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Discerning Spirituality: Biblical and Reformed Perspectives

Pierre Berthoud

SUMMARY

This study deals with the question of the testing of the spirits and of the diverse forms of spiritualities encountered in the contemporary world. How is one to respond to the charismatic emphasis given to the Christian experience or to the claims to miracles in many circles today? What criteria can the believer use in order to exercise a mature form of discernment? The paper argues that Christian spirituality is determined essentially by its

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RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude aborde la question du discernement des esprits et de la diversité des spiritualités rencontrée au sein du monde contemporain. Comment considérer la forme charismatique de l'expérience chrétienne ou la pratique des miracles dans bien des milieux aujourd'hui ? Quels sont les critères qui permettent aux croyants d'exercer un discernement qui soit l'expression de la maturité de la foi ? Cet article argumente que c'est essentiellement l'objet, le Dieu infini et personnel, qui

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Diese Untersuchung behandelt die Frage der Unterscheidung der Geister und der verschiedenen Arten von Spiritualitäten, denen man in der zeitgenössischen Welt begegnet. Wie soll man auf die charismatische Betonung reagieren, die auf die christliche Erfahrung gelegt wird, oder auf die Behauptung von Wundern in vielen heutigen Kreisen? Welche Kriterien kann ein Gläubiger benutzen, um zu reifen Urteilen zu gelangen? Der Artikel argumentiert, dass christliche Spiritualität wesentlich von

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My subject is the question of the testing of the spirits and of the diverse spiritualities we come across as Christians in our contemporary world. For example, how are we to respond to the charis-

matic dimensions of the Christian experience and the claims to miracles in many circles today? Is it possible to establish biblically based criteria which will enable believers to discern in a mature way?

object, the infinite yet personal God. It considers some extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit in Scripture, seeking to point out the specificity of such experiences. Finally, in the light of Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (18, 21-22) and 1 John 4:1-6, it seeks to establish some fundamental criteria for a healthy discernment that is helpful and challenging to the individual as well as to the community. Relevant characteristics of the spirituality of the Reformation are briefly emphasised in the concluding section.

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détermine la spiritualité chrétienne. Ensuite, il évoque quelques manifestations extraordinaires de l'Esprit rapportées dans les Ecritures en relevant les caractéristiques et la nature de ces expériences. Enfin, à la lumière de deux passages bibliques, Deutéronome 13.1-5 (18, 21, 22) et 1 Jean 4.1-6, il cherchera à établir des critères permettant d'exercer un discernement sain, qui soit à la fois une aide et une stimulation pour l'individu comme pour la communauté. Pour conclure cette étude, quelques aspects pertinents de la spiritualité issue de la Réforme seront brièvement présentés.

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ihrem Objekt bestimmt wird, dem unendlichen, doch persönlichen Gott. Er bedenkt einige außergewöhnliche Manifestationen des Geistes in der Bibel und versucht, die besondere Ausprägung solcher Erfahrungen herauszuarbeiten. Im Lichte von 5. Mose 13,1-5 (18,21-22) und 1. Johannes 4,1-6 versucht er abschließend, einige grundlegende Kriterien für ein gesundes Urteilsvermögen zu etablieren, das sowohl für den Einzelnen als auch für die Gemeinde hilfreich und herausfordernd ist. Im abschließenden Abschnitt werden kurz relevante Charakteristika der Spiritualität der Reformatoren betont.

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matic dimensions of the Christian experience and the claims to miracles in many circles today? Is it possible to establish biblically based criteria which will enable believers to discern in a mature way?

I will deal first of all with the nature of Christian experience, emphasising that Christian spirituality is determined by its object. I will then consider some extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit in Scripture, seeking to point out the specificity of such spiritual experiences; finally, on the basis of the first two points, I will seek to establish some fundamental criteria which can help us to practice a discernment that is both challenging and edifying to the individual and the community. Some relevant characteristics of the spirituality of the Reformation will be emphasised in the concluding section.

I. Fundamental aspects of spirituality within the historic Christian faith

A. The object of Christian spirituality

What is the nature of Christian spirituality? Is it essentially *subjective* in the way that modern humanist psychology presents it? Subjective in the sense that *it doesn't have an object*, that it is *the product* of the human spirit and effort, of the wakening of feelings or of imagination? In that case, spirituality is akin to a *psychological endeavour*, without precise content outside of itself. It is both relative and beyond verification.

If, however, spirituality is not merely subjective but rests upon an objective foundation and has a precise content, what is its nature, how can it be defined, how can it be identified? What type of relationship does it offer? The answer to these questions is essential because we live in a culture, and too often in churches, which have confused the issue. There is a supermarket of spiritualities which, for the most part, convey an immediate sensation of being. However, all too often such experiences, because of lack of depth, are short-lived; despair and anguish regain their rights in the face of such a cruel reality.

The *object* of spirituality is on the one hand the infinite and personal God who acts in the world and in the life of his creatures, the believers in particular; and on the other hand, the human being who seeks a reference point beyond himself that will bring purpose to life, happiness and a deep communion with his ultimate *Vis-à-vis*.

1. The importance of the object

In contemporary forms of spirituality, whether humanist, mystical and romanticist¹ – and that is what some forms of Christian spirituality are – the

problem lies either in the fact that they do not have any object, or in the confusion between ‘contemplation’ of an object and ‘enjoyment’ of the sight of the object. We cannot at the same time ‘enjoy’ our inner activities and ‘contemplate’ them. For instance, when you see a table you ‘enjoy’ the act of seeing and you ‘contemplate’ the table. Then, if you think about the sight, you contemplate the sight and you enjoy the thought. In *Surprised by Joy* C. S. Lewis makes this interesting comment:

It seemed to me self-evident that one essential property of love, hate, fear, hope, or desire was attention to their object. To cease thinking about or attending to the woman is, so far, to cease loving; to cease thinking about or attending to the dreaded thing is, so far, to cease being afraid. But to attend to your own love or fear is to cease attending to the loved or dreaded object.²

In the same way, what characterises Christian spirituality is its object: God. We cannot at the same time ‘enjoy’ our inner activities and ‘contemplate’ them. When we do so, we immediately interrupt our relation with God, our interaction with him; we cut ourselves off from the object on which our spiritual experience is founded. We are left with a man-made religious or psychological experience or spirituality.

2. The infinite and personal God

Therefore, the foundation of the specific character of biblical spirituality is its object, i.e. an infinite and personal being. One of the presuppositions underlying some major modern theological currents is that God is totally other, meaning that he is beyond reason, concept and language. Hinduism emphasises the impersonal nature of the divine, while the emphasis of Islam is essentially on a transcendent and thus distant God. The biblical perspective recognises that God as the Creator is indeed totally other and transcendent; he is distinct from his creation. It also affirms at the same time that he is immanent, a personal being who thinks and communicates, who loves while remaining just, who deliberates and acts.

The unity and the diversity of the Trinitarian God confirm the all sufficiency of the Lord of the universe as well as his infinite and personal character. Communication and love are at the very centre of the deity. It is this God who created man in his image. The creature, just like his ultimate *Vis-à-vis*, is a personal being who thinks and communicates, who loves while remaining just, who deliberates

and acts. His primary calling is precisely to live an interpersonal relationship, a reciprocal intimacy on the vertical as well as on the horizontal level.³

3. *Truth and spirituality*

A reciprocal relationship involves communication and therefore knowledge. But this knowledge is of a personal nature, both objective and subjective. It encompasses all faculties of man and therefore resists fragmentation. As a consequence, it challenges all forms of dichotomy between knowledge and faith, or truth and faith, or even head and heart. Faith and trust are based on what is trustworthy: truth communicated by God that humans can truly understand, even if they do not grasp it exhaustively. This truth of God is the foundation of biblical spirituality. It unfolds throughout the history of revelation and is fully manifested in Jesus the Christ. It does not only give meaning to the believer's life, but implies that communication is essential for all true communion.

4. *Communion with God*

To be in communion with the God of Jesus Christ, our ultimate *Vis-à-vis*, that is the nature of biblical spirituality. However, it can be defined in other ways using both biblical and non-biblical expressions:

- to walk with God (Genesis 5:24; 6:9)
- to be 'the friend of God' (James 2:23)
- to be 'one with the Father and the Son' (John 17:21)
- to glorify God and enjoy him forever.⁴

The reciprocal intimacy between Creator and creature is at the heart of Christian spirituality. It is the nature of the object, God, which determines both the form and the content, for the Father has not kept silent, he has really spoken, he has made himself known in the categories of human language and communication. Therefore, it is faith grounded in a personal and intelligible truth that enables me to know and to meet God. The *instrument* thereof is the Holy Spirit who illuminates and renews my intelligence, revives and gives a new impulse to my life. Finally, the *distinctive mark* of this spirituality is not the intensity of the experience, but the fruits produced in the Church as well as in the city. These fruits find their expression in the love of one's neighbour, which is nothing less than the practice of the second part of the Ten Words that God revealed to Moses (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5).

5. *An incarnate spirituality*

But alas, we live in the shadow of death, life is but a valley of tears, we are confronted by suffering and evil. We also know something about the solitude that has invaded our lives and about the frustration of our spiritual aspirations. It is precisely at this point that the motif 'creation – *fall* – redemption' intervenes. Biblical revelation gives us the key to the enigma of evil. It reminds us that evil is not ontological, related to being, but moral. It springs forth from the subsequent usage of freedom and is defined in terms of rebellion against God. The purpose of the story of revelation is to help us discover the redemption that God has brought in order to reconcile the creature to himself, to re-establish a broken relation, a relationship of communication and love. To say that *sin is moral* is of utmost importance. It enables us:

- to declare that God is good. There is no inkling of evil in God.
- to separate the origins of being and of evil and thus to emphasise the dignity, freedom and responsibility of the human creature.
- to offer a sure answer to the dilemma of humanity, an answer that is fully revealed to us in Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross, the Son of God takes upon himself the death that mankind deserved and he covers the believer with his justice (righteousness). His bodily resurrection testifies to the truth and authenticity of this extraordinary work including both propitiation and expiation.
- to fight against evil and injustice of all kinds, individual or collective, without fighting against God.

We are here at the heart of spirituality as it is described in the written and incarnate Word of God. It is not an escape from the world, nor is it evasion of a too painful reality. It is offered to us within the created world, in the midst of our fragile human condition and at the very centre of our misery. Our whole existence is renewed in the expectation of the transfiguration that is promised at the time of the glorious advent of Jesus Christ. In the meantime, God calls his children to accomplish their daily tasks with faithfulness, wisdom and in union with Christ who builds up, guides and nourishes their existence.

B. *Extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit in Scripture*

The historic Christian faith has tended to minimise

the extraordinary, ecstatic manifestations of the Spirit in order to put more emphasis on the objective character of the Christian faith and experience. The infinite personal God exists in truth. In the words of the Westminster Shorter Catechism: ‘God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.’⁵ This infinite personal being has not remained silent, he has revealed himself. The form of communication he uses reflects his nature and character. It is personal and varied, including the use of the categories of human language. The witness of Scripture to the objective and true – though not exhaustive – nature of God’s revelation is overwhelming.⁶

Although Christian experience and spirituality involve both the mind and a conscious awareness, a significant number of passages in Scripture recall some extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit. This double dimension of the Spirit’s wise and powerful activity as it communicates divine revelation is well illustrated in 1 Corinthians 14, where Paul deals with the gifts of prophecy and tongues.⁷ In the following paragraphs we deal with some unusual expressions of the Spirit, especially in the Old Testament, and seek to understand their nature.

1. *Emphasis on circumstances*⁸

a. Some passages mention the significance of music:

- 2 Kings 3:15: ‘Elisha said... “now bring me a harpist.” While the harpist was playing, the hand of the Lord came upon Elisha and he said, “This is what the Lord says...”’
- 1 Samuel 10:5-6: Speaking to Saul, Samuel says:

As you approach the town [Gibeah], you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the Lord will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

In the context of this passage, prophesying includes a number of physical expressions that are related to the action of the Spirit: songs, cries, dances and corporal movements. Such unusual behaviour would have been recognised and evident to all who witnessed the events.⁹ But our present concern is with the relation between music and the activity

of the Spirit.

- 1 Chronicles 25:1: ‘David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals.’

In the first passage, music is not the cause of spiritual ecstasy or the means to attain it; it is only an accompaniment which predisposes Elisha to receive the Spirit. Here music has a preparatory function but it is the divine Spirit that reveals to the prophet the content of the message he is to communicate to the rebellious people.

In the second passage, music and singing are more precisely manifestations that accompany the coming of the Spirit, his revelatory and transforming action (vs. 6).

In the third passage, the author of Chronicles recognises the prophetic value of sacred songs. Servants of King David were in charge of this specific ministry. It is also indicated that Heman was ‘the king’s seer’ (vs. 5). Thus he also had, just like Gad, a prophetic ministry. Further, Asaph the seer is, with David, the author and composer of Psalms used in temple worship (2 Chronicles 29:30). These indications reveal a strong link between music and words. No doubt, instrumental and choral music gave a grandiose and esthetical dimension to the temple service and worship, but there was also to be a deep correspondence and harmony between the ‘prophetic’ words, the musical score and composition.¹⁰

b. Water

Water and especially rivers are associated with prophetic revelation (Ezekiel 1:3; Daniel 8:2; 10:4) and spiritual activities such as prayer (Acts 16:13, 16). In these examples withdrawn and quiet places by a riverside were sought for, as they were conducive to prayer as well as to divine communication. It is easier to be alert to the Spirit as it reveals to the believer’s mind the word of truth and life.

c. Divine inspiration

Revelation by the means of visions and dreams (Genesis 15:1,12,17; Numbers 12:6; 22:6; 1 Samuel 3; 2 Samuel 7; Daniel 1:17; 7:1; 8:1; Joel 3:1; Zechariah 1:8), general revelation (Psalm 19:2) as well as meditation, pondering of the law of God, praying, singing and communicating with the Lord (Psalms 42:8; 77:6; 119:148) often take place during the silent hours of the night when believers are more receptive and their passive postures makes them conscious that they are totally

dependent on the initiative of the Lord.

2. *Unusual manifestations*

a. The activity of the Spirit can manifest itself in a dramatic way. Thus for example the influence of the Spirit¹¹ produces restlessness and even agitation on Ezekiel. Not only did the Spirit ‘lift up’ the prophet and ‘took him away’ but he ‘went in bitterness and in the anger of his spirit’ for ‘the strong hand of the Lord was upon him’ (Ezekiel 3:14).¹²

b. In some passages of the Old Testament the prophet’s behaviour is qualified by the term *meshugâ* which implies that the man under the influence of the spirit had a ‘crazy’ attitude, in other words that his behaviour could be compared to or caricatured as rambling and even raving. The false prophet Shemaiah, in exile, had sent a letter to Zephaniah, the priest who was in Jerusalem, reminding him his obligations:

The Lord has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the Lord; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons (Jeremiah 29:26).

Shemaiah was upset because Zephaniah hadn’t silenced Jeremiah who on behalf of the Lord had announced a long exile!

In Hosea God proclaims his judgment on Israel because its sins and hostility led the people to despise the prophet. They ‘consider the inspired man to be a fool (*’êwil*) and a maniac (*meshugâ*)’ (Hosea 9:7). As Jehu is on the verge of coming to power, his officers ask him concerning the prophet who had brought him a message and anointed him: ‘Why did this madman come to you?’ (2 Kings 9:11). These passages indicate that at times the activity of the Spirit led to some unusual, not to say extraordinary behaviour of the persons that came under its influence.¹³

c. The inner vision can be brought to bear on the subject.

A passage relating to the oracles of Balaam illustrates this point:

The oracles of Balaam son of Beor,
The oracle of the one whose eye sees clearly (or ‘whose eye is closed’),¹⁴
The oracle of the one who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision from the Almighty,
Who falls prostrate, and whose eyes are open.
(Numbers 24:3)

Though a pagan diviner, Balaam becomes the instrument of God’s sovereign revelation and action. This passage describes a phenomenon with multiple aspects: Balaam is rushed off his feet (vs. 3e) and he has a vision; he sees physically (3b) but this is not enough to perceive the vision (3d, e). In fact, he contemplates the vision when his eyes are closed (3b) and he falls prostrate before God (3e). In other words, the inner perception of the vision is beyond physical seeing and hearing. This type of experience is identified in the Greek Bible as ‘ecstasy’. Thus in Genesis 15:12, the LXX translates ‘deep sleep’ (*tardemâh*)¹⁵ by ‘ecstasy’ (*ekstasis*), a word also used to describe the spiritual states of Peter (Acts 10:10; 11:5) and Paul (Acts 22:17) as they contemplate visions they receive from the Lord.

3. *The nature of biblical ecstasy*

a. A comparison

In a detailed commentary on Genesis 15, in his discussion of ecstasy, Philo of Alexandria says that the prophets experienced its highest form and that it can be described as divine possession and frenzy.¹⁶ This is in fact what Abram experienced when the Lord made a covenant with him. Philo argues that Abram was the object of divine inspiration and possession (Genesis 15:12). But, according to the Neo-Platonist, ‘when the divine Spirit comes, the mind is driven from its home, since mortal and immortal may not share the same home.’¹⁷ At this point, E. J. Young appropriately comments that Philo has taken ‘the terminology of the Greeks which described frenzy’ and applied ‘this terminology as a description of the inspiration of Scriptural prophets’.¹⁸

A brief look at the Oracle of Delphi will help to reflect on the specific nature of divine inspiration and spiritual experience. Apollo is the central divine figure of the temple in Delphi. He has received the gift of divination from Zeus and communicates the will of Zeus to the Pithy. In the words of André Bonnard,

Apollo, god of the day, has such a piercing eye that he knows the future and reveals it. At the shrine of Delphi, in a valley on the slope of Mount Parnassus, one finds the famous Temple of Apollo. He is revered by the whole of the ancient world, by both the Greeks and the barbarians. There the god inspires the prophetess and the priests interpret into oracles the inarticulate language of the Pithy. Apollo knows what

is suitable, the best for the individual as well as the cities.¹⁹

This quotation reveals that the prophet (priest) is both dependent on the utterances of the god and independent, for he is called to interpret the signs as well as the obscure divine pronouncements. In fact, he is expected to formulate the oracles.

The biblical emphasis is quite different. First of all, the multiple mediations are absent and the divine Word comes directly to the human messenger. Secondly, the spokesman of God receives a divine word that he is expected to communicate to his audience. Though not absent, the interpretative role of the prophet²⁰ is significantly reduced compared to the prophet-priests of Delphi. The written word as it bears witness to itself as well as the Word incarnate (John 1:18) are the keys to a proper understanding of the divine message. Lastly, the divine communication is characterised by clarity. This is not surprising, as the infinite-personal God has made humanity in his own image. Though finite, humans are personal beings to whom God communicates an intelligent message in the categories of their language that can truly be understood by the messenger and the ultimate auditors. In this revelatory process, it is important to emphasise that the mediator loses none of his human attributes (cf. the prophet Jeremiah and his profound humanity).

It follows that we cannot accept Philo's apparent confusion of divination and prophecy; especially we cannot accept that 'the mortal and the immortal cannot share the same home.' Of course, what we have just said doesn't exclude the possible ecstatic aspect of divine revelation and of human spiritual experience. But this ecstasy must be qualified.

b. Some fundamental characteristics²¹

- Biblical ecstasy does not exclude objective divine activity and an intelligible communication of the divine mysteries and counsel; a communication that is true but not exhaustive. This specificity contrasts with pagan divination – prophecy which refers back to a seemingly obscure irrational or supra-rational domain; but it contrasts also with 'false prophecy' which is often described as springing from the human mind and experience. Referring to false prophets, the Lord says through Jeremiah: 'The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions,

worthless divinations and the delusions of their minds' (14:14).²²

- Biblical ecstasy often requires a time of preparation. As we have seen music, a quiet place of prayer and the silence of the night can be conducive to divine communication and spiritual experience. This is not to be confused with artificial forms of provocation prevalent in paganism and false prophecy, such as drugs, alcohol, scourging and fasting (cf. Judges 9:27; 1 Kings 18; Isaiah 28:7; Micah 2:11; Amos 2:11-12).²³
- Biblical ecstasy implies a somewhat passive state of the receptive mind but its activities are not suspended. Divine inspiration and communication do not affect, weaken or suppress human consciousness and dignity. This is in stark contrast with the religious experiences of Antiquity.
- Finally, because biblical ecstasy is inseparable from divine communication and content, it is closely associated with the width and the breath of revelation as it unfolds in history and makes known the sovereign God of Jesus Christ who holds all things in his hands. Such an eschatological outlook is foreign to the surrounding religions, which are limited in scope to the present and the immediate future.

II. The discernment

A. The scriptural emphasis

1. *Determining factors*

It is now possible to understand better where Scripture places the emphasis. As we have just noted, divine intervention can have a strong effect on the recipient. Spiritual experience can be very intense in its manifestations, which are at times ecstatic. Such manifestations can even be accompanied by signs and wonders (Deuteronomy 13:1-2; Matthew 24:24). But these are no guarantee that the communication and the experience involved are genuinely divine. It may be so but they could also reflect a human or another divine (gods – demons) origin. The determining factors in our endeavour to exercise discernment and mature discrimination are the following:

- a. The objective existence of the infinite, personal and sovereign God who clearly and truly – but not exhaustively – communicated his wisdom

and law in the categories of human language. This is possible because, though radically different, both the Creator and the human creature are personal beings. This means that verbal communication is at the very heart of our communion with God. As a consequence, the mediation of the word is a fundamental aspect of our mystical union with the Lord. We should have no difficulty to understand this for it is characteristic of personal relationships. Imagine a couple, a friendship or a professional relation without verbal communication! Of course, our communion with God, just like the unity within a couple, far surpasses verbal communication, but it cannot do without it (Ephesians 3:17-19; Philipians 4:7).²⁴ Since the God of the Bible has not remained silent, the mediation of the word, both written and incarnate, is fundamental, especially in a fallen world. The creature is in need of a clear and true word, the basis for a genuine faith and trust in the living God who in fact has revealed it. This is why a proper understanding of God's wisdom is so important to true faith. This is where the analogy of faith enters into the picture as well as the Word incarnate as the ultimate exegete and revealer of the mind of God (John 1:14). Of course, this also implies the enlightenment of the believer by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-16).²⁵

b. True spirituality implies that the Lord takes the initiative for restoring relationship and fellowship. This leads to a passive – active posture (attitude) of the believer who is both receptive and involved in the renewed covenantal relationship, but who cannot provoke the relationship by psychological or artificial means. Neither can believers manipulate the living and holy God according to their desires, however noble these may be; but believers can undertake preparatory measures that can predispose to divine favour.

c. Both the glory of the Lord and the dignity of the human creature must be taken into account. Furthermore, such a gracious initiative of God not only appeals, but also renews the understanding and conscious awareness of humanity.

d. Finally, it is important to recognise the incarnate and concrete, down to earth aspects of the biblical spiritual experience. Right through the two Testaments, the leitmotiv is to fulfil the requirements of the law (cf. Deuteronomy 29 and the renewal of the covenant) and to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). Hearing the word and obeying it go hand in hand. It is in the midst of a corrupt and depraved reality, in the nitty-gritty of life lived in the shadow of death, that this spiritual-

ity brings meaning, substantial healing and lasting hope. Rather than seeking to escape the ugly brokenness of this world, it invites us to fulfil the culture mandate the Creator has given us as we glorify him and enjoy him. As we yield to the living God, it is his very character that moulds both the form and the content of our spiritual experience and life (Leviticus 19:2; 20:8).

2. *Two significant passages*

Two biblical passages can help us to understand better what is involved in spiritual discernment, discrimination: Deuteronomy 13 and 1 John 4. The first passage seeks to identify the false prophets, the second deals with the testing of the spirits but false prophecy is also in view.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 (18, 21-22)

As D. L. Christensen summarizes:

The law raises the issue of true and false prophecy which becomes a significant theme in both the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets within the canon of Sacred Scripture. When there is discrepancy between the written text of the Ten Commandments and the oral claims of false prophets, the written word is authoritative.²⁶

Actually, this chapter deals with three specific cases: idolatry instigated by a prophet or a dreamer of dreams (1-5); idolatry instigated by a relative or a friend (6-11); and idolatry instigated in a town by wicked men (12-18). The first case is the most significant for our purpose, although the description of the psychological and religious pressure brought about by a relative or friend bears on the subject at hand. Moses is dealing with the case of a messenger of God who spoke on his behalf;²⁷ a person who, having been appointed and recognised in his office, carried a particular authority in the community. We are told, to confirm this, that he was able to perform a miraculous sign, 'ob, and wonder, hammôpêt (cf. also Exodus 4:21; 7:11-12; Numbers 22).²⁸ Apparently, this officer was someone who was willing to 'abuse his position for his own evil end', to turn the people away from the Lord and thus to precipitate their ruin. Christensen translates 'apostasy against the Lord your God'. In encouraging defection from the Lord in order to follow other gods, the prophet was claiming falsely that God has said something. He proclaimed something new which was in opposition to the very essence of the law and in particular to the first commandment. The

people were to remain totally faithful to the Lord who had redeemed them from Egypt. The written stipulations of the covenant were normative, above the authority of the prophet, above the signs and wonders (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9; Galatians 1:8). These laws were even above his dreams (Jeremiah 23:28-29) and the wagging of his tongue²⁹ as he claimed to speak on behalf of the Lord (31).

In Deuteronomy 18:21-22, the emphasis is similar (20b). But how is discernment to be exercised when the prophet speaks his own words claiming to be speaking in the name of God? P. Craigie says that the phrase ‘the word is not true’ (vs. 22) can be rendered literally ‘the word is not’ implying ‘that the word has no substance or what the prophet says simply is not so’.³⁰ The criterion is that of truth and specifically that this word is devoid of substance because it does not agree with the word of God.³¹ The other criterion mentioned in verse 22 is the fulfilment of a short-term prediction that had been attributed to God and established the credibility and reputation of a true prophet. The long-term fulfilment would confirm the already existing authority of the spokesman of God.

The conflict between the false prophet Hananiah and Jeremiah, related in Jeremiah 28, is a significant example. Both men pronounced short-term predictions in the name of the Lord; Jeremiah announced a long exile and in response Hananiah proclaimed that the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar would be broken within two years (vs. 2-4, 10, 11). Jeremiah would have liked to agree with the son of Azzur, but warned him that the criterion of fulfilment was to decide who spoke the truth: ‘But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true’ (vs. 9). Jeremiah was to restate his oracle concerning the lasting burden of the king of Babylon even more severely (12-14) and he added an oracle announcing the death of Hananiah who had seduced the people ‘to trust in lies’ and thus turned them away from the Lord. Jeremiah’s word was fulfilled within seven months (17). The silence concerning the fulfilment of Hananiah’s oracle is eloquent!

*1 John 4:1-6*³²

In reflecting on this passage I found John Calvin’s commentary particularly helpful and in the following paragraph I summarise his reading.³³ In the first three verses he sees the Apostle making three points:

- The danger which threatens the believers and from which they must preserve themselves: the false prophets who under the influence of Satan seek from within the Church ‘to corrupt and infect the purity of the Gospel by a diversity of errors’;
- The means by which believers are to guard themselves from the danger: the testing of the spirits;
- The injunction not to listen to those who deny ‘that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh’ (vs. 2b).

Calvin begins by indicating that the word ‘spirit’ (vs. 1) is a metonymy which designates ‘the person who boasts that he has the gift of the Holy Spirit in view of exercising the prophetic office’. ‘Such persons are usurpers who pretend to be legitimate teachers and to have a right to such an honorific title, but in fact at best, they speak out of their own depths as they seek’ to corrupt the word of God. They are in stark contrast with the ‘spirits’ who ‘lend their tongues to the oracles of the Holy Spirit to serve him... who represent him... who don’t bring something by the means of their own initiative nor present themselves in public in their own name.’³⁴

But, since the power of seduction is real, especially if the false teacher is subtle and cunning, it is important ‘to examine and test’ the spirits. This is true for the Church as well as for each individual believer. In order to practice discernment correctly, not only must one evaluate all doctrines in the light of the Word of God, but one must have a ‘spirit of wisdom’ (*un esprit de prudence*) which enables to interpret the Scriptures. In other words, in order ‘to be competent judges, it is necessary that the Spirit of discernment be given to us and that we be governed by it.’³⁵

Calvin goes on to say that no believer will be deprived of the Spirit of wisdom (*prudence*), especially if they request it from the Lord. Then, the Reformer makes this most significant statement: ‘And this is how the Spirit will give us a true discernment: when we subject all our senses to the Word.’ Such an examination and testing of the doctrine takes place both on the individual and the public, community level. The particular testing happens when believers are confirmed in their faith, when ‘they acquiesce to that doctrine which they know to proceed from God.’ Where else can the consciences find peace except in God himself? As to the public level, it is bound ‘to the common

consent and government of the Church' and takes place when 'the believers come together and seek the means of a pure and holy agreement and consent'.³⁶ Yet neither the individual nor the community is infallible and thus they cannot sidestep the test ordered by the Apostle.

John Calvin now proceeds to consider John's christocentric confession of faith (2-3) which contains a decisive criterion that can help one to better exercise discernment and, within this immediate context, to discriminate between true and false prophets. Indeed, Christ is both the finality of the faith and the rock which all heretics run up against. Regarding the Apostle's confession 'Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God' (2), the theologian from Geneva argues that it emphasises the three following aspects of the New Testament Christology:

- the eternal divinity of Christ ('Christ has come');
- the incarnation of Christ so that he might be our brother yet remain without sin ('Christ has come in the flesh');
- the cause or purpose of his advent which includes both 'the office and virtue' of Christ ('he has come').

Thus, in the words of Calvin, 'the knowledge of Christ includes in itself the sum of the totality of the doctrine of the true religion.' Heretics passed and present have in one way or another sought to weaken and even deny aspects of this doctrine. It is only as believers remain steadfast in the knowledge of Christ, who is 'the end/finality (*la fin*) of the Law and Prophets' and in whom both the divine 'virtue and grace' are manifested, that they can resist and overcome 'the spirit of the antichrist' (vs. 3).³⁷

Regarding the verses 4-6, in which the Apostle contrasts the children of this world and the children of God who listen to the doctrine of the Apostles and thus have victory over the spirit of the antichrist, the Reformer makes further interesting comments. It is possible to distinguish between false and true prophets insofar as the former boast to speak 'under the cover of the name of God so as to deceive' whilst the latter 'don't boast of their speech without demonstrating its reality'.³⁸ In other words, their concern is truth and not duplicity. Calvin says that the Apostle invites believers to examine and test all doctrines to see if they are from God or from the world. In order to find out, believers need to seek advice from the Word of God, but this will only be possible if they have the

right attitude towards it and the correct interpretation.

Calvin concludes this section of his commentary by emphasising the mutual interplay between Word and Spirit:

Therefore, each time the seductive spirits put forward the name of God we are to enquire from the Scriptures if such is the truth. If we go about this with a holy zeal, a pure desire (*affection*) combined with humility and modesty, the Spirit of discernment will survene, who will be as a faithful interpreter, so as to declare himself speaking in the Scriptures.³⁹

This basic appreciation of the question of discernment is still relevant insofar as it remains in agreement with Scripture. We may disagree with some of Calvin's exegetical choices, but his hermeneutical approach which seeks to combine the authority of Scripture, a rational – personal enquiry and the illumination of the Holy Spirit is most appropriate. It invites us to revisit the writings of the Reformers, who have more to contribute to our topic than we imagine. Hence in the final section of this paper I will summarise some specific characteristics of the spirituality emphasised by the Reformation.

B. The spirituality of the Reformation

Because of the attention justifiably given to the theological and cultural dimensions of the Reformation, its spiritual character has been somewhat forgotten. In fact, the Reformation was also, and perhaps even primarily, a time of revival and spiritual renewal. Has it not been said that Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was a theology of the Spirit?! The following reflections endeavour to emphasise some important features of Reformed spirituality as a whole.

1. *Righteous and sinner at the same time*

a. A sober anthropology which implies two main aspects:

- It presupposes a well-defined anthropology. Humanity is unique since it is created in the image of God. Personal beings, clothed in dignity, their non-fragmented identity is one. Their relationship with God involves their whole being in all areas of existence. This also presupposes a united field of knowledge.
- Limited, human creatures are fragile. But this fragility is first and foremost related to their condition as sinners and not to their finiteness. The effects of sin, like a cancer, affect all

the facets of their person, including will and intelligence.⁴⁰

Consequently, humans are totally incapable of contributing to their salvation. The distance that sin introduces between God and man is insurmountable without outside intervention. Humans are thus entirely dependent upon grace and divine goodwill, upon revelation and redemption. In the area of knowledge, God, by means of revelation, enlightens their darkened intelligence while in the area of being he corrects the destructive consequences of sin by his redemptive work. Revelation and redemption meet fully in Jesus Christ, the unique and sufficient mediator. He is indeed the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

b. Justification by faith alone

Without ignoring the communal and social aspects of spirituality, the Reformation starts by emphasizing the individual responsibility of humans before God. Like Job (Job 40:3-5), humans can only recognize their indignity and misery, and it is precisely for this reason that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is at the centre of this piety. Whoever believes in Christ and in his redemptive work is declared just by God. As recipients of this justice, such persons are reconciled with God, their ultimate *Vis-à-vis*, who restores them in their dignity and humanity. But, as Calvin says so well, it is the Holy Spirit who impresses this salvation in the innermost being of the believers. There lies the foundation of their assurance that calls upon perseverance in communication and communion with God, the Father. Calvin even says that the Holy Spirit is the initiator of this 'mystical union' with Christ, source of vitality and fruits in the life of every believer.⁴¹

2. Six characteristics

This spirituality takes on certain characteristics, which, while not the exclusive prerogative of the Reformation, are nevertheless noteworthy. We will briefly mention six of them:

a. The spirituality of the Word

This spirituality has as its object the Word of God, written and incarnate.⁴² For the Protestant Churches, it is the means of grace par excellence. From the time of the Reformation, preaching has played an important role in the awakening of faith and the spiritual growth of the believers. Reformers such as Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin and Knox insisted on the *lectio continua*. The continued and systematic interpretation of the biblical books was

the central feature of the worship service. Emphasis is placed upon the expounding of the Word of God, which is the only infallible authority in matters of doctrine and of life. Catechism of children and adults plays an important part. Personal meditation of the Word and the reading of sermons are promoted, and discussion of the Scriptures is encouraged, mainly on Sunday after the service, during the family meal.

b. Spirituality of the Psalter

The Psalter has been the prayer book of the Church at all times (Acts 4:23-31). To pray the Psalms, to sing the Psalms, to meditate the Psalms is a specific characteristic of Reformed spirituality.⁴³ This threefold process takes place in the context of the ecclesiastical community. It also takes place in the family every day of the week. These edifying exercises seek to enhance the growth of the believers and to strengthen their faith. The Huguenot Psalter is a major contribution to Christian spirituality as well as to French literature.⁴⁴

c. The spirituality of the Lord's Day

The day of the Lord, first day of the new creation, was instituted by Jesus Christ (John 20:19, 26). It is a blessed day of peace, of rest and quietness, a day consecrated to prayer and charitable works (Luke 13:16; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Acts 6:1-6). The Sunday worship service gives a foretaste of the heavenly celebration (Hebrews 4:9; Revelation 1:10). Understood in the light of the resurrection, it should be a joyous and festive celebration, an event-celebration that announces the time of fulfilment, of accomplishment.

d. Spirituality and Holy Communion

Holy Communion is a sign and a seal of divine grace. It is an invitation to renew and to strengthen the covenantal relationship between God and the community of believers. It is a sign of belonging to the Christian community. As Holy Communion is not regularly observed in most Reformed churches, it is important to carefully prepare oneself. At the time of the Reformation, the cycle of sermons during the week, which preceded the celebration of Holy Communion, fulfilled this educational role. This practice still exists in some churches.

e. The spirituality of stewardship

Daily, family and professional activities are perceived as a divine calling. Ordinary life manifests a sacred dimension (Luke 12:42-48; Matthew 25:14-30). Dutch paintings of the 17th century stress this spiritual approach. In the same way, the Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta family witness

to the manner the gospel of Jesus Christ meets the believer at the very heart of his existence and of his daily occupations. That was an extraordinary liberation for many! The development of an ethics of work in the Protestant tradition is conceived as a protection against poverty. This approach prompts the reconsideration of the manner in which people manage their possessions and the gifts that God has entrusted to each believer. This goes far beyond the practice of a few good deeds (Mark 12:42; Luke 21:2).⁴⁵

f. The spirituality of divine providence

This concerns meditation on the mystery of divine providence in relation to the existence of the believer. People of faith consider what Providence has given rise to in their lives while listening to the Word of God so as to discern the will of the Lord.⁴⁶ Faithful persons are convinced that their life is meaningful, given by God, and that it is led by him. They are indwelt by the assurance of salvation, but they also know that they are called to perseverance in the faith. As Calvin has said it so well:

Faith tells us... that only the hand of God leads and governs our life in the good and the evil days. God does not act towards us in an arbitrary fashion, but dispenses good as well as evil according to a perfectly ordained justice.⁴⁷

In a concluding summary, one can define the spirituality stemming from the Reformation along the following three lines:

- a covenant spirituality that encompasses the individual, the couple, the family, the Church and even implicitly the city;
- an incarnate spirituality that allows believers to live the concreteness of life with its sorrows and its joys in the presence of the Trinitarian God and in communion with him;
- a spirituality of faith that binds knowledge, consent, confidence. To the question ‘What does it mean to believe in God?’, the catechism of Martin Luther answers:

The words ‘I believe in God’ mean:
I know what Scripture says about God (knowledge);
I acknowledge it as true (consent);
I place my entire trust in his Word (confidence).⁴⁸

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Notes

- 1 P. Berthoud & A. Schluchter, *Spiritualités et spiritualité biblique* (Aix-en-Provence: Kerygma, 1999) 12-24.
- 2 C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins, 1955) 174.
- 3 P. Berthoud, *En quête des origines. Les premières étapes de l'histoire de la révélation, Genèse 1-11* (Cléon d'Andran: Excelsis, Aix en Provence: Kerygma, 2008) 223-227.
- 4 *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, answer to the first question: ‘What is the chief end of man?’ *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh and London, 1963) 115.
- 5 *The Confession of Faith*, 115.
- 6 Some more significant passages: Ex 4:15, 16; 7:1, 2; Dt 18:18; 1Ki 17:24; Jer 1:5-9; 15:19; 25:4.
- 7 The contrast is between the edification of self and that of the community of believers.
- 8 This is already mentioned by E.W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (MacDill AFB: MacDonald, n.d. [German original 1832]) 1363 ff.
- 9 For the ecstatic nature of the activity of the Spirit whether in judgement or in prophecy, cf. Nu 11:24-29; 1 Sam 10:5-15; 8:9, 10; 19:18-24; Jer 29:26. These manifestations are also related to false prophecy (1 Ki 22:20 and 2 Chr 18:9) as well as to pagan inspiration (1 Ki 18:29). Such an ambiguity implies and calls for discernment so as to avoid and resist seduction! The Nifal and the Hitpaël of the root *nāba'* are used to express the ecstatic form of prophecy.
- 10 Cf. J. Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), esp. 219 for the link between music and prophetic inspiration.
- 11 Cf. 2 Pet 1:21.
- 12 The expression ‘the hand of the Lord was upon me’ occurs also in Ez 1:3; 3:22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; 40:1. It indicates an overpowering action of the Spirit inciting Ezekiel to communicate the divine revelation he has received to the people in exile. In the above passage the adjective ‘strong’ (hard) is added to underline the powerful effect of the divine action. Some have suggested that the prophet identifies with the divine emotions that are the consequence of God’s righteous indignation and anger. But this interpretation shouldn’t play down the effects of the powerful divine action on the man of God.
- 13 This is also expressed by the fact that the prophet is transferred from one place to another (no doubt in a vision), by the presence and intervention of many actors and by the ongoing conversation with the angelic world (cf. Is 21:2-10, 11ff; 40:3; 52:8;

- 62:6; Ez 8:11; Dan 7; Zech 1, etc.). In some cases *meshugá'* may have a figurative meaning (cf. Hos 9:7).
- 14 The Hebrew reads *shátam*. This form has been analysed in two ways: either it is considered as the Kal passive of the verb *she*, meaning to obstruct, or it is a compound form made up of the short form of the relative *she* and the word *tóm*, meaning 'perfect'. These two explanations lead to the two very different translations mentioned above: '... whose eye is obstructed, closed', or '... whose eye is perfect, sees clearly'.
 - 15 The word *tardemáb* is also used in Gen 2:21 to speak of the deep sleep of Adam when Eve was created. In Is 29:10, it is used to describe the absolute spiritual blindness of Israel, unable to understand the vision revealed by God.
 - 16 Cf. Philon d'Alexandrie, *Quis rerum divinarium heres sit* (Quel est l'héritier des biens divins?; transl. M. Harl, *Œuvres Complètes Vol. 15*) esp. §11 (39ff), §249-266 (291 ff.). English version in *Philo IV*, transl. F. H. Colson & G. H. Whitaker (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).
 - 17 E. J. Young, *My servants the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952) 165.
 - 18 Young, *Prophets*, 165. In fact, Philo is influenced by Plato (cf. his understanding of prophecy in *Phaedrus*).
 - 19 A. Bonnard, *Civilisation grecque. De l'Illiade au Parthenon*, vol. 1 (Bruxelles: Ed. Complexe, 1991) 166; cf. J. Jaeymano, *Merveilles de l'Antiquité, Europe* (Paris/Bruxelles: Sequoia, 1960) 40 ff.; M. Andreonicos, M. Chatzidakis, V. Karagoerghis, *Les merveilles des musées grecs* (Athènes: Ekdotike Athennon, 1974) 149.
 - 20 E.g. Is 43:27-28: 'Your first father (Jacob) sinned: your interpreters (*mélits*) rebelled against me. So I will disgrace the dignitaries of your temple, and I will consign Jacob to destruction and Israel to scorn.' The word 'interpreter' is usually translated 'spokesmen' (NIV), French 'porte-parole' (NBS). The reference is either to the priests and Levites whose task was to teach the law and consult God on behalf of the people, or to the priests and prophets. The priests could also exercise a prophetic function so the distinctions between priest and prophet are not clear-cut.
 - 21 Cf. Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 1372 ff.
 - 22 2x lies, falsehood (*sheker*); 1x ineptitude, worthlessness (*'elil*); 1x delusions, deception (*tarmit*).
 - 23 Cf. the dramatic effects of alcohol (Prov 31:4-7; 23:29-35).
 - 24 Ephesians reads: '... to know this love that surpasses knowledge...' (19). P. Bonnard says the believer will never come to the end of the knowledge of the love of Christ: 'Il s'agit de l'immensité de l'amour du Christ qui surpassera toujours la connaissance que les croyants en auront.' P. Bonnard, *L'Épître de St-Paul aux Ephésiens* (CNT IX; Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1953) 182. Philippians reads: '... the peace of God which transcends (surpasses) all understanding...' (7). The same idea is expressed but perhaps also that this peace overcomes our anxieties in a way that our understanding cannot (Calvin). Cf. also Ph 3:8: 'the surpassing (excellence of) greatness of knowing Christ Jesus...' In Ephesians, the verb *hyperballō* is used; in Philippians we find *hyperechō* (to rise above, surpass, excel).
 - 25 Speaking of 'the peace that overcomes all understanding' Calvin brings together word and spirit beautifully when he says: 'Et tout cela en la seule grâce de Dieu, laquelle n'est connue sinon par la Parole et l'oeuvre intérieure du Saint-Esprit.' *Commentaires de J. Calvin sur le Nouveau Testament*, vol. IV (Toulouse: Société des Livres religieux, 1894) 42.
 - 26 D.L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1.1-21.9* (WBC 6a; Nashville: Nelson, 2001) 269. Chapter 12:32 is connected both with chapter 12 (an inclusion with verse 1) and 13 where it functions more as a transition and thus stresses the authoritative nature of the command of God (cf. also Dt 4:2). Within the immediate context these injunctions concern the stipulations of the treatise God concluded with Moses (cf. also Rev 22:18).
 - 27 The main means of divine communication were visions and dreams (cf. Nu 12:6 which adds riddles; 1 Sam 28:6, the negative example of Saul).
 - 28 Balaam was a diviner and performed signs and wonders. This is why Balak sought him out.
 - 29 Lit. 'taking his tongue'. The LXX has either 'forcing his tongue' or 'taking out his tongue' in order to proclaim an oracle.
 - 30 P.C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976) 263.
 - 31 For a violent and scathing diatribe against the lying of prophets of Judah, cf. Jeremiah's oracle in 23:9-40.
 - 32 Another passage on discernment is 1 Thes 5:21-22 where the apostle to the Gentiles proposes three steps: test everything; hold on to the good; avoid every kind of evil. In 1 John 4, the Apostle uses *dokimazō* to test, examine, interpret, discern, discover, approve, prove, demonstrate (cf. 1 Thes 5:21). In Acts 17:11 Luke uses the term *anakrinō*, to question, examine (study), judge, evaluate, set a judgment on, call to account.
 - 33 J. Calvin, *Commentaires sur le Nouveau Testament*, tome 8, vol. 2 (Aix en Provence/Marne la Vallée: Kerygma – Farel) 264-270.
 - 34 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 263.
 - 35 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 266.
 - 36 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 266.
 - 37 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 267.
 - 38 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 268.

39 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 270.

40 This anthropology is in stark contrast with that of humanism and especially Romanticism. In an unpublished lecture ‘Romanticism and Christianity’ (1989), the Spanish Reformed philosopher David Estrada (who taught at the University of Barcelona for many years) argues that there is a collusion and thus a confusion between Romanticism and Christianity. This had disastrous consequences for the understanding of man. The anthropology put forward had three characteristics:

- It affirms the natural goodness of man.
- It presents a fragmented vision of human identity. The Romantics accept and build upon the viewpoints of the Enlightenment. If reason must be limited to the area of phenomenon, of the real, then other faculties, such as feeling, imagination, will and faith must penetrate the area of the noumenon – things in themselves – to which belong metaphysical ideas such as God, the soul and the universe. The noumenal ‘separation’ is achieved, the field of knowledge is divided and the unity of the identity of humanity is broken. Such was the perspective of C.S. Lewis before his conversion.
- Finally, this anthropology offers a promethean vision of man capable, by the power of the imagination, to create on his own a universe in which it is possible for him to find refuge.

This anthropology leads to acceptance of the motif necessity-freedom in which liberty is confused with autonomy. Humanity’s dilemma is not moral, but ontological. It is related to its finiteness, to its ignorance. As he exercises his freedom, man hopes to liberate himself from the weight of necessity by means of imagination or sensible experience, whether reli-

gious or not.

41 Cf. the re-publication of an abstract of Calvin’s *Institute* on spirituality: J. Calvin, *Une spiritualité à visage humain* (Aix-en-Provence, Cléon d’Andran: Kerygman Excelsis, 1999); C.-A. Keller, *Calvin mystique, Au Coeur de la pensée du Réformateur* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2001) gives an interesting analysis of Calvin’s understanding of this topic, but his reading of the reformer’s *union mystique* is somewhat influenced by the neo-platonistic tendencies of Dionysius the Areopagite.

42 This is the witness of the whole Bible, cf. the Wisdom literature; Jas 1:1-18; Acts 6:4. It is also true for Judaism (the teaching of rabbis especially in the synagogue) and for the Fathers of the Church (Origen, Jerome, Augustine, Chrysostomus, etc.).

43 [Ed.: On the importance of the Psalms, see also the previous issue of *EJT*.]

44 *Les Psaumes de David mis en rime française* par C. Marot et Th. De Bèze. Adaptation en français actuel par M.-F. Gonin (Nîmes: Vida, 1998).

45 E. R. Charles, *Our Neighbour: Martin Luther. Chronicles of the Schönberg-Cotta family* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964); A. Biéler, E. Dommen, J.-P. Thévenaz, *La pensée économique et sociale de Calvin* (Georg Editor, 2008); cf. André Biéler, *Calvin’s Economic and Social Thought* (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005).

46 Cf. Ecclesiastes 7:14.

47 Calvin, *Commentaires*, 62.

48 M. Luther, *Le Petit Cathéchisme*, édité par l’Eglise Evangélique Luthérienne, 98. For further reading, cf. H.L. Rice, *Reformed Spirituality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); H.J. Selderhuis, *Calvin’s Theology of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

Aspects of the Atonement

Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity

I. Howard Marshall

The Christian understanding of the meaning of the death of Jesus Christ and its relationship to the salvation of sinful humanity is currently the subject of intense debate and criticism. In the first two chapters Howard Marshall discusses the nature of the human plight in relation to the judgment of God and then offers a nuanced defence of the doctrine of the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners. The third chapter examines the place of the resurrection of Christ as an integral part of the process whereby sinners are put in the right with God. In the final chapter Marshall argues that in our communication of the gospel today the New Testament concept of reconciliation may be the most comprehensive and apt expression of the lasting significance of the death of Christ. The papers are expanded versions of the 2006 series of Chuen King Lectures given in the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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