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The Spirit in the New Millennium:

THE DUQUESNE
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HOLY SPIRIT LECTURE
AND COLLOQUIUM

JULY 7-8, 2005
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Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, the Robert Earl Cushman Professor of Christian Theology
at Duke University's Divinity School

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The Spirit in the New Millennium:

“The Spirit in the New Millennium: The Duquesne University Annual Holy Spirit Lecture and Colloquium” was initiated in 2005 by Duquesne University President Charles J. Dougherty as an expression of Duquesne’s mission and charism as a university both founded by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit and dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It is hoped that this ongoing series of lectures and accompanying colloquia will encourage the exploration of ideas pertaining to the theology of the Holy Spirit. Besides fostering scholarship on the Holy Spirit within an ecumenical context, this event is intended to heighten awareness of how pneumatology (the study of the Spirit) might be relevantly integrated into the various academic disciplines in general.

This lecture may be read online at www.theholyspiritcolloquium.duq.edu. To contact us, please go to holyspirit@duq.edu. W. Thompson-Uberuaga, Ph.D., serves as the director.

2005 Colloquists

- Dr. Sixto J. García, Professor of Systematic Theology and Sacred Scripture, St. Vincent de Paul Seminary (Boynton Beach, FL)
- Dr. Elizabeth T. Groppe, Assistant Professor of Theology, Xavier University (Cincinnati, OH)
- Dr. Angela Kim Harkins, Assistant Professor of Theology, Duquesne University
- The Very Rev. Dr. Michael Aksionov Meerson, Pastor, Christ the Savior Russian Orthodox Cathedral (New York, NY)
- Dr. Andrew Purves, the Hugh Thomson Kerr Chair in Pastoral Theology, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- The Rev. John A. Sawicki, C.S.Sp., Assistant Professor of Political Science, Duquesne University
- The Rev. David G. Schultenover, S.J., Professor of Historical Theology, Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI)
- Dr. William Thompson-Uberuaga, Professor of Systematic Theology, Duquesne University

The Holy Spirit, Witness, and Martyrdom

Geoffrey Wainwright

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the sevenfold Spirit which is before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the first witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. (Revelation 1:4-5)

Grace to you

The writings of the New Testament make strong connections between the Holy Spirit and witness. The Greek terminology for witness (*martyrs, martyrein, martyria, martyria*) provides our English word for the ultimate witness, the “witness unto death”: martyrdom. My main purpose here is to display how, and to what ends, the Holy Spirit works to conform Christians to “Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,” and for whose “appearing” we wait (1 Timothy 6:13-16).

First, we shall look at the Apostle Paul, both for the setting of a theological frame for our topic and for the sake of his existential example. Then other biblical literature will be examined for what it says about testimony in the circumstances of persecution and in the cause of evangelism. The next step will be to observe the links established historically and theologically between the passion and death of Christ and the sacrificial martyrdom of his disciples. Finally, we shall treat the part played by martyrdom in the building up of the Church and in the attainment of salvation. In all this, our focus will highlight the pneumatological dimension of witness to the gospel. What we discover here about witness and martyrdom may, in reverse, hold implications for our understanding of the Holy Spirit, but these will remain as hints rather than being developed in detail in this place.¹

I. THE PAULINE THEOLOGY AND EXAMPLE

We may begin innocuously enough with what the Apostle says in Romans 8:15-16: “When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with [or: to] our spirit [*auto to Pneuma synmartyrei to pneumati hêmôn*] that we are children of God.” That is the foundation of all Christian prayer, beginning with the prayer that the Lord himself taught to his disciples. It would take us too far afield to investigate the variant reading in the Lukan version of the Lord’s Prayer, whereby “May thy Holy Spirit come upon us” is substituted for “Thy kingdom come.” Nevertheless, the ambivalent phrasing of that petition opens up for us an eschatological prospect in which to consider the work of the Spirit.

The Apostle Paul confirms that perspective when he immediately continues: “And if we are children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Romans 8:17-18). Moreover, from those verses it appears that the way to glory lies through suffering, and even a suffering that somehow shares the suffering of Christ (*eiper sumpaschomen hina kai sundoxasthōmen*, v. 17). And this is all given a corporeal dimension by the frequent mention of our bodies in the same chapter: having already “the first fruits of the Spirit,” we await “the redemption of our bodies” (v. 23): “If the Spirit of him who raised Christ Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you” (v. 11). The “love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” will see us through all danger, even “death” (vv. 38-39):

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For thy sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (8:35-37, citing Psalm 44:22)

As the opening verses of Romans 8 make clear, the condition of all this is that we have appropriated to ourselves the redeeming work of Christ, the Son sent “in the likeness of sinful flesh” so that sin might therein be condemned and we might “walk according to the Spirit” (vv. 1-10).

It is the Spirit who aids our stumbling lips when we groan and pray for full salvation in the midst of a creation that is itself groaning for liberation from decay (Romans 8:22-27) – just as it is the Spirit who (we shall soon see) puts words into the mouths of those who confess Christ in the setting of the hostile court room. It is the same Spirit who, knowing the depths of God, reveals to believers “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:6-12); and this no doubt brings consolation and hope to those who are being persecuted for Christ’s sake.

Thus Paul, above all in Romans 8, sets a theological frame for our topic in terms of euchology, soteriology, and eschatology.

Elsewhere the Apostle’s own sufferings are intimately linked to his witness to the gospel. Already in Acts, in the thrice-told story of Paul’s conversion, Ananias

is instructed by “the Lord”: “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). Ananias baptizes Saul/Paul that he might “regain [his] sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (9:17-18) and become “a witness for the Just One to all men” (22:12-16). Upon his preaching in the synagogues, “the Jews” both in Damascus and repeatedly in Jerusalem plotted to kill him (9:22-30; 23:12-21; 26:21). Paul’s Roman citizenship (22:25-29; 23:26-27; 25:8-12, 21; 26:32) proved to be the means of getting him to Rome, in accordance with a vision from the Lord: “Take courage, for as you have testified about me at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also at Rome” (23:11). The Apostle stayed in Rome for two years, welcoming all who came to him, “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered” (28:30-31). There the story in Acts ends, but a strong tradition has it that Paul underwent martyrdom in the imperial capital, under the emperor Nero, but in circumstances of which we are otherwise ignorant.²

In his epistles, Paul views his own sufferings and impending death as integral to his witness to the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, he writes – in the face of internal controversy -- that, as servants of God in the cause of the gospel, “we commend ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watching, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit [!], genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” Later in the same epistle, he speaks in mock boasting of his service to Christ “with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Harassed by the satanic “thorn in the flesh,” the Apostle hears the word from the Lord, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”: “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Might it be legitimate to hear in

the “beatings” of 2 Corinthians 6:5 (cf. 11:23-25) an echo of the stripes of Christ’s passion by which we are healed (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:21-24)? Certainly, the Apostle declares that “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Galatians 6:17): “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (ibid., v. 14).

Sensing the approaching end of his own life, and perhaps of the world, Paul reaffirms in his Second Letter to Timothy the connections between the gospel, his own proclamation of it, and the sufferings and rewards for the Spirit-indwelt preacher and those who accept the message:

I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (4:6-8)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus with its eternal glory. The saying is true:

If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;
if we deny him, he also will deny us;
if we are faithless, he remains faithful—

for he cannot deny himself. (2:8-13)

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, and therefore I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what I have entrusted to him. Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus; guard the truth that has been entrusted to you by the

Holy Spirit who dwells within us. (1:8-13)

What is related of Paul by himself and in the Acts of the Apostles corresponds to the warnings and promises recorded of the Lord himself in the Gospels. To these we now turn, locating the testimony to be rendered by Christ’s disciples in hostile circumstances in relation to the more general witness to the gospel with which the followers of Jesus are charged.

II. FORENSIC CONTEXT AND EVANGELISTIC SCOPE

When Jesus sent the Twelve out on mission, Matthew records that he issued a warning that yet contained a promise of support by the Holy Spirit:

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ... You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10:16-22)

Mark places almost the identical warning and promises in what scholars have called the “apocalyptic discourse” during the last week of Jesus’s earthly life (13:9-13), emphasizing that “the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (v. 10) – or, as Matthew this time adds, “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14; cf. 28:19-20). Luke locates in yet another context the promise of the Holy Spirit’s instruction of what to say when the confessors of Christ are hauled before the courts (Luke 12:11-12).

The Johannine equivalent is found in the so-called “farewell discourses” of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel. The world is still hostile, or at least ignorant (John 14:17, 30; 15:18-19; 16:33). Jesus promises that he will send to his followers the Holy Spirit, who will “indwell” them (14:17). Notice that the terminology bears a forensic cast: the “Spirit of truth” is the *“allos Paraklêtos”* – another Advocate (14:16). The tables, however, are now turned: besides defending believers, this Counselor functions in prosecuting mode; he will “convict” (*elenxei*) the world in terms of sin, justice, and judgment (16:8-11). This does not mean that God has abandoned the world that he loved to the point of giving his only Son for the sake

of its salvation (3:16-18). Jesus tells Pilate that the very purpose of his own coming into the world was “to bear witness to the truth” (18:37). Jesus sends his disciples into the world in order that their witness may bring the world to believe in his divine mission; and their sanctification in the truth as well as their unity among themselves are to be integral to their testimony (17:17-23). To aid their witness, the Holy Spirit will “take the things of Christ” (*ek tou emou*) and “announce” (*anangelei*) them (16:14-15; cf. 14:25).

What, then, does the Holy Spirit inspire the followers of Christ to say in these situations? The crux of the matter – literally – may reside in the confession of Jesus as Lord. Oscar Cullmann suggested that witness under persecution was the context for the Apostle Paul’s declaration that “No one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus be cursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).³ Thomas’s acclamation of the risen Christ as “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28) may have been paradigmatic for confession in the face of a persecuting emperor such as Domitian, who took for himself the title “*dominus et deus noster*” (Suetonius, *Domitian*, 13). The German theologian and preacher Helmut Thielicke imagined a twentieth-century equivalent in which someone would have shouted “Jesus is Führer” in the midst of a Nazi rally.

In the middle of the second century, in an imperial context, Polycarp of Smyrna refused to say “Caesar is Lord,” to “swear by the fortune of Caesar,” or to “curse Christ”:

The governor persisted and said: “Swear and I will let you go. Curse Christ!”

But Polycarp answered: “For eighty-six years I have been his servant and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme against my king and Savior?”

But the other insisted once again, saying: “Swear by the emperor’s genius!”

He answered: “If you delude yourself into thinking that I will swear by the emperor’s genius, as you say, and if you pretend not to know who I am, listen and I will tell you plainly: I am a Christian. And if you would like to learn the doctrine of Christianity, set aside a day and listen.”

The proconsul declined Polycarp’s offer. As he was about to be burned, “a holocaust prepared and made acceptable to God,” the aged bishop looked up to

heaven and voiced what rings like a eucharistic prayer:

O Lord, omnipotent God and Father of your blessed Christ Jesus, through whom we have received our knowledge of you, the God of the angels, the powers, and of all creation, and of all the family of the good who live in your sight: I bless you because you have thought me worthy of this day and this hour, to have a share in the number of the martyrs in the cup of your Christ, for the resurrection unto eternal life of both the soul and the body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit. May I be received this day among them before your face as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, as you, the God of truth who cannot deceive, have prepared, revealed, and fulfilled beforehand. Hence I praise you, I bless you, and I glorify you above all things, through that eternal and celestial high priest, Jesus Christ, your beloved child, through whom is glory to you with him and the Holy Spirit now and for all ages to come. Amen.⁴

What, more fully, was the content of the Christian witness that might lead to martyrdom, even if not necessarily so? According to Acts 1:8, the risen but not yet ascended Christ promised his disciples: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.” The first witness borne at Pentecost in Jerusalem, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was to “the mighty works of God” (Acts 2:11). Peter interpreted the descent of the Holy Spirit as a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy concerning a universal outpouring of the Spirit, in a day when “whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:14-21). Addressing himself to the “men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem” (including presumably the visiting “Jews and proselytes”), the Apostle went on to present the foreordained story of Jesus of Nazareth, “a man attested to you by God with many mighty works and wonders and signs,” having been “crucified by the hands of lawless men,” but now raised up by God and established as both Lord and Christ (2:22-36). Peter’s concluding summons and offer was: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). And “those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (2:41), who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). When Peter repeated his recital before the court of the sanhedrin, he concluded: “We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him” – and “when they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill him” (Acts 5:27-33).

In turn, the Apostle Paul also sums up the gospel that he preached to

the Corinthians – a delivery of what he himself had received – in terms of Christ’s death and resurrection: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-11). This message he had brought to them “not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Holy Spirit and of power” (ibid., 2:1-5; cf. Romans 15:18-19). He recalls to the Thessalonians that “our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction” (1 Thessalonians 1:5), and “you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit” (1:6). In welcoming the message, they had “turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:9-10).

The mention of imitation in affliction brings us to the next stage in our display of witness to Christ under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁵

III. WITNESS UNTO DEATH AND THE IMITATION OF CHRIST

The First Letter of Peter was written to encourage the persecuted Christians in Asia Minor:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you ... If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. (1 Peter 4:12-16)

Peter presents himself as “a witness of the sufferings of Christ” and expects to “partake in the glory that is to be revealed” (ibid., 5:1). The risen Christ had predicted to Peter: “When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go” – thus showing, says the narrator, “by what death he was to glorify God” (John 21:1-19). Christ immediately instructed Peter, “Follow me”; and the Prince of the Apostles did indeed follow his Master in the way of the Cross. Peter himself had earlier confessed that he had nowhere else to go, since Jesus alone, the Holy One of God, had the Spirit-filled words of eternal life (John 6:61-69). A tradition known to Origen tells that Peter chose to be crucified head downwards, and Jerome attributes Peter’s choice to humility at his unworthiness to suffer in the same position as Christ.⁶

The Fourth Gospel records the Apostle John as having stood at the foot of the Christ’s Cross with Mary and the other women (John 19:25-27). From the pierced side of Jesus “came out blood and water,” and “he who saw it has borne witness – his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth – that you also may believe” (John 19:34-35). This event appears to be alluded to, perhaps among other things (say, the baptism of Jesus), in a complex and otherwise puzzling passage in the First Letter of John:

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has borne witness to his Son. (1 John 5:6-9).

In his great commentary on the Fourth Gospel, Raymond Brown showed himself skeptical of taking John 19:34 – a move found already in Chrysostom and Augustine -- as the Evangelist’s equivalent to an *institution* of baptism and the eucharist. Nevertheless, in the case of the Epistle’s concept of “the Spirit, the water and the blood as three *ongoing* witnesses,” the Spirit may “be pictured as working through baptism and the eucharist”:

The logic of the argument is that all Johannine Christians recognize the life-giving powers of the Spirit, of baptism, and of the eucharist; and they should reflect that all three were already symbolized in the outpouring of the Spirit, water, and blood on the cross (John 19:30-35). Thus the sacraments testify to the salvific character of the death of Jesus; and by constituting people as children of God and feeding them with heavenly food and drink, the sacraments are ways in which true believers share in the action by which Christ conquered the world (16:33).

If not as a matter of Gospel exegesis, then at least as a matter of Epistle exegesis, and certainly as a matter of theological interpretation, Brown is thus ready to join Rudolf Schnackenburg in the judgment that “the Spirit is the principle of life from which the two sacraments [of baptism and eucharist] acquire their supernatural power.”⁷

Raymond Brown lists ancient interpreters who link John 19:34 and/or 1 John 5:6-8 with the sacraments in one way or another, sometimes seeing the water and the blood as references respectively to the first sacrament and to martyrdom,

the “baptism of blood” (so Tertullian, Cyril of Alexandria, and indeed Thomas Aquinas).⁸ An old liturgical text connects the Passion of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the eucharist in a way that is particularly pertinent to our topic. The fourth-century anaphora in the eighth book of the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, after the narrative of the Last Supper and the offering of “this bread and this cup,” continues:

And we beseech you to look graciously upon these gifts set before you, O God who need nothing, and accept them in honor of your Christ; and to send down your Holy Spirit upon this sacrifice, the witness of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, that he may make [*apophênêi*] this bread body of your Christ, and this cup blood of your Christ; that those who partake of it may be strengthened to piety, obtain forgiveness of sins, be delivered from the devil and his deceit, be filled with Holy Spirit, become worthy of your Christ, and obtain eternal life, after reconciliation with you, almighty Master.⁹

Here the Holy Spirit, as both the Witness of Christ’s Passion and the consecratory Power in the eucharist, figures both in “anamnesis” and in “epiclesis” (as the liturgiologists say). Note also that the fruits of communion, given through the Holy Spirit, include both becoming “worthy of Christ” and the attainment of “eternal life” – two themes that readily fit with a martyr’s witness.

As a Methodist, I may be allowed to recall that John and Charles Wesley, in their Hymns on the Lord’s Supper (1745), developed the text from Apostolic Constitutions in the following way:

Come, Thou everlasting Spirit,
Bring to every thankful mind
All the Saviour’s dying merit,
All His sufferings for mankind;
True Recorder of His passion,
Now the living faith impart,
Now reveal His great salvation,
Preach His gospel to our heart.

Come, Thou Witness of His dying,
Come, Remembrancer Divine,
Let us feel Thy power applying
Christ to every soul and mine.... (#16)¹⁰

For the Wesleys, as hymns 128-157 in the same collection show, the “living faith”

was embodied in “the sacrifice of our persons,” as our self-oblation is joined to Christ’s, and all in the strength of the Holy Spirit:

Whate’er we cast on Him alone
Is with His great oblation one;
His sacrifice doth ours sustain,
And favour and acceptance gain.... (#137, v. 3)

Father, on us the Spirit bestow,
Through which Thine everlasting Son
Offer’d Himself for man below,
That we, even we, before Thy throne
Our souls and bodies may present,
And pay Thee all Thy grace hath lent.

O let Thy Spirit sanctify
Whate’er to Thee we now restore,
And make us with Thy will comply;
With all our mind, and soul, and power
Obey Thee, as Thy saints above,
In perfect obedience and love. (#150)

This inclusion of the self-oblation of believers in the self-oblation of Christ is vital, if the “imitation” of Jesus in martyrdom is not to be seen as some kind of pelagian “addition” to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ who “through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” (Hebrews 9:14). To the theme of martyrdom as the imitation of Christ we now come.

Stephen is traditionally given the title of “protomartyr” or “first martyr.”¹¹ Having delivered himself of a history of Israel culminating in “the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,” Stephen met the rage of his accusers in this way: “Full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.’” And as they were stoning him to death, he prayed “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” and cried aloud “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:54-60). Thereby Stephen, in the act of bearing mortal witness to Christ, transposed into christological key the very words of Jesus on the Cross at Luke 23:46 and 34: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit” and “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

In his own contexts, the Apostle Paul summoned his readers: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1); “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2). There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends, said Jesus on the eve of his Passion, commanding his disciples also to love one another and thereby share in the character and indeed the very nature of God (John 15:9-17; cf. 1 John 4:7-11). Self-donation appears to belong to the life of the Triune God both *ad intra* and *ad extra*.¹²

In the early second century, Ignatius of Antioch rushed from Syria to his expected and desired death in Rome. The good bishop considered that he might thereby “not only be called a Christian but found to be one. For if I am found to be one, I can also be called one, and be faithful when I am no longer visible to the world. ... Then I will really be a disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world will not even see my body” (Ignatius, “Letter to the Romans,” 2-4). More commonly, martyrdom is not deliberately sought but rather accepted, if it should come, as the last moment in a life of witness.¹³

The local account of Polycarp’s martyrdom, in the middle of the second century, presents him both as an imitator of Christ and as himself an example to be imitated, noting that his witness impressed even the pagans:

We are writing to you, dear brothers, the story of the martyrs and of blessed Polycarp who put a stop to the persecution by his own martyrdom as though he were putting a seal upon it. For practically everything that had gone before took place that the Lord might show us from heaven a witness in accordance with the gospel. Just as the Lord did, he too waited that he might be delivered up, that we might become his imitators, not thinking of ourselves alone, but of our neighbors as well. For it is a mark of true and solid love to desire not only one’s own salvation but also that of all the brothers.

... This then was the story of the blessed Polycarp, who, counting those from Philadelphia, was the twelfth to be martyred in Smyrna; yet he alone is especially remembered by everyone and is everywhere mentioned even by pagans. He was not only a great teacher but also a conspicuous martyr, whose testimony, following the gospel of Christ, everyone desires to imitate. By his perseverance he overcame the unjust governor and so won the crown of immortality; and rejoicing with all the apostles and all the blessed he gives glory to God the almighty Father and praise to our

Lord Jesus Christ, the savior of our souls, the pilot of our bodies, and the shepherd of the catholic Church throughout the world.

... We pray that you are well, brothers, who live according to the word of Jesus Christ and the gospel (with whom be glory to God the Father and the Holy Spirit), for the redemption of the faithful elect, for in such wise was the blessed Polycarp martyred; and may it be granted to us to come into the kingdom of Jesus Christ following his footsteps.¹⁴

In the Gallic persecutions of AD 177 at Lyons and Vienne, the servant girl Blandina was among those who “were comforted by the joy of martyrdom, their hope in the promises, their love for Christ, and the Spirit of the Father.” Blandina was not only spiritually but physically and iconically conformed to the scourged and crucified Christ:

Blandina was hung on a post and exposed as bait for the wild animals that were let loose on her. She seemed to hang there in the form of a cross, and by her fervent prayer she aroused intense enthusiasm in those who were undergoing their ordeal, for in their torment with their physical eyes they saw in the person of their sister Him who was crucified for them, that he might convince all who believe in him that all who suffer for Christ’s glory will have eternal fellowship in the living God. But none of the animals had touched her, and so she was taken down from the post and brought back to the gaol to be preserved for another ordeal. ... [T]iny, weak, and insignificant as she was, she would give inspiration to her brothers, for she had put on Christ, that mighty and invincible athlete, and had overcome the Adversary in many contests, and through her conflict had won the crown of immortality.

... Finally, on the last of the gladiatorial games, they brought back Blandina again, this time with a boy of fifteen named Ponticus. ... Ponticus, after being encouraged by his sister in Christ so that even the pagans realized that she was urging him on and strengthening him, and after nobly enduring every torment, gave up his spirit. The blessed Blandina was last of all: like a noble mother encouraging her children [cf. 2 Maccabees 7:20-23], she sent them before her in triumph to the King, and then, duplicating in her own body all her children’s sufferings, she hastened to rejoin them, rejoicing and glorying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet instead of being a victim of the beasts.¹⁵

From a region in which Christians have experienced centuries of suffering, sometimes to the point of martyrdom, comes an early twentieth-century instance of the imitation of Christ:

A Turkish officer raided and looted an Armenian home. He killed the aged parents and gave the daughters to the soldiers, keeping the eldest daughter for himself. Some time later she escaped and trained as a nurse. As time passed, she found herself nursing in a ward of Turkish officers. One night, by the light of a lantern, she saw the face of this officer. He was so gravely ill that without exceptional nursing he would die. The days passed, and he recovered. One day, the doctor stood by the bed with her and said to him, "But for her devotion to you, you would be dead." He looked at her and said, "We have met before, haven't we?" "Yes," she said, "we have met before." "Why didn't you kill me?," he asked. She replied, "I am a follower of him who said, 'Love your enemies.'"¹⁶

IV. THE SEED OF THE CHURCH AND THE FIRSTFRUITS OF THE KINGDOM

By the fourth century at latest, tradition has it that all the original Apostles – those appointed by the Lord himself to witness to the gospel -- were martyred.¹⁷ "The more you mow us down, the more we grow and produce," said Tertullian; "the blood of Christians is a seed."¹⁸ Alluding to Tertullian's dictum in one of its commoner forms – "*sanguis martyrum, semen christianorum*" – Pope John Paul II remarked that "the Church of the first millennium was born of the blood of the martyrs. The historical events linked to the figure of Constantine the Great could never have ensured the development of the Church as it occurred during the first millennium if it had not been for the seeds sown by the martyrs and the heritage of sanctity which marked the first Christian generations."¹⁹ In fact, few generations have passed without the numbers of the martyrs increasing. Their primary witness has brought many people to the faith. Stories abound across the centuries of missionaries suffering martyrdom at their entry upon new and hostile territories, while soon thereafter a church springs up and thrives. Under aggressively godless regimes in the 20th century, martyrdoms have -- counterproductively for the persecutors -- helped to perpetuate the Christian generations.²⁰

At another level, ancient Irish tradition reckoned as a kind of martyrdom the voluntary exile from the beloved homeland for the sake of spreading the gospel in foreign fields, sometimes at the cost of one's earthly life.²¹ To this may be assimilated in modern times those missionaries from northern climes who went in numbers to such places as "the white man's grave" of West Africa, knowing full well the mortality rate among their kind who succumbed to tropical diseases.

At another level again, the witness of the ascetical life, itself sometimes viewed in terms of martyrdom, may also yield fruit among others. Even in times of bloody persecution, Origen knew that there was a witness to be borne "not only in public, but also in secret, so as to be able to declare with the Apostle, 'For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world with holiness and godly sincerity.'"²² Concerning the ascetic witness of Origen, Eusebius reports that "by setting such an example of the philosophic life to those who saw him, he naturally kindled a similar enthusiasm in many of his pupils, so that even among pagan unbelievers and those who had been to schools and colleges there were persons of distinction who were won over by his teaching. Thanks to him, men like this with all their heart honestly embraced faith in the word of God, and came into prominence in the persecution that broke out at that time, some of them being arrested and finding fulfillment in martyrdom."²³

In his *Life of Antony*, Athanasius tells how the monk in his cell was "daily martyred by his conscience, doing battle in the contests of faith" (47), "reflecting on the dwellings in heaven, both longing for these and contemplating the ephemeral life of human beings" (45). When the Eastern emperor Maximin persecuted the Church in the early fourth century, Antony left his cell for the city of Alexandria, in order to support the confessors, "suffering in those ministrations ... like one who had been bound along with them": "He seemed like one who grieved because he had not been martyred, but the Lord was protecting him to benefit us and others, so that he might be a teacher to many in the discipline that he had learned from the scriptures. For simply by seeing his conduct, many aspired to become imitators of his way of life" (46).²⁴

At yet a different level, questions arise as to whether those killed in a struggle for "social justice" – the definition of which is often controversial -- are properly described as "martyrs." Such cases come to the fore in the March 1983 issue of the journal *Concilium*, which was dedicated to "Martyrdom Today."²⁵ Karl Rahner there recognizes that this would be an "expansion" (*Erweiterung*) of the classical understanding of martyrdom (German edition, pp. 174-76). Much depends on the criteria employed for the discernment of what Pope John Paul II called "the Redeemer's presence through the fruits of faith, hope and charity in men and women of many different tongues and races who have followed Christ in the various forms of Christian vocation."²⁶ The gifts of faith, hope, and charity are the "theological virtues" that are owed to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13). According to St. Cyprian of Carthage, self-sacrificial Christian witness by way of charitable works will be rewarded by a white crown, while a red crown will be added for testimony to Christ through the shedding of one's blood under persecution.²⁷ With an echo of 1 Thessalonians 5:8 as well

as 1 Corinthians 13:13, Augustine calls martyrs “the princes of faith (by their confession), of hope (by their fortitude), and of charity (by the breadth of their love).”²⁸

Apart from their primary witness to Christ and to the Christian faith and life that functions *evangelistically* in the spread of the gospel, what other functions fall to the martyrs in the life of the Church, particularly with a view to the final Kingdom of God? Their role as *examples* has already been treated under the heading of “imitation.” I suggest now that they further figure as *prophets*, as *intercessors*, as *precursors*, and as *unifiers*.²⁹

Their *prophetic* character was underlined by the French Lutheran historian Marc Lods in his study of “confessors and martyrs” as “successors of the prophets in the Church of the first three centuries.”³⁰ Noting the dictum of Tertullian that “we can suffer for God only if the Spirit of God is in us,” he characterizes the confessors and martyrs as “*hommes de l’Esprit*,” “people of the Spirit.”³¹ At a further stage in the history of God with the world, the martyrs prolong the gift of prophecy beyond both the Old Testament and even the first generations of the New. The Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas, young North African women martyrs under Septimus Severus (c. 203), were recorded in order to show the Lord’s promise of a great outpouring of the Spirit being fulfilled in the latter days: “Thus no one of weak or despairing faith may think that divine grace was present only among men of ancient times, either in the grace of martyrdom or of visions, for God always achieves what he promises, as a witness to the non-believer and a blessing to the faithful.”³² To their pagan persecutors, says Lods, the martyrs bring both the message of salvation and the threat of judgment. To their fellow Christians they bring the example of a courageous faith and the assurance of divine support. Eschatologically, they announce and prepare the establishment of God’s Kingdom in three ways: their victory as soldiers and athletes over the forces of Satan signals the final victory of God over the Enemy; having themselves withstood both the judgment of the world and (by the merits of Christ) the judgment of God, they now sit with God and with Christ; and in that capacity, as themselves redeemed, they share in the work of final redemption.

The appeal to martyrs as *intercessors* is documented by graffiti in the catacombs, both verbal inscriptions such as “*roga pro nobis*” and “*in mente nos habete*” as well as the depiction of “*orante*” figures.³³ The practice is theologically attested by St. Augustine, who distinguishes their case from that of the rest of the faithful departed: “The Church’s rule, known to the faithful, is that when the names of the martyrs are recited at the altar, it is not that the martyrs themselves are being prayed for. Prayer is indeed offered for others of the departed when they

are commemorated there. But it would be an insult to pray for a martyr, when we ought rather to be commending ourselves to his prayers.”³⁴ The Protestant Reformers objected to any practice that might detract from the sole mediation of Christ, but it would seem churlish to allow the fact of death – and especially a death undergone as a martyr – to detract from the principle declared by St. James that “the prayer of a righteous person has great power in its effects” (Jas. 5:16). The martyrs may, in fact, be said to “adorn” the Church at prayer. Bishop Kallistos points to the sequence of Pentecost and All Saints but one week apart in the Orthodox calendar:

The two feasts are seen as closely connected, All Saints being devoted to the consequences that the descent of the Holy Spirit has had upon the life of the Church. It is significant that the special hymns appointed for All Saints Day ... refer explicitly to martyrdom:

With the blood of thy martyrs, O Christ our God,
Thy Church is adorned throughout the world,
As with purple and fine linen....

The feast of All Saints thus proves to be in fact the feast of All Martyrs. The saint *par excellence* is the martyr.³⁵

It is, at the least, a happy coincidence that, in the liturgical scheme of the West, red is the color of both Pentecost and the feasts of the martyrs, even if the primary symbolic association is with fire in the former case and with blood in the latter (though, in fact, the two need not be so far apart).

The status of martyrs as *precursors* is pictured in the visions that some early martyrs had of their predecessors as having already “finished the course.” They have gone on ahead to the heavenly feast to which, in fact, all God’s people are invited. Blandina, we remember, “hastened to rejoin them, rejoicing and glorying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet.” At the martyrdom of Papyrus and Carpus, in Pergamum (Asia Minor) during the time of emperor Marcus Aurelius, “a woman named Agathonica was standing by, who also saw the glory of the Lord, as Carpus said he had seen it. Realizing that this was a call from heaven, she raised her voice at once, ‘Here is a meal that has been prepared for me. I must partake and eat of this glorious repast!’ ... And taking off her cloak, she threw herself joyfully upon the pyre. ... As soon as she was touched by the fire she shouted aloud three times ‘Lord, Lord, Lord, assist me, for you are my refuge.’ And thus she gave up her spirit and died together with the saints.”³⁶ From Numidia (North Africa) and the persecution under Valerian in 257-58 comes

a vision where the notion of following the forerunners is even clearer. Just before his death, James, who was to undergo martyrdom with Marianus, not only catches sight of Agapius and others at the heavenly banquet but is actually summoned to join them by a boy messenger who had himself suffered three days earlier:

Around his neck was a garland of roses, and in his right hand he was carrying a bright green palm-branch. He said, "Rejoice and be glad: tomorrow you too will dine with us."³⁷

The martyrs, in fact, may be seen as blazing the trail for all faithful Christians who will one day reach the heavenly destination.

The role of the martyrs as potential *unifiers* is a fresh perception of the modern Ecumenical Movement. The decree "Unitatis Redintegratio" of the Second Vatican Council declared that "Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments for our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary -- *aequum et salutare* -- to recognize the riches of Christ and the virtuous deeds in the lives of others who bear witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in his works and worthy of all praise" (4). Pope Paul VI took up the idea in his homily for the canonization of the Catholic Martyrs of Uganda, explicitly mentioning the Anglican martyrs from the same period.³⁸ The Ugandan Catholics and Anglicans commemorate on the same day – June 3 – their martyrs at the court of Buganda in 1885-87.³⁹

On his visit to Rome in October 1967, Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople spoke in St. Peter's of the cry of the martyrs common to Catholics and Orthodox alike calling for the reconciliation of the churches as a witness to the truth of the gospel: "We hear ... the cry of the blood of the Apostles Peter and Paul, we hear the voice of the Church of the catacombs and of the martyrs of the Coliseum, ... calling on us to leave no ways and means untried to complete the holy work that has been begun – that of the perfect recomposition of the divided Church of Christ – so that the will of the Lord may be fulfilled, and the world may see the first mark of the Church according to our Creed, namely her unity, shining forth brilliantly."⁴⁰

At the meeting of the Faith and Order Commission in Bangalore in 1978, I helped to write a short text on "Witness unto Death." Given its place in the larger study on "Sharing in One Hope," it is not surprising that we picked up some pneumatological themes, for those who "have the first fruits of the Spirit" are said to be "saved in hope" (Romans 8:23-25; cf. 5:5; 15:13). The development is fully

trinitarian:

Jesus the Messiah, consecrated by God and anointed with the Holy Spirit, is the witness to the Father.

He proclaims his Father's reign in this way: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the Lord's year of favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

When his own testimony, which is definitive, is coming to an end, Christ promises and gives to his disciples the same Holy Spirit with which he himself was anointed, in order that they too may bear witness to him, and therefore to his Father, to the ends of the earth, beginning from the very place where his own witness reached its summit in martyrdom.

[T]he Christian eucharist is a perpetual sacrament of Christ's martyrdom in the time before his final return in glory [cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26]. Already in this interval, the risen Christ makes himself present, in the Holy Spirit and by the sacramental sign, in order to conform us to himself, to make us into witnesses of the same God to whom he bore witness in his life, death and resurrection. Our sacramental configuration to Christ in the Spirit means that we put our deepest hope in God alone, in the One who has raised his chief witness from the dead and will be able to do the same for those who faithfully follow Christ in a testimony of which He himself is the pattern, the inspiration and the strength. Sometimes historical circumstances will demand that the Christian witness to the God of Jesus Christ take the form of a martyrdom in the strongest sense of the term. In these extreme cases, where Jesus has already passed because of the opposition which his testimony provoked, the Christian is called to persevere even to the point of death. The history of the Church affords many examples to show that God's grace will not fail his elect, even in the extremity of their suffering.

Some specific ecumenical consequences are drawn, and some recommendations made:

In the martyrs the Church discerns Christ himself, the very heart of its faith, beyond all interpretations and divisions. That is why the martyrs of the early Church and some great witnesses in the later history of the

Church are the common property of all Christians. In the tapestry of Christian history, the ever-renewed succession of martyrs is the golden thread. This also explains why, in some countries, the churches are engaged in the process of a mutual recognition of the saints, even if they were killed in the course of interconfessional struggles: beyond the inevitable cultural and ecclesiological limitations of their confession of faith it is possible to recognize the absoluteness of the Christ to whom they desired to bear witness.

... The reading of the acts of the martyrs and their presence in preaching serve to strengthen the churches in their witness today. It is desirable that an ecumenical anthology of both early and modern accounts of martyrdom should be published for the use of the churches, since the recognition of martyrs already transcends confessional boundaries and brings us all back to the centre of the faith, the source of hope, and the example of love for God and fellow human beings. The use of such a book would also strengthen the solidarity of all Christians in prayer and action with those who are in difficult or dangerous situations.¹¹

At the end of the second millennium and looking forward to the third, Pope John Paul II noted that "in our own century, the martyrs have returned, many of them nameless, 'unknown soldiers' as it were of God's great cause. As far as possible, their witness should not be lost to the Church. ... [T]he local churches should do everything possible to ensure that the memory of those who have suffered martyrdom should be safeguarded, gathering the necessary documentation. This gesture cannot fail to have an ecumenical character and expression. Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us."¹² In his encyclical letter "Ut Unum Sint," the pope returned to the ecumenical scope of the communion of the saints, again with special mention of the martyrs:

All Christian communities ... have martyrs for the Christian faith. Despite the tragedy of our divisions, these brothers and sisters have preserved an attachment to Christ and to the Father so radical and absolute as to lead even to the shedding of blood. ... In a theocentric vision, we Christians already have a common Martyrology. This also includes the martyrs of our own century, more numerous than one might think, and it shows how, at a profound level, God preserves communion among the baptized in the supreme demand of faith, manifested in the sacrifice of life itself. ... Albeit in an invisible way, the communion between our Communities, even if still incomplete, is truly and solidly grounded in the

full communion of the Saints -- those who, at the end of a life faithful to grace, are in communion with Christ in glory. These Saints come from all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities which gave them entrance into the communion of salvation." (83-84)

Pope John Paul II himself presided at an ecumenical celebration of the martyrs in the Roman Coliseum in May 2000. The last time I myself saw Pope John Paul II was in November 2004, on the occasion of a special Vespers at St. Peter's in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the conciliar decree "*Unitatis Redintegratio*." After his final years of suffering from physical infirmities, his face appeared radiant. Here was "strength perfected in weakness" (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:8-10). Here was a life that had been informed by the Holy Spirit.

The ecumenically dedicated Community of Bose in North Italy has taken up -- from Faith and Order at Bangalore in 1978 and from Pope John Paul II's Letters -- the task of composing an ecumenical martyrology.¹³ A delicate question in such an effort concerns the sad fact of killings among Christians of diverse confessions. Lukas Vischer, Swiss Reformed theologian and a former director of Faith and Order at the World Council of Churches, put the matter in very pointed fashion in a paper presented to a consultation at Bose in March 2004. Vischer cited not only the sufferings of Waldensians, Hussites, and Huguenots (the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572!) at the hands of "Catholics," but also the persecutions of Anabaptists and Mennonites by the "Reformed." Can each side now see the others as "martyrs"? Clearly, political and cultural factors played their part in such "inter-confessional" strife, but articles of faith were also involved, and so any "healing" or "reconciliation" of memories must also face -- and if possible resolve -- the doctrinal differences between the parties.

When the Forty [Catholic] Martyrs of England and Wales -- from the time of the Reformation -- were canonized in 1970, English Protestants were perforce reminded of the 300 of their own number, including Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, who were put to death under "Bloody Mary," the Catholic queen (1553-58). In his homily at the canonization, Pope Paul VI said this:

[We] extend our respectful and affectionate greeting to all the members of the Anglican Church who have come to take part in this ceremony. We indeed feel very close to them. We would like them to read in our heart the humility, the gratitude, and the hope with which we welcome them ... May the blood of these Martyrs be able to heal the great wound inflicted upon God's Church by reason of the separation of the Anglican Church from the Catholic Church. Is it not one -- these Martyrs say to us -- the

Church founded by Christ? Is this not their witness? ... Perhaps we shall have to go on, waiting and watching in prayer, in order to deserve that blessed day. But already we are strengthened in this hope by the heavenly friendship of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales.⁴⁴

A dozen years later, invoking the mutually inflicted martyrdoms, Rowan Williams -- a future Archbishop of Canterbury -- could write:

[I]f Christian belief expresses itself in communities of gift, there must be the possibility of the martyr's death becoming a "gift" to the martyr's murderers, the persecuted group becoming a "gift" to its enemies. And this requires two things: that the martyr's community celebrate the martyr's memory in such a way that he or she offers grace and hope to those outside; and that the persecuting body remember the martyr in penitence and thanksgiving.⁴⁵

It is to be noted that, since its Alternative Services Book of 1980, the Church of King Henry VIII now commemorates, on July 6, "Thomas More, martyr, 1535."

According to the insight of St. Filaret of Moscow (1782-1867), it is unthinkable that the walls of separation should reach up to heaven.

CONCLUSION

From the earliest days Christians have taken special care of the bodily remains of their beloved martyrs. In the case of Polycarp, their persecutors suspected that their concern for the body meant that "they may abandon the Crucified and begin to worship this man." Not so: "We could never abandon Christ, for it was he who suffered for the redemption of those who were saved in the entire world, the innocent one dying on behalf of sinners. Nor could we worship anyone else. For him we reverence as the Son of God, whereas we love the martyrs as the disciples and imitators of the Lord, and rightly so because of their unsurpassed loyalty towards their king and master."⁴⁶

Despite the medieval abuses castigated by the sixteenth-century Reformers, and in face also perhaps of the thaumaturgical qualities that have been attributed to authentic items, it is possible to interpret the veneration of relics positively as respect for the bodies that have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and for persons who, having "crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts," have shown in their lives the "fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-25). Such may be a pointer to the awaited work of the Spirit in the transformation of bodies when Christ

comes for the general resurrection.⁴⁷ We know that the Spirit can make dry bones live (Ezekiel 37:1-14).

The general resurrection will bear a trinitarian stamp. Returning, where we began, to the Apostle Paul, we recall his declaration: "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life also to your mortal bodies through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). According to 1 Corinthians 15:22, the Apostle is confident that "as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." The "last Adam has become a life-giving Spirit" (*ibid.*, v. 45). In expounding the "mystery" of the general resurrection, Paul adopts the notion of a "spiritual body" (v. 44), the product of a transformation from the perishable to the imperishable, from the mortal to the immortal (vv. 51-57).⁴⁸

Meanwhile, from beneath the heavenly altar, the "souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and the witness they had borne" cry out, "O Lord, how long?" (Revelation 6:9-11). "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'" (22:17). "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

Footnotes

1 G. W. H. Lampe spoke of "a pneumatology of martyrdom" (recognizing that martyrdom also had a "christology," a "soteriology," an "anthropology," and even a "demonology"). In a chapter on "martyrdom and inspiration" in the early Church, he wrote that "the martyr's testimony was believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the Christian who confessed his faith in circumstances of persecution was regarded as closely akin to the prophet as a recipient of revelation and a proclaimer of God's word": "The Christian was essentially a missionary, and martyrdom was for him the supreme and most effective mode of evangelism" (see *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, edited by William Horbury and Brian McNeil, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 118-35). For a brief, multi-faceted pneumatology, see Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Holy Spirit" in Colin E. Gunton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 273-95.

2 The earliest literary allusion to the martyrdoms of both Peter and Paul is probably found in the First Letter of Clement, chapter 5. The oldest liturgical tradition commemorates both Peter and Paul on June 29, "*passi sub Nerone*."

3 Oscar Cullmann, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, translated by J. K. S. Reid, London: Lutterworth, 1949, pp. 25-30.

4 "The Martyrdom of Polycarp," paragraphs 8-10, 14, from *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, introduction, texts, and translations by Herbert Musurillo, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp.

2-21: cf. Bruno Chenu and others, *The Book of Christian Martyrs*, translated by John Bowden, New York: Crossroad, 1990, pp. 36-43.

5 Hans von Campenhausen stressed the christological shaping of the distinctively Christian idea of martyrdom, but he probably overplayed the contrast between the apostles as original “witnesses” to the Resurrection of Christ and the “martyrs” as sharing in Christ’s Passion; see *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936 (substantially unchanged 2nd edn 1964). The themes of death and resurrection, of suffering and glory, are woven together in the idea and practice of witness from the start and remain so.

6 Origen is cited by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, III.1 (PG 20:216). Jerome: “A quo [Nerone] et affixus cruci, martyrio coronatus est, capite ad terram verso, et in sublime pedibus elevatis: assesens se indignum qui sic crucifigeretur ut Dominus suus” (*De viris illustribus*, 1; PL 23:638).

7 See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 30, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982, in particular pp. 572-85, 594-99; idem, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 2 (Chapters 13-21), Anchor Bible, vol. 29A, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, pp. 936-37, 946-52; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Die Johannesbriefe*, Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, vol. 13, 3rd edn, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1965, p. 261.

8 Brown, *The Gospel*, vol. 2, pp. 951-52; *The Epistles*, p. 575. For a full consideration of the Fathers on the matter, see Sebastian Tromp, “De Nativitate Ecclesiae ex Corde Iesu in Cruce,” in *Gregorianum* 13 (1932), pp. 489-527, especially pp. 523-26.

9 Translation from R.C.D. Jasper and G. I. Cuming, *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed*, 3rd edn, New York: Pueblo, 1987, p. 111.

10 *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, no. 16; see G. Osborn (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, vol. 3, London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1869, p. 226. A facsimile of the original edition of the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* – a collection whose ecumenical importance has emerged in the second half of the 20th century – appeared under the auspices of the Charles Wesley Society, Madison, NJ, 1995.

11 In addressing the Lord, the Apostle Paul speaks of “to haima Stephanou tou martyros sou” (Acts 22:20).

12 See, for example, from two quite different theological camps, D. Lyle Dabney, *Die Kenosis des Geistes: Kontinuität zwischen Schöpfung und Erlösung im Werk des Heiligen Geistes*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1997, and David B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

13 Historically, it was in Asia Minor, sometime between Ignatius and Polycarp, that a terminological distinction emerged between “martyr” and “confessor” (a “witness unto death” as compared to a brave witness that does not end in being killed). So Theofried Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, Münster: Aschendorff, 1980, pp. 257-306. The author summarized the arguments of his entire book in “Märtyrer und Verfolgte im frühen Christentum,” in *Concilium*, vol. 19 (1983), no. 3, pp. 169-73 (English language edition, no. 163). Theologically, Karl Rahner stressed the active character of martyrdom as the fruit of a free decision, a faithful conviction, a self-surrender – with Christ and by his grace – into the

hands of the living God, and thus the “death of deaths” and the Christian witness; so in his “excursus on martyrdom” in Karl Rahner, *Theologie des Todes*, Quaestiones Disputatae 2, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1958, pp. 73-106.

14 “The Martyrdom of Polycarp,” paragraphs 1, 19, and 22, in Musurillo, pp. 2-3, 16-17, 18-19; cf. Chenu, et al., pp. 37, 42-43.

15 “The Martyrs of Lyons,” in Musurillo, pp. 72-75, 78-79.

16 See Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, pp. 433-34. The stories of some Orthodox martyrs under the Ottoman empire – some of them converts from Islam -- can be found in Norman Russell, “Neomartyrs of the Greek Calendar,” *Sobornost* 5 (1983), no.1, pp. 36-62.

17 See Ernst Lucius, *Die Anfänge des Heiligenkults in der christlichen Kirche*, ed. Gustav Anrich, Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1904, p. 141.

18 Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 50 (PL 1:603): “Plures efficimur, quoties metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum.”

19 John Paul II, “Tertio Millennio Adveniente” (Apostolic Letter of 10 November 1994), 37.

20 For Russia in Soviet times see, for instance, Olivier Clément, “Martyrs and Confessors,” in *The Ecumenical Review* 52 (2000), no. 3, pp. 343-50.

21 See Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, “What is a Martyr?” in *Sobornost* 5 (1983), no.1, pp. 7-18; here p. 16, interpreting the so-called Cambay Homily from c. 700.

22 Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 21 (PG 11:589), quoting 2 Corinthians 1:12.

23 Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI. 3 (PG 20:529).

24 Athanasius, *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, transl. Robert C. Gregg, New York: Paulist, 1980, pp. 65-67.

25 J. B. Metz and E. Schillebeeckx (eds.). English language edition, no. 163.

26 John Paul II, “Tertio Millennio Adveniente,” Apostolic Letter of 10 November 1994, paragraph 37. In his 1993 encyclical on moral teaching, *Veritatis Splendor*, the Pope extended the notion of martyrdom to “a voluntary acceptance of death” out of “fidelity to the holy law of God”(91). Such a “witness makes an extraordinarily valuable contribution to warding off, in civil society and within the ecclesial communities themselves, a headlong plunge into the most dangerous crisis which can afflict man: the confusion between good and evil”(93).

27 Cyprian, *On Works and Almsgiving*, 26: “In pace vincentibus coronam candidam pro operibus dabit, in persecutione purpuream pro passione geminabit” (PL 4:644-646). In his “Exhortation to Martyrdom,” addressed to Fortunatus, Cyprian writes: “In the baptism of water is received remission of sins, in the baptism of blood the crown of virtues”; and he hints that the “garments of Christ” to be worn by the martyrs are “the very wool and the purple from the Lamb [cf. Revelation 7:14]” (PL 4:679-680).

28 Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmum LXVII*, 36 (PL 36:835; CCSL 39:895).

29 Gerhard Ludwig Müller nicely says that the martyr describes “the basic shape of the Christian saint”: “Martyrdom constitutes the original image of Christian sainthood; the contest with evil, its paradigm; the assimilation to Christ in the Holy Spirit, its goal; and the Eschaton, its perspective”; see *Gemeinschaft und Verehrung der Heiligen: Geschichtlich-systematische*

Grundlegung der Hagiologie, Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1986, pp. 221-35 ("Der Märtyrer Christi – Grundfigur des christlichen Heiligen"). Müller cites Cyprian to trinitarian effect: "The martyrs [are] full of the Holy Spirit and already, through their suffering, closest to the face of God and his Christ (*martyres sancto spiritu pleni et ad conspectum Dei et Christi eius passione iam proximè*)" (Epistle 69, 7 [PG 4:417] = Epistle 66, 7 [CCSL 3/C: 441]).

30 Marc Lods, *Confessors et martyrs: Successeurs des prophètes dans l'Église des trois premiers siècles*, Cahiers théologiques 41, Neuchâtel and Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1958.

31 Ibid, pp. 28f. Tertullian: "Nos pati pro Deo non possumus nisi Spiritus Dei sit in nobis" (*Adversus Praxean*, 39; cf. *Scorpiace*, 9).

32 See "The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," 1, in Musurillo, pp. 106-9. The accounts were indeed assembled at the Holy Spirit's directive: "Since the Holy Spirit has permitted the story of this contest to be written down and by so permitting has willed it, we shall carry out the command..." (16, pp. 124-25). The final apostrophe reads thus: "Ah, most valiant and blessed martyrs! Truly are you called and chosen for the glory of Christ Jesus our Lord! And any man who exalts, honors and worships His glory should read for the consolation of the Church these new deeds of heroism which are no less significant than the days of old. For these new manifestations of virtue will bear witness to one and the same Spirit who still operates, and to God the Father almighty, to his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom is splendor and immeasurable power for all the ages. Amen" (21, pp. 130-31).

33 See, for instance, Lods, pp. 63-65.

34 Augustine, *Sermo 159*, 1: "Ideoque habet ecclesiastica disciplina, quod fideles noverunt, cum martyres eo loco recitantur ad altare Dei, ubi non pro ipsis oratur; pro caeteris autem commemoratis defunctis oratur. Injuria est enim, pro martyre orare, cujus nos debemus orationibus commendari" (PL 38:868).

35 Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia, "What is a Martyr?" (as in note 21), here p. 7.

36 "The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonica," in Musurillo, in particular pp. 26-29.

37 "The Martyrdom of Saints Marian and James," in Musurillo, in particular pp. 208-9. Saturus, who was martyred along with Perpetua, was granted a vision of the paradise garden that they would enter, and there they "met Jucundus, Saturninus, and Artaxius, who were burnt alive in the same persecution, together with Quintus who had actually died as a martyr in prison." The newcomers asked the others where they had been; but the supporting angels said to them, "First come and enter and greet the Lord" (Musurillo, pp. 118-21).

38 Paul VI, "Homily for the Canonization of the Ugandan Martyrs" (18 October 1964), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964), pp. 901-912, in particular p. 906; cf. idem, "Address at the Shrine in Namugongo" (2 August 1969), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 61 (1969), pp. 590-91. The former homily of his predecessor was recalled by John Paul II in his apostolic letter of 10 November 1994, "Tertio Millennio Adveniente," where he wrote that "the witness to Christ borne even to the shedding of blood has become a common inheritance of Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans, and Protestants" (37).

39 On the Ugandan martyrs, see Chenu, et al., pp. 152-60. In *The Martyrs of Papua New*

Guinea, Theo Aerts chronicles the lives and deaths of 333 missionaries and locals, from seven different churches, who were killed during World War Two (Port Moresby: University of Papua New Guinea Press, 1994).

40 E. J. Stormon (ed. and transl.), *Towards the Healing of Schism – The Sees of Rome and Constantinople – Public Statements and Correspondence between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate 1958-1984*, New York: Paulist, 1987, p. 172.

41 *Bangalore 1978: Sharing in One Hope*, Faith and Order Paper no. 92, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1978.

42 John Paul II, "Tertio Millennium Adveniente," 37.

43 Produced under the direction of Riccardo Larini of the Bose Community: *Il libro dei testimoni: martiriologia ecumenica*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan): San Paolo, 2002. The notion of "witness" is here understood quite broadly.

44 *The Canonization of the Forty English and Welsh Martyrs: A Commemoration presented by the Postulators of the Cause*, London: [Jesuit] Office of the Vice-Postulation, 1970, pp. 58-64.

45 Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984, pp. 56-57.

46 "The Martyrdom of Polycarp," 17, in Musurillo, in particular pp. 14-17.

47 The Council of Trent spoke of "the holy bodies of the martyrs and other saints now living with Christ, which were once living members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit, and which will one day be raised and glorified by him for eternal life (*quae viva membra fuerunt Christi et templum Spiritus Sancti, ab ipso ad aeternam vitam suscitanda et glorificanda*)" (Denzinger-Hünemann, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 1822).

48 For the coming of the final Kingdom of God as the completion of the continuing Pentecost, see Sergius Bulgakov, *The Comforter*, transl. Boris Jakim, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, pp. 280-85, and indeed as far as p. 358.

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