinful ways.

B. Wrong about righteousness. It is the Spirit who makes us righteous and transforms us into likenesses of Christ. The world, here, refers to those cultural traditions that promise happiness and success, but which turn out to be empty promises. The Spirit sees where things come from and where they go and warns us against pursuing false pathways to happiness.

C. Wrong about judgment. God does not judge as the world does, but sees the heart of an individual. Sometimes what the world sees on the outside the Spirit, viewing the inside, sees as perversion. Sometimes the opposite is true as well-what the world deems worthless, the Spirit considers priceless. This is especially true of a heart that is humble and open to the Spirit's guidance.

How do you experience the Spirit in you providing guidance about the harmful ways of the world? What aspects of the culture does the Spirit move you to value?

Fifth Teaching: Jn. 16: 12-14: summary

The Spirit . . .

- A. will guide us ... into all truth
- B. will speak what he hears
- C. will prophesy
- D. is self-effacing
- E. will glorify Jesus

This is a good summary of previous teachings, reaffirming the Spirit's orientation to Jesus and Her emphasis on truth. We note the addition of the action of prophesying, which means far more than foretelling the future. The more common purpose of this gift is to speak God's word- especially words of encouragement and correction-to the community to help them live in accordance with God's ways.

So there we have the core of Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit, presented in John's Gospel in the context of Jesus' departing remarks to his disciples. We see that his teaching is not complicated or highly intellectualized; the Spirit is introduced in a way that Jesus' early followers could understand.

Now let's see what some of your impressions are of this teaching.

1. *What images of the Holy Spirit do Jesus' teaching suggest to you?*
2. *How do you think you would feel if you were hearing this teaching for the first time?*
3. *How do you feel about the kind of "work" the Spirit wants to accomplish in us?*

3. THE COMING OF THE SPIRIT

In this section, we will continue to reflect on biblical references to the Holy Spirit, focusing now on early accounts of the coming of the Spirit. This is a kind of natural follow-up to our reflection on Jesus' teaching in that we are examining how this teaching actually came to be realized in the early Church.

To begin, we note again that before the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were an impotent group, largely consumed by grief over the crucifixion of Jesus, and

wonder concerning their experiences of his resurrection. His parting words to them (according to Luke) were that they would "receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1: 8). Following his ascension, they returned to Jerusalem and the upper room where Jesus had eaten the Passover meal with them before he was crucified. Present were the Apostles, several women, Mary the mother of Jesus and some of his kin. They prayed, had meals in common, supported one another, and waited . . . for what, I'm sure they knew not.

Early Outpourings

There are two accounts in the New Testament of the initial outpouring of the Spirit—one in John's Gospel, the other in Acts. In John's Gospel, the Spirit is breathed upon the Apostles in his first resurrection appearance to them.

"Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you', and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." After saying this he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained." (Jn. 20: 19-23)

Here we see the disciples gathered and waiting, and we see Jesus imparting the Spirit to empower them as witnesses. This isn't really so different from the Acts account, which presumes a longer period of time between the resurrection and Pentecost. The differences in the accounts are real, however, and are the sort of thing that critics of Christianity like to harp on. Did the Spirit come right after the resurrection or weeks later? Both accounts cannot be correct on this point.

Well, maybe, but maybe not. It's possible that Jesus' breathed the Spirit upon the Apostles when he appeared to them, but that the fullness of the gift became known to them later, at Pentecost. It's also possible that John is not as concerned about history as Luke (the author of Acts) was, and that John is completing the teaching on the Holy Spirit we reflected upon in conference Two with this action of Jesus. Biblical scholars have much to say about these kinds of questions, but we'll leave them aside in favor of emphasizing the fact that the Spirit was given, as Jesus had promised, and this marked the beginning of the Christian religion.

As we read through the Acts of the Apostles, we find other instances when the Spirit was poured out. Generally, the transmission seems to come after a period of teaching and formation, with an Apostle coming to lay on hands to call forth the Spirit. This procedure continues in many Christian traditions to this day. There were other occasions, however, when outpourings were manifest before people were even baptized or had any significant Christian education. Acts 10: 44-48, for example, describes the Spirit coming to Gentiles who had listened to Peter's preaching. This type of manifestation was considered extraordinary, however, and was taken to be a message to the leaders of the early Church to help them recognize that Christ had come not only for the Jews, but for everyone, and that Baptism was to be open to all.

Finally, we noted outpourings upon believers who had presumably already been baptized and who had even already received the Spirit. An instance of this is described in Acts 4: 31; the purpose seems to be to embolden the believers in the face of persecution.

Receiving the Spirit

As noted above, there seem to be two general modes for transmitting the Spirit. In both examples, there is a gathered community who has been grieving the loss of Jesus, but who are in wonder over his resurrection. In the first mode, the Spirit is literally showered upon

them without the mediation of laying on of hands or any other such method. What is being emphasized in these passages is the gratuitous nature of the gift-that it comes directly from God and cannot be confused with any kind of energetic dynamic on a human level. This is not simply an instance of Jesus' followers getting caught up on a kind of nostalgic enthusiasm; there is a Power Who descends upon them and they are changed by the experience. There is also, in these outpourings, a definite experience noted by the recipients, a "before and after," if you will. The Spirit's presence is unmistakable in the experience it communicates and the effects that follow.

In the second mode--the transmission of the Spirit through the laying on of hands--we can presume a period of catechesis and preparation in advance. Even though there were occurrences such as those described in Acts 10: 44-48, these seem to have been the exception rather than the rule. Acts 8: 14-17 gives us what is more likely to have been the ordinary course of events. Here we read of Samaritans who had received the preaching and who had been baptized, but who had not yet received the Spirit. In response to a request from the evangelizing deacons, Peter and John "went down there, and prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet he had not come down on any of them. . . Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit."

