

The Spirit in Creation and New Creation

Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms

Edited by

Michael Welker

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
Introduction	xi
<i>Michael Welker</i>	
I. THE SPIRIT IN CREATION: SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES	
The Hidden Work of the Spirit in Creation	3
<i>John Polkinghorne</i>	
The Spirit of God in Evolutionary History	11
<i>Denis Alexander</i>	
Hovering Over Waters: Spirit and the Ordering of Creation	26
<i>Jeffrey Schloss</i>	
Mathematics of Infinity and the Orthodox Name Worshipping Spiritual Tradition	50
<i>Vladimir Katasonov</i>	
II. THE SPIRIT IN CREATION: THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES	
The Spirit of Life	65
<i>Jürgen Moltmann</i>	

The Spirit or/and Spirits in Creation? Recalling the Seventh
Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra 79

Vladimir Shmaliy

How Exactly Is the Spirit Present in Creation?
The Hesychast Reception of Natural Theology
and Its Modern Implications 95

Sergey Horujy

III. CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE?

Convergence between Theology and Science:
Patterns from the Early Christian Era 111

Cyril Hovorun

Challenges of a Consistent Christian Language
for the Creativity of God's Spirit 120

Friederike Nüssel

The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God 134

Michael Welker

'Keep Thy Mind in Hell and Despair Not':
Implications for Psychosocial Work with Survivors
of Political Violence 143

Renos K. Papadopoulos

IV. THE SPIRIT IN NEW CREATION

Pneumatology and the New Creation in the
Macarian Writings: An Ecumenical Legacy 161

Marcus Plested

The Holy Spirit in Creation and Re-Creation:
The Byzantine Fathers 171

Andrew Louth

Justified in the Spirit: Implications on the Border
of Theology and Science 179

Frank D. Macchia

Human Religious Evolution and Unfinished Creation 192

José Casanova

AUTHORS 203

Acknowledgments

division in Christendom.” Divisions often cause conflict and pain. However, they can also generate fruitful and creative differences and contrasts of perspectives from which we profit, as is obvious in the differentiation of the academic disciplines today. Similarly, building on the differences among the religious traditions can lead to a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the nature of the Spirit — human and divine.

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MICHAEL WELKER

Introduction

Michael Welker

This book explores a vast field of experience, knowledge, curiosity, wonder, and awe. It aims at a better understanding of and respect for the Spirit — divine and human, for its working in creation and its striving towards new creation, a process in which human beings are transformed and ennobled. How does the Spirit relate to the world in which we live, and how does it lead to “the world to come”? The contributions from different academic fields and different faith traditions collected in this volume approach these questions in a number of ways. While some authors endeavor to cross the boundaries between the areas attributed to religion and theology on the one side and the natural sciences on the other side, others demand that their separation be respected and cultivated, and thus emphasize the differences between cognitive, emotional, and prayer-based approaches towards spiritual realities. Some contributions attach strong importance to contemporary research, while others primarily seek to preserve the continuity of current knowledge with grand traditions of faith and spiritual learning. All contributions, however, agree in their estimation that the dialogue among the different academic disciplines and different faith-traditions is fruitful and even needed, when we want to gain new and deeper insights into the working of the Spirit in creation and new creation.

I

The first four contributions relate insights from physics, biology, and mathematics to biblical, patristic, and modern theological perspectives on the Spirit. John Polkinghorne (*The Hidden Work of the Spirit in Creation*)

draws attention to the fact that the working of the Spirit in creation is discreet and even hidden, and he tries to identify the character of this working from a scientist's perspective. After the displacement of the materialistic and mechanistic worldviews from the scientific agenda, and on the basis of observations such as the fact that as far as the atoms are concerned, our actual bodies are distinct from our bodies several years ago, we can develop perspectives on the role of the Spirit even in natural and material creation. Polkinghorne speaks of the role of "active information" in the physical world. He suggests that the Spirit creates highly complex "information-bearing patterns" and acts by inspiring and guiding all creatures in the unfolding work of continuing creation. Several contributions take up his insight that the Spirit is active "at the edge of chaos," that is, "in situations in which order and openness, regularity and contingency, necessity and chance, interlace each other."

Denis Alexander (*The Spirit of God in Evolutionary History*) gives an impressive picture of correlations of order and disorder, chance and necessity, the impersonal and the personal in evolutionary history. He observes a very early "tendency towards increased complexity in specific evolutionary lineages" and systems of sociality. This constellation already hints at the development of personality and "orders of intentionality." Many of these observations are in line with the insights and wisdom of the biblical traditions: ". . . the characteristics of the work of the Spirit known to us through revelation can provide a magnifying lens through which the biological story can provide a richer theological narrative."

