

Healing our Brokenness: the Spirit and Creation

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Christian theology has for centuries been in a grip of a series of interlocking and destructive dualisms. Because Christianity has strongly affected the shape of Western culture, these dualisms are pervasive in the thought structures throughout the parts of the world historically dominated by that culture, even when those thought structures are not seen as specifically religious. In this article I wish to show, first, the set of interconnected dualisms and something of the intellectual roots of these destructive fragmentations. I then wish to argue that these are not a series of innocent intellectual mistakes, but are founded in vested interests of power and control, rationalized and legitimized by misguided theology, and ultimately rooted in fear. Finally, I shall make some suggestions towards the healing of these divisions, based on a solidarity with the Spirit of God in her work of the renewal of all creation.

1. Fragmentation

The basic theological dualism is the split between God and the material universe. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is usually centred on an understanding of God as pure spirit, utterly other than the material universe which is created by divine fiat. This world, thus created and set apart from God, is essentially matter (minds are introduced by a separate act of divine creation, as we will shortly consider), and the attributes of matter are the polar opposites of the attributes of God. God is the omnipotent living one; matter is lifeless and powerless, utterly passive to the forces exerted upon it. God is all-knowing; matter is mindless, irrational. God is goodness itself, matter in itself is without value, mere stuff. Given these polarities, it is no wonder that one of the ways God has been named in Western theology is as the Wholly Other, the one who is in every respect different from material creation and shares nothing in common with it.¹

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The cosmic dualism that places God and the world at opposite ontological poles is often taken for granted as essential to the Christian doctrine of creation rooted in scripture. Actually, however, the situation is much more complex. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is nowhere found in the Bible, and indeed is at odds with those Bible stories of creation which portray God's creation not as making the world out of nothing but rather as forming cosmos out of chaos by the presence of the divine Spirit. It was in the early Christian era that the doctrine of creation, much influenced by a rather hastily baptized Platonism, began to take for granted a cleavage between spirit and matter that was both an ontological distinction and a distinction in value as well. God as Spirit is good; matter, seen as the opposite of spirit, is not good.

The dualism between God and the world reflects and is reflected by a dualism of mind and body in the human person. Again, this mind-body division has deep roots in Platonic thought (though much of its modern foliage is due to the influence of Descartes) and was taken up into Christian theology by early thinkers as diverse as Origen and Augustine. Mind (or soul) is seen to be the real person; the body is its prison house from which it can hope to be released only by death to enjoy an incorporeal immortality no longer shackled by the demands and clamours of physicality. The real self (soul or mind) is akin to God, specially created by God and breathed into the material body; the body is a part of the physical universe, dust from dust, to which it will return. Thus for instance Augustine said:

Not in the body but in the mind was man made in the image of God. In his own similitude let us seek God; in his own image recognize the Creator.²

Accordingly, the mind, made in the image of God, reflects the attributes of God. As God is life, so the mind is the life or animating force of the person; a human body without a mind ("where the soul has departed") is a corpse. As God is omniscient, so the mind is the organ of knowledge and wisdom, reflecting on finite scale the infinite wisdom of God. The body, by contrast, shares in the irrationality of the material world. As God is omnipotent, so, on finite scale, the mind is powerful, exerting its strength through the force of will on the body which, left to itself, shares the inertia of matter. The mind, being the real self made in the image of God, is of infinite and eternal value; the eventual crumbling of the body to dust is no loss.³

Yet that is not quite the whole story, even on a strongly dualist analysis. The body, irrational and powerless as it seems, nevertheless exerts a pull of its own, a resistant weight to the things of the spirit. Through bodily desires for food, drink, sleep and comfort, distractions and demands are placed on the soul. This is especially the case with the sexual desires of the body, where physical desires are capable of completely dislodging the mind from its pursuit of wisdom. Thus the body, and with it the whole material order, reveals itself not simply as an inert innocent lump, but as having a kind of negative power of its own, especially strong and sinister in the case of sexuality. It is the life-long task of every person to free ourselves — that is, our minds — from these clamours and pulls of our bodies, using, if necessary, sharp discipline and ascetical techniques.

