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The Spirit and Teaching

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The Holy Spirit ought to be relevant to the teaching in which we... engage.

The Holy Spirit ought to be relevant to the teaching in which we university professors and teachers engage. After all, both biblical and theological tradition associate learning and knowledge in a special way with the Spirit. Likewise, we speak of “inspired” and “inspiring” teachers, thus witnessing to something of a certain “spirit” which animates the really fine teachers, for they are “in-spir(it)ed.” So what follows will be something of a meditative experiment on what we will likely agree are three central components of the teaching process, namely, the student, the teacher, and the connective between these, the particular subject matter under concern. In a wide sense, we are all to one another always engaged in some kind of teaching experience, at least potentially, but I am focusing here upon the university teacher. As I understand it, it is the university teacher’s dedication to his or her particular area of concern (the “subject matter”) which distinguishes the university professor/teacher from others on the university campus. In the first instance, students do not enroll in our classes because of our personalities, but because of our competence in a particular subject matter.

Spirit and Student

How might a theology of the Spirit be relevant to our understanding of the student, and to the student’s own self-understanding? If we bear in mind how the New Testament frequently associates the Spirit with the mission and power of making connections, then we gain a certain point of entry here: How might the Spirit enable the student to “connect,” not precisely with the teacher, but with the subject matter of a particular course, naturally by means of the teacher? The Spirit of truth (Jn 14.17), who is present in the truth of reality, to whom that truth is utterly transparent, is also somehow present in the student, we believe. If this be so, then a connection already exists between the student and the truth available within the subject matter. In the first instance, this connection does not have to be created. It already is. Let us circle around this somewhat.

Perhaps the notion of “resonance” might help. The subject matter being offered by the teacher ought to resonate with the student, for the Spirit of truth mediated by the teacher ought to harmoniously resonate with the Spirit indwelling the student. The truth of the one finds an “echo” in the other. It is as if there is a potential alertness in the student, on the look for what is in harmony with the truth of existence, through the power of the Spirit. Teachers have often experienced this sense of the student

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*...the truth of oneself is
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being suddenly alert, awake, keenly following the curve of what is being said and discussed. The student in this case is inspired, inspired, offering no resistance, but in the current of the Spirit's mission of witnessing to the truth. Students experience this as a kind of "it fits" experience: Somehow, sometimes despite a certain resistance, they find something in class fitting with their experience, attractive to it. In our theological tradition, this inner capacity for learning is often associated with the anointing in the Spirit by Christ: "...the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you" (1 Jn 2.27[NRSV]). Through this anointing, information is transformed into something meaningful, enriching, challenging, and formative of our character. St. Simeon the New Theologian (d. 1022), along these lines, described Christ as "the door," and the Holy Spirit as the giver of the "key" to that door, the door opening out onto knowledge. "What in fact is the key of knowledge other than the grace of the Holy Spirit bestowed by faith which by illumination really produces knowledge and full knowledge...The door is the Son – 'I am,' he says, 'the door' (Jn 10.7-9). The key of the door is the Holy Spirit..."¹

If all of this be so, then the student ought not to sense an alienation from the subject matter. The too common complaint of the "irrelevancy" of what is being taught ought not to arise. If the Spirit present to the subject matter is speaking to the Spirit indwelling the student, so to speak, then somehow the truth of oneself is at stake in the teaching process. The student is engaged in a process of self-discovery, being led to encounter and participate in dimensions of his or her own deepest self. The Spirit, so subtle and non-violent, knows us better than we know ourselves. More intimate to us than we are to ourselves, said St. Augustine (*Confessions*, 3, 6). Closer to us than our own jugular veins, the Quran (50.16) tells us. "...the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God," wrote St. Paul (I Cor 2.10, 12). Of course, this can be challenging, and even scary for the student, as if we are somehow afraid to own up to our own deepest potential, but that is quite different from alienation and irrelevancy. Likewise, a certain deep down confidence and hopefulness ought to accompany this process of self-discovery, for we are both exploring and being carried along at the same time, carried by the Spirit's power.

We have mentioned the notion of resistance, and naturally we encounter subtle and not so subtle forms of resistance in the teaching process, from all sides. The Christian tradition is a soteriological tradition, that is, it is a tradition that is realistic,

“mugged by reality.” That tradition knows that we have to contend with error, imperfection, and forms of sin, both personal, historical, and collective. All of this interferes with our capacities for resonance. We do believe in salvation, however, that is, a healing process at work in reality through Christ and his Spirit, enabling us to work through our resistances, whatever they may be, although some of this remains very mysterious and only finally resolvable in eternity.

Thus it may well be that particular students do experience a certain kind of alienation from the subject matter of a particular class. The resonance capacity is cramped, at least temporarily. This can be painful for teachers, and it can have very negative effects upon other students, but it is also, like all forms of alienation, a painful and deadening experience for the student undergoing it as well. Think of how long fifty minutes can seem to be when there is little or no “connect” with the subject matter.

*...the spirit is inventive
and imaginative...*

But the spirit is inventive and imaginative, two traits also commonly associated with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the Spirit will work through some of the other students in the class: their inspirited capacities for resonance may be active and firm, and through their responses the students who are cramped might be suddenly or gradually, but always nonviolently, lifted from their stasis. The Spirit is, we believe, the glue -- “glue of love,” wrote Gertrud of Helfta (d. 1301/2)² -- connecting us with others, and these other students become co-mediators and in a way co-teachers with the primary teacher in the class. I recently noticed this at work in a powerful way while attending a colleague’s class as a part of her peer evaluation. The students simply seemed cramped, when it came to responding to her questions. She then, in what seemed like an inspired move, asked each student to dialogue briefly with a near student on the questions posed. Somehow the safety of the more private dialogue, and the teacher’s trust that the Spirit was at work in the students and that in that power they could themselves break free of their “cramp,” was all that was needed. This process of activation of our capacities for resonance is mysterious and profound, naturally, and it may even occur outside the classroom by means of other acquaintances, and sometimes even years later.

*O divine Spirit, I want
to be before you like a
light feather...*

A prayer for/by the student: “O most holy and adorable Spirit of my Jesus, let me hear your sweet voice. Refresh me with your precious inspiration. O divine Spirit, I want to be before you like a light feather, so that your breath may carry me where it will and that I may not offer the least resistance to it.”

*The Gospel of John speaks
of the Spirit as a teacher...*

*Something of the Spirit-
Teacher should be
reflected in the human
teacher...*

(Ven. Francis Libermann, *Commentaire du S. Évangile selon S. Jean*, 2, Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp., “Multiple Facets of Libermann’s Charism [4],” Oct. 15, 1996, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann,” unpub. ms)

Spirit and Teacher

The Gospel of John speaks of the Spirit as a teacher: “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14.25-26). Here we are seeking some insight into what it is that characterizes a Spirit-oriented view of the teacher. Something of the Spirit-Teacher should be reflected in the human teacher, if the Spirit dwells in him or her.

Might popularity be a significant sign of the inspired (in-Spirited) teacher? Perhaps. It is possible that simply good teaching sparks a blessed popularity among students. In the sense that students find in a particular class, with a particular teacher, the flame of their own Spirit-indwelt spirits sparked and aroused, to such an extent that the class is almost a bit like the recovery of paradise, a blessed place to be, in which somehow the way creation is meant to be is reflected and experienced. Why not?

On the other hand, we all know of popular classes with their popular teachers, but on a closer look, this popularity properly arouses our suspicion. The teacher may have an attractive personality; or a forceful and somewhat manipulative one, yet somewhat disguised; but the competency of what is communicated is deficient, or the requirements of the course are very lax. An “easy pass,” the students say.

So popularity would seem to be a possible sign of the Spirit-inspired teacher, but not a necessary one. A certain discernment is needed, which forces us to a deeper level of understanding of what the in-Spirited teacher is.

Related to popularity, and in a way a new form of it today, would be a competent and even clever expertise in teacher technology, namely, computers, and audio-visual aids. An older but still related form of popularity would be that coming from oratorical, rhetorical skills, which enable a person to be persuasive and impressive. Like popularity in general, the popularity stemming from these is ambiguous. Rhetorical skills can easily be used in subtly invasive and violent ways, manipulating students so that they will “come around” to the teacher’s point of view, regardless of the authenticity and truth of that point of view. The same

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holds for computer expertise, perhaps even more problematically. For computer technology can be interactive and in this sense participative on so many levels, thus masking its potential to be a tool of manipulation as well. The student can feel he or she is enjoying the freedom of true interactive dialogue, when in fact he or she is being manipulated. Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer provides us with a bridge to our following observations when, in writing of the nature of dialogue, he notes that “it is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter).”³ Teaching, it seems, can be a form of dialogue, and likely ought to always be an appeal to a possible dialogue. And the dialogue is not manipulation, Gadamer is saying. Note how he refers to the notion of the “subject matter.” The dialoguers are united by attunement to that.

Attunement to the subject matter, let us suggest, brings us much closer to what a Spirit-inspired teacher is all about. What is involved in “attunement” and how might the Spirit be involved in this? We wrote earlier of the student’s capacity for resonance; similarly, attunement on the part of the teacher requires such resonance. Perhaps we might say, if we want a bit more of a distinction between student and teacher here, that the student begins with resonance and hopefully comes to attunement, while the teacher, because he or she has grown through resonance in a more developed manner, begins with a somewhat more full-throttled attunement. But given this qualification, we can thus just as easily speak of teacher resonance, if we are so inclined. And this has the advantage of indicating that Spirit-inspired teachers are also students. Like them, their attunement to the subject matter involves the activation of their capacities for resonating with the subject matter; the subject matter finds in the good teacher a form of transparency. The teacher is transparent of the subject matter. Inasmuch as the subject matter is a reflection of the truth of reality, the Spirit of truth, it would seem, is there, attracting the teacher and enabling the teacher to submit to its challenge. The teacher participates in the Spirit’s witness to truth through attunement and resonance. And, we need to add, the Spirit has the ability to “convince us,” giving us a sense of a certain helpful (not pathological) guilt, should we refuse the drawing of the Spirit. The Spirit would seem to want us to live up to our potential. John 16.8-18, is a key text in this regard, noting how Jesus speaks of the Spirit’s power of illuminating us on issues of sin and failure and misjudgment.⁴

Because the teacher’s form of attunement is a form of student-resonance as well, good teachers experience a form of solidarity

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students...*

with students. In a way, in the Spirit, they are in communion with their students on this deepest of levels – the bond of the Spirit – and through the Spirit’s gifts of attunement and resonance they can identify with their students. Their knowledge of their students is something of a knowledge from within rather than from without. As the students experience wonder and excitement at the prospect of new insights and discoveries, so does the teacher. As the students struggle through to an integration of these with their other levels of knowledge, so does the teacher, albeit on his or her likely more complexified level. As the students experience at times a certain fear of the challenges involved in new learning, with their accompanying responsibilities, so does the teacher. So, paradoxically, in placing his or her focus upon transparency to the subject matter, the teacher is not sidelining the students or giving them second rate status, but finding an appropriate way to honor his or her service role on their behalf.

The Gospel of John describes the function of the Spirit as one of witness or testimony: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will also testify on my behalf. You also are to testify...” (15.26-27). This is a particularly helpful notion for our purposes here, since, as we think about it, the act of witnessing is at least a threefold one. There is the witness him/herself. And the witness does so in the presence of and to others. But the witness remains in a posture of pointing away from him/herself and toward that to which he or she witnesses. The Spirit, then, knows a thing or two about witnessing, and inasmuch as the teacher participates in the Spirit’s mission of witness, he or she also will likely manifest this threefold movement: he or she points to and guides toward the subject matter on behalf of the student, without disappearing, it is true, but also through a certain form of decentering the self (the teacher in pointing toward the subject matter points away from him/herself).

*...the teacher is
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the truth of reality...*

Decentering the self, something non-violently enabled by the Spirit, has its way of breaking down our egotistical resistances to the Spirit’s inflow. Echoing Gadamer, the teacher is not out to manipulate the students by “bringing them around” to his or her point of view, making a strong case out of what is really a weak one (the sophist’s trick), but rather the teacher is attempting to witness to the truth of reality inasmuch as that may be reflected in the appropriate subject matter of his or her field of competency. As the teacher’s self is decentered, then the chances of an appropriate form of “popularity,” and an appropriate use of teaching technology, along with an appropriate form of rhetorical skillfulness, become a more likely possibility.

As is well known, St. Paul taught us that “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12.7). He then went on to offer examples of the different kinds of gifts bestowed: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, the gifts of tongues, and interpretation of tongues (12.8-10). “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses” (12.11). For myself, it is difficult to think that St. Paul is being exhaustive, given the infinite possibilities open to the Spirit. Perhaps we can say he is offering representative and particularly illuminating examples of the Spirit’s gifts. Paul very likely was aware of Jesus’ teaching about the surprising ways of the Spirit. He knew it quite concretely from his own surprising conversion. “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn 3.8). Likewise, every teacher has had the experience of the amazing variety of talents and aptitudes – charisms, we say in theology – of his or her students. Like the wind, they blow where they will, and it is one of the teacher’s supreme responsibilities not to stifle these talents, but to nurture them, respect them, and allow oneself to be enriched and challenged by them. This would seem to be an important aspect of the decentering of the teacher’s self in the Spirit. The Spirit, who knows our depths better than we know ourselves, knows these talents in our students, as the Spirit knows them in the teacher. It would seem that inasmuch as the Spirit indwells the teacher, and inasmuch as the teacher is attuned to that, a certain capacity of recognition of the unique talents and capacities of students would characterize that teacher. He or she would resist the cookie-cutter approach to teaching, where one shape or size fits all, even if that is a particular challenge to the teacher, who might on some levels resist this recognition out of fear or other inadequacies. At the same time, Paul is confident that our unique talents, if given by the Spirit, will ultimately foster the common good, building true community. In Paul this is expressed especially in his great hymn of love in First Corinthians 13. Our talents are to be used in the service of love, for that is what builds community. So the “common good” exists where love is happening. It is a bit more complicated than some understandings of the common good. Love ought not to entail the smothering and destruction of unique talent, but the loving embrace of it, in a kind of wave of love spilling out on behalf of others. In any case, the in-Spirited teacher would seem to be on the lookout for these two realities, seeking to foster the student’s unique talents in such a way that they build up the love which creates community.

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A suggestion for the teacher from Father Libermann: “Descend deeply into your inmost self... If you do that, your joy will be full and the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ will flood your soul... For as long as you remain withdrawn into your heart of hearts you will always find the Holy Spirit there, who will lift you up and transport you to the top of that mountain of love which our Lord has built for his elect, and he will fill you with his graces, lights, beauty and happiness.”

The image coming to mind here is of...both together “facing” the subject matter...

(Ven. Francis Libermann, *Lettres spirituelles*, 1.126 [1835], Malinowski, “Praying in the Holy Spirit [3],” Sept. 15, 1998, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann”)

Spirit and Subject Matter

We have been led to place a significant emphasis upon the centrality of the subject matter in our approach to a Spirit-centered view of the teaching process. The image coming to mind here is of teaching characterized principally not so much as teachers and students facing one another, but rather as both together “facing” the subject matter. In a way, the subject matter becomes the bond between them. The image is useful in distinguishing the teaching process from other kinds of relationships, for example, counseling, or certain forms of friendship, or intimate relationships, all of which are rather more “face to face” relationships. True, this image runs the risk of depersonalizing the teaching process, so I am somewhat hesitant about it. Perhaps we will need to complement and correct this image with some qualifications. But let us work with it, keeping this hesitancy in mind.

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The subject matter of the university curriculum is, from the point of view of a Spirit-centered perspective, an expression of the university’s mission of witnessing to the truth of existence in its amplitude. Pope John Paul II called this the “*diakonia* of the truth,” a mission making “the believing community a partner in humanity’s shared struggle to arrive at truth” and one obliging it “to proclaim the certitudes arrived at, albeit with a sense that every truth attained is but a step toward the fullness of truth which will appear with the final revelation of God: ‘For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully’ (1 Cor 13.12).”⁵ Obviously not everything making up the “subject matter” of the curriculum is an expression of truth. On the journey to truth we wade through much untruth. Yet, at its best the curricular subject matter ought to be a helpful map opening teacher and students alike to dimensions of the truth of existence. On the most general level, then, the subject matter participates in the Spirit’s mission of witnessing to the truth, albeit amidst the debris of untruth

stemming from humanity's imperfection and hostile resistance to the truth as well.

*...God is inviting
humanity into a
dialogue...*

In our Christian tradition, "truth" has been most commonly associated with Christ, the *Logos* or "Word" of the Father, reflected in creation on the one hand (Jn 1.3) and historical experience and revelation on the other (Jn 1.14). Thinking of the divine Word at the appropriate time becoming flesh in the human Jesus makes us think of God as one who wishes to share and communicate, or dialogue with, humanity about the nature and truth of it all. So God is inviting humanity into a dialogue, part of whose goal is the acquisition of truth. "Truth" needs to be understood here in a rather ample manner. It is not first and foremost a series of propositions telling us this or that, but rather the disclosure of reality itself, its unveiling. In classical Greek tradition, truth ("aletheia") bears the double meaning of reality and reality's manifestation, while the biblical tradition adds to this the notion of the reliability of that manifestation, for God is faithful and can be trusted. ⁶

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Likewise, as we have seen, the Spirit is commonly associated with witnessing to the truth by guiding and attracting humanity thereto. It is as if God both offers us the truth in dialogue and gives us the loving support we need to keep the dialogue alive. Father Libermann wrote that "the Spirit of God acts, it is true, strongly, but He always disposes matters with suavity." ⁷ Like that, perhaps, the Spirit draws us into dialogue, strongly, but without forcing us. A gentle strength. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth," the Jesus of John's Gospel says. But that Gospel importantly adds that the Spirit "will not speak on his own." (Jn 16.13). There is nothing of the manipulating ego at work in the Spirit. This dialogue, when guided by the Spirit, is non-invasive, gentle, yet still strong. A Spirit-guided approach to teaching ought to reflect something of this as well, it would seem.

From this perspective, what makes a "university" literally what it claims to be, a witness to the "whole," to the universe of truth, is its sharing in this *diakonia* of the truth of creation and historical experience and revelation. Ignore one or the other of these, and we do not have a true university, for part of the "whole" has been amputated and suppressed. Both the lessons of creation in general and historical existence (among which are the historical revelations at the origins of the religions) form the subject matter of a Christian, Spirit-guided view of education.

There ought to be, then, a deep down oneness in a university, because the truth is one. The God of creation "doth not speak with

forked tongue,” one way in creation and contrariwise in history and historical revelation. This is an aspect of the *Shema* taught by Judaism and received by Christianity and Islam: The Lord is one, there is but one (Deut 6.4). The Spirit, then, guides us into this oneness, fostering the deep down bond which transforms a university into a true “collegium,” a site of dialogue between colleagues (among whom are students). Something of the Spirit’s refreshing dynamism is cramped when signs of this collegiality are missing. This does not mean that all subjects are ultimately teaching the same thing; that would be a difficult thesis to sustain. However, it might mean that, whatever the discipline, should one “dig down” deeply enough, one will stumble across the opening to the transcendent characteristic of all non-superficial learning. This openness to the transcendent “ground” of existence is not first the result of learning, but the reality making learning possible in the first place.⁸ It likely would also mean as well that we need to keep struggling our way through to the deep down harmony between the various disciplines, a harmony that at times is more promise than realized acquisition.

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So the Spirit unifies. But the Spirit also diversifies. The truth is many-layered, for there are many mansions in the Father’s house (Jn 14.2). The diversity of disciplines, with their diverse subject matters, at their optimal best reflect the richness of the truth, and witness to that. The frequent biblical references to the unique gifts bestowed on each by the Spirit, and perhaps most famously, the Pentecost text in which the many tongues and cultures of the world are so many manifestations of the Spirit’s gifts at work (Acts 2), are indicative of this diversifying work of the Spirit. Thus another sign of the Spirit at work in the educational effort is this respect for diversity and plurality. Apart from the Spirit, it is true, it can be so much babel, locking people up in little empires, and impeding collegiality. We all recall the tower of Babel story (Gen 11). But in the Spirit diversity can be a pathway into the richness of existence itself.

Here we come upon certain interplaying tensions between the oneness and diversity in the subject matters of the university. These tensions are well known: between the physical (natural and environmental) and the humane sciences; the tension within each between the various specialized subdisciplines; the tensions between the liberal arts and sciences on the one hand, and the professional schools on the other (business, education, music, medicine/health/pharmacy, law, leadership and professional advancement, etc.); the tension between learning and careerism; and more. These tensions can be productive and creative, albeit also arduous and challenging.

*...tensions remain as
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At times, we are able to work our way through to a certain resolution of these tensions, for example, between reason and faith, evolutionary theory and faith, the classical-medieval heritages and Christian revelation vis-à-vis the challenges posed by modernity, late modernity with its various advocacy critiques (social, liberationist, eco-feminist, gender, etc.), postmodernity, postcolonial theory, globalization, etc. But at times we are not so able. The tensions remain as fruitful challenges, an in-between patch of spaces demanding imagination and openness and a certain measure of experimentation. Not unlike the Spirit, who is also in-between: between Father and Son, and between both of them and creation, in an unending series of waves. The Spirit is at home in the in-between, helping us to build bridges (connections), and keeping what seem like exceedingly distant polarities somehow one on a very deep level.⁹

Three Potentially Creative Tensions “in the Spirit”

Truth as Manifest and as Mystery: The truth, we believe, is one, for ultimately it is God, the fullness of reality itself. This does not exclude us, for created reality is embraced within the reality of God the Creator. To some extent, this truth is manifest to us in creation and history, and we trust that it is true, because God is a firm foundation upon whom we may rely. But likewise the divine Ground is a mystery exceedingly bright, the famous “known Unknown.” As the Spirit guides us into the truth, we are being led into the depths of mystery as well, a mystery always ever greater. So the Spirit wants to nudge us, to stretch us, to keep us open and on the alert for the “more,” some of which is found expressed by the voices hitherto silenced by injustices and other inadequacies of the past. This is what might be called the “prophetic edge” of the Spirit. Sometimes what is called “relativism” is not really relativism at all; rather is it the attempt of an hitherto mute voice striving to receive a hearing, even if it means the certainties of the past may need some further refinement, complexification, and correction. Such is what it means to plunge ever more profoundly into the Mystery. Relativism is a matter worth worrying about, for it is one of those dogmatisms it argues against, and it leads in the end to replacing allegiance to the truth with subservience to whatever power currently is in vogue. But, as one of my colleagues suggested to me, also worth worrying over is a too speedy naming of unheard voices as forms of relativism. Such accusations can mask a fear of openness to the mysterious depths of truth, and in that sense represent an attempt to “stifle the Spirit” (1 Thes 5.19).¹⁰

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Information and Formation: As we, students and teachers, grapple with the subject matter of our disciplines, we potentially travel a path from surface to deeper depths. What begins as information slowly becomes formative of our characters as we more profoundly sound the depths of what we are learning, participating in its meaning ever more deeply, and integrating it into the deeper fabric of our lives. This is what happens in our personal relationships, and in an analogous manner it seems to happen in our educational experience in general. Sometimes we allow the subject matter to remain mere information. Perhaps we are not ready to integrate it; or we find it boring; or we are in subtle ways afraid of its challenge and accompanying responsibilities. Perhaps, too, we reject it, for we might find it profoundly mistaken, our spirits not resonating with it. Myriad possibilities present themselves. The Spirit is the sounder of the depths: The Spirit bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8.16), searching everything, even the depths of God (1 Cor 2.10). Plausibly, then, as we allow the Spirit to indwell us, we ought to experience something of this movement from surface information to formative depth, which can include a rejection of what is really not formative but deformative. This is another way of saying that the Spirit helps us transform our knowledge into wisdom (1 Cor 12.8), that special gift by which our knowledge is truly formative not only of ourselves, but of human society itself. Here perhaps is one way in which a Spirit-guided approach to the subject matter of the various disciplines avoids an impersonal approach to education. The Spirit is formative of the personal and even interpersonal.

Self-regard and Mission: As the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, we find ourselves coming to life, our God-given potential unfolding. The Spirit, breathing over the waters of creation (Gen 1.2), bringing them to life, brings us to life as well. In this sense, there ought not to be a sense that our personal gifts and dignity are denigrated in the educational process. The Spirit may well challenge us through our teachers and fellow students, but that ought to be quite different from any form of denigration of our selfhoods. Where we find a teacher or student denigrating anyone, even in subtle ways, such as through camouflaging the denigration through humor, we can be sure that the Spirit has nothing to do with it. This is not to say that the Spirit does not have a sense of humor, but it is wholesome humor. “Good fun,” we like to say.¹¹ Joy is, after all, one of the Spirit’s gifts (Gal 5.22).

On the other hand, it is one of those Gospel paradoxes that we lose our lives to find them (Matt 10.39), which might be another

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way of saying that the Spirit, in witnessing to Christ Jesus, brings us into that witness as well, a witness moving us beyond our narrow worlds, and to the world to which Jesus went: the land of those who have not heard the good news of the Gospel, the land of the hurting, the poor, the victims. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1.8). Thus Peter, appropriately at his Pentecostal sermon, cites Joel’s prophecy that the Spirit will be poured out upon the young, the old, and the slaves, whether female or male (Acts 2.17-18). The Spirit, then, is a missionary, and a significant dimension of a Spirit-guided form of education would be, then, the willingness to be in some way a missionary as well.

The two founders of the Spiritan Congregation, Claude-François Poullart des Places (d. 1709) and François-Marie-Paul Libermann (d. 1852), were profoundly stamped by this Spirit-guided missionary dynamism, and they remain primary paradigms for us in our educational endeavors. Father Poullart des Places dedicated his Congregation on the Feast of Pentecost, and it was stamped from the beginning with a special sensitivity to the poor. Father Libermann, as is well known, was especially attuned to the African world. His words remain prophetic to this day: “Make yourselves Negroes with the Negroes to form them as they ought to be, not in European ways, but leaving what is natural to them. Be to them like servants towards their masters...”¹²

Father (“Monsieur”) Jean-Jacques Olier (d. 1657), the founder of the priests of St. Sulpice, diocesan priests dedicated to ministry formation, was in varying ways a formative influence upon both Father Libermann, and Father Poullart des Places. M. Olier, saturated by the Christological and trinitarian spirituality of the French School, has a remarkable meditative prayer which he offers us upon entering into any conversation. In it he writes of adoring “the communication of spirit and openness of heart which the three divine persons of the Trinity have with one another.” He then passes to consider the “perfect truth and love” uniting the triune persons into one society. From there he prayerfully regards Jesus’ own conversations with his Mother, with St. Joseph, and with his disciples, all of these in some way participations in the trinitarian conversation.

We should add that we ought not to romanticize these representative biblical conversations noted by M. Olier. For example, in his conversation with the Syrophenician woman

(Mk 7.24-30/Matt 15.21-28), Jesus seems to be brought up short by her questioning, and it would seem that his own view of his mission is stretched by her aid. Through her, he seems to recognize his call to all, even beyond the frontiers of Judaism. Mary, to note the woman to whom the Spiritan Congregation is especially dedicated, was open and receptive, for example, in her conversation with the angelic messenger, but she was also perplexed and an active questioner in regards to her vocation to be Jesus' mother, in the end coming to her own free decision (Lk. 1.26-38). She truly dialogued, in other words; she was not inertly mute. Such give and take is the reality of conversations echoing the trinitarian conversation, it would seem.

Father Olier concludes his meditation by praying for the gift of the Spirit, asking that the Spirit dwell in us and enable us to be filled with the characteristics of this trinitarian form of conversation.¹³ M. Olier is suggesting a dialogue model of the Trinity: God is a dialoguing reality, a Holy Mystery sharing the Word with each divine person and with us in the Spirit. Mystery (a Father with an infinite, Mother's Womb) – Sharable (the Divine Word) – and Shared (the Spirit), Father Olier is suggesting. In its own modest way, and in the power of the Spirit, teaching itself is an icon of this kind of dialogue.

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¹ *Catéchèse* 33, as cited in Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, trans. David Smith (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 27.

² Gertrud the Great of Helfta, *Spiritual Exercises*, 3d exercise, Cistercian Fathers Series, vol. 49, trans. and intro. Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Jack Lewis (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 45.

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2d rev. ed., trans. rev. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 367.

⁴ Particularly helpful on this is Pope John Paul II, *On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World*, encyclical letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, May 18, 1986, no. 35 (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media), 56: "The Spirit...who 'searches everything, even the depths of God,' knows... 'the secrets of man.' For this reason he alone *can fully 'convince concerning the sin' that happened at the beginning*, that sin which is the root of all other sins... The Holy Spirit therefore convinces the world of sin ...by constantly *guiding toward the 'righteousness'* that has been revealed to man..." Nos. 27-48 form one long meditation by the Pope on John 16.8-10.

⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, encyclical letter, Sept. 14, 1998, no. 2 (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998), 10-11.

⁶ E.g., the Hebrew "emeth" and "emunah," as in Hos. 2.20 and Deut. 32.4; see E. C. Blackman, "Truth," in Alan Richardson, ed., *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 269.

⁷ Ven. Francis Libermann, *Lettres spirituelles*, 3.504 (Sept. 15, 1845), cited in Francis X. Malinowski, C.S.Sp., "In the Years 1844-1847 (21)," April

15, 2000, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann,” unpublished ms.

⁸ See Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis: On the Theory of History and Politics*, Collected Works, vol. 6, trans. M. J. Hanak and Gerhart Niemeyer, ed. David Walsh (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 353-54.

⁹ Robert Davis Hughes III, “The Holy Spirit in Christian Spirituality,” in Arthur Holder, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 211-212, considers Paul Tillich the giant on the issue of how “the Holy Spirit (Tillich’s ‘spiritual presence’) is always incarnated in ongoing history, resolving its ambiguities...and making Christians responsible for the culture in which they live, including the ‘higher’ culture of literature, art, and music.” See Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, ed. R. C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963). Ambiguities, however, will always remain in history, and thus, rather than resolutions, we have something like the mystic’s sense of the cloud of unknowing quite often.

¹⁰ See Karl Rahner’s celebrated text, “Do Not Stifle the Spirit!” in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. 7, trans. David Bourke (New York: Seabury, 1971), 72-87.

¹¹ Meister Eckhart had this to say: “When God laughs at the soul and the soul laughs back to God, the persons of the Trinity are begotten. To speak in hyperbole, when the Father laughs to the Son and the Son laughs back to the Father, that laughter gives pleasure, that pleasure gives joy, that joy gives love, and love gives the persons [of the Trinity in the soul], of which the Holy Spirit is one” (*Meister Eckhart: A Modern Translation*, trans. Raymond Blackney [New York: Harper Torchbook, 1941], 245).

¹² See Joseph Michel, “Poullart des Places,” and Paul Sigrist, “Libermann,” in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*, vols. 12/2 and 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1986, 1976), 2027-35, 764-80; Malinowski, “Francis Libermann, In the Years 1844-1847 (4),” Feb. 15, 1999, in his “The Holy Spirit in Francis Libermann.”

¹³ Jean-Jacques Olier, “Actes pour faire avant la conversation,” in his *La Journée Chrétienne*, ed. François Amiot (Paris: Rameau, 1953), 206-7 (published with his *Catéchisme Chrétien pour la Vie Intérieure* in one volume).