Jeffrey Schloss (*Hovering Over Waters: Spirit and the Ordering of Creation*) takes up the biblical claims that "the dynamically creative and life-giving energy of spirit is associated with the purposeful ordering of word or wisdom." He shows how scientific enquiry can be inspired by this insight, but also how scientific enquiry can "inform belief by both affirming and challenging it." He illuminates the relation of the Spirit as "life-force of created beings" and "living space in which they can grow and develop their potentialities." He deals with the highly disputed question whether there are "directional trends" in evolution, and makes out tendencies towards "goal-oriented functionally purposive aspects of living systems" and "biotic intensification through progressive escalation of cooperative interdependence." He does not claim that this leads to a (quasi)scientific demonstration of the role of the Spirit in creation. More modestly, he sees an impressive concordance of these observations with ancient insights into the meaning and work of the Spirit in creation.

The philosopher and mathematician Vladimir Katasonov (*Mathematics of Infinity and the Orthodox Name Worshipping Spiritual Tradition*) evokes the world of spirituality and mathematics in early 20th-century Russia. He outlines "the Name worshipping theology" of a spiritual movement (palamitism and hesychasm) which sees God's presence in the world in and through His energies. Famous Russian theologians (such as P. A. Florensky) and famous mathematicians (such as N. N. Luzin) interact in shaping a post-materialistic worldview, which can embrace mathematical thought about the infinite and a spirituality which tries to relate to the divine in prayer and spiritual insight.

II

Jürgen Moltmann (*The Spirit of Life*) sets out with a Trinitarian perspective on creation and proposes to read the biblical creation accounts in a broader biblical perspective. The Spirit — as the "Spirit of the Earth" and the "New Earth" — is at work in creation and new creation. Righteousness and justice are indispensable for "endurance and peace" on earth. The prophetic traditions of the Old Testament and the life, cross, and resurrection of Jesus Christ unfold both the tensions and the relation between the old creation and the new. With the help of the theologies of Paul and Luke (esp. the Pentecost account), Moltmann illuminates the work of the Spirit in both domains. His contribution ends with reflections on the limits of a merely scientific approach to these matters.

Vladimir Shmaliy (*Spirit or/and Spirits in Creation: Recalling the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra*) argues for a fine balancing of the doctrines of creation, Christology, and pneumatology in a Trinitarian framework. Constant theological watchfulness is required to discern helpful theological rebalancings (such as overcoming the attempt to neglect or downplay the work of the Spirit in creation) from new disbalances or misbalances. He accentuates the need for a "discernment of the spirits," so that the Holy Spirit will not be confused with all sorts of spirits. This is a prerequisite in the search for understanding and truth in meaningful dialogues with other Christian faith traditions, with other religions, and with philosophy and science.

Sergey Horujy (*How Exactly Is the Spirit Present in Creation? The Hesychast Reception of Natural Theology and Its Modern Implications*) offers such an attempt to discern the spirits. He turns to Orthodox ascetic

traditions (hesychasm) which over against pre-modern and modern types of “natural theology” emphasize that “knowledge of God . . . (has to be) converted from the purely intellectual cognitive paradigm to the integral, holistic paradigms of love and communion.” The Holy Spirit is the power that effects a spiritual transformation which enables and ennoble the human being to attain knowledge of God and of God’s creation. Horujy recommends a strong anthropological concentration of the science and theology discourse in order to foster their rapprochement. His contribution leads to the question which guides the third part of this book: “Convergence between Theology and Science?”

III

Cyril Hovorun (*Convergence between Theology and Science: Patterns from the Early Christian Era*) argues that we should think in broad time-spans and should learn from the ‘Cappadocian Synthesis’ which focuses on the human being, located between the created and the non-created world, in constant movements from non-existence to existence, from existence towards God and to perfection. From Gregory of Nyssa we should learn not to confuse theology and technology and to base theology more strongly on spiritual experience than on intellectual exercises.

Friederike Nüssel (*Challenges of a Consistent Christian Language for the Creativity of God’s Spirit*) invites us to consider “the unity of the one spirit of God active in creation and granting righteousness in new creation.” She reconstructs the intricate theological history in which the working of the Spirit became disconnected from cosmological perspectives. Taking up insights from Wolfhart Pannenberg, she argues that we should unfold pneumatology in the framework of a Trinitarian theology in order to illuminate the whole spectrum of workings of the Spirit in creation and in new creation. She concludes with reflections on how we could meet current challenges from the so-called New Atheism in the neurosciences.

