

# The Spirit in Creation and New Creation

*Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms*

*Edited by*

Michael Welker

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## The Human Spirit and the Spirit of God

Michael Welker

General talk of the “spirit” is highly ambiguous. In some languages “spirit” refers to the depth and brilliance of a human mind and is used for the person as a whole (e.g., the great German poet Goethe is said to have been a great “spirit”). “Spirit” can also stand for the power or force which gives orientation to the thinking, behavior, and actions of a group, a society, a culture, and even an epoch (“the spirit of a school,” “the spirit of an age”). However, the term “spirit” can have negative connotations, for instance when it refers to pathological phenomena (“He saw spirits and was put in a psychiatric institution”). Given such a broad spectrum of meanings, how are we to gain some clarity in the discussion of the “spirit”?

### 1. Human Mind and Human Spirit

First, in order to gain a clear perspective on the “human spirit,” it will be helpful to examine the amazing mental and cognitive capabilities of human beings, beginning with apparently simple and indisputable “basic” cognitive and mental operations. The seemingly trivial ability to take external events and “internalize” them within us is attributed to the human “mind.” But we do not just “store” an abundance of signs, sounds, words, and stories in our minds. We do not just bring them forth again and again, and we do not just reproduce impressions and repeat expressions. We create new constellations and connections in our minds which unfold, deepen, and sharpen both our memories and our imaginations. As soon as we want to address the complexity of this enterprise and as soon as we want to acknowledge a remarkable quality of this storing, selecting, con-

necting, and creative representing and imagining, we do not only speak of a human “mind,” but also of the human “spirit.”

In order to grasp this human spirit, we have to acknowledge that even the most trivial internalized “depictions” in our mind are incredibly complex. We internalize an object, many objects, networks of objects, indeed an entire environment, or multiple environments, together with their diverse signals, feelings, and impressions which are all taken up into human memory and imagination and thus “spiritualized.” These objects, constellations of objects, environments, realms of impressions existed or still exist in physical reality and as potentials of a mental or “spiritual” depiction within our memory and imagination.

On the one hand our “mental (or spiritual) depiction” can be totally inadequate, fleeting, and tainted with self-deception. It remains, as we tend to say, more or less “far removed from reality.” A spiritual or mental impression can begin to torment us, can become traumatic and obsessive. It can hinder normal life, and can have an impact on our mental health. In both these instances, “the spiritual” takes on a negative character. Either such mental impressions can never be a match for the fullness, plasticity, and solidity of reality; or they break free into their own independent, ghostly apparitions.

On the other hand we should not let these boundary cases disguise the solidity, richness, and positive power of the spirit and its spiritual dimensions, nor should we underestimate its blessings. We have the power to concentrate on specific objects, networks of objects, events, situations, histories that we can “internalize,” store away, and then later recall and recombine. There is room within our memories and imaginations for entire worlds of images and whole “spiritual films.” In addition acoustic and spoken impressions are filed away in all their richness: stored, connected, catalogued, and bound together in a variety of ways with individual snapshots and whole series of images and stories. Scents, sounds, and melodies, not to mention tactile impressions, all enrich this mental, spiritual world. And bound to them all are strong impressions and powerful emotions.

The interplay as well as the selection and limitation of these elements are all vitally important and influence the quality and power of our mental operations. Literature, the fine arts, and music all demonstrate the power of the spirit at different levels. Modern film combines pictorial impressions, music, and language and uses them in ways that can provoke incredible fascination. Abstract symbol systems such as mathematics, formal logic, and analytical thought allow us to discover principles, rules, and cor-

relations of order in the natural and intellectual worlds, enabling us to give sensible order to the wealth of these mental impressions and unleashing within us great powers for “world dominion.” Using some of these spiritual powers, we can reconstruct past situations and even entire states of the world, and can reliably predict future events and the correlations between these events. They also enable us to communicate with each other over vast distances, not only relaying information, ideas, and stories but also sharing fairly complex emotions, coordinating memories, and expectations, and creating shared spiritual environments and a common world.

This brief sketch of our mental capabilities might give rise to great enthusiasm for the “powers of the spirit,” especially when we consider a constellation that fascinated occidental professional and popular philosophy and was often connected with the term “reason.” In Book XII of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle observes that human persons have the (mental) ability to connect their discovery of the world with a growing knowledge of their selves (and to do so in systematic ways), and the tendency of these two forms of knowledge to mutually amplify and strengthen one another. “Thinking in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and the more it is thinking, the more it deals with that which is best. Spirit (= *nous*, which might be more appropriately translated as reason) thinks itself by participating in that which is thought. Spirit (reason) becomes itself an object of thought by grasping and thinking that which is thought, so that spirit (reason) and that which is thought are identical.”<sup>1</sup> Aristotle sees in this not only the spiritual power of thinking and “reason” (*nous*), but also nothing less than the existence of the divine. “For that which is capable of receiving that which is thought and which is, is also spirit, to be sure, but it is in actual activity only when it has (that which is thought). Thus actually active thought, more so than the capacity to think, is the divine element that spirit seems to have.”

However, we should be extremely cautious not to glorify the spirit in ideological ways (be it even in the forms of thought and reason). Apart from recognized psychotic phenomena, the many and varied ways in which spiritual communication can be used (consciously and unconsciously) for what is ill and evil must always be taken into account when we examine the phenomena of the spirit. It is not only the helpful and healthy communications, illuminations, and reductionisms but also the emotionalizations and the trivializing and banalizing forms of thought (even under the title of

1. Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 8, *Metaphysica*, transl. W. D. Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928, 1072b, 19-32.

philosophy or theology) which can be transported spiritually, and which can become communicatively and culturally engrained.

On the one hand, monistic, dual, and dualistic forms of thought serve to harness broad cultural concepts and enable the controlled progress of thought and quick and dependable communication. Yet on the other hand, these forms also serve to highly degrade thought and experience, distanced as they are from the fullness of real life and its formative opportunities. When combined with strong emotion, reductionistic thought can blind people in highly dangerous ways and pledge them to harmful ideologies both cognitively and morally. An “evil spirit” then controls the minds and souls and employs the many mental abilities towards the corruption and destruction of our human and created conditions of life. In this light, it would be highly problematic to simply invest that tremendous spiritual world automatically with associations such as “good,” “promotive of life,” or even “divine.”

## 2. Human Spirit and Divine Spirit

These observations of the deep ambivalence of the power of the spirit challenge us to develop a nuanced understanding of the relationship between God’s Spirit and the human spirit. The Apostle Paul perceives the incredible complexity of the human spirit when he marvels at its ability to overcome spatial and temporal distances, to enter into contact not only with other human beings but even with God Himself. However, he also sees the limitations of the complex spirit which intervenes for us before God “with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). “For we do not know how we ought to pray; the spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express.” By speaking in tongues the spirit seeks in a highly ambiguous way to enter into contact with God (1 Cor. 14:1ff.). Paul comments: “In church I would rather speak five words with reason (*nous*) . . . than ten thousand words in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:19). This indicates clearly that a spirit on its own does not automatically lead to clear insights and clear speech. But even clear speech, apparently firm hearts, and clear consciences can be lied to and deceived, determined, and led astray by a “spirit of the world” (1 Cor 2:12, and often) which closes them off from God. So-called “final concepts of God” may be clear and impressive, yet still spiritually impoverished or empty; and they may systematically distort and deform our relationship to God.

Therefore it is important that we never just simply associate the spiritual world with the divine world, nor simply equate the divine Spirit with the intellectual world. "God is Spirit" — but God is not, as Aristotle and many of his followers seem to suggest, essentially reason and intellect. The creative Spirit of God also touches and shapes the natural world and the natural networks of life. Again, Paul emphasizes this frequently in the area of anthropology when he says that God's Holy Spirit pours God's love into the human hearts (of flesh!) (Rom. 5:5) and that human bodies are supposed to be the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19). Yet the workings of the Spirit should not be limited to the realm of anthropology and "the increasing complexity of hominin social life over the past two million years."<sup>2</sup>

Neither should this insight lead us, with Spinoza, to equate God and nature (*deus sive natura*), nor should we derive an abstract theism or even pantheism from the occasional use of the biblical phrase "all things," connected with God's workings. The biblical talk of the restoration and renewal of "the whole" (*panta*) should not be confused with the meaning "anything and everything." The biblical traditions make it very clear that God can "withdraw" His hand and His Spirit, that God can turn His "countenance away" and leave creation to self-jeopardy, self-destruction, decay, and death.<sup>3</sup> Therefore we must ask which specific creativity is to be connected with the Spirit of God. Here we need to take into account the connection between creation and new creation, as well as the way in which the Spirit of God has been christologically shaped.

The setting in motion of the cosmos and the processes of natural evolution are certainly deserving of our wonder and our research efforts. Yet they cannot answer the problem of theodicy — for "life is robbery" (Whitehead), life lives off other life.<sup>4</sup> And the incredible extension of the universe, given the highly probable finitude of all natural life, can hardly dispel the impression of its and of our final futility and senselessness.<sup>5</sup>

2. D. Alexander, *The Spirit of God in Evolutionary History*, in this volume; see also the contributions in this book of J. Schloss, *Hovering Over the Waters: Spirit and the Ordering of Creation*, and S. Horujy, *How Exactly Is the Spirit Present in Creation?*

3. Cf. the dialogue and discussion between John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker in *Faith in the Living God. A Dialogue*, London and Philadelphia: SPCK and Fortress, 2001.

4. Michael Welker, *Konzepte von 'Leben' in Nietzsches Werk. Eine Sichtung von Denkansätzen, in Leben, Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie IX*, ed. W. Haerle and R. Preul, Marburg: Elwert, 1997, 41-52.

5. Cf. the first chapters of J. Polkinghorne and M. Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000.

What we need here is an examination of the Spirit of God, an examination which takes into account the forces of new creation revealed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and in the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. Yet these forces of salvation and exaltation must not be isolated in an end-time eschatology. They are also formatively at work now, in this creation. For this reason, the discourse between theology and the natural sciences, on topics dealing with the real, natural, and social world, are not only advisable but utterly indispensable.

Thus genuinely christological and pneumatological perspectives on the workings of the Spirit must return and refer back to the forces of creation. For the biblical witnesses, creation right from "the beginning" aims at the sabbath, the cult, the temple, and the mutual communication between God and humanity; and likewise today we need a differentiated understanding of the continuity and discontinuity of "creation and new creation." The great significance of the spirit, even with regard to the astonishing individual and cultural abilities discussed above, needs to be reevaluated in this context — and also subjected to a "discernment of the spirits." For by no means do all natural and all mental or spiritual powers correspond to the intentions of God the creator. We need to examine whether their impressive achievements can indeed be put in relation to the Spirit of God — or whether they finally just disguise and strengthen those forces which render earthly life increasingly more banal, and then finally destroy it.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The Spirit in New Creation

It is most important not to identify "new creation" exclusively with end-time theophany. Rather, the creative God, the resurrected and elevated Christ, and the workings of the Holy Spirit bring the powers of "new creation" into creaturely and human life on earth, into nature and history. The coming reign of God or the reign of Christ, for which Christianity prays in the "Lord's prayer," connects "present eschatology" and "future eschatology" and constitutes the "new creation" in the midst of the "old creation." A transformation and renewal of creation takes place which will be fulfilled in the end-time theophany but is not restricted to it.<sup>7</sup>

6. This concern governs Vladimir Shmaliy's contribution in this volume.

7. Cf. the contributions in T. Peters, R. Russell, and M. Welker (eds.), *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

The promise and the event of the “pouring of the Spirit” offers a powerful witness to the work of the Holy Spirit in new creation. The announcements of the Messiah on which the Spirit of God will “rest” (cf. esp. Isaiah 11, 42, and 61) say that the Messiah will bring “justice, mercy and the cognition of God” to Israel and to the gentiles.<sup>8</sup> The New Testament sees these promises fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. “Justice, mercy, and faith” are the “weighty matters of the law” (Matt. 23:23). Thus the Messiah will bring the “fulfillment of the law.” He will, however, bring it by “baptizing with the Spirit,” by involving His witnesses as the “members of His body” into His post-Easterly, resurrected life. James Dunn has noticed that the New Testament coined a fresh image that strengthened the hope for a “richer experience of God’s vitalizing presence and activity” on earth. Jesus, “who had been inspired by the Spirit, had now become the dispenser of the Spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

The pouring out of the Spirit as an act of “new creation” is in many respects revolutionary. It transcends the boundaries and limits of an ethnic religiosity. It also questions the patriarchal, ageistic, and class fostering structures by stressing with Old and New Testament voices that God’s Spirit will be and has been poured out on “males and females, old and young, masters and slaves” (cf. Joel 2:17f and Acts 2:17f).<sup>10</sup> The edification of the “body of Christ” thus transforms sexist, ageist, and social conflicts and tensions. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit brings an abstract unification, turning all members of the body of Christ into standardized “subjects” in the sense of some popular modern philosophies. John Polkinghorne has stressed the “context-sensitivity” of the working of the Holy Spirit. For this reason the Spirit is rightly attributed a “personality,”<sup>11</sup> although the Holy Spirit does not exhibit structures of self-referential personhood which are basically shaped by thought and reason.<sup>12</sup> The Holy Spirit “will not speak on his own authority” (John 16:13; cf. Rom. 8).

8. Cf. M. Welker, *God the Spirit*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994, part 3.

9. J. Dunn, *Towards the Spirit of Christ: The Emergence of the Distinctive Features of Christian Pneumatology*, in M. Welker (ed.), *The Work of the Spirit: Pneumatology and Pentecostalism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006, 3-26; see also the contributions of Frank Macchia in that book and in this volume.

10. M. Welker, *God the Spirit*, part 5; see also the contribution of Jürgen Moltmann in this volume.

11. J. Polkinghorne, *The Hidden Spirit and the Cosmos*, in M. Welker (ed.), *The Work of the Spirit*, 169-182.

12. I have shown this in *God the Spirit*, part 6.

Enormous dynamics come with the work of the Holy Spirit, a fact which makes it very clear that the new creation is not a black picture of a death-like “eternal rest,” but an “eternal life” which is already reflected and expressed in the true worship of the church, in its celebration of the sacraments, and in its proclamation and teaching, but also in the diaconical and prophetic existence which bear witness to the resurrected and elevated Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus we see the differentiated spiritual presence of God more clearly, despite its immense power and richness, when we consider its Christo-morphic shape of the elevated Christ in continuity and discontinuity with the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection of Christ. The spiritual presence of Christ and the triune God brings the creative transformation of the whole creation into the new creation, the elevation, purification, and glorification of creation.

First, in the light of the pre-Easter life of Christ, a *theological humanism*<sup>13</sup> is generated. The powers of love and forgiveness radiate oriented on the caring, sustaining, and rescuing God whom Christians see revealed in the brotherly *kingship of Christ*. This spiritual reign is concerned with the care for very basic human needs, such as nourishment, healing, and fellowship. It is intensely correlated with the familial and educational systems, with the establishment of health care and basic human social and diaconical routines, with the rule of a just law and, in our time, of human rights. These powers of the new creation, already at work in the middle of the old creation, are not confined to human societies and cultures. They have an impact, visibly or in latent and emergent ways, on the rest of creation.<sup>14</sup>

The second dimension brings the revealing and judging aspects of the presence of the divine, which are attributed to the *prophetic office of Christ* and which should be correlated with the complex understanding of the dimension of the cross. In this respect, not only the co-suffering and kenotic presence of God, but also the disclosure at the cross of the principalities and powers which dominate even religion, politics, morals, and public opinion are crucial. Here the real and the symbol-political conflicts, the critique and self-critique of religion, the critique of academic, moral, legal, and political developments which are not compatible with the search for truth, justice, and mercy, and the striving for freedom and peace, become

13. Cf. D. R. Klemm and W. Schweiker, *Religion and the Human Future: An Essay on Theological Humanism*, Chichester: Blackwell Publ., 2008.

14. See the contributions of John Polkinghorne and Jürgen Moltmann in this volume.

important. And here again, we see a broad impact on the whole of creation which has suffered and still suffers from all sorts of chauvinism, colonialism, racism, and ecological brutality. In the middle and against the groaning of creation under the powers of sin and death, the Spirit of new creation is constantly working towards "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13).

Finally, we have to envision the sanctifying and ennobling presence of the divine Spirit, which Christian faith correlates with the priestly office of Christ and with the powers revealed in the resurrection. As Francis Fiorenza has shown,<sup>15</sup> the resurrected Christ brings the basic spiritual forms of the constitution of the life of the church, such as the breaking of the bread, the illumination and opening of the Scriptures, the greeting of peace, the sending of the disciples, etc. — basic forms which Christians connect with the constitution of the body of Christ and its service in the world. All these spiritual powers of the new creation — the diaconical, prophetic, and pastoral forms — reach far beyond human societies, cultures, and the realms of the church. The reign of the triune God and thus the reign of Christ want to gain shape and clarity in the life of the church, but they are not confined to it.<sup>16</sup>

All three dimensions of the spiritual presence of the divine which Christians see revealed in the life and lordship of Jesus Christ show various interdependences and a multitude of specific radiations into the different spheres of our cultures, our systems of memories and imaginations. They work for the transformation of the human spirits, souls, and minds, the fleshly hearts and the bodies — and through it on a constant transformation of all dimensions of spiritual and natural creation. This orientation will help us to replace all sorts of vague visions, mere wishes, soft pleas, and illusions by a biblically oriented and realistic eschatology to which both theology and science have to contribute.

15. F. Fiorenza, *The Resurrection of Jesus and Roman Catholic Fundamental Theology*, in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall, and G. O'Collins (eds.), *The Resurrection: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Resurrection of Jesus*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 213-248, 238ff.

16. Cf. the "General Eschatology," which deals with the "transition of the contemporary shape of the world to the renewed one," developed by D. Staniloae, *Orthodoxe Dogmatik III*, Düsseldorf and Gütersloh: Benzinger and Gütersloher, 1995, 318ff., with strong references not only to the church fathers but also to Sergej Bulgakow, Nicolai Lossky, and Paul Florensky.

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

Renos K. Papadopoulos

This is not a theological essay. I am not a theologian but a social scientist and academic who is also involved in field projects offering psycho-social assistance to refugees and other survivors of political violence but also traumatised victims of natural disasters. In this paper, I will attempt to develop some reflections about aspects of my work from an Orthodox Christian perspective which, to my understanding, address the theme of our symposium, the Spirit in Creation.

### 1. New Creation and Spirit in Social Sciences

At the outset, it seems appropriate to ponder on what could be understood by the Spirit and its role in the movement from Creation to New Creation in the context of social sciences. My esteemed colleagues in this volume address the same question mainly from the perspectives of theology and natural sciences where there is a considerable body of literature dealing with these connections. However, when we move to the human and social sciences it is rather difficult to find any established tradition within which to formulate further observations.

However, by making use of part of Welker's contribution, it will be argued that it is possible to create a working framework within which to locate meaningfully an attempt to relate this theme within the context of social sciences.

Welker emphasises that the term 'New Creation' should not be restricted to its eschatological meaning. He argues that 'It is most important not to identify "new creation" exclusively with end-time theophany'