The New Testament leaves little doubt concerning the reality of a reception of the Holy Spirit. It is a real experience! Everywhere we read of the coming of the Spirit, there are always signs that accompany Her reception, the most visible being exuberant praise and glory to God, often in a new or mysterious language (the gift of tongues, or glossalalia). Recipients also prophesy, speaking God's word of truth to one another, and generally show signs of boldness in speaking of what God has done in Christ. Paul seems to take it for granted that the people he writes to had an experience of the Holy Spirit, as he often reminds them of this Gift and encourages them to remember what it was like when the Spirit was given to them. This was a clear and distinctive "event" in the life of Christian faith, signifying the reality of God's life in the soul and new life in Christ. (As you read this, you're probably wondering about the disparity between that early perspective and what we observe in most Christian churches today. Maybe we can discuss this on the forum.)

A Modern Perspective

Theologians today maintain that the Spirit is given with Baptism, and that She is active in our lives even if we have not been especially open to Her. Some Christian denominations do not have a Sacrament of Confirmation, for example, or any kind of rite or ceremony to signify transmission of the Spirit. Even in the Roman Catholic Church, which makes a distinction between the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, it is taught that Baptism ". . . gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification . . . giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1266). Confirmation, in the Roman Church, is "like Baptism, which it completes" and which "imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual mark . . . the sign that Jesus Christ has marked a Christian with the seal of the Spirit by clothing him with power from on high so that he may be his witness." (CCC #1304)

The practice of the early Church and of many Christian denominations today, then, points up a kind of two-stage incorporation into Christ's mystical body, the first step being Baptism and the second Confirmation, which presupposes Baptism and is often administered years later. Traditions that do not celebrate Confirmation often encourage a kind of "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" to invite full surrender to the Spirit. In fact, even in traditions that do provide Confirmation, there is often an encouragement to seek this more mindful and conscious reception of the Spirit, as Confirmation is often received without much knowledge of the Gift or expectancy of its efficacy. Undoubtedly, there are still outpourings upon groups and individuals falling outside this process, not to mention the action of the Spirit in other world religions. That is another issue, however, to be discussed at another time . . .

Bottom line for readers: if you have been baptized as a Christian, you may be reassured that you have received the Holy Spirit. "Stirring up the Spirit" is more what is needed, and we will be discussing this in conferences to come.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What questions or comments do you have from this conference?
 2. What times in your life have you felt the Spirit stirring within?
 3. Do you remember your Confirmation or Baptism? How did you experience the Spirit during that time?
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4. TRANSFORMATIVE GIFTS

Early in the history of the Church, it was observed that those who received the Spirit began to evidence many wonderful changes in their lives. In reflecting on their experience, they turned to their own Scriptures and found resonance in a passage from the writings of the prophet Isaiah:

*A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,
A scion thrusts from his roots;
On him the spirit of Yahweh rests,
A spirit of wisdom and insight,
A spirit of counsel and power,
A spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh.*
- Is. 11: 1-2

Eventually, these came to be known as the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The passage alludes to the Messiah, who manifested these gifts fully; the same Spirit was shared with the followers of the Messiah, who also began to evidence these gifts. What the transformative gifts describe is what we might call the "character of Christ." The ongoing development of these gifts is a sure sign that the Spirit is transforming our human nature into a likeness of Christ's.

The transformative gifts of the Spirit are different from the charismatic or spiritual gifts; we will talk about the latter in our next conference. The transformative gifts are given to individuals for the sanctification of the individual while the charismatic gifts are given primarily for the good of the community. It is true that the transformative gifts also benefit the community, but that is not their primary purpose. What they indicate is growth unto becoming a likeness of Christ.

Let's spend a little time going through these gifts, reflecting on their meaning and the evidence of them we find in Scripture and in our own lives.

A. Wisdom. There is a wisdom that comes from human experience, but that is not the same thing as the Gift of Wisdom, which enables one to share in God's own perspective concerning a situation. Wisdom makes use of faith, human experience and reason and points the way to practical exercises of faith. Because of Holy Wisdom, one's conscience is moved to act correctly, and in accordance with God's will.

B. Understanding. This gift makes possible the comprehension of divine truth. Again, it works

in concert with human understanding, but to help us grasp something of the mysteries of revelation in a manner that supports and informs one's faith.

C. Counsel is specific guidance from the Spirit, enabling us to discern good from evil and, in certain circumstances, the better course of action.

D. Fortitude is a gift of courage, providing strength and energy to remain faithful and resolute during times of adversity.

E. Knowledge refers, here, to a direct grasp of God—a kind of experiential “knowing” the ways of the divine. Because we have knowledge of God, we are better able to discern the ways of God and to act accordingly.

F. Piety moves one to a deep love and devotion for God. It is this gift that makes it possible to keep the first commandment—that we love God above all else.

G. Fear of the Lord pertains to the dread of sin instilled by the Spirit; it is also a kind of holy reverence, taking expression in a desire to avoid offending God and to worship Him in religious ways.

Every Christian is blessed with seeds of all of these gifts, but their growth depends on a number of factors—most especially the response of the individual. The gift of fortitude, for example, grows stronger in us if we act on its promptings during times when the Spirit moves us to stand up for Christ, or perhaps simply for goodness. If we squelch the gift, we will be less sensitive to it the next time the prompting comes along. Through reading, prayer and study, the Spirit is better able to grow the gifts of wisdom, knowledge and understanding in us. This is not to diminish the gratuitous nature of the gifts, however. Some people who don't read, pray and study very much show more evidence of wisdom, knowledge and understanding than people who are more active in these disciplines. In fact, it seems that the more one tries to develop spiritual gifts through human effort, the less likely they are to develop. There is a paradox here, for sure: God wants us to be transformed by the Spirit, but the Spirit builds on human knowledge and experience to grow the gifts in us. Even finding the right balance between receptivity and effort seems a work of the Spirit—probably a manifestation of wisdom and counsel.

There is another mystery, here, and it is that even among the most willing and fervent souls, we do not find equal manifestation of the gifts. The Spirit grows them differently in depth and proportion in each of us. Knowing this can help one to be less inclined to compare him/herself with another, who seems to be more wise, or more pious. God has made each of us different and unique; who we are is good, and the way the gifts develop in us is what is good for us. As long as we are open to the Spirit and are doing what we feel moved to do by the Spirit to grow in Her gifts, that is all that can be expected. Even this certainty isn't always possible, of course, and so we must be assured that our offering of self to God is acceptable, and that if God wants more of us, it will be made known.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit give us a good way to recognize Christian character. They describe the kind of intelligence and willingness that the Spirit produces in people who are being transformed in Christ. Our growth in these gifts enables us to become more and more like Christ—not only through word and action, but at the level of being. It is as though a new kind of sap is running through the branches that we are on his vine, and we grow new leaves and bear more fruit accordingly. Most amazing!

Take a few moments now to consider the seven gifts of the Spirit. How do you experience them in your life? You might compare their manifestation during an earlier part in life with where you are now to get a perspective on this. Which of the gifts seems strongest in you? Weakest? What helps them to grow?

5. CHARISMATIC (MINISTRY) GIFTS

You might say that the main difference between the transformative gifts and charismatic gifts is that the former are given to benefit the individual while the latter are for the good of the community. Granted that this distinction is not "hard-and-fast"-transformative gifts do benefit the community and individuals are blessed through the exercise of charismatic gifts-still, it's one that has endured through the centuries, and I think there are some good reasons for it. What we will be covering in this section as charismatic gifts (also called charisms, spiritual gifts, ministry gifts) do seem to be fundamentally ordered to address certain needs in a community, especially a Christian one. They are ways in which the Spirit energizes and grows the Mystical Body of Christ.

Let's first consider references to these gifts in the Scriptures. There are several places where we learn of them, including lists of different kinds. As early as Acts 4: 33-35, we read of a deep and profound sharing of gifts and resources by the Christian community, with the Apostles having a special role "to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power." It is in Paul's letters, however, that we find a developed treatment of spiritual charisms, especially in 1 Cor. 11. Here we learn that:

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of services to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. (4-6)

Undoubtedly, Paul's ministry informed this statement with many communities and his observations of how the Spirit moves individuals to serve. What he wishes to emphasize is that it is all God's work; we are to be content with the gift given us to share and grateful for those shared by others.

Paul then goes on (v. 7-11) to list some of the most common gifts, which I will enumerate below:

1. Preaching with wisdom
2. Preaching instruction
3. Faith - willingness to take risks, depending on God's care.
4. Healing
5. Miracles
6. Prophecy
7. Discerning spirits
8. Speaking in tongues
9. Interpreting tongues

In his more brief treatment of spiritual gifts in Eph. 4, Paul lists gift-roles: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. These seem to be more like ministries in the community, but no doubt they were determined, to some degree, by the evidence of spiritual gifts. In 1 Cor. 12: 27-29, Paul provides a summary and ranking of the importance of the gifts/roles in the life of the community:

Now you, together, are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it. In the Church, God has given first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers, after them, miracles, and after them the gift of healing; helpers, good leaders, those with many languages.

I think the main point here is that the Church needs all these gifts to be exercised for its ongoing growth, but to overemphasize the importance of some (as was happening in the Church in Corinth) leads to a distorted understanding of the role of the gifts in the life of the community. Paul was especially trying to give a perspective on the relative importance of speaking in tongues, which had become a divisive issue in that community. In Chapter 14, he addresses the place of tongues (glossalalia) in the Christian life—a topic we shall take up more fully later on.

Catherine of Siena Institute

The kind of knowledge and appreciation of charisms shared by Paul and evidenced in the early Church seems to have become diminished through the ages. I daresay that if you went into almost any Christian Church and asked individuals a few questions about spiritual gifts, you would be greeted with a puzzled look in reply. Ask them what their particular charisms are and you'd see more evidence of bafflement. They might begin to share an inventory of their natural talents and aptitudes, but that's not really the same thing.

I've been fortunate through the years to have been involved in the charismatic renewal in the early 1970s, and, in recent years, through a second wave of appreciation for charisms catalyzed by the Catherine of Siena Institute (henceforth: CSI). Through the Institute's teachers—primarily Fr. Michael Sweeny, OP and Ms. Sherry Weddell, a sound, updated theology of spiritual charisms is once again made available to all Christian Churches, with resources to help individuals discover their own charisms. CSI emphasizes the ancient teachings—that if we have been baptized in Christ, then we belong to him and are gifted by the Spirit to help build up the Church. The problem for many is that they haven't ever taken this very seriously, and haven't done much to investigate what their charisms might be. Almost equally manifest is the phenomenon of people who are habitually exercising spiritual charisms but have never identified them as such.

CSI defines charisms or spiritual gifts as "special abilities given to Christians by the Holy Spirit to enable them to be powerful channels of God's love and redeeming presence in the world." They distinguish these charisms from natural talents by emphasizing that "charisms are not 'in-born' or inherited from our parents, but are given to us by the Holy Spirit." We possess our talents all the time, but a charism seems to manifest only when the need presents itself. As the CSI notes, "charisms are supernaturally empowered. They are focused outward and enable Christians to bear results for the Kingdom of God above and beyond our normal human abilities." One might, for example, have natural gifts of listening and empathy, but these are not the same as the charismatic gift of encouragement, which "empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's love—nurturing others through his or her presence and the words of comfort, encouragement and counsel." Often, of course, there is a correspondence between natural aptitudes and charismatic gifts, but that doesn't mean that one is simply an outgrowth of the other..

You might have noticed that CSI's inclusion of encouragement as a gift differs from the Pauline inventory shared above. The reason for this is because: a.) they (and other scholars) maintain that Paul's list was not intended to be a comprehensive summary, and b.) it's obvious that there are many other ways in which the Spirit blesses individuals to serve the Church. You might say that almost any kind of service to the Church could be charisms expressing in some manner. Hence, the CSI has included in its inventory additional charisms such as celibacy, giving, helps, hospitality, intercessory prayer, knowledge, mercy, music, pasturing, service, wisdom and writing. Others may be added in the future, according to Fr. Sweeny and Ms. Waddell.

Recognizing Your Charisms

A charism can be given by the Spirit at any time to any person as the need requires. I recall, for example, a time years ago when I was meeting with a young woman for spiritual direction. She was depressed because her doctor had just told her that the results of a biopsy for a spot on her lungs showed a malignant tumor to be the cause. As I listened to her, I felt a strong-almost overwhelming!-desire to pray for her healing. I asked if she wanted to join hands to pray for healing, and she was most willing. As I prayed, I felt a strong flow of energy moving through me; the woman felt it, too. We ended the session shortly after this prayer, and that was the last I heard from her for a few weeks. Then one day, she came bursting into my office with the news that, must to the puzzlement of her doctors, the tumor was gone. She was sure that a healing happened when we prayed, as she had felt better from that time on. But she thought it might have been just a spiritual healing, enabling her to accept her condition and stay close to God during the difficult journey ahead. During her next medical visit, she asked for an X-ray, which was reluctantly granted. Then came the good news!

I mention this incident because it's about the only time it has ever happened to me, and I've had thousands of spiritual directions session since-often with people who were struggling with an illness of some kind. I have never since felt moved to pray with someone for healing as on that day long ago, however, and I don't consider myself someone blessed with a gift of healing. But God wanted to heal that woman and I was the person in the Church chosen to do that at that time. Other isolated manifestations of charisms have happened through the years as well.

Generally, what we discover is that there are a few charisms that are habitually called forth from us; we find ourselves drawn to exercise them again and again, so much so that they eventually suggest a calling or even a vocation of some kind. How can you tell what these charisms are? The CSI emphasizes three criteria:

- 1. When you express this gift, you feel energized and close to God.*
- 2. Your exercise of the gift produces results (e.g., healers heal, teachers communicate, administrators bring order, etc.)*
- 3. The Christian community validates your gift through positive feedback and by calling upon you for its exercise.*

All three of these criteria are important. It's not enough, for example, to say that you really like to perform a certain work; the results that ensue must also be considered. You might like praying for healing, for example, but if people are not healed because of your ministry, it's doubtful that you have a gift of healing.

CSI provides an inventory and discernment process to help one recognize charisms. If you're interested in obtaining their work, check out their web site: <http://www.siena.org/> There are other inventories on the web, some of which provide an interactive form to do a quick survey online. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America has a good one. See http://www.elca.org/dcm/evangelism/assessments/assess4int_spiritgifts.html to try it out. Know, however, that a quick test like this one is no substitute for observing what actually happens in your life. Discussions with a spiritual director can also help to discern charisms.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What have been some of your experiences with charismatic gifts?
 2. What gifts have become habitual expressions in your life?
 3. How does it feel when others with charismatic gifts minister to you? Give examples.
 4. What gift(s) are you trying to discern at this time? How can you "experiment" to see if the gift is given to you?
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6. THE GIFT OF TONGUES (Glossolalia)

There are few spiritual topics that arouse as much curiosity and debate as speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Although this phenomenon is not restricted to Christian spirituality, our discussion of it in this series will examine the types of glossolalia described in Scripture, the kind of prayer this is, its relationship to other charismatic gifts, and even how to receive the gift.

The gift of tongues appears in the Pauline lists of charismatic gifts, but it is not included in the inventory published by the Catherine of Siena Institute. The CSI views this gift as more in the service of prayer and personal holiness than ministry to the community, and I'm inclined to agree. There are exceptions, however, such as when the gift manifests in pentecostal meetings as a catalyst for prophecy or other inspired messages, but outside of this, the manifestation is usually for the individual's good. As Paul himself notes:

For he who makes use of tongues is not talking to people but to God; because no one has the sense of what he is saying; but in the Spirit he is talking of secret things . . . He who makes use of tongues may do good to himself; but he who gives the prophet's word does good to the church.
- 1 Cor. 14: 2, 4 -

For this reason, it seems best to treat glossolalia as a kind of special case--a spiritual gift, to be sure, but one directed to the edification of the individual, and often with the consequence of catalyzing the expression of other charismatic gifts.

In Christianity today and in the early Church (it seems to have not been widely manifest for centuries in between), speaking in tongues is generally associated with charismatic, or pentecostal spirituality, where we see it manifesting in three distinct ways:

A. The person praying in an unknown language is actually speaking a human language that another person can understand. This is very rare, but it may have been the kind of tongue-speaking mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles 2:3-12.

B. The person praying in tongues is speaking syllables that constitute no known human language but that serve as a catalyst to open this person or another to a prophetic message from God. This is what Saint Paul encourages in 1 Corinthians 14:13-19. Tongue-speaking for purposes of prophetic enrichment can be noted at most charismatic/pentecostal prayer meetings.

C. The purpose of this prayer is the inner healing and spiritual edification of the individual praying. Such tongue-speaking is often called a prayer language. It may manifest spontaneously during prayer times and throughout the day. This impulse to pray in tongues may be suppressed, or the individual may choose to pray silently or aloud. We read of this type of prayer in many places in Scripture. (See, for example, Romans 8:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 14:1-2, 18-19.)

My concern in this series is with the third kind of tongue-speaking: prayer language. From my own experience (since 1973), I am convinced of the value of this type of prayer. The impulse for it seems to come from the Holy Spirit through unconscious dimensions of the psyche. Its consequences are inner peace, healing of emotions, and awakening the soul to the presence of God. It is also a natural bridge between active, mental prayer and quiet, contemplative prayer. Obviously, there are many Christians who could benefit from growth in these fruits.

I find this gift suggesting itself all through the day. Giving expression to it is possible under

one's breath, but doing so aloud at times as when driving somewhere (preferably alone -- unless with an understanding passenger) is also good. The mysterious syllables and their rhythms seem to awaken the mind and heart, and bring balance and wholeness to one's life. Through this gift, the Holy Spirit ministers to us all through the day, keeping us centered and protecting us from dark influences. It seems as though the Spirit regulates one's breath and vibrates the inner energy centers through the medium of these sounds and syllables. It also often happens that after a time of praying in tongues, new insights come into the mind, and deep appreciations of God's presence in one's life.

Another major point made in the Book of James and other places is that control of the tongue is a way of controlling one's entire being (James 3: 1-5). Turning over the control of one's tongue to the direction of the Spirit is a powerful way to surrender one's life to God. Sometimes when I don't know how to pray, I just direct my mind and heart to God in praise and the gift of tongues becomes available, moving me to pray in the way I need at that time. I find Scriptural affirmation of this in Rm. 8: 26-27, where Paul notes that there are times when the Spirit prays for us "with groanings which cannot be expressed in speech." It is most reassuring to know that we have been given such a magnificent Helper, ever close at hand, to even direct our prayer when we do not know how to pray.

As with all other gifts, the more one uses this one, the stronger it grows. I've spoken through the years with many people who once had the gift while they were in a charismatic prayer group, but left it behind as they stopped attending prayer meetings. One need not be a practicing member of a pentecostal prayer group to receive this gift (although a Life in the Spirit Seminar in a charismatic group can serve as an excellent introduction to it). Because the prayer language is for the spiritual growth of the individual, I believe this particular manifestation of glossalalia is available to all Christians. The other manifestations of glossalalia, as with the other charismatic gifts, may be available to only a few and then at only certain times and in special circumstances.

In their excellent book on Christian prayer and commitment, *Friendship With Jesus* (Dove Publications, 1974), Joseph Lange, OSFS, and Anthony Gushing suggest the following approach to asking for and receiving the gift of tongues:

"Step 1. To receive the gift of tongues, begin by relaxing. It is not something you can do for yourself, so there is no point in becoming all worked up trying to get it. You don't get it, you receive it. Find the most relaxing place and position you can. One person I know received it in the bathtub!

"Step 2. Enter into God's presence. Focus your attention on the presence of Jesus, the giver of the gift. We do not baptize in the Spirit. We do not give the gifts. Jesus does. Focus on his presence. Remember his perfect love for you.

"Step 3. Ask Him to stir up the Spirit within you, to pour out His Spirit upon you, to fill you up so that it rushes out of you in this new language of prayer.

"Step 4. Open your mouth and speak out, your mind and heart on him. Speak out in anything but your native language. Let the Spirit form the language, the syllables. Praise him."

"If, after a few minutes, Jesus has not given you this gift, switch to your native language and give praise to him. Be silent for a while. Talk to him again and try again. Be persevering but don't be excessive. If you don't receive it, try again another time and follow the advice we gave above.

"Praise God, the giver of all good gifts.

"Further Reading

[Tongues as a gift, a sign, a practice.](#)

[The Gift of Tongues, by R.H. Johnston](#)

[The Gift of Tongues, by Jim Scully](#)

[Speaking in Tongues](#) This article has an Imprimatur!

Reflection and Discussion

1. What questions, comments, feedback do you have about this conference?
2. Have you experienced the gift of tongues in your prayer life? At other times? What consequences seem to ensue from it?

[June 21, 2004, 04:09 PM: Message edited by: Phil]

7. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

So far, we have been reflecting on the experience of the Holy Spirit and the works accomplished by the Spirit. At some point, it also becomes helpful to inquire into what the gift of the Spirit means . . . what it signifies? By this, I mean not simply what the Spirit is doing to individuals and communities, but what is implied in the order of grace, or God's activities among us. As with other important experiences in one's life, one's intellectual understanding makes a difference unto ongoing consent and integration, so it was inevitable that the early Christians and then later generations reflect on the theological meaning of the coming of the Spirit.

For the first Christians, who were primarily Jewish men and women, they must have looked to their Hebrew scriptures for guidance. The over-arching paradigm for their relationship with God was understood in terms of covenant—how they belonged to God and God to them-- through the events, promises, and agreements related in their history. Space does not permit here a detailed treatment of the evolution of Hebrew covenants; we need only note here several points that seemed to be widely held among Jews of Jesus' time.

1. The Mosaic Law and its elaboration through the ages defined the terms of the covenant. To be in covenant with God, one had to keep the Law.
2. A promise had been made to David that he would have a successor who would be the great king of the Jews—the Messiah. He would initiate a new covenant between God and humanity.
3. By and large, Jewish history was marred by infidelity to the terms of the covenant. It was very difficult to keep the Law.
4. In connection with the coming of the Messiah, a new capacity to keep the Law would be given. God would write the Law on their hearts and give them power to keep it from within. (Jer. 31: 31-34)

It's obvious from the Acts of the Apostles and from Paul's writings that the early Christians believed that Jesus had initiated a new covenant between God and humanity. Unlike the old covenant, which was ritualized with sacrifice, which included circumcision, and which emphasized fidelity to the Law, the new covenant was established through the sacrificial death of Jesus. To enter into this new order of life with God, one was instructed in the basics of the faith and then baptized in water in the name of Jesus (some places used a Trinitarian formula). Keeping the old Jewish Laws brought no advantage whatsoever; faith in Christ was considered the "way" to "plug-in," as it were, into the new life that Christ made available to

the human race. There's much discussion about all this in Paul's writings; the primacy of faith over keeping the law was championed by him, largely because of his conviction that the Old Covenant has been replaced, or, rather, "updated," in Christ.

What, then, of the Spirit? As these Jewish Christians reflected on their experiences in the light of their Hebrew scriptures, they undoubtedly made a connection between the passage in Jer. 31 cited above and the coming of the Spirit. It was the Spirit, they saw, Who gave one this inner knowledge, wisdom, and power. They read what we now call Isaiah 11 in a new light as well, I'm sure, recognizing that the transformative gifts mentioned there in connection with the Messiah were happening in them as well. Then there was the prophet Joel, whose writings about the new age to come included the following:

*"I will pour out my spirit on all mankind.
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall dream dreams,
And your young men see visions.
Even on the slaves, men and women,
Will I pour out my spirit in those days."
- Joel 3: 1-2.*

This passage from Joel is cited in Peter's address to the crowd shortly after the initial outpouring, and the community continued to see its realization in their midst thereafter.

It was important for those first Christians—all Jewish—to connect their experiences of the Spirit with their understanding of what God had done through their history, and what God had promised to do in the new age to come. In fact, they seemed to regard their experience of the Spirit as a kind of seal, or "proof," if you will, that the time of the new covenant was being realized among them. In light of their experiences, the prophecies of Joel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and others made more sense. They came to understand that the Spirit was God's great gift to people living in this age, for it was the Spirit Who enabled them to not only recognize the Messiah, but to live as the Messiah had lived. This was made possible because, as Paul noted, the same Spirit that reaches into the depths of God also dwells now in the depths of human beings, providing power and discernment to effect behavior according to the rule of the Spirit. (1 Cor. 2: 10-16). Because of the Spirit dwelling within, the prophecy of Jer. 31 was being realized.

I'm sure that non-Jewish converts to Christianity also came to appreciate the Jewish teachings about Jesus, the Spirit, and the new covenant. For many of them, however, it seemed their greater interest concerned Who the Spirit was in the divine order . . . or, to pose the question a different way: what did the Spirit and the Christ reveal to us about the divine nature Itself?

The Holy Spirit and the Trinity

It's only natural that our inquiry lead us to not only investigate what the Holy Spirit does, but who the Spirit is. Our religious education has taught us the answer to this, of course: the Spirit is God--more specifically, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity. And so goes the teaching, but in order to appreciate more this profession, let's take a little time to reflect on how we got from Jesus' teaching about a Helper to such a formal dogma and a radically new vision of God.

First, we can look to Jesus' own words about himself and the Spirit, especially in John's Gospel, where we noted statements such as the following:

"He who comes from above is above all others. . ." (Jn. 3: 31)

Jesus' constantly calling God his Father, suggesting that he is God's son, and not in a creaturely sense: (E.g., Jn. 3, 16)

"To have seen me is to have seen the Father." (Jn. 14: 9)

Even if one questions whether such words were, in fact, spoken by Jesus, John's placing them on his lips leaves little doubt that the early Church viewed Jesus as an incarnation of the divine. Their reflection on the meaning of Jesus' miracles and his resurrection had led them to this conclusion, and yet it is understood that Jesus is not the Father ("The Father is greater than I") nor is he simply a human being who became so filled with God as to image the Creator with a perfection unsurpassed before or since (the Arian heresy). Expressing an Apostolic conviction in the first century of Christianity, John writes that Jesus is "the Word made flesh" (1: 14). That "Word," who was "with God in the beginning" and "through whom all things came to be" was fully divine: "and the Word was God." (1: 1-3).

In later Christian writings, we find Paul speaking many times of Jesus as the Lord--a term used only for God. Peter, too, calls Jesus Lord, and even states that righteousness comes from "our God and savior, Jesus Christ." (2 Pt. 1). Although they might have struggled to understand how to explain the incarnation, the early Apostolic tradition gives evidence in many ways of a deep intuition of Christ's divinity.

So far we have a Divine Dyad (or Dynamic Duo, if you will)--the Father and the Word, who became incarnate in Jesus. What, then, of the Spirit?

Again we turn to John's Gospel, and to the writings of Paul. There we find many clear distinctions between the person of Jesus and the Spirit. Jesus himself states that the Father will send the Spirit in his name (Jn. 1: 25) and constantly refers to the Spirit as a person. This person is not simply the risen Christ in his exalted energetic state, but one sent by the Father in Jesus' name to lead Jesus' followers into the fullness of truth (Jn. 14: 26). So the Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, and is not simply an energy emanating from them, but a Person in Her own right, participating in the work of salvation in Her own distinctive way. Believers are to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28: 19), an early formula that eventually became the predominant practice of the Church.

When we turn to the writings of the early Fathers of the Church (2nd and 3rd C.), we find continuing references to the Persons of the Trinity.

"Do we not have one God, one Christ, and one Spirit of Grace poured out upon us?" (St. Clement, 80 A.D.)

"The three days before the luminaries were created are types of the Trinity: God, His Word, and His Wisdom." (St. Theophilus of Antioch, 181 A.D.)

"For the Church, although dispersed through the whole world even to the ends of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith in the one God, Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them; and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who announced through the prophets the dispensations and the comings . . . " (St. Irenaeus, 199 A.D.)

"We do indeed believe that there is only one God; but we believe that under this dispensation . . . there is also a Son of this one only God, His Word, who proceeded from Him and through whom all things were made . . . We believe that He (the Son) sent down from the Father, in accord with his own promise,

the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father and in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. . . the Unity is distributed in a Trinity. Placed in order, the Three are Father, Son, and Spirit. They are Three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in kind; of one substance, however, and one condition, and one power . . ." (Tertullian, 213 A.D.)

We can see, here, a deepening grasp of this Christian mystery as the decades move along. Tertullian, in particular, articulates an understanding informed by Greek philosophy that was to take fuller expression in the Council of Nicea a little over a century later.

How can we make sense of this idea of Three Persons and one divine nature, especially if philosophical terms used to explain it traditionally don't make sense to us?

I think we can use our own human experience as an analogy, here. Without ever thinking much about it, I'm sure we all grasp intuitively that even though one man and another, or one woman and another, are different individuals, what they share in common is the possession of a human nature. It is this human nature even more than the way they dress or speak which makes them human beings. Because they are human, you "expect" to see certain powers at work in them, or that they will possess similar feelings and understandings. I think we can do the same with God. We can analogize from our human experience that there can be but one divine nature or supernatural realm, with its distinct powers (omniscience, omnipotence, etc.) and with three Persons--Father, Son, and Spirit--possessing it by nature. Two men might have very different gifts, but they are no less human because they are different; so, too, the Persons of the Trinity have different roles in the work of creation and salvation, but that makes them no less divine.

You might think of it this way::

- A. There is one God, or supernatural nature, consisting of three Persons.*
- B. The Father is the unmanifest Creator, who begets the*
- C. Son, or Word, the One through whom the Creator gives form and existence to creatures,*
- D. And Spirit, who communicates the love of the Son for the Father and with Whom the Son effects the work of creation.*
- E. This progression in the Trinity is eternal, having no beginning and no end, existing outside of all dimensions of time (which is, ultimately, related to matter—created stuff).*

The tragedy of Original Sin was that the human form/nature became disordered so that the innate guidance of the Spirit within was lost; willfulness, anxiety, shame, etc. contaminated human nature, overshadowing the still, small voice of the Spirit within. The created human spirit and its natural tendency to find its happiness in God became severely damaged, so much so that its tendency was to seek happiness by perpetuating its own contrived image and identity (illusion). Out of this spiritual sickness, cultures of injustice were formed, reinforcing and perpetuating the disorder within.

God's ultimate remedy was to incarnate as a human being through the Word, restoring human nature in this Christ or New Adam, and thus introducing into the race through Christ's divine nature the movement of Spirit that flowed between the Son and the Father. In other words, the gift of the Spirit is not simply God's love for humans, which the first parents knew and which we can still discover through spiritual work; what the New Covenant made available to us is God's love for God—the great Love movement in the Trinity Itself. Through our faith connection to Christ, the New Adam, we ourselves are enabled to partake of the Trinitarian

love flow—the Spirit who gifts us to become transformed into images of Christ, and to form communities of love that mirror on earth the Community of Love that exists in the supernatural realm.

No small blessing, here . . . and no insignificant revelation! You can see why Christian tradition came to regard this teaching as a dogma—an indispensable truth for help in understanding and realizing what God has done through Christ.

Let us ponder then, the holy mystery of the Trinity; let us marvel at these Persons and their Unity, Their ongoing work in creation, Their holding us and cherishing us through all eternity. Let us strive to know Them and be open to Them in Their uniqueness, marveling at the gifts each of Them brings, and how together they communicate to us the fullness of the divine life.

Reflection and Discussion

1. What questions or comments do you have after reading this conference?
 2. What difference does a theological understanding of the Holy Spirit and Trinity make for you?
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8. THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

After reading all of these conferences, you might be wondering if you have received the Holy Spirit. If so, how could you know, for sure?

There are different levels of response to this, the first being a reassurance that if you have been baptized, you have received the Holy Spirit; if you have received Confirmation, then you have received an additional anointing. Since most Christians have at least been baptized, they can then conclude that the Spirit is already joined to them and that they have been sealed with the Spirit, claimed for Christ, and that the Spirit is ready and waiting to bless them with spiritual gifts. *The issue, then, for Christians, is not whether they have been given the Spirit or not, but whether they are open to the Spirit's guidance and action in their lives.* It is here that Christian morality and spirituality become most significant for those who do want to live in union with the Spirit.

The presence of spiritual gifts would be a second sign of the presence of the Spirit in your life. We have already discussed the nature of spiritual gifts, so it's a matter now of you discovering what gifts you have been given and how they are manifest in your life. It's important to learn the difference between exercising these gifts and exercising your natural talents; sometimes the two go together, but not always. It might seem a redundancy to say that where the spiritual gifts are manifest, there is the Spirit, but this point is nonetheless an important one. This was what caught the attention of the early Christian leaders, as they observed the gifts of the Spirit among non-Jewish believers who had not yet even been baptized. And so we might examine our own lives more deeply to see where spiritual charisms are already present. They might be showing up in Church-related settings, but maybe not.

I know a woman, for example, who's not especially Christian in her religious faith perspective, but others seemed to be drawn to her for listening and encouragement after she began a regular practice of meditation in her early 40s. She found herself energized by this and that her interactions with them seemed effortless and efficacious unto their growth and healing--this with virtually no training as a therapist. Eventually, she decided to study to be a clinical social worker, and now makes her living counseling with people every day. I don't have any doubt about the Holy Spirit blessing her with charisms and leading her to her new profession,

where she can exercise it for the benefit of others more regularly. She is a baptized Christian, but, as noted, has been away from the Church for many years.

A third criterion you can use for recognizing the presence of the Spirit in your life and elsewhere is the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit. In fact, this is probably the most important means for discerning the Spirit, as charismatic manifestations can sometimes be the result of human and even demonic processes—as in telling the future, for example, or working signs and wonders. Remember that in the Old Testament, Pharaoh had his own miracle workers, who were puzzled by the signs worked by Moses. In the New Testament, there is the story of Simon the magician (Acts 8: 9-25), who practiced magic arts and was held in esteem by the people. When Simon saw the signs worked by Christian leaders through the power of the Spirit, he became puzzled and wanted to do the same. This eventually led to a confrontation with Peter, but Simon seems to have found sufficient humility to avoid total condemnation.

"Beware of false prophets who come to you disguised as sheep but underneath are ravenous wolves," Jesus warns. "You will be able to tell them by their fruits." (Mt. 7: 15).

And what are these fruits?

The Apostle Paul lists them in Gal. 5: 22 as follows: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control." He contrasts these with the fruits of self-indulgence: "fornication, gross indecency and sexual irresponsibility, idolatry and sorcery, feuds and wrangling, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels, disagreements, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and similar things." (Gal 5: 19-20).

Wherever we see the fruits of the Spirit, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit has been at work—even if there don't seem to be dramatic manifestations of charismatic gifts. So look to your own life and see what kinds of fruits of the Spirit are manifesting. First, examine your own being, then your relationships, and so forth. Where do you see love, joy, peace . . . ? Know that the Spirit is at work in those areas.

Fruits of the Spirit in the World

The criterion of fruits helps us to recognize the working of the Spirit outside the formal boundaries of the Church and its ministries. We note, for example, the presence of the fruits of the Spirit in other world religions, especially among their saints and mystics. Who can doubt that Mohandas Gandhi was guided by the Spirit? His work for justice was thoroughly grounded in a life of deep meditation and spiritual practice, and it bore the fruits of the Spirit all across the continent of India--indeed, the whole world. Even the British who governed India at the time came to respect him and to recognize in him an extraordinary power and spiritual presence. Other examples could be given from Buddhism, where Tich Nhat Han and the Dalai Lama have sowed seeds of peace and deep spirituality for decades.

Sometimes people with no religious commitment give evidence of spiritual charisms and fruits. The examples here are fewer, as the human Ego can quickly become darkened by the corrupting influences of sin if one has no spiritual practice.

So what does this mean, then, if the Spirit is alive and well outside of Christianity?

Well, first of all, it means that God loves all people and is at work to lead us all to fulfill the destiny we have been created to achieve. That's pretty clear, and is affirmed in scripture and the doctrines of the Church most emphatically.

A second consideration is the dynamic orientation of the Spirit to Christ. I'm not suggesting, here, that all who are moved by the Spirit are really some kind of "anonymous Christian," to use a term coined by the great theologian, Karl Rahner. Rather, what I am saying is that the

Spirit's reference to Christ is a way that others are led to Christ, much as the early Gentile converts were allowed to be baptized because they were already showing signs of the Spirit. In other words, it seems that by sharing the Spirit so generously, God is hoping thus to draw them to recognize the Christ in Whom the Spirit was expressed most fully, and through Whom the Spirit is transmitted most perfectly. "You like My Spirit? You want more? Come to Christ and you will be blessed abundantly," seems to be the message, here. The Christian missionaries called this the "proto-evangelium," or first evangelization, as this was the way they understood how certain cultures had been prepared, as it were, for the message of the Gospel.

Almost completely opposite the issue of non-Christians showing signs of the Spirit is the phenomenon of Christians who show very little evidence of the Spirit in their lives. They give lip service to the Spirit in the creeds, but have little understanding of what this means, nor do they seem to experience of the transformative and charismatic gifts. For many of these people--and they may make up the majority of Christians (I don't really know)--their Christianity is mostly a social involvement, not a way of life they take very seriously. They are scarcely different from the secular culture at large in their values and perspectives. Indeed, for many of them, the culture is the measure of what the Church must accommodate itself to, not vice versa. Such people (probably most of us, at some time) grieve the Spirit, Who can only wait patiently for us to come around and claim the heritage of blessing we have been given through Christ.

Let us be fully alive in the Spirit, then, continuing to open ourselves more and more to the gifts the Spirit want to bless us with. Let us also be open to the mystery of our own ongoing transformation, delighting in the new person the Spirit is birthing in Christ. And, finally, let us share the good news of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the greatest blessing God could ever bestow on us.

Reflection and Discussion

1. Where do you see evidence of the fruits of the Spirit in your own life? What might this be telling you about the Spirit's presence in your life?
2. How do you understand the relationship between Christianity and other world religions? Is this much of an issue for you