

5-1-1968

The Spirit of Man: The Subject as Seen by Theologians

George W. Hoyer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoyer, George W. (1968) "The Spirit of Man: The Subject as Seen by Theologians," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 39, Article 30.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol39/iss1/30>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

The Spirit of Man

The Subject as Seen by Theologians

GEORGE W. HOYER

The *National Catholic Reporter*, which, like jokes about the Model T, is doing more to sell its product than the reverent sober sell could ever hope to do, has a column on the front page called "Cry Pax." Just to look at the title is to rejoice in the spirit of man. There's the feel of "A plague o' both your houses!" the sobering sound, "Peace, peace when there is no peace!" and at the same time the sense of the kiss of peace, or the *Pax Domini*, "The peace of the Lord be with you always," to which the faithful respond, "And with thy spirit." The column carries the sharp weapon of ridicule that works for renewal in the church like a scalpel, and it delights in that best-of-all humor when a group laughs at itself. It also carries the typos that make the kind of jokes everyone can participate in. In this one Ingrid Bergman gets mixed up with Ingmar Bergman. The quote is from the Catholic *Herald Citizen* of Milwaukee, which was reporting a lecture in which Father Walter Burghardt addressed himself to the modern phenomenon of the man who is committed to nothing: "He is a man alone, isolated, a stranger to himself and to the world and to God. His Hell is the Hell of Ingrid Bergman. . . ." To which the editor appended

This paper was originally delivered to the Twenty-first Central States Regional Conference of the American Institute of Architects meeting at Wichita, Kans., from November 3 to 5, 1966. The author is professor of practical theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

the comment, "He's in sad shape, but he has good taste." "Cry Pax" in *National Catholic Reporter*, May 4, 1966.

This is one summary—sharp, succinct, and probably suburban—of what man in this era is like. "He's in sad shape, but he has good taste." There are others, like Hagglund's cartoon in the *Saturday Review* (July 30, 1966) picturing a whole sequence of men, identical in black little bow ties and baggy shirts and trousers walking out of an office door like a chain of paper men—the caption: "Mr. Peebles fell into the Xerox machine!" Enough voices are lamenting the faceless man and the machined man to make that sobering humor. But the depths are quickly reached when the faces of poverty and starvation stare out at us from pages of slick magazines, or, when eyeball to eyeball, we must face up to the fact that the starving have skeletal hands that ask only for the pennies we waste but which could feed them for another day.

Is it possible to generalize about "the spirit of man" when there is such great divergence among men? Where exactly does the spirit of man find some common ground on which to stand between those suffering creatures and the well-fed crowd of us who look forward to scheduled luncheons and Western vittles? "Cry Pax." "The Lord be with you, and with thy spirit." Will that do it? Add to those faces the blindfolded ones of men flushed out of burning Vietnam villages and on their way

to prison camp, and the staring ones of the burned and bombed dead, all of which merely repeat and repeat the thousands and thousands of the dead faces of World War II bodies stacked like cordwood and waiting the ovens. Where exactly can architecture locate the spirit of man in order to do some building around it? Or the clergyman, for that matter, to share the Spirit of God with the spirit of man?

Ultimately the question does come home to the individual. A subject like "The Spirit of Man" may be considered in the abstract and must be projected out of generalities, but finally it is made up of persons, and of persons each one of whom is insisting that he is a person, that he is of some dignity and of mysterious worth. Even those who rode the black horses in all the horrible dramas of World War II or who ride them still in the tragedies of current struggles of race or of poverty or of pollution must finally dismount and be themselves—individual persons. Saul Bellow in *The Adventures of Augie March* described an old woman trying to hire herself as a guide in a European museum and recorded her indignant insistence that she was a person.

I said to her, "I don't want a guide. I understand how it is, but what do you want me to do? People are coming up to me all the time. So why don't you please take this money and—" I was beginning to be in pain over it. . . .

"People! But I am not other people. You should realize that. I am—" and she was voice-stopped, she was so angry. "This is happening to me!" she said. She seemed to crowd her heart with her elbow and came up close and started it again, that queer begging and demanding.

This ancient lady was right too, and there

always is a me it happens to. Death is going to take the boundaries away from us, that we should no more be persons. That's what death is about. When that is what life also wants to be about, how can you feel except rebellious?

How *do* you reach the spirit of man, of individual man? "Cry Pax!" "The Lord be with you. And with thy spirit." Will that do it?

One would have to be of bold disposition to claim to be able to interpret the work of Salvador Dali. Because that famous watch of his hangs drooping and almost dripping over a limb, it does not prove that he understands time as bent, a kind of contemporary echo of "The time is out of joint." But he has done a number of pictures that show man pierced with a square hole, usually propped up with some kind of crutch. It takes only a little imagination to see here a visual parable of the fact that man comes into life and time with a built-in square of emptiness. T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" suggests something similar.

We are the hollow men
 We are the stuffed men
 Leaning together
 Headpieces filled with straw. Alas!
 Our dried voices, when
 We whispered together
 Are quiet and meaningless
 As wind in dry grass
 Or rats' feet over broken glass
 In our dry cellar
 Shape without form, shade without
 colour,
 Paralyzed force, gesture without
 motion;

Those who have crossed
 With direct eyes, to death's other
 Kingdom

Remember us — if at all — not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

Eliot prefaced that poem with two epigrams. One is "A penny for the Old Guy" — "the cry of English children on Guy Fawkes day, as they go about with straw effigies of the seventeenth-century traitor Guy Fawkes — later to be hung and burned — and ask for pennies with which to buy fireworks. But it is we who are the real hollow men, the poem hints — not the lost violent souls like Fawkes." * And is it enough to reach the spirit of man to invest a few pennies for fireworks that the drab and the ugly might be hidden for a little beneath the sparks? "Cry Pax!"

It is about us that Eliot is talking in the fifth part of that poem:

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear, prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.
Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire
And the spasm

Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

Into our hollowness we struggle to stuff the straw of significance, but we remain hollow still, and between every effort and seemingly meaningful effect falls the Shadow. And all that makes meaning in the life that is long is the repeated if but half understood, *For Thine is the Kingdom*.

The other epigraph above Eliot's poem is a phrase used by the black cabin boy in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* announcing the death of a Mr. Kurtz, a European trader: "Mistah Kurtz — he dead." Mr. Kurtz "had gone into 'the heart of darkness' — the mysterious primitive life of the African jungle — with high intentions, but was soon barbarized by it: 'The wilderness (Conrad wrote) . . . found him out early. . . . I think it whispered to him things about himself which he did not know — and the whisper . . . proved irresistibly fascinating. It echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core.' Despite his hollowness, however, as Marlowe the narrator of the story insists, Mr. Kurtz had been 'a remarkable man.' His dying whisper, 'The horror! The horror!' showed at least 'some sort of belief; it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note

* *Modern Poetry*, ed. Maynard Mack, Leonard Dean, and William Frost, 2d ed., (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., ca. 1961), VII, 162.

of revolt. . . . it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth.'” (Ibid., p. 162)

“Some sort of belief . . . it had candour, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt . . . it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth.” This has the sound of many a contemporary concept — relevantly irrelevant. “Cry Pax!”

Now what have I been saying? It has all been an opener for further conversation. To all that theology might say from the Sacred Scriptures or from the systematic doctrinal summations of the church, to all the descriptions of man as being “alone, isolated, a stranger to himself and to the world and to God,” of man as being in a hell of his own and destined for a hell not of his making nor his choosing, the reaction of all of us on this occasion and in this setting might be, “He’s in sad shape, *but he has good taste.*” And what I have been trying to evoke by joke and by poet and by novel is the reflection that *man is in sad shape*, even though “he has good taste.” We are the hollow men, and if the only thing that echoes loudly in our hollow core is “some sort of belief” no matter with how much candor and conviction, its significance is only “The horror! The horror!” But what I am hoping for is further conversation.

The *Living Church*, a magazine of the Episcopal Church, carried a little squib recently describing the conversation on a plane between a space scientist and a Christian clergyman. When the scientist discovered that his seat companion was a bishop, he began to discuss his views of religion. “There are so many conflicting views among the denominations; but I have given it all a good deal of thought and I have concluded that all that is essential

can be summed up in those words of the Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.’” The bishop nodded as if in profound agreement. Then he said, “You men who are probing into outer space have literally gone far beyond me, but I have given this whole matter of space a great deal of thought as well, and I have concluded that it can all be summed up in those well-known words, ‘Twinkle, twinkle, little star, How I wonder what you are.’” Not much of an opener for further conversation, no doubt, but the kind of rejoinder to gladden the heart of many a clergyman who has found himself wandering down similar primrose paths.

This is the opener I would propose for that further conversation. Remember the empty square hole in the Dali figure, the hollow square of emptiness? I would suggest that this is really a visual parable of every man as he enters into life. In every man there is a *God-sized square of emptiness*. Again, one may not be able to interpret Dali, but consider this — he has done some pictures of the Virgin Mary sitting in typical Renaissance robes, and within her bosom Dali has carved an empty square; but within that square is seated the Child Jesus; and within the Child Jesus there is also a square of emptiness. And inside that square is the host of the Holy Eucharist.

One can reach many different conclusions about the symbolism involved in these drawings. But perhaps the most significant, I suggest, is made by the interpretation that the square of emptiness is *God-sized*. If it were once known by all the hollow men of our generation that their hollow core of being was exactly the size that God designed for Himself, and if men would admit this God who will not force

an entry but who urgently presses His willingness to enter every life, all human existence would be revolutionized. There is involved here, of course, another interpretation that is particularly Christian in its significance—Jesus Christ, appearing as a man among men, has both shared our problem and solved our problem. It is through the life and work of Jesus Christ that the revelation about the God-size of man's hollowness and the completeness of God's willingness to enter has become clear. In addition to that reference to the influence of Jesus Christ there is reference to the continuing presence of Jesus Christ in the church. The implication is that God is even now making His presence available to fill in the hollowness of all who will receive Him.

Perhaps all this can be interpreted just as succinctly and just as meaningfully from another starting point. All the symbolism involved here with its reflection of the tremendous revelation of God's entry into this world asserts the importance of man. Man may indeed be in sad shape, but this sad shape is man. He has been created by God, not to be His slave but to be His companion. He was made by a God who needed no companion, whose essential being was not plagued by lonesomeness, but whose divine love, whose self-giving *agape* was such that He made man to love. And in the very design of that creature He built in a place for Himself. But even if one's starting point is man, the conclusion must deal with God. Man is a worshiping creature. At the very heart of his being is the awareness of the existence of a God before whom, even though he may rebel and reject the imperative, he should bow down in adoration and responding love.

It could be said, then, that the symbolism read out of Dali as basic to a definition of man is the centrality of God and the priority of worship. Man is fearfully and wonderfully made, but the most fearful and wonderful part of his construction is the space within him for the boundless and infinite God. All this brings us to the conclusion that the definition of man can only begin with the word *God*. "God made man in His own image." It is true about the entire definition of the spirit of man as it happens to be true about the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning *God*." This is the first and basic fact about man as understood by the theologian.

For further conversation let's try it all once again in terms of a simple contemporary parallel. Use the picture of someone preparing to construct a huge picture puzzle. He must first of all decide on the particular scene which he will develop into a puzzle. His must be the overall view of the completed subject. Others may never get to see the complete picture, but since he is building it, creating it, since his is the prior view, he will have the entire scene under his eye. Obviously in our parable it is God who laid out the complete picture of His universe. He sketched into that picture all the elements that make up earth's total environment. He determined to include man in the picture and conceived the makeup of man's body and spirit. Then God proceeded to create all the pieces of the picture.

There are several significant things about this total picture which by revelation He has made clear to those willing to accept it. One is that His total design does not contain simply the picture of one man, or even the picture of one man and one

woman. What is portrayed in the total picture, the revelation of God makes clear, is a whole community of humankind. God created *humanity* and not simply a man and a woman. His desire was for a multiplying race that would be *involved* with one another as *family*, as brother to brother, as father to child, as husband to wife, as man to woman, as nation to nation. This became very clear as God acted to call for Himself a particular people and make a chosen race out of the children of Abraham. It became equally and convincingly clear as through Jesus Christ He gathered a symbolic twelve like the twelve tribes of that chosen race. It is clear in our present age as He builds for Himself "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, God's own people," giving to the members of the church all the Old Testament names once given to His chosen people.

Another significant thing about the total picture God designed is that God has placed *Himself* into the center of that picture. He was not creating a world which He would watch as if it were in some distant amphitheater. He did not design generations of puppets whose antics over the years would provide laughs for those times when the divine ennui would prompt Him to watch. The creation that God saw as very good was a creation that was designed around God. It is as though He Himself were the central figure in the picture puzzle, around which all of the other interlocking pieces of humanity and of created animal life and vegetable life and mineral "life" clustered in interlocking pieces. What is more, the humanity that He created was each one in its place designed to carry a piece of that God. That is hardly the way to say it, for it conveys the im-

pression that there could be particles of God, bits of deity. Man was designed with a God-sized space within him in which the whole of the infinite God could find a place. And in God's initial design of His created universe He placed Himself not only at the center of all created things, but He entered into the very center of every created man's being. He "breathed" into man's nostrils the breath of life, and man "became a living being." He "created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him."

This immense design of the total universe — with all its stars and planets, with all the worlds and spheres, with all created things, men and women, animals, vegetables, minerals — all these things moved successfully from God's drawing board into actual created life. These things were all entities, separate in their own right, each having its own individuality and personality, and yet all these things interlocked into one great solid whole. And the keystone, as it were, of the whole thing, the piece that made it possible for all the other pieces to find their place, was God Himself.

And now what happened? It was "a happening," the kind of thing in which the participants seem to be entirely serious but which onlookers can only interpret as foolish or even inane. This "happening" in its results makes the entire creation seem something of a mistake; and yet the basis of it all, that unique promise of man's creation which made the "happening" possible, makes the entire creation a thrilling risk. This is the basis of the "happening," something fundamental to the definition of the spirit of man — God willed that man should have a will. The mankind which God designed for His particular picture

puzzle was no flat, one-dimensional, four-color printer's image. He was man, man indeed! Fearfully and wonderfully made, man within whom dwelt the infinite God—he was all of that. But more—he was man, whose construction in God's image implied that he was not a mere machine, but was equipped with a free will which made it possible to decide whether he would continue to be God's or would strive to become *as God*. Within the image of the picture puzzle this man was able to stand up, to shake off the interlocking curves that bound him to his place in the total puzzle of the universe, and to stalk off the board, as it were, and declare himself independent of the Designer's intention. And yet (the mystery of it!) it was the Designer's *intention* that he be able to do exactly this. He built into man the freedom of the will. At the same time it was the Designer's intention and fondest hope that the creature which He had made in His own image would not succumb to the temptation to be *as God*, but would see that the meaning of his life was complete only as he remained God's man within the initial design. God hoped that His creature would recognize that he could be happy only as he lived his life and participated in its possibilities within the interlocking unity of God's entire universe. God hoped that man would hold to the conviction that real life had as its center and keystone *God Himself*, and that living this life could only be realized in *relationship*, in "life together," together with God and with fellowmen.

But when man chose to be his own lord and master, when man chose to stand up and stalk off the picture-puzzle board and to take his place at the edge of God's in-

tervention, God's secondary will *permitted* it. He had intended for man to be in a position to run his own life, and part of His intention was that if a man chose to go it alone, he would have to bear the brunt of his decision. Anything less than this would have made man less than man. Any intervention on God's part to force man back into his place would have in the very action distorted man from a human being to a machine run by a power outside himself. This would have been the very opposite of God's creative intent. And so man was able to assume the attitude of high dudgeon, to stand arrogantly on the outside edge of God's total plan, and with one egoistical, envious, ignorant swipe of his hand to push the entire puzzle off onto the floor of the living room of God.

Now we have come closer to the circumstance and distorted environment in which man must be examined. Here begins the sadness of the shape he is in and the badness that touches his taste. The basic fact that explains the sad shape of man Luther called "the bondage of the will." St. Paul, even though he was labeled Saint, agonized over the fact that the good he would he didn't, and the evil he wished he wouldn't, he did. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24) Man's rebellion against God left him incapable any longer of love for God or of deep concern for his brother. This is not a strange or unbelievable claim of theology. We all experience a similar reaction when we have exploded in a selfish spasm of irritation against someone we love or toward whom we have obligations. We may shout out accusations or unreasonable insults and slam out of the room. And who dares approach us as we sulk in

our tent? "Just leave me alone!" And if we try to carry on with our normal duties feeling as we do, we bungle and we break things and everything goes wrong. If all this is true when minor picture puzzles are smashed, is it far from reason that the nature of man itself would be distorted when in self-centered pride he stormed out of the presence of God?

A significant trio of facts must be observed. In the first place, the marvelous thing is that man although on the surface apparently no more than another piece in the midst of the jumbled mass of pieces of this universe, can be seen sorting out the confused pieces and fitting together the universe his own precipitous action had destroyed. In his inventive restructuring he displays abilities that seem almost to rival divinity. In the midst of what seems to be a chaos, and which for generations seemed to be only jumbled mystery, man has begun to put together such an accumulated knowledge, such a science, that there seems to be almost no end to the possibilities of his power. That is one of the significant things about man as he is.

A second significant observation is that in the midst of all of the greediness, all of the self-grasping ambition, all of the ego-centered pride of that busybody man, there are moments of love, there are huge expenditures of unselfish energy designed totally for the welfare and happiness of humanity, structured to achieve goals that improve the conditions of fellowmen. For all that it was self-centeredness that caused man's downfall, his concern for his own little children and not infrequently for the stranger whose only claim on him is that humanity reveals a nobility that is a mark

of *man* even though he bears as well the scars of Adam and the brand of Cain.

There is a third factor, one that can only partly be observed by those who stand as men with man in the midst of the fallen pieces. This fact is the intervention of God within the life of every man in the hope of bringing about a restored connection. This fact is one which the theologian would say has been *revealed* by God. But this fact is something which those who work with the inner processes of man have sometimes been able to suspect and to which they have given various terms of their own inventing. But, the theologian asserts, man would not be able completely to apprehend the situation had not revelation made it plain. Consider the sequence of acts that brought about this fact in man. Once the world puzzle went crashing to the floor, God Himself intervened. He intervened in a manner that would have occurred only to the infinitely wise God. He reached down and picked up a few of the pieces and reserved them for Himself. He could have swept out the entire game and begun anew. He could have declared the whole effort a total loss and made a new creation, beginning with a new construction of a mankind that would have had no choice but to be loyal to Him. But the loving action of God expressed itself in a different way. He allowed His creation to continue. But He took out of the jumbled puzzle some of the most significant pieces, and yet pieces which in the very nature of the situation that fallen man had initiated would scarcely be missed. He took out *some of the pieces of the sky*. You know the way it is in picture puzzles — there are vast areas of sky that have almost no variation in color, whose very

blandness causes the difficulty of the puzzle to increase because they provide no apparent variation in color or distinctive shape. This is what God did. He took out pieces of the sky. He set up a situation in which man, in order to make sense out of the universe, would have to look elsewhere for some of the key pieces. He would have to look up to God to find his sky. This is a symbolic way of saying something very significant. God picked Himself up out of the puzzle. He no longer walked and talked with man so that together they might make stirring plans in the framework of the whole picture. He reserved Himself for a relationship quite different from what His initial design had intended. Where He *had* built Himself in as the central being of all created beings, after the Fall, He, as it were, removed Himself from direct contact with His creatures.

It would create a totally false impression to say that He picked Himself up and departed, leaving the universe on its own resources. But it would be less than accurate to ignore this drastic shift in design and to act as if He had retained the same kind of obvious relationship with man, the rebel, as He had initially expressed with man, His child. The result? The God-sized square of emptiness in men! More accurate than describing God as departing from man would be to say that rebelling man had in his very rebellion pushed God out of himself. As one looks at mankind's life in the total universe, it becomes apparent that God did not choose to remain in lives in which He was so evidently unwanted. As a result, mankind, designed to have the living God as the ground of his being, now attempts to build his life on no other footing than his own dust. Man enters

life equipped with only a God-sized space. In that space there is to be found, in the natural state of things, only emptiness. And empty man, knowing something is missing, yearns and aches, even as he sulks or seeks.

God wanted man to realize his emptiness and work on the puzzle. But He did not abandon man nor leave him to his own resources. He revealed His presence with men through repeated mighty acts. He deliberately called out Abraham and his family to be His chosen people, and made the Children of Israel into a nation that was to be His standing invitation to all men to return to their God. And then the climax! God carried out from His working drawings a significant shift in the relationship of the jumbled pieces. After many years of man's confused efforts to rearrange the puzzle, God deliberately reached down and placed Himself into the arena of His action — *Himself*, in a way so different, so complete, that Christians have always spoken of it as new. The Christian doctrine of the incarnation, which explains that God Himself took on human nature and entered into life and time as Jesus Christ, asserts a truth that decisively reorients human life. Instead of permitting man to remain in his yearning and his aching, to struggle with the God-sized space of emptiness within him, and to puzzle over the indistinct picture of God who would have to be found at the center of the puzzle to make it all make sense, God returned to live in a direct relationship with men. He walked into our life in a form that made Him indistinguishable from a Galilean carpenter, and yet He was there, apparent to faith, so that Jesus Christ could say, "He

who has seen Me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

What is the point of all this action on God's part? By this dramatic act He set up a world ecology which of necessity would force life to be lived in "the creation tension." All the pieces of God's creation were there, but they were once again without form, that is, without complete and meaningful integration; they were "void" and empty of full meaning. Within that formlessness, just as the Spirit of God had brooded over the waters at the time of the initial creation, so the Spirit of God was present again, brooding, designing, intending the new shape of a new world and a new age. The removal of vital pieces of life's pattern aimed for this result, that "the creation tension" would affect the total living of men. This tension would compel their attention. They would be forced to be looking elsewhere for the missing pieces of the sky. But when God placed Himself among those pieces in the person of Jesus Christ, the "creation tension" was tremendously increased. Just as the Word was "in the beginning," and "all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:2-3), so the presence of Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, among all the jumbled pieces of the world, has developed the kind of "creation tension" in our world that compels reaction on the part of men. The existence of the incarnated Son of God among men compels men to realize that the real puzzle, and its total solution, is something significantly and magnificently different from anything that could be conceived by the mind of man alone. More than that, the presence of the incarnate Son of God and the creating,

energizing Spirit of God is exactly the situation that preceded God's breathing into man the breath of life and making him—a man. The Son and the Spirit in our world and time! The Spirit of God broods over all mankind—and God's Word works!

All this, said in the language of an illustration, is familiar ground to those who are acquainted with the Scriptures. The Bible makes very clear that God exists. It asserts that this God created man and placed him to live as the dominant figure in a fascinating, complex world. It clearly explains the initial freedom of man's will that enabled him to go God's way or go his own. It reflects realistically the disaster of man's rebellion against God. It calls this rebellion by the name of *sin*. It clearly asserts that sin has so corrupted man that he is in himself incapable of restoring life to God's initial design. His will is in bondage. It reveals long ages of God's pleading with men, speaking with men through prophets and through the action of world history, attempting to turn him back to his initial relation with his Creator. And then with the beginning of the New Testament the Scriptures assert that God fulfilled the many promises He had made of a new creation by entering time as Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the incarnation has more to say about the significance of the spirit of man, as the object of all of God's re-creative activity, than anything else in the Scriptures. St. Paul stands astonished at the realization that Christ Jesus in the form of God emptied Himself of His divine prerogatives to assume the human nature, but, let it be underlined, God did indeed assume the human nature. What greater comment can be made on the importance

of man and the significance of the spirit of man than that God Himself "became flesh and dwelt among us"! (John 1:14)

But all this would remain an incomplete story, and the spirit of man would remain nothing but a struggling factor of ineptness, if there were not more. That is true because man is so false to himself. There would be no cause for optimism that all this would end in anything but failure, even though in dignified failure, if the story had no further plot line.

If the action of God were only a matter of placing some new pieces into a puzzle for man himself to recognize and reconstruct, it would be quite inadequate to solve man's dilemma. The decay of fallen man, as the Scriptures describe it, is much greater than man himself can repair. If any illustration of the depth of the corrosion of man were needed, what man did to Jesus Christ would supply it. What partial excuse we can muster out of the difficulty of recognizing this carpenter as the Son of God vanishes if we describe what man did to that Man as merely the inhumanity of men to an individual man. The entire record is a revelation of the evil that lives in the heart of humanity. That crime is no unique crime. That crucifixion is not the only sin. That men of His day rejected all that Jesus Christ had to say and all that He *was*, can be matched in our day by the rejection of fathers by their children and children by their fathers, and the rejection by nations of whole nations even to the point of attempted genocide.

But what is at its root rejection of God can be summarized in the rejection of Jesus Christ by the mankind of His day. The fact that they betrayed Him to the very officers of the enemy conquerors whom

they detested, the fact that those enemies were goaded into crucifying Him, all this can be matched by the betrayal of many men to their enemies, and by the years of total torture and suffering that have been endured up to our day by innocent victims in political intrigue and struggle. All the blood that was shed by Jesus Christ on that Roman cross can be matched by the bleeding wounds of suffering men throughout the ages. But while in that suffering of Jesus Christ is epitomized all the evil that men can do to man, a worse thing is revealed. Man rejects the good that is God. Without the consideration of these facts there would be no honest appraisal of the spirit of man. Shall we cry "Pax! Pax!" when there is no peace? To say that "man is in sad shape" is but to attempt phrasing in words which a man can hold in his mind an actuality so far beyond comprehension and so revolting and so repulsive that no man wants to hold it in his consciousness. But it is a dreadful truth, a truth made most evident and most dreadful in man's treatment of Jesus Christ, that man is indeed in sad shape. "Mistah Kurtz — he dead." "The horror! The horror!"

It is at this point that theology's most revolutionary doctrine enters and completely revolutionizes the understanding of the spirit of man. At this point the Biblical assertion is made that the life and death of Jesus Christ was vicarious, was substitutionary. His life and death and coming to life again were means for the direct achievement of the intention of God by which He Himself would take over all the evil that is within mankind and forgive it. This is the very heart of Christian theology. It is, we believe, the very heart of Hebrew theology as well. The opinion that

the sacrifices offered on Old Testament altars were something that would change the mind of God is but one more revelation of man's need for sacrifice. God intended the sacrifices He commanded to be reminders, strong visual reminders, to men that they could live the real life only as they were in touch with God, and that they could be in contact with God against whom they had repeatedly sinned only as that God in His steadfast love accepted them. Sacrifice was not designed to change God but to make man realize that God must change *him*. In exactly that way the life of Jesus Christ was not designed by God to show man how he ought to live. If that were the point of His intervention in time, God could only hope for an increase in the rate of suicide. Only despair can follow an attempt to imitate the life of the Son of God. But Jesus Christ made very clear that He regarded Himself as God's Suffering Servant, as the One who would by His own life ransom the lives of men. He declared Himself to be the sacrifice that would remove the sins of the world. And when after His death Jesus Christ came to life again, He made clear that God's entry into time had placed a whole new power of regeneration into the puzzle of life. He indicated that He did not intend for man to remain the dying and confused being that his own rebellion had made him. He unleashed within the circumstances of humanity the powers for a new age, a new being, a new mankind.

All of this is background for what Jesus Christ indicated was to come as He spoke of the outpouring of the Spirit of God after His own ascension marked the removal of His visible presence among men. If the incarnation, in which God took His place

in the fashion of one man, is a miracle and an amazing condescension, it is as nothing compared with this greater miracle—which is of the essence of contemporary life—that God has poured out His Spirit upon all mankind and that He has deliberately in this new approach entered into the circumstances of every life so that all the God-sized emptinesses of man that are not deliberately closed to Him can be filled with the Spirit of the living God. This is the most significant thing that can be known today of the spirit of man.

It is here that the risk of exclusiveness and narrowness on the part of the church becomes most dangerous. But let it all be said positively at this point. The theology of the Christian religion asserts that the Spirit of God reaches into the lives of men through the action of God in His Word. That was apparent in His creative Word, it was climactically apparent in His redeeming Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, and it is continually apparent in His Word as it works in the Sacred Scriptures, in the sacraments, and in the mutual sharing of this Word among those who accept and believe it. This means that when in the company of God's people this Word of God is talked or is received in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism or the celebration of the Eucharist, God is making Himself available for inclusion inside the hollowness of mankind. The symbolism of Dali shows the Child Jesus within the square of emptiness of the Virgin Mary. It suggests the reality of Christ's humanity by the Christ Child's own square of emptiness (He emptied Himself and became obedient unto death!). Finally, as an ultimate fact to be reckoned with, it also shows this significant action of God within humanity by

the symbolