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Images of the Spirit: Renewing Source for the Spiritual Life

I. THE SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Over forty years ago, G. J. Sirks wrote an essay in which he called the Holy Spirit “Cinderella” (1957: 8). The name calls forth the image of a poor, bedraggled sister, relegated to the dungeon to perform dirty and menial tasks—ignored or forgotten by the world. This “Cinderella status” is reflected in many descriptors of the Spirit—“personally amorphous,” “faceless,” “forgotten,” “upstaged,” “ethereal and vacant,” “unclear,” “invisible.” Kilian McDonnell has catalogued the hesitant and groping theologies of the Spirit in the Scriptures and in the early Church that gave rise to a pneumatological vagueness across centuries, nations, and denominations from Augustine, through Nicolas Berdyaev and Nikos Nissiotis to Pope Leo XIII and Albert Outler (1985: 191–204). Traditional portrayals of the trinitarian persons deepen the dilemma—two male persons and a bird! But Elizabeth Johnson reminds us that forgetting the Spirit is tantamount to ignoring “the mystery of God closer to us than we are to ourselves, drawing near and passing by in quickening, liberating compassion” (Johnson, 1992: 131). The Spirit is the means of God’s personal engagement with the world in its history filled with both glory and tragedy.

The ending of the Cinderella story, however, is a happy one, and pneumatology might be said to enjoy a similar recovery. Exclusive theological preoccupation with christological questions has given way, making room for spirit—christology and pneumatology. We are now aided in our reflection on the Holy Spirit by a steady stream of books and articles (Congar, 1979, 1980; Kovel, 1991; Olson, 1992; Smith 1988; Williams 1992). Just like Cinderella, the Holy Spirit is being rescued from the shadows and placed in the spotlight.

A recovery of the Spirit is significant for several reasons. From a theological perspective, it is important to take the trinitarian foundations of Christian faith seriously, giving due weight to all three persons, as they relate both to one another and to the world. The point of a renewed pneumatology is not to upstage the figure of Christ, demanding that an over-exposed christology step aside in order to give the Spirit a turn. The context for pneumatological reflection is always christology and trinitarian theology. Being “in Christ” and “in the Spirit” mutually interpret and enrich each other (McDonnell, 204). Ad-

ditionally, we stand to glean significant benefit from delving into the tradition to recover ways in which our ancestors in the faith spoke about the Spirit's presence and work. One discovers that the Spirit was not as invisible or faceless as some would claim. Finally, recovering the language and imagery of the Spirit will aid us in our present efforts to form and shape our own experience and understanding of the Spirit's presence. In this essay, we turn to Augustine of Hippo (354–430), whose thought has so profoundly influenced later trinitarian thought in the west; and two medieval women mystics, whose voices are only beginning to be heard in theological discussions—Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Catherine of Siena (1347–1380).

Spiritual formation is a multi-faceted and never-ending process that should explore the many roles of the Spirit. In fact, one could describe spiritual formation as an "awakening" of the self to the Spirit in all facets of experience (Hauser, 1986: 5). Throughout a lifetime, one grows in one's ability to recognize and respond to the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Always rooted in one's specific socio-historical setting, spiritual formation takes one form for children and another for adults. Initial formation will have characteristics different from those in on-going formation. Education can be by both word and example. It goes on in families and neighborhoods as well as in classrooms and at liturgy. It can focus on one's own personal formation and/or on the ministry of formation in which one becomes explicitly responsible to help others grow in the faith. And spiritual formation always has both individual and communal dimensions. Many theologians who write about the Spirit today emphasize communal dimensions as a corrective to what is perceived as a too individualistic understanding of the Spirit's work in the past (Moltmann, 1992; Smith, 1988; Kovel, 1991).

One way to expand our understanding of the Spirit's role in spiritual formation is to retrieve key images and symbols from the tradition. How did our ancestors in the faith talk about their experiences of Spirit? In *God the Spirit* Michael Welker suggests that we need to analyze "complex symbolic resources" in order to decode and reformulate them (1994: 132–33). We can correct abstract and reductionistic notions of the Spirit by entering into the rich symbolism of the tradition. Although images of Spirit-presence are always embedded in a particular socio-historical matrix, they do not, for that reason, remain foreign or unusable to us. Symbols, images and the narratives that contain them function as vehicles of a deeper meaning and can provide a bridge between the past and the present. Here we will explore how select medieval figures used Spirit images and how these images might assist us in renewing the Spirit's presence and role in spiritual formation in both its individual and communal dimensions.

II. THE SPIRIT AND THE INDIVIDUAL

1. *The Spirit's Call: Charism and Vocation*

American culture emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual. We take note of special attributes or gifts that suggest a direction in which life is calling us. This awareness of individual giftedness can function in the spiritual life as well. Most Christians are familiar with the passage in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (12:4-7). One of the tasks of spiritual formation is to pay attention to the particular ways in which the Spirit gifts the individual.

In his *Life of Catherine of Siena*, Raymond of Capua cites a passage from Catherine's major theological work, the *Dialogue*, to underline the way in which Catherine's special gifts were a participation in the very life of the triune God. In the text, Catherine addresses God: "For you endowed me with something of the Power which is proper to yourself, Eternal Father; and you endowed my intellect with something of your Wisdom . . . and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from you and from your Son, has given my Will, the faculty which makes me capable of love" (*Life* III.3.356). While we no longer understand ourselves in terms of a medieval faculty psychology, Catherine's words invite us to reflect on, and acknowledge our participation in, the power, wisdom and love of the triune God.

The Spirit is the enabler, the power within and around us that makes a life of love and service possible. Spirit-christologies remind us that the Spirit who enabled Jesus to live the life he led is the same Spirit who operates and empowers the life of every Christian. Linking Catherine to Christ, Raymond writes, "The little one grew and waxed strong, in readiness for the day when she would be filled with the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God." He compares Catherine to a seedling that would grow into a lofty cedar because it was watered by the fountain of the Holy Spirit (*Life*, I.2.34). The Spirit fortified Catherine in times of temptation and enabled her to cling to the truth in times of sorrow (*Life*, I.4.49). Catherine's insight into the things of the Spirit permitted her to react to criticism as Jesus did—with patience (*Life*, II.5.176). Since Catherine refused to "quench the Spirit," the Spirit taught her heroic virtues (*Life*, I.3.35; I.4.51).

Exemplary models of the spiritual life include past narratives of designated saints such as Catherine as well as present, living narratives of people around us in our world. Moral philosopher Edith Wyschogrod reminds us that understanding the works and lives of

such holy people consists not in recounting their meaning, but in being “swept up in their imperative force.” Comprehension equals practice. We are “gathered into the narrative to extend and elaborate it in our own lives” (1990: xxiii). If we allow ourselves to be touched by the exemplary lives of others, we acquire a “felt sense” of these stories that then becomes inspiration for our own. These models offer clues to help one realize what it might mean, in very concrete terms, to have the Holy Spirit descend upon us. The Spirit’s gifts are forms of real power. They may be personal talents and strengths that operate within various social structures for the good of others. Or they may be counter-cultural and prophetic—appearing in paradoxical ways that confound power that is self-seeking or destructive. The lives of the “saints” offer patterns and language by which one can invite the Spirit to empower for virtue, and to transform us and our gifts for the good of others.

2. Transforming the Affections

Contemporary attempts to overcome dualisms of every stripe have led to an articulation of a holistic anthropology and spirituality. We are not happy with a spirituality that takes account only of a narrow range of human existence. We want to include our bodies and our feelings as well as our minds and wills. Feminist theology has been a crucial locus for the recovery of bodiliness and the affections in our theologies and spiritualities. We ignore the need to train our affections at our peril. Throughout the tradition, the Spirit’s power is often invoked to account for the conversion of affections.

Perhaps the most common symbol for the Spirit, showcased in the story of Pentecost, is fire, a multivalent image, often linked to the affections, that represents intense engagement with God, purification, ecstatic absorption, erotic consummation, prophetic courage. The symbol of fire is extended to include images of light and warmth. The Spirit’s presence brings light to dispel the darkness. Hearts that are made of stone or that are even as hard as diamonds melt and become flesh under the Spirit’s influence. Timidity and fear are cast out, enabling one to live and preach the good news with clarity, courage and abandon. In Germany, twelfth-century seer and abbess Hildegard of Bingen unleashes a plethora of images to describe the sweetness of the Spirit bestowed at Confirmation. “Its path is a torrent, and streams of sanctity flow from it in its bright power, with never a stain of dirt in them; for the Holy Spirit is a burning and shining serenity, which cannot be nullified, and which enkindles ardent virtue so as to put all darkness to flight” (*Scivias*, II.4.2).

But Hildegard is perhaps best known for her use of the agricultural metaphor of “greening” (*viriditas*) to point to lively affections. For Hildegard, *viriditas* is a cosmic idea. It expresses and links the bounty

of God, the fertility of nature, and especially the presence of the Holy Spirit. Barbara Newman comments about this aspect of Hildegard's thought: "If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, then you are filled with *viriditas*. You are spiritually fertile, you are alive" (Newman, 1989). Green things need water; thus, Hildegard associates *viriditas* with moisture (*humor, humiditas*). If the earth did not have moisture or greenness it would crumble like ashes, she says. In the spiritual realm, both *viriditas* and *humiditas* are manifestations of God's power, qualities of the human soul, for "the grace of God shines like the sun and sends its gifts in various ways; in wisdom, in greenness, in moisture." A lack of moisture causes the virtues to become dry as dust (Letter 85r: Baird and Ehrman, 195–196).

Hildegard describes the presence or absence of *viriditas* in terms that can be easily related to various aspects of spiritual formation. For example, she counsels the neophyte in religious life to strive for "spiritual greenness" (Baird and Ehrman, 7). Like a fallow field, a person with good heart receives the seed of God's word and thus is granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit in superabundance. She writes, "And so these three Persons are in the unity of inseparable substance; but they are not indistinct among themselves. How? He who begets is the Father; He who is born is the Son; and He who in eager freshness proceeds from the Father and the Son, and sanctified the waters by moving over their face in the likeness of an innocent bird, and streamed with ardent heat over the apostles, is the Holy Spirit" (*Scivias*, III.7.9). At the various stages of spiritual formation, one can reflect on the state of one's "field" in terms of readiness to receive and nurture the word of God. Is the Spirit's warming heat able to penetrate our lives, make us more generous, more supple to the nuances of grace that are available at each stage of one's life?

As one engages in ongoing spiritual development, there will undoubtedly be times when progress is arrested or reversed or when the Spirit is known by absence rather than presence. Hildegard describes a prelate who is filled with weariness (*taedium*) as lacking in *viriditas*. And we saw above how she uses the metaphor of dryness to describe a spiritual life that is lagging in growth and virtue. These images invite the believer to reflect on the state of one's spiritual affections. Have they become cold or dried out? What are the sources of this aridity? What is an appropriate response that might irrigate the affections, making them supple and expansive once more? Hildegard offers a counter-image when she speaks of St. Rupert, a man of exceptional virtue and the patron of her monastery as the *viriditas digiti Dei*, the "greenness of the finger of God" (Letter 38r: Baird and Ehrman, 107). No doubt every community includes persons who have "spiritual green thumbs," who function as models of spiritual aliveness and ma-

turity and who can point the way to fertility by their fervor and example.

3. *An Intelligent Faith*

Throughout most of the tradition, the Word/Logos has been linked with the mind, while the Spirit is often associated with love, the bond that unites the first two persons of the Trinity. But in the Gospel of John, the Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (14:17), the one who leads us into all truth (16:13). Augustine of Hippo delineates stages of spiritual growth, distinguishing between simply having the gift of faith and knowing that one has it. This later stage is seen as a completion, a fulfillment, a more mature stage in one's spiritual development. Pentecost represents a fuller possession of the Spirit. He writes, "We are therefore to understand that he who loves has already the Holy Spirit, and by what he has, becomes worthy of a fuller possession, that by having the more he may love the more . . . for this present possession has also a bearing on that fuller gift of the Holy Spirit, that they might come to a conscious knowledge of what they had" (*On the Gospel of John*, LXXIV.2).

Augustine fought for an inclusive Church—Christ died for all, not just for those who understood the faith—but he also held out for inclusion of the "highest peak of human reason" within the realm of faith (Letter CXVIII.5.32-33). He admits that, in the end, the Spirit infuses us who are infirm with a "certain learned ignorance" (Letter CXXX.15.28), but in the heat of daily life in the Church, he combated the fundamentalism and anti-intellectualism around him: "Far be it from us to think that God would hate in us that which distinguishes us from the beasts . . . Love understands wholeheartedly" (Letter CXX.3; CXX.13). Spiritually mature persons do not travel the spiritual journey in a mindless, empty "going-along" way but rather in a conscious, intentional embrace that includes heart, mind, speech and behavior. Without the Spirit's presence, individuals may hear about the Good News of salvation, but they would be unable to know the truth about God's life; or that God dwells within (1 John 3:24; 4:13), or to proclaim that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3).

For Augustine, the Christian life is a longing for home that admits of growth and development. It is as if he says, Don't just be a stupid believer (one is reminded of Paul's remonstrance, "O you stupid Galatians!"), but rather live in the Spirit, that is, seek understanding, vision, wisdom and joy that accompanies ease in being good. The presence of love and the gifts and fruits are signs of the Spirit's presence. But being conscious of that love is a fuller gift. One often hears the comment that many forty-year-old Christians are satisfied with a fourth-grade faith. Augustine implies that spiritual maturity is connected with the fullness

of the Spirit's truth. It is through the power of the Spirit that God knows about human reality and it is that same Spirit that makes it possible for us to know what takes place in God (On the Gospel of John XXXII.5). The Spirit is the means by which we know the things of God and appropriate that knowledge in a conscious, intentional way.

III. THE SPIRIT AND COMMUNITY

The point of distinguishing between the Spirit's role in individual and in communal aspects of spiritual formation is not to separate them, but to underline their integral relationship. The overemphasis on the individual that appears so prominent in American culture falsely obscures the primacy of communal existence. From the moment of conception, every human being is enmeshed in relationship—from the womb to the early moments in a family and thence to engagement with ever broader and more diverse communities. It is from these communal matrices that the individual emerges and not vice versa. But we also value and hold precious the individual, struggling to respect and tolerate, if not embrace differences. Pluralism is surely a hallmark of the global village in ways our ancestors in the faith would never have dreamed. We do not understand unity as sameness or oneness but strive rather for community-in-plurality where differing gifts are seen as assets and treasures rather than as causes for dissension.

One can extend this principal to spiritual formation that takes place within a complex matrix of communities. We are influenced by family, church, friends and nation—as well as the “communion of saints”—and it is out of all these influences that one's unique spiritual portrait emerges. Throughout the Church's history, the Spirit has been understood to function to build up the community and today, we extend that function to the entire world. The Spirit's power functions for the good of the “other” as this “other” comes to us in an infinite number of guises throughout the ages, with the ultimate Christian challenge being the command to love even the enemy. We examine two particular functions of the Spirit in community—as a power for unity and reconciliation and as the enabler of service to the neighbor.

1. Unity and Reconciliation

Because of sin, the realization of community is difficult. Transgressions and omissions erode the bonds that link us together, making forgiveness and reconciliation indispensable to our common life. Sebastian Moore calls the topic of God's forgiveness the most spiritually ambitious of religious ideas because it links two ultimate extremes of human experience: the infinite, all-transcending whole and the experience of one's life as sordid, trivial and self-seeking. Forgiveness is an

act of God acting like God in the very heart of the small, mean world of the sinner. The touch of God's mercy invites us to become more, not less aware of our meanness, knowing that it is in this very place that God touches us (Moore, 1977: 85-86). In the tradition, the Holy Spirit is often associated with the mercy of God. In the fourteenth century, the ever hopeful Julian of Norwich (c 1343-c 1416) encourages her readers by reminding them that the Spirit inspires persons to contrition and "turns bitterness into hope of God's mercy" (Julian of Norwich, 1978: 244).

Augustine struggled in the midst of a failing empire to combat forces that he judged inimical to orthodoxy and the Church's integrity. The fourth century witnessed the Arian controversy and debate about the Spirit's identity. At every turn, Augustine invoked the Holy Spirit to support his idea of Church against that of the Donatists. For Augustine, the sending of the Spirit revealed a trustworthy God who fulfills all promises, but he warned his congregation that just as the soul departs from a severed limb, so the Spirit departs from those who cut themselves off from the Church (Sermon 267.3). "So if you wish to be alive with the Holy Spirit, hold on to loving-kindness, love truthfulness, long for oneness, that you may attain to everlastingness" (Sermon 267.4). It is easy to take community for granted. When it is functioning well, we may not advert to the ways in which it nurtures us spiritually. Perhaps it is only when unity is threatened, as Augustine judged it to be in his time, that we speak up and become advocates and protectors of that unity.

The sign of the Spirit's presence for Augustine was the unity of a world Church that embraced all the languages symbolized at Pentecost. He writes, "Among you is being fulfilled what was prefigured in those days, when the Holy Spirit came. Because just as then, whoever received the Holy Spirit, even as one person, started speaking all languages; so too now the unity itself is speaking all languages through all nations; and it is by being established in this unity that you have the Holy Spirit, you that do not break away in any schism from the Church of Christ which speaks all languages" (Sermon 271). For Augustine, the Holy Spirit is the Gift that makes possible communion with God and with each other. In Sermon 71, Augustine links the bond of love that is the Holy Spirit within the Trinity, with its effects in the community of faith. "The Father and the Son have willed that we enter into communion among ourselves and with them through . . . the Holy Spirit, God and gift of God. It is in him in fact, that we are reconciled with the divinity and take our delight in it" (Sermon 71.12.18).

Augustine understood deeply Paul's ambiguity and inner struggle expressed in Romans 7:19: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." For Augustine, it is the Spirit who

accomplishes in us freedom from this inner duplicity and division. The Spirit has the power to reconcile the war that rages within us and to extend that reconciliation to others. The Holy Spirit is the Gift that makes possible communion with God and with each other. For Augustine, the remission of sins is the first blessing of God's goodness in the Holy Spirit. In his commentary on Psalm 8, he locates the bowels of the mercy of God in the Holy Spirit (Ps VIII:8). Against this gratuitous gift, the impenitent heart stands as an affront of enormous proportion.

In a number of texts, Augustine calls attention to the passage from Matthew (12:31-32) about the sin against the Holy Spirit. Part of the context for these comments was the debate about the contrast between the ideal unity and holiness of the Church and the actual, often unedifying behavior of its members. In Sermon 21, Augustine excoriates the recalcitrant individual who remains impassive in the "persevering hardness of an impenitent heart" (Sermon XXI.20). Both the sources and fruits of reconciliation are found in the love poured forth into hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5)—perhaps Augustine's favorite biblical reference to the Spirit. Reconciliation in love, he says, makes us sons and daughters of God (1 John 4:18); casts out fear (Rom 8:15); calls us back into friendship and acquaints us with all the secret things of God (John 16:13).

God's forgiveness of us is always linked to our forgiveness of one another. In a *New Yorker* Comment entitled "Getting Over," the author reflects on forgiveness in light of conflicts in both the former Yugoslavia and U.S.S.R, Africa, Northern Ireland, Central America, Sri Lanka, India, Palestine and Crown Heights, N.Y. The author notes that in *The Human Condition*, philosopher Hannah Arendt sees forgiveness as essential to human freedom. "Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new" (Arendt, 1958: 240). The article goes on:

And yet the forgiveness she [Arendt] sees as the ground for that hope is not a simple forgetting. If anything, it is a highly charged and continuously recharged form of remembering that cannot be done in isolation . . . True forgiveness is achieved in community: it is something people do for each other and with each other—and, at a certain point, for free. It is history working itself out as grace, and it can be accomplished only in truth (*New Yorker*, 4/5/93).

In significant ways, our future as a global community depends on the kind of remembering that leads to genuine compunction and for-

givenness. For Christians, this very difficult and challenging gesture is made possible through the Spirit's power and intimate presence.

Spiritual formation must take into account the complex dynamics that characterize the many communities to which we belong. Spiritual writers often speak of the initial stages of the spiritual journey in terms of one's awareness of, and sorrow for, sin. This difficult road to genuine self-knowledge is possible because of the Spirit's empowering presence. Sin becomes horrible to the extent that we are aware of betraying a relationship with an infinitely loving God. As one grows in love, one becomes more and more sensitive to the ugliness of sin. In turn, this experience leads to a willingness to offer reconciliation to others who have harmed or offended us. After Christ ascends to heaven, the Holy Spirit becomes the means of God's merciful activity toward the world.

Many of our ancestors in the faith speak of the Spirit in ways that give the reader a clear sense that the Spirit is not an abstract principle, but rather a present and compelling force, engaged in the struggle to preserve the faithful and give them hope. The present challenge is to engage the Spirit in as real and compelling a way as they did. Their stories can inspire us to call upon the Spirit to empower us as agents of reconciliation and communion within and beyond the borders of the Church.

2. Servant to Others

The ultimate test for growth in the spiritual life is its fruits. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit become concrete in the ways in which we live in community and relate to others, near and far away. The fast-paced nature of much modern living can block us from noticing the Spirit's gifts in ourselves and others—a moment of gratitude, a forgiving gesture, a generous act. The Spirit functioned in Jesus when he washed the feet of his disciples (John 13:1-5), providing a model of relationship to the neighbor. It is this same Spirit that disposes and empowers Christians to act in love for the well-being of others.

Throughout the tradition, theologians and mystics have associated the Spirit with the charity that is lived out in service to the neighbor. For example, in the thirteenth century, Bonaventure of Bagnoreggio (1217–1294) links the Holy Spirit with activity, with the presence of the virtues, and to the living of the moral life (Pentecost sermon 1, 331). But one of the most unusual metaphors for the Spirit's role as servant comes from the fourteenth century. Catherine of Siena makes the Spirit's role in neighbor love explicit when she speaks of the Spirit as a waiter at table. This particular image brings up an important consideration. For some, a certain image can have a negative impact, or an image can be meaningful at one stage in life and not at all in another. For example,

some women may balk at this image of God as waiter because it is perceived as a sign of diminishment or oppression. Social expectations that women are the ones to “wait on table” can minimize their ability to choose this role in dignity and freedom. In response, one can throw the image out completely; simply let it go, knowing that while it may be helpful to some, it is not for everyone; or remain open to the possibility that this symbol of humble service can be transformed and appropriated in a new key that is indeed revelatory of God and liberating for humans. Let us explore this latter possibility—envisioning this gesture of service as one of authentic love and genuine hospitality.

Catherine images the persons in the Trinity as table, food, and waiter. Perhaps her starting point for this metaphor was the Eucharist, the food that is Christ’s body, from which she broadened the metaphor to include the other persons in the Trinity. She writes of her experience at Eucharist on the feast of the martyr, St. Lucy. Catherine recounts that St. Lucy allowed her to taste the fruit of her martyrdom—a desire that Catherine always harbored for herself. At the table of the lamb, God says to Catherine, “I am table and I am food.” Catherine continues, “The hand of the Holy Spirit was dispensing this food, sweetly serving those who relished it” (Letter 47, 145).

In the *Dialogue*, Catherine’s major theological work, she describes the experience of those who have reached the fourth and highest stage of the spiritual journey—those who experience the indwelling of God in a steady, on-going way. Souls find rest at this stage of perfection in which they find “table and food and waiter.” God is their bed and table. The Word is their food and the Holy Spirit, God’s loving charity, is the waiter who serves God’s gifts and graces. The Spirit is the go-between between heaven and earth. God speaks to Catherine, “This gentle waiter carries to me their tender loving desires, and carries back to them the reward for their labors, the sweetness of my charity for their enjoyment and nourishment. So you see, I am their table, my Son is their food, and the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from me the Father and from the Son, waits on them” (*Dialogue* 78, 146). The fruits on this table are the “true solid virtues” (Letter 6, 49). We often speak of spiritual formation as *imitatio Christi*. This provocative metaphor of the Spirit as waiter gives an added perspective on God as servant of all. When the Spirit is imagined as a waiter at table, we may be motivated to take on this same role in service to the neighbor.

In a letter to a Florentine bishop, Catherine specifies the image of waiter, referring to the Holy Spirit as a cellarer. She writes, “Bleeding from every member, he had made himself cask and wine and cellarer for us. Thus we see that his humanity is the cask that encased the divine nature. The cellarer—the fire and the hands that are the Holy Spirit—tapped that cask on the wood of the most holy cross” (Letter

37, 126). Catherine understands the Spirit to be the energy or the means by which redemption is effected. It is in and through the Spirit that the blood of Christ becomes the grace of Christ present to the community in every age.

The image of the Holy Spirit as waiter is further extended to include not only food for the soul but also food for the intellect in the form of teaching, and food for the neighbor in the form of charity. In one of her prayers, Catherine says, "And the Holy Spirit is indeed a waiter for us, for he serves us this teaching by enlightening our mind's eye with it and inspiring us to follow it. And he serves us charity for our neighbors and hunger to have as food souls and the salvation of the whole world for the Father's honor" (Prayer 12, 102). The soul comes to know the Truth through the "light from the Holy Spirit, whom I have given her as a servant" (*Dialogue* 141, 293). Food for the neighbor is described in an arresting juxtaposition of opposites—the Holy Spirit serves us hunger. Not exactly what one expects to receive at a table! But being hungry for souls and for the world's salvation go hand in hand with being fed charity for these same neighbors.

In a rare instance, Catherine explicitly extends the effects of God's love to the worldly, indicating by this rather inexplicable move just how great God's love really is. God speaks, "For the Holy Spirit, my mercy, waits on these and gives them love for me and warm affection for their neighbors, so that with immeasurable charity they seek their salvation" (*Dialogue* 143, 297). The abyss that separates even the perfect from God must be even greater between God and the worldly. By suggesting that the Holy Spirit "waits on" the worldly, Catherine suggests the awesome nature of God's condescending love who chooses to bridge even the widest gap, reaching out to those who are the least deserving of God's tender care. But even here, the goal of the extension of God's mercy is not the individual soul, but the neighbor.

Catherine's association of the Spirit with divine providence is made the centerpiece of one section in the *Dialogue*. The Holy Spirit as servant provides whatever is needed to individuals and communities. The services the Holy Spirit performs are many. God speaks, "This servant, the Holy Spirit, whom I in my providence have given her, clothes her, nurtures her, inebriates her with tenderness and the greatest wealth" (*Dialogue* 141, 292). In this part of the *Dialogue*, Catherine is wrestling with her intense desire to receive frequent communion; with the ways in which God thwarts this desire in order to enhance her hunger; and with the final resolution in which God provides for her in unimaginable ways. The goal of this "cat and mouse" game is to get Catherine to trust "that the Holy Spirit, her servant, would nourish her hunger" (*Dialogue* 142, 296). The Spirit even pricks the conscience of the priest who refuses Catherine Communion! (*Dialogue* 142, 294).

Among other things, what the Holy Spirit serves is grace. In one instance, Catherine writes that the Holy Spirit serves us God and “every grace and gift, spiritual as well as material” (Letter 53, 161). Catherine is angry at the abuses in the Church, in particular at those who “sell” the Holy Spirit’s grace like a piece of merchandise. The vices that cause ministers to do this are impurity, bloated pride and greed (*Dialogue* 126, 244). “Not only do they not give what they are in duty bound to give to the poor, but they rob them through simony and their hankering after money, selling the grace of the Holy Spirit” (*Dialogue* 114, 213; 119, 221; 121, 232; 127, 247; 127, 248; Letters 28, 101; 65, 207). When the Church administers the sacraments worthily, the Spirit is able to serve those who partake.

Catherine always interprets life’s obstacles and suffering in terms of a loving God who sends hardships in order to test faith and strengthen the faithful in love. God makes things difficult in order to invite the believer to see better that God can and will provide whatever is needed and to trust in that providence. God speaks about bringing souls to the brink “so that they will fall in love with my providence and embrace true poverty as their bride. Then their servant, the Holy Spirit, my mercy, when he sees that they lack anything that is necessary for their bodies, will light a nudging spark of desire in the hearts of those who are able to help, and these will come to help them in their need” (*Dialogue* 149, 314). Catherine uses the metaphor of God’s hands to describe the providential activity of the Holy Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is the light that banishes all darkness, the hand that upholds the whole world” (Letter 29, 103).

Spiritual formation aims to free persons from self-preoccupation, to engender ever greater trust in God’s love, and to lead believers to engage in loving service to others. We have examined aspects of the tradition that remind us of the Spirit’s presence and activity in this process. By bringing the Spirit into sharper focus, these authors invite us to become aware of the Spirit’s presence and power within us and within our communities. Readers of the mystics are sometimes scandalized by their presumption of intimacy with God. Perhaps because they are so aware of God’s utter transcendence and awesomeness, they are able to abandon themselves to the horizontal dimensions of the relationship as well. They often speak about God as though they were equals, intimate lovers, ever experiencing the Spirit as servant. When ego predominates in the psyche, the suggestion that the Spirit is a servant produces embarrassment. But when love holds sway, one can imagine the Spirit as servant and be awed and humbled by the metaphor. The ultimate goal of spiritual formation is to fall in love with God in such a way that we become loving servants of the neighbor and of the entire creation. Catherine’s metaphor of the Spirit as waiter in-

vites us to see and appreciate the ways in which the Spirit is at our service in love, motivating us to do the same for others.

IV. CONCLUSION

As we approach the millenium, Roman Catholics have been invited to focus on the Trinity. The year 1998 has been named the year of the Spirit—an opportunity to become aware of the Spirit who, in Christ, is God's constant and intimate presence to creation. Individually and in community we can ask ourselves whether we have, like the wicked step-mother in the story of Cinderella, relegated the Spirit to obscurity or even invisibility in our spiritual formation. We can take advantage of recent theological discussions on the Holy Spirit and of the retrieval of pneumatological traditions to awaken our consciousness to the Spirit's many empowering roles. The Holy Spirit need not be on the sidelines in God's relationship with the human community. Sometimes the Spirit acts directly on an individual; at other times, the Spirit's service is deeply incarnational and communitarian. In the process of spiritual formation one learns to trust that the Spirit will inspire Christians to respond to the call to provide loving and generous service to the world. In the end, each of us is that person.

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