

Hermann Müller SVD

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A KEY TO THE SPIRITUALITY OF OUR SOCIETY

Summary

It seems the essence of the spirituality of our founder and of our Society is the inseparable unity of the devotion of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit. It was a sacred family inheritance. Our founder developed it further. Father and Son breathe the Holy Spirit. The Logos becomes the Incarnate Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ preaches and offers himself up on the cross by the power of the Holy Spirit. By his death the Lord merits and gives us the Holy Spirit. In the power of that same Spirit Christ rises from the death and sends his apostles to the end of the world. As Jesus often withdrew, we want to withdraw into the sanctuary of our heart, adore the Holy Spirit, ask him what to do and do it wholeheartedly to become the personality God wants us to become.

A. The Spirituality of Our Founder

I. Spirituality

The term Spirituality is modern and unknown in biblical theology. The New Testament sees the Christian life as the life of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Son, in man. Rm 8 tells us much about that life in the Holy Spirit, as does Ga 5. We are not just persons, living „by the flesh,” by our natural inclinations, but by the Spirit (Rm 8:9.11). Ga 5:25 sums it up succinctly: „If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit” (NAB Revised NT)! „Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behaviour be guided by the Spirit” (New JB)! „If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct its course” (Revised NEB)! „If we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's lead” (RSV)!

Spiritual life means therefore man living to full capacity, as sharing in God's life in the Body of Christ, through and guided by the Spirit. *Spirituality* is the way this life develops.

Spirituality is on the one hand the structuring of an adult personality in faith according to one's proper genius, vocation, and charismatic gifts, and on the other hand according to the laws of the universal Christian mystery.[1]

So in one sense, there is only one spirituality for all, since we all live in the Spirit by following Christ. But each one can do this his way and so we can speak of a Benedictine, Franciscan, etc. spirituality. Is there also a SVD spirituality?

It seems to me there is, i.e., the combination of the devotion to the Divine Word and to the Holy spirit, taken as an inseparable unity.

II. SVD Spirituality: Spirituality of the Parents of Our Founder

The two outstanding devotions of our Society, the devotion of the Divine Word and of the Holy Spirit are family inheritance and show once more that we are what we are to a great extent because of our parents.

1. The Devotion of the Divine Word

When storms or frost threatened Gerard Janssen's, the father of our founder's scanty hard-earned crops and so the lives of his children, he lit a candle, fell upon his knees and cried out to heaven in a loud voice: „In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God,” down to the conclusion of the great opening verses of the Gospel of St. John. He recited it every night after the long family prayers and would some times even pray it while plowing. He used to tell his children that it was „a strong prayer and had great power with

God.” Arnold never forgot his father's devotion, and so the worldwide Society which he founded came by its title out of the heart of a common carter and ploughman. If that is not heavenly romance, what is? When now in every continent and country the members of the Society of the Divine Word take or renew their religious vows, they begin by chanting, lighted candles in their hands, just like farmer Janssen long ago: „In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum" (Jn 1:1).

2. The Devotion of the Holy Spirit

Gerard Janssen had an extraordinary devotion to the Holy Spirit and heard Mass every Monday of his life in honor of the third Divine Person. He never tired of talking to his children about this devotion. From his deathbed in 1870 Gerard made all his children promise to honor the Holy Spirit by attending Mass every Monday as they should attend a second Mass on Sunday, the High Mass, in honor of the Blessed Trinity.

III. Development of the Spirituality of Our Founder

1. The Devotion of the Divine Word

Meditating on the relation between the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit our founder saw the following relations:

- (1) Father and Son breathe the Holy Spirit.
- (2) Christ becomes man by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Logos becomes the Incarnate Word.
- (3) Christ preaches in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- (4) Christ offers himself by the power of the Holy Spirit on the cross.
- (5) Christ sends the Holy Spirit by his death and resurrection so that we can preach the good news as he did in his lifetime.

To express all this in one name, i.e., the relation between Divine Word and Holy Spirit, which is the unique contribution of Father Arnold's spirituality, would have been impossible. We remember how hard it was for him to get the name „Society of the Divine Word" approved by Rome. He certainly could not have named us „Society of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit." Thus he was lucky that he could found two Societies. The one he named after the Divine Word, the other after the Holy Spirit. But both Societies should be dedicated to the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit.

2. The Devotion to the Holy Spirit

a. The custom of the entire community to pray or sing the hymn Veni Creator every morning goes back to September 8, 1875, the day on which our Society was founded.[2] And ever since it has become part of our morning prayer, kind of a national anthem of the Society.

b. The devotion to the Holy Spirit grew with Fr. Arnold. Providential to strengthen it were since 1883 the Vincentian Father Ferdinand Medits[3] and the visionary Magdalene Leitner.[4] So the founder dedicated himself to the Holy Spirit in the church of the Lazarists in Vienna[5] on October 3, 1887,[6] probably with this prayer:

God, Holy Spirit, love of the Father and the Son,
in order to belong to you completely
I consecrate to you both now and forever my heart,
my body and soul, my energy and talents, my thoughts and desires,
my word and deeds, my work and leisure, my sufferings and joys, my life and death.
I dedicate to you also all those dear to me
and all what I am and have
that you alone may dispose of me

and by your love reign over me in time and in eternity. Amen.

Fr. Arnold considered it as one of the greatest graces of his life.[7]

c. The Quarter-hour-Prayer was another fruit of this devotion to the Holy Spirit. What our founder wanted was a certain spirit of contemplation in his sons and daughters. Although the members of the Society of the Divine Word and the Congregation of the Holy Spirit are active they shall live in the presence of the Lord as God already told Abraham: „Live in my presence and be perfect" (Gn 17:1). So it became custom in our Society and the Congregation of the Servants of the Holy Spirit to pray every quarter of an hour the Quarter-hour-Prayer since 1876.[8] Medits thought an invocation to the Holy Spirit should be added which was done at least since 1884,[9] which has been kept till today (although the Quarter-hour-Prayer is unfortunately not said in common any more):

- God eternal Truth,
we believe in You.
- God, our strength and salvation,
we trust in you.
- God, infinite goodness,
we love you with all our heart.
- You sent the Word into the world
as our Saviour.
Make us all one in him.
- Fill us with the Spirit of Christ
that we may proclaim your name. Amen.

As one can see, there are the acts of the three divine virtues: faith, hope and love. Then follows a petition to the Divine Word and lastly to the Holy Spirit. The last two petitions make up the particular spirituality of our founder.

d. Father Arnold also prayed to the Holy Spirit to find out God's will. Thus when there was an important letter with a great decision to be written, he would say to his secretary: „This is an important matter. Let us first pray the Veni Creator Spiritus!"[10]

IV. Some Conclusions for Our Life

If we meditate on all this we can draw the following conclusions for our life in the light of the spirituality of our founder:

- (1) God is an outgoing God.
- (2) He communicates.
- (3) We as Divine Word Missionaries must dialogue, pass over to other cultures and to the poor.
- (4) The Holy Spirit empowered Christ to preach the Gospel. He will do the same with us.
- (5) We are able to do everything in the Spirit's power,
- (6) if we are only open to him, listen to him, surrender ourselves to him.
- (7) The Holy Spirit even enabled Christ to offer himself on the cross, expressed by pictures in many Holy Spirit Sisters convents where the Holy Spirit hovers over the cross of Jesus. Cf. Heb 9:14: „Christ through the Holy Spirit offered himself up, unblemished to God and cleanses our consciences from dead works to worship the living God." So the Holy Spirit will make us generous.
- (8) As Jesus often withdrew to desert places, we want to withdraw to the sanctuary of our heart, adore the Triune God, especially the Holy Spirit, ask him what we shall do and do it.

V. Spirituality of Our Founder: Hallmark of SVDs

This devotion of the Divine Word and the Holy Spirit has become the hallmark of many SVDs, the alumni of our Society.

1. During World War II one of our theologians, then a soldier, paid a visit to the Lord in the Blessed Sacrament in a church in France. The church was empty. But somebody was playing the organ. He played the Veni Creator with all the stanzas, the way we sing it: The uneven stanzas with the melody, the even stanzas recited. Curious who the player might be, the theologian went to the choir loft and found a soldier. The theologian excused himself and asked: „Are you an SVD?” The answer came: "Not any more. But I cannot forget the hallmark of the SVD, the Veni Creator."

2. John William Naumann was a student in Steyl and left the Society during the First World War. After the Second World War, he got a name in Germany as the founder of the Catholic newspaper „Neues Abendland” (New Occident) which later on got the name „Deutsche Tagespost” (German Daily). He died on May 1, 1956. His wife wrote about him that he prayed the rosary daily since his tenth year of age. The breath of his soul, however, was the morning hymn of the Society, the „Veni Creator Spiritus!” without which he could not live. Still a few days before his death he sang the entire hymn with outstretched arms, sick to death, with tears in his eyes. It was for him the great exorcism against all evils of this world.

B. The Scripture Foundation of the Spirituality of Our Founder

As so often, our founder had a good Catholic nose and was sometimes fifty years ahead of his time. It seems to me there are two sets of texts in Scripture which show this connection between Divine Word and Holy Spirit as our founder saw it.

I. Jesus the Servant of Yahweh Becomes a Life-giving Spirit, a Father of Many Nations

1. Jesus the Servant of Yahweh

There are four Servant of Yahweh Songs in Deutero-Isaiah: (1) Is 42:1-4(5-7); (2) Is 49:1-4.5b(5a-9), (3) Is 50:4-9(10-11), (4) Is 52:13-53:12. What is in parenthesis are the secondary texts, which form the transition from the Servant of Yahweh Song to the Deutero-Isaiah text. If we take all the texts of this mysterious Servant of Yahweh we get the following idea of the Servant:

(1) The Servant is chosen, called (Is 42:1; 49:1), even before his birth, from his mother's womb (Is 49:1.5).

(2) He is full of the Holy Spirit (Is 42:1).

(3) He shall preach and thus be a light to the nations (Is 42:6; 49:6).

(4) He shall suffer (Is 50:6; 53:3),

(a) quietly like a lamb (Is 53:7),

(b) vicariously, taking away our sins (Is 53:4.5.6.10.11.12).

(5) His posterity will be big (because of his suffering) (Is 53:10.12) (so also in Ps 22:29) or in the words of Paul (Rm 1:4): He will become a life-giving Spirit (1 Co 15:45).

(6) He will rise (Is 53:11).

2. Jesus Offers Himself as Servant at the Jordan[11]

a. When Jesus came to the Jordan in order to be baptised by the Baptist (Mt 3:13-17 par), he placed himself in line with all the sinners, not because he was a sinner, but because he wanted to take upon himself symbolically all the sins of mankind which on the cross he would atone for in reality. Here at the Jordan he made the morning offering of his public career to the Father: „Take

me as that Servant of whom Deutero-Isaiah speaks, chosen, called, full of the Spirit, who preaches the good news, who suffers vicariously, and rises. In short, I am willing to be that Servant (in Greek: *pais*), being a slave, including the death of a slave on the cross and thus becoming a son of God in power (Rm 1:4), which is the other extreme of *pais*" And the Father accepted this morning offering by saying: „This is my beloved Son" (Mt 3:17).

b. Another time Jesus came again to the Jordan and the Baptist told his disciples: „Look, there is the Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). Since John spoke Aramaic he probably said: „Behold, the *talya* of God," which can mean (1) the boy/servant and (2) the son.[12] Thus Jesus is the Servant who suffers like a lamb (Is 53:7) and thus atones for the sins of mankind and becomes the Son of God (in power) by his resurrection, a life-giving Spirit as Paul puts it in 1 Co 15:45.

3. Jesus Renews His Offering before the Transfiguration

Jesus predicted his suffering three times (Mk 8:34-38 par; Mk 9:30-32 par; Mk 10:32-34 par). The apostles, especially Peter were shocked, and Peter told the Lord to forget about the morose idea of crucifixion (Mk 8:32). But the Lord could only insist that crucifixion was the Father's will. But resurrection would follow with necessity.

Thus Jesus took this three favourite apostles Peter, James and John and was transfigured before their eyes to show them: „Don't be discouraged if I tell you that I and you have to suffer as the Servant of Yahweh. Easter glory is the other side."

Thus in prayer (Lk 9:28) Jesus renewed his offering to the Father, as he had done at the Jordan, to be the Servant of Yahweh, atoning for the sins of mankind on the cross and thus become a life-giving Spirit. The Father accepted the renewed offering and Jesus was transfigured before the eyes of the apostles, received anticipated Easter glory. The Father proclaimed Christ as his beloved Son once more as at the Jordan, to whom his apostles should listen (Lk 9:35 par = Dt 18:15). Thus if he told them that he and they would have to suffer they should accept it.

II. By His Dying on the Cross Christ Merits Us the Holy Spirit

The second series of texts shows us that Jesus had to die in order that the Holy Spirit could come to us. His generosity by which he died on the cross merited us the Holy Spirit.

1. Prediction of Christ as Source of Living Water on the Feast of Tabernacles

On the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles a priest attended by Levites went down to the Pool of Siloe and took some water from it in a golden jug. The procession returned to the temple through the Water Gates and a trumpet recalled three times the Messianic promise: „With joy you will draw water at the fountain of salvation" (Is 12:3). Then the priest poured the water into two bowls at the Altar of Holocausts. This ceremony was to beg for the gift of autumn rain and a fruitful harvest for the next year. After all, a good harvest depends on rain.

Jesus used this opportunity to proclaim himself as the source of living water and said (Jn 7:37-38):

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me;
let him drink who believes in me.
Scripture has it:
„From within him rivers of living water shall flow."

Jesus is this source of living water by sending the Holy Spirit. For the text continues: „Here he was referring to the Spirit, whom those that come to believe in him were to receive. There was, of course, no Spirit as yet, since Jesus had not been glorified."

This reading is favoured since Justin (2nd century), the Gospel of Thomas, Ambrose, and nowadays held by many scholars.[13]

The other reading, therefore, which makes the hearers the source of the living water since Origen is less likely:

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.
He who believes in me (as Scripture says),
„From within him shall flow rivers of living water.”[14]

Nothing is said to which Scripture text Jesus refers. But one of the clearest parallel texts would be Ex 17:1-4, as we will see.

2. Christ Will Send Holy Spirit

In the Farewell Address (Jn 16:7) Christ tells his apostles that they have no reason to be sad, if he leaves them and dies. On the contrary, if he goes he will send them the Holy Spirit (by and through his death):

You are overcome with grief,
Yet I tell you the sober truth:
It is much better for you that I go.
If I fail to go,
the Paraclete will never come to you,
whereas if I go,
I will send him to you.

By dying Christ will send us the Holy Spirit.

3. Giving of the Holy Spirit by Christ's Death

The fulfilment of the promise in Jn 7:38 and 16:7 comes in Jn 19:33-37:

When they (the soldiers) came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers thrust a lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. This testimony has been given by an eyewitness, and his testimony is true. He tells what he knows is true, so that you may believe.

According to Jewish law the bodies of crucified people had to be taken down from the cross (tree) before sunset lest the land would be defiled (Dt 21:22), even less could they remain on the cross during a Sabbath (Jn 19:31). Thus the legs of the two thieves were broken to hurry up their death. But when the soldiers came to Jesus they found he was already dead. But to be sure, a soldier thrust a lance into Jesus' side and then blood and water flowed out.

In the flow of water from the side of Jesus (from within him) John sees the fulfilment of Jesus' own prophecy[15] in Jn 7:38. The water symbolises for John the water of the Spirit and his graces, and the blood stands for the humanity of our Lord bleeding in his passion which brought us the water of the Spirit.

An ancient interpretation going back to the 2nd century sees in this water and blood the two sacraments most closely related to the death of the Lord, Baptism and the Eucharist.[16] In any case, by his death on the cross Christ merits and gives us the Holy Spirit.

4. Hitting of the Rock by Moses Prefigures Christ's Piercing with a Lance

We saw that on the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus had referred to „Scripture” which says that „from within him shall flow rivers of living water” (Jn 7:38). No clear text is indicated. But one

of the clearest typologies is the scene where Moses tried to get water for the Jews in the desert (Ex 17:1-7):

From the desert of Sin the whole Israelite community journeyed by stages, as the Lord directed, and encamped at Rephidim. Here there was no water for the people to drink. They quarrelled therefore with Moses and said, „Give us water to drink.” Moses replied, „Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the Lord to a test?...” So Moses cried out to the Lord, „What shall I do with this people? A little more and they will stone me!” The Lord answered Moses, „Go over there in front of the people, along with some of the elders of Israel, holding in your hand, as you go, the staff with which you struck the river. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock in Horeb. Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink.” This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel.

The parallel is impressive: As Moses was striking the rock and beautiful spring water was coming out for the Jews to drink, so Christ's side had to be pierced with a lance so that the water of the Holy Spirit would flow out for all people to drink.

Deutero-Isaiah took up the picture of water and Spirit so that those of good will could follow Christ at the Feast of Tabernacles:

I will pour out water upon the thirsty ground, and streams upon the dry land;
I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring,
and my blessing upon your descendants (Is 44:3).

5. Christ the Rock

St. Paul explains the scene in the desert and tells us that Christ was this rock, which Moses hit at Rephidim, and thus the parallelism between Ex 17:1-7 and Jn 19:34 becomes even more obvious:

Brothers, I want you to remember this: our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; by the cloud and the sea all of them were baptised into Moses. All ate the same spiritual food. All drank the same spiritual drink (they drank from the spiritual rock that was following them, and the rock was Christ) (1 Co 10:1-4).

In some mysterious way the Logos was already active in the history of the Jews before the Incarnation. So Jn 1:10 tells us that the Logos was in the world. And Jn 1:11 continues: „To his own he came but his own did not accept him.” The Incarnation follows only in Jn 1:14. And Ws 18:14-16 tells us that God's powerful word came from God's throne and killed the Egyptians and saved the Jews in the Passover night.

Thus the argument is complete: Christ promises that from him (his belly, his side) will flow streams of living water, which are the graces of the Holy Spirit. That happened when he died on the cross and his side was pierced. This was prefigured when Moses hit the rock and refreshing water came out.

Notes

[1] Albert-Marie Besnard, OP, *Tendencies of Contemporary Spirituality*: Concilium 9 (1965) 14.

[2] Fritz Bornemann SVD, *Arnold Janssen. Founder of Three Missionary Congregations 1837-1909* (Romae: Apud Collegium Verbi Divini, 1975) 190.

[3] Bornemann, op. cit., 188.

[4] Bornemann, op. cit., 187ff,

[5] Hermann Fischer SVD, *Arnold Janssen. Gründer des Steyler Missionswerkes* (Steyl: Missionsdruckerei, 1919) 467.

[6] *An heiligen Quellen* (Steyl: Missionsdruckerei, 1947) 134.

[7] Fischer, op. cit., 409.

[8] Bornemann, op. cit, 188.

[9] Bornemann,op.cit,188.

[10] Bornemann, op. cit., 410.

[11] Joachim Jeremias, *pais theou*: Gerhard Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967) 705-717.

[12] Jeremias,loc.cit.,702.

[13] Raymond Brown, SS, *The Gospel According to John (I-XII): The Anchor Bible 29* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1966) 320.

[14] A third reading (Brown, *John*, 321) would leave the source of the living water open: If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink (i.e. he who believes in me).

As the Scripture says, „From within him shall flow rivers of living water.”

[15] Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 950.

[16] Brown, *John XIII-XXI*, 951.