Again, I would not wish to give the impression that this portrayal is the only possible Christian understanding of personhood or indeed of sexuality; far from it. I have argued elsewhere that central Christian doctrines of creation, incarnation and salvation require a very different conceptualizing of personhood and sexuality.⁴ Nor

do I think that the ascetical practices of Christian monasticism, in particular in its emphasis on chastity, were uniformly negative about sexuality: in at least some cases, for example, the possibility of living together in celibate communities was a radical counter-cultural alternative for women whose society perceived them largely as bearers of children.⁵ The qualifications notwithstanding, however, a negative Christian theology of the physical, and its outworking in body-despising attitudes and practices cannot be denied, and are anchored in a mind-body dualism that parallels the cosmic dualism between God and the world.⁶

Now, the psychological dualism of mind and body was further projected as a dualism between male and female, giving a rationalization and theological justification for the misogyny pervading Western culture.⁷ According to Augustine, only men (and then only their minds) were made in the image of God; women were made in the image of man, from man's rib, and to serve his needs.⁸ The male is identified with the mind and with God; the female with the body and the material universe. Just as the mind is the rational and the body the irrational, so it is between the man and the woman: male rationality is set over against female ignorance, an ignorance exacerbated by the typically female characteristic of feeling. Thus men are wise; women are prey to fluctuating emotions. These emotions are seen to be rooted in the woman's body, particularly in her menstrual cycle, and therefore in her sexuality. Though the woman is perceived as weak and vulnerable, and the man as strong and dominant, it is nevertheless also the case that female sexuality is sinister and invidious, always lurking to prey upon the unwary man, undermine his rationality and unsettle his control. Therefore the man must dominate the woman, who must be subordinate to him and serve him as the body and sexuality must be subdued in the service of the mind. The same principle of danger that lurks in physicality generally is embodied in the sexual temptation that women represent to men made in the image of an asexual (but yet normatively male) God.

It is easy to see that this male-female dualism identifies women strongly with the material, the earth. The male principle of rationality and mastery, by contrast, is identified with the technological dominance of nature. Just as men by their rationality master their bodies, feelings, and women, so technology is the rational mastery of nature by males.⁹ The biblical writings offer a vocabulary of *subduing* the earth and *subordinating* women: the extent to which mastery of the earth is identified with violent sexual conquest of women is evident in the much-used modern phrase "the rape of nature". While those who use this phrase are pointing to the inappropriateness of such violence, it still indicates that the earth and the female are identified with each other, and presumably that males stand in a dominant relation to both, even if that dominance should be less overtly violating. The irony is staggering: all human beings are born of women, and all derive ultimately from "Mother Earth"; yet men have sought to reverse this dependency and bring women and the earth into subjection to themselves. Hence the mind-body dualism and the male-female dualism generate an ecological crisis of technological proportion as the technological dominance of nature proceeds; and in the background is the theological rationalization of a cosmic dualism between a God of ultimate value and a material universe of no intrinsic worth.

Male dominance, however, is not restricted to nature; and the same dualistic pattern that results in an alienating split can be seen in other situations of mastery. Just as there

is a fracturing of technology and nature, so also there is an assumption of "godlike" power, rationality and right by Western males over people of other races who are (or can be rendered) powerless. Imperialism in every form, whether military, intellectual, or economic, finds a ready justification in a dualistic ideology which sees power vested in the rational, male-dominated society. This is also the dualist basis of racism, which splits white people from people of colour, and indeed of slavery and oppression of every form, which splits master from servant and rich from poor. In each case the assumed superiority of the former is used to despise and exploit the resultant weakness of the latter. It is no coincidence that it is Western society with a Christian theological heritage that has been much to the fore in aggressive and oppressive imperialism, regularly offering theological justification for its exploitation of non-white races and non-Christian cultures.

That is not to say that all oppressions rooted in dualisms are the same. It has been rightly remarked, for instance, that the universal oppression of women by men is in important respects different from the oppression of black people by white people, not least in the fact that white women are no less racist than white men and historically have enthusiastically participated in injustice towards black women and men.¹⁰ The oppression of a white woman in a top administrative position in a London office, dressed in shoes and clothes which restrict freedom of movement, and expected to wear perfume, make-up and jewellery to be sexually attractive to her male colleagues (and yet at fault as a seductress if the attraction develops into an affair) is utterly different from the oppression of the Asian women working in sweatshops a few streets away.

Significant as these differences are, however, I suggest that the fundamental basis of both is a dualism which vests dominance and rationality ultimately in white Western men (whose ideology has been internalized by, *inter alia*, many white Western women) to dispose of as kindly or as harshly and in whatever forms they see fit. To the extent that this is true, it goes back to the identification of the male with the mental and with God, and therefore with rationality, value and power, as over against the "other", whether in terms of sex, race, class, or culture, who is (or can be made) weak, and is thus "given" to men for conquest and exploitation in whatever civilized or uncivilized form they choose.

Christianity has colluded with this oppressive structuring not only by providing its ideological underpinnings but also in some structural dualisms of its own. Branches of the church differ, but in many of them there is still a very strong dualism between clerical and lay people, with the former regarded as having the authority and the truth on their side, and the latter as being the weak and ignorant flock who must be told what to think and what to do. Significantly, the branches of the church with the most strongly institutionalized hierarchy are also the branches that find it hardest to allow women to be ministers, in many cases still refusing their ordination. Once we have noticed the way in which the fundamental dualisms on which Western culture rests perpetuate themselves in increasingly alienating structures, this stance by the male-dominated ecclesiastical hierarchies is unsurprising; and it becomes clear that what is needed is not simply such changes as would permit women to be ordained into the existing structures, but a fundamental change in the structures themselves and a whole revisioning of the church and all humankind along holistic rather than dualistic lines.¹¹ I will return to this in the third section.

2. Innocent oppression?

From the way in which I have thus far presented the series of interconnected dualisms one might suppose that they were rooted in simple intellectual mistakes, with unfortunate effects but without evil intent. On this view, it was in part because of the early church's preoccupation with Greek thought — a preoccupation wholly understandable and even laudable in the cultural context of the early Christian centuries — that theologians like Origen, Augustine and Jerome defined the doctrine of creation in overly Platonic categories, and developed their anthropological understanding along lines which drew too strong a contrast between the material and the spiritual. The other dualisms in the series, male/female, technology/nature, mastery/slavery, clerical/lay follow from these initial mistakes in a logical or at least understandable sequence. Hence any oppression which has resulted from these mistakes (and on this view the oppression is usually perceived as balanced by very considerable benefits which have accrued to women, non-whites, lay people, etc.) is unfortunate but should not be judged too harshly.

In my view, however, the situation is quite different. I do not at all deny that there is a certain deductive sequence in the parallel dualisms which I have outlined; indeed the logical parallels have been part of my point. Nor do I wish to underestimate the extent to which the mind-body dualism and its cosmic counterpart are rooted in Greek metaphysical categories. But I suggest that whereas the God-world split is logically prior to the other dualisms and provides the basis for their theological rationalization, it is naive to suppose that this doctrine of ontological dualisms is itself a result of neutral, objective scholarship detached from all vested interests and pursuing theological truth for its own sake. There has been plenty of recent work developing and using a "hermeneutic of suspicion"; I suggest that it can be applied fruitfully to the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the sequence of parallel dualisms which anchor themselves in it. One need only ask who perpetrates this sort of thinking, and from what position, and what they would stand to lose by reconsidering it, to make us highly dubious of the claim that the dualisms are a result of neutral, objective thought incorporating some unfortunate but innocent intellectual errors.

This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that there is nothing at all new in my presentation of the dualisms; it has all been said before. Theologians of the stature of Paul Tillich and Karl Rahner have been pointing out the deficiencies in an anthropology based on Platonic-Cartesian dualism and showing that Christian theological categories rooted in a doctrine of incarnation require a more holistic approach.¹² Along with this has been a theological reconsideration of the relationship of God to the material universe, rejecting the idea of a God wholly removed from the physical world in favour of a view which gives more prominence to divine immanence.¹³ Theologians have had available the work of secular thinkers like Lévi-Strauss, who have shown the parallels between (male) Western society's view of nature and its understanding of women, other races, and the colonized.¹⁴ The two have been brought together powerfully in feminist analyses, notably those of Rosemary Radford Ruether.¹⁵

For more than a decade the analysis of parallel dualisms and their theological and human inadequacies have been widely available; yet in important respects they have made very little impact. Large branches of the church still refuse to ordain women, and even in those who do, the ordination is usually in terms of existing structures of power

and control of the clergy over against the laity. Theologians and the ecclesiastical hierarchies have hardly been to the fore in championing the dismantling of the technology/nature dualism, often being at best a reluctant late-comer in addressing urgent ecological issues. Even worse is the Western church's recent record on calling into question the economic, military and cultural imperialism of the North Atlantic over exploited peoples. Christianity has been more likely to emphasize "enterprise" and "success" than to challenge militarism and consumerism, more willing to offer theological justifications of nuclear weapons than to support the women of Greenham Common or even to take them seriously. The moral preoccupations of the churches have been far more with keeping control of people's sexual practices (witness the endless and often repressive debates and policies about contraception, abortion, homosexuality and divorce) than in dismantling the dualisms that perpetuate racism, sexism and poverty. One of the most striking characteristics of Christianity of the North Atlantic in the recent past has been its increasing tendency to privatization and thereby its alignment with and perpetuation of the status quo.¹²

Why should this be so? How is it that well-intentioned and well-informed Christians, many of them in positions of intellectual or administrative power in the churches, have done so little and appeared so reluctant even to acknowledge let alone deconstruct the structures of fragmentation? It is not, as I said, out of ignorance; the analysis has long been available. Neither is it that the laity form a lump of inert resistance; many have joined, for instance, in campaigns for nuclear disarmament, the ordination of women, and environmental concerns. Yet all too often they are then regarded with suspicion and even hostility by the established churches and theological institutions, at best tolerated as fringe or marginal activities for Christians to engage in and at worst seen as having nothing to do with the real work of the church (whatever that is: saving souls, perhaps, and preserving the nuclear family). There are, thankfully, exceptions; but their presence only heightens the question of why it is that the churches are not at the forefront of an intellectual and practical campaign to dismantle unjust structures perpetrated by dualisms that have long been recognized to be theologically untenable.

It appears obvious that the dualisms which perpetuate the privatization of religion and the vested interests of the powerful do not derive merely from a series of intellectual errors which have not yet been rectified by properly qualified academics. Indeed, the extent to which the dualisms reflect and carry forward these vested interests should make us sceptical not only about them but about the very idea of neutral, objective intellectual endeavour patiently seeking truth without personal preference or passion. It is a truism too frequently ignored that all thinking is done by thinkers; and in the world as we know it thinkers are not disembodied, timeless, isolated minds, but embodied people with a history and a culture, who therefore can think only from the particularity of their own perspectives with all their inbuilt biases.

This is not to say that thought cannot be correct: from the fact that thinking is inevitably *affected* by the perspective of the thinker it by no means follows that it is wholly *determined* by that perspective and is therefore without validity. The phenomenon of vision provides a parallel: we see from where we are, and can do no other. From the fact that our vision is limited and affected by our perspective it does not follow that what we are seeing is not really there or even that it is utterly different from how we see it. But when we suppose that our vision is *not* particular, when we neglect

the stance that generates our perspective and suppose that what we see is the whole, universal reality without need of appraisal that takes the character of our own stance into critical account, then we are liable to serious error.

Now, this is as true for theological thinking as for anything else: theologians think from particular personal and cultural perspectives, and our thought is inevitably affected by them. But Western Christian theologians have been singularly reluctant to recognize the particularity and partiality of our thinking, treating the products of our reflection as though they came from a stance of neutrality and universality, even though the idea of a "universal stance" is literally a contradiction in terms. We have been slow to accept the implications of the message of liberation theologians that "academic theology has tended to emerge from the dominant groups of society and be entrenched on the side of the status quo in various situations throughout the world."¹ Instead, the theologies of liberation which regard this as a fundamental premise of theological analysis — feminist, black, Latin American, etc. — are themselves regularly treated as fringe or marginal by the theological and ecclesiastical establishments of Western Christendom, with the presumption that those establishments are the normative "centre" in reference to which the "margins" can be defined.

When we take this seriously with reference to the series of dualisms outlined above, it becomes obvious to what extent theologians, emerging, as Boesak says, "from the dominant groups of society", have a vested interest in providing a theological rationalization for the dualisms rather than getting on with the real work of dismantling them and constructing in their place a theology of integration and justice. In fact, although the sequence of justification of the dualisms proceeds from the split between God and the world, the sequence of their construction is, I suspect, different.

As I have said, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, usually seen as primary datum for a theological doctrine of God wholly other than the world, is not in the Bible, and was a theological construct using Greek philosophical ideas. It is at least arguable that, far from being a doctrinal given to which all else must conform and from which the sequence of dualisms followed, it was itself constructed as a theological justification for patriarchy. The dominant group of ruling class males constructed a world-view which set them apart as normative humanity, over against the "other" — women, other races, the poor, the earth — and then fashioned in their own image a God of ultimate value, power and rationality over against the disvalue, passivity and irrationality of the opposite side of the duality.

Of course I do not mean that this was done deliberately in the sense that theologians set about with conscious intent to construct a theological rationalization for patriarchy. But what I do mean is that as ruling-class males increasingly identified themselves over against the "other" over whom they took power, so the "other" of the various dualisms began to be a series of look-alikes because of the perspective from which they were defined. As Ruether puts it:

A repressive view of the alien female was also the model for the interiorization of other subjugated groups, lower classes, and conquered races. Subjugated groups are perceived through similar strategies, not because they are alike, but because the same dominant group (ruling-class males) are doing the perceiving. All oppressed peoples tend then to be seen as lacking in rationality, volition, and capacity for autonomy. The characteristics of repressed bodiliness are attributed to them: passivity, sensuality, irrationality and dependency.¹²

And in the same categories as the subjugated groups came, as we have seen, the body, feeling, and even the earth itself. When men of that perspective construct a theology using Greek conceptual structures, and perpetuate it through the patriarchal centuries of Western Christendom, it is hardly surprising that God will turn out to be the omnipotent, omniscient male of ultimate value, wholly other than the material universe of "his" fiat which is given to "man" to subdue. It is the classic instantiation of Boesak's comments on the provenance of academic theology and its entrenchment on the side of the status quo.

This in itself however does not make it false, even if it raises our suspicions. As I have said, the mere fact that our perspectives are particular does not mean that it is impossible for them to be correct. But as already pointed out, there has been for some time solid theological argument showing their inadequacies and suggesting alternatives, and yet these have been largely ignored as serious theological positions, let alone as part of popular Christian education.

This makes it necessary to look more closely at the vested interests of power and control which the sequence of dualisms serves to illustrate and legitimate. It is a striking fact that the recognition of a desire to control — even the recognition that that desire is inappropriate — does not of itself diminish the desire. For example, it is well known in Western Europe that our prosperity is built on the oppression of poorer countries, and that that is unjust; and yet the structures of that oppression are if anything stronger than they were a decade ago. Similarly, while many men recognize the injustice of patriarchy and might even be sympathetic to feminism, little is actually being done to change the male domination of society in which most scientific, technological, business and political decisions are made by men, usually set free to do so by a whole pyramid of supporting women, from a wife who looks after home and children, irons shirts and prepares meals, to the secretary, administrative assistant, telephonist, and cleaning lady in the office.

Why is this the case? Why is there such reluctance to get serious about structures that are recognized to be corrupt, and to dismantle them together with the faulty thinking that props them up? How is it that vested interests have such a binding power over people and societies? Is it sheer wickedness? There is wickedness in the structures, to be sure, but how does it get its purchase? At a conscious level, most people want to be fair and decent; yet the corruption persists, along with a great reluctance to take it seriously enough to do anything about it.

It is this great reluctance, I suggest, which gives us a clue to a deeper analysis. Whenever there is such great resistance to knowing something that in itself is obvious, or facing the practical implications of something that on one level cannot be denied, it is very likely that at least one ingredient of that resistance is fear. We refuse to know because we are afraid to know. At some deep level we feel fundamentally threatened. This need not be the only ingredient, of course; it can coexist with the sheer inconvenience that would accrue from renouncing the structures of injustice, and a whole ideology which supports them. Yet I suggest that fear is fundamental to the resistance, and indeed to the ideology itself.

This becomes clearer when we look at several of the dualisms in turn. Why should it be deemed essential that the body, especially sexuality, should be rigidly controlled? Surely it is because of fear of sexuality *out* of control. Why should white people — say, in South Africa — cling to a system of apartheid? Surely it is because of fear of

what would happen if the black population were no longer in their control. Why is it necessary for dominant white males to keep a very tight rein on their feelings? Surely it is because the strength of those feelings is terrifying. And there is no shortage of misogynist literature showing that women are dominated because they are seen to present a threat to men; or that technology is pursued with such ferocity in order to bind the earth.

Now, if the need to control is rooted in fear and insecurity regarding the element to be controlled (sexuality, feelings, women, other races, the earth), this fear will not be eliminated by the simple recognition that the control is unjust. Indeed, the recognition of the injustice of patriarchy, or of minority oppression, is far more likely to produce guilt than to produce change, as long as the fear on which the injustice is based is not dealt with. Indeed, this guilt is all too likely to find relief in reinforcing the intellectual rationalizations and legitimations of the very dualisms on which the injustice is built. I suggest that the paralysis in theology, the churches, and Western society generally is in large part due to fear. Until this fear is healed, no amount of chastigation is likely to have the least good effect.

But what is this fear about? Are feelings, sexuality, women, other races, the earth really threatening? Will they really do harm? The previous quotation from Ruether can be helpfully adapted here: all these subjugated groups are perceived as threatening, not because they are all alike, let alone because they are inherently sinister, but because they are being defined by the same group: dominant males. Characteristics of fearsomeness are attributed to them, not because they are fearsome, but because those who are defining them are afraid, and are projecting their own fear on to them.

But if the things themselves are not inherently fearsome, where does the fear originate? I have already used the term "projection": I suggest that the source of much of the fear, and hence of the whole sequence of dualisms, originates with an alienation of the bodily dimension of male selfhood that has not been welcomed. The self must then be defined as other than this split-off dimension; and this definition sets up a series of "others" whose definition as other and fearsome is a projection of the split-off aspect of the definer. Ultimately the sequence of dualisms together with their theological ratification are a result of this fear, self-alienation and projection. Until this is dealt with, no amount of intellectual theology, however brilliant, and no amount of prophetic denunciation, however merited, will begin to shift the structures of oppression. They cannot, because the oppressors are themselves oppressed, rigid with fear, paralyzed. And often too frightened even to recognize it.

3. "God has not given us a spirit of fear"

What can be done about it? Perhaps the least helpful thing to say to someone in the grip of fear — especially if that fear is at an intellectual level recognized to be irrational — is that they ought not to be afraid. The fear is real enough, and unwelcome, and cannot be banished by moralizing. And yet it is also the case that these fears are not a product of the Spirit of God. Indeed the Holy Spirit, as portrayed in scripture, is the spirit of encouragement and boldness and creative integration, not a spirit of alienation or repression. Perhaps the greatest need of the Christian churches of the West is a new encounter with the Spirit of God, both intellectually and practically, not simply at a privatized personal level but at a structural level, to deconstruct the edifices of oppression and their theological props by dissolving the fear and threat

upon which they are based. Since our need to control is rooted in our fear and insecurity, it is the healing love of the spirit of God to which we need to be exposed.

But this will not come about by magic, or by wishing it were the case, or by privatized charismatic experience divorced from political analysis and action. My immediate impulse as an academic theologian who has pursued the argument this far is to urge the development of a new theology of the Spirit, searching the scriptures and the tradition with a special eye for the way in which the Spirit liberates from fear and brings about integration and healing, not simply at a private "mental health" level but in terms of all the alienating dualistic structures which we have been considering. The understanding of the Spirit of God immanent in the created world dismantles the cosmic dualism that sets God apart from the universe. The Spirit of God in the incarnation liberates us from fear of the body and sexuality. The Spirit poured out upon all flesh, women and men, slaves and free, deconstructs myths of superiority and fearfulness, and enables mutuality and inclusiveness.

All this is true; and I would in no way belittle the importance of an intellectual engagement with the theology of the Spirit. Yet I doubt whether this is the place to start. I have argued at length that the structures of oppression and the sequence of alienating dualisms on which they rest are not a result of innocent intellectual mistakes but rather arise out of vested interests of power and control, ultimately based on fear. But if it is the case that our wrong thinking is a product of this fear and its projections, then it is highly unlikely that we will get our thinking right unless we begin from a *practical* confrontation with the fears, by way of a radical renunciation of the control mechanisms it spawns, not as an intellectual exercise merely, no matter how worthy or theologically correct, but in concrete commitment to the poor and weak and despised. When we begin to give priority of attention and to hold ourselves accountable not to the powerful but to the powerless, and when we begin deliberately to make changes in our life-styles and ecclesiastical structures reflecting this solidarity, the effect on our thinking and theologizing will inevitably be more profound than any amount of insulated intellectual activity could bring about.

If this is correct, then what we need much more than a new theology of the Spirit is a new practical commitment within the tradition of Christian spirituality, learning how to proceed from the women and men of the Christian tradition who show in their lives the challenging and integrating fruits of the Spirit, and who offer models of living by the Spirit of liberating love in a diversity of concrete situations. As we take seriously the need to reverse the patterns of alienation by practical solidarity with the split-off other, the way in which the giants of Christian spirituality model this praxis takes on an absorbing interest far removed from saccharine hagiography.

One example must suffice to clarify my meaning. The story is well known of Francis of Assisi ministering to the leper who then turns out to be Christ: it is often told as an illustration of Francis's holy generosity and its reward. But the real point of the story is very different. As told by Bonaventure following Francis's biographer Thomas of Celano, Francis was for a long time utterly revolted by lepers with a revulsion born of fear and fastidiousness. Whenever he encountered a leper he would hold his nose, send his servant to give alms, and ride away as rapidly as possible. This fear and revulsion was still very much a part of him when he felt himself constrained by the Spirit of God not simply to send token alms from a distance, but to get off his horse and kiss the leper, offering the solidarity of an embrace.

With that embrace Francis was given to himself. He acknowledged and received to himself the fear and revulsion he had projected on to the leper, and found that the leper, the alien other, was Christ to him, giving back to him the dimensions of himself from which he had alienated. Francis of Assisi did not first love the lepers and then begin to care for them; he began, in spite of his revulsion, to care for them, and thus was healed by their love. The story is at least as much about Francis's healing and reintegration as it is about any good done to the leper: the leper becomes a Christ figure because through him Francis is made whole in a way which is fundamental for his whole subsequent pattern of thought and life.¹²

Like Francis, much of our need to dominate is built on revulsion born of fear. Since this is at the root of our need to control, our greatest lack is not in the first instance intellectual. What we need is to expose ourselves to the healing love of the Spirit of God, which will be ministered to us, not abstractly, but precisely through those whom we have feared, and have rejected because of that fear. Far from this being a matter of detached "doing good" to them, the whole-making of all of us and the survival of the earth is at stake.

The sequence of dualisms shows the sequence of splits in consciousness particularly as defined by dominant males and largely internalized in Western Christian mentality, both male and female. As such it is also the sequence of fear. This fear can be relieved, and the fragmentation healed, not so much by word or theory but by embrace, deliberate practical solidarity with the "other" side. In our thinking and in our policies, individually and corporately, we need a real commitment in each case to the "underside" of the dualism, to begin the process of reintegration by what may seem at first like overcompensation, giving priority of attention and accountability to our bodiliness and sexuality, to our feelings, to the people of colour, women, the laity, other cultures and faiths, the earth itself. We need to learn together to get in touch with the vulnerable dimensions of ourselves that we have split off, not to eliminate them or control them, but to integrate them and allow them to be the basis for the sensitivity of the Spirit of God to each other and to our vulnerable world.

NOTES

¹ Cf. *my God's World, God's Body*, ch. 3, London, Darton, Longman & Todd, and Philadelphia, Westminster, 1984.

² Augustine, *A commentary on the Gospel of John*, XXIII 10.

³ Cf. Origen, *The First Principles*, *Strom.*, Against Celos, 3.411; 4.566., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 93, 5.

⁴ In *God's World, God's Body*, *op. cit.*, ch. 1.

⁵ Cf. Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginitas in the Early Church", in Bernard McGinn & John Meyendorff eds., *Christian Spirituality: I. Origins to the Twelfth Century*, New York, Crossroad, 1987, pp.427-443.

⁶ Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and Godtalk: Towards a Feminist Theology*, chs 3 and 6, London, SCM, 1983.

This is not to minimize the misogyny of other cultures, which have different rationalizations. Cf. Mary Daly, *God Ecology: the Metaphysics of Radical Feminism*, chs 3-5, London, Women's Press, 1979.

⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *See, Woman: See Tardie: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, New York, Seabury Press, 1975, p.72; Eleanor Clarke McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology", in Rosemary Radford Ruether ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1974.

⁸ Cf. Carol MacCormick, *Science, Culture, and Gender*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.6; also her "The Experience of Wholeness: the Limits of Dualism", Essex Hall Lecture, 1988, London, Unimark Publications, 1988.

⁷ Cf. Angela Davis, *Women, Race and Class*, London, Women's Press, 1982.

⁸ *New Woman/New Earth*, op. cit., pp.75-6.

⁹ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, University of Chicago Press, 1951, part II; Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, London, Dutton, Longman & Todd, 1978, part I.

¹⁰ John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London, SCM Press, rev. ed. 1977, chs 5.9 and 10, cf. my *God's World, God's Body*.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. I, New York, Basic Books, 1963; Vol. II, London, Allen Lane, 1977.

¹² E.g. in *New Woman/New Earth*.

¹³ Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Religion and Society: Sacred Canopy vs. Prophetic Critique", in Ellis and Mahoney eds, *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honour of Gustavo Gutierrez*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1989. Her analysis also applies to Thatcherite Britain and other right-wing European countries.

¹⁴ Allan Bossek, preface, in Charles Villa-Vieira ed., *On Reading Karl Barth in South Africa*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1988, p.vii.

¹⁵ *New Woman/New Earth*, op. cit., p.4.

¹⁶ Bonaventura, *The Life of St Francis*, 1.5.6, in Bonaventura, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, New York, Paulist Press, and London, SPCK, 1976, pp.188-190.

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