Michael Welker (*The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God*) illuminates the dimensions of human mind and human spirit, which are often confused. The admiration for the enormous powers of the individual and above all the communal human spirit often blurs the fact that the human spirits and the “spirit of the world” can generate all kinds of self-endangerment and destruction. It is thus crucial to clearly differentiate the

human spirit in its many forms and the divine Spirit. Here Paul’s insights are most helpful. Welker shows how the “pouring” Spirit of God constitutes the “new creation” in the midst of the “old creation.” The belief in the transformation and renewal of creation gains a clear form when it focuses on the life and lordship of the resurrected and elevated Jesus Christ who wins his witnesses in the power of the Spirit to participate in his kingly, prophetic, and priestly offices.

Renos K. Papadopoulos (*‘Keep Thy Mind in Hell and Despair Not’: Implications for Psychosocial Work with Survivors of Political Violence*) makes use of these Christological and pneumatological insights and differentiations in order to deal with pressing issues in the social sciences, namely work with survivors of political violence and traumatized victims of natural disasters. He further uses a saying of the famous Russian monk called Silouan which he quotes in the title of this contribution. The trauma grid in clinical and field work cannot be addressed, named, and opened up with the help only of symbolic forms from religious wisdom and pneumatological insight. Rather, trust in the working of the divine Spirit can open up persons to a renewal of their personality out of the depths of despair. The search for theological and socio-scientific insights and the search for spiritual renewal should not be disconnected or even become opposed to each other.

IV

The last part focuses on the work of the Spirit in new creation. Marcus Plested (*Pneumatology and the New Creation in the Macarian Writings: An Ecumenical Legacy*) deals with insights of Macarius-Symeon (Pseudo-Macarius, fourth century) in his work on mysticism. Macarius describes ways to a union with the Spirit which opens up the soul in compassion and love. Insights into the ambivalence of nature which can mirror the divine reality but also the powers of evil lead to the search of “active information” (John Polkinghorne) which opens the soul to the search for truth, compassion, and salvation, for the light of new creation “here and evermore.”

Andrew Louth (*The Holy Spirit in Creation and Re-Creation: The Byzantine Fathers*) supports and unfolds these insights on the basis of further writings of the Church Fathers. From the Byzantine Fathers we can learn that we should not translate “our hopes and expectations, as well as our fears, into a theological vein.” Openness to the Spirit results from

prayer and discernment; it is a fruit of an ascetic struggle and a gift of the synergy between the human and the divine. Only an attitude of “humility and watchfulness” can open the eyes and our hearts for the work of the spirit in creation and new creation.

The Pentecostal theologian Frank D. Macchia (*Justified in the Spirit: Implications on the Border of Science and Theology*) offers a surprising perspective on Luther’s explanation of the first article of the Creed (God as Creator). Following Oswald Bayer, he sees that Luther underlines the immense spiritual grace of God already in creation. In his *Small Catechism* and other writings, Luther says that we receive even the most basic gifts of nature “without our merit or worthiness.” Macchia argues for a deep and realistic understanding of justification which encompasses the breadth of the working of the Holy Spirit and the depths of the basic processes of creaturely life. In this perspective we reach an area where concerns of theology and science can and must overlap. We also see how closely old and new creation lie together and how badly the powers of new creation are needed in each step of our earthly life.

The social scientist José Casanova (*Human Religious Evolution and Unfinished Creation*) warns against ideological contaminations in the study of socio-cultural developments such as “methodological individualism, methodological racism, and methodological nationalism and now methodological evolutionary theory.” He argues for a nuanced view which differentiates humanity’s natural evolutionary development as a species, its socio-cultural development, which culminates in the current phase of globalization, and the radical moral and religious predicament, which indeed challenges us to search for a deeper understanding of the spirit in creation and new creation. He also argues for a differentiated perspective on “the dyadic analytic categories sacred/profane, transcendent/imminent, and religious/secular” which are often confused with one another and with the dual of “creation and new creation.” With these insights and with his provocative proposal that we might need “a new de-secularization of nature and of the earth,” he demonstrates that the voice of social theory is needed in the theology and science dialogue on the spirit in creation and in new creation, and that social theory can as well profit from this dialogue.

I. THE SPIRIT IN CREATION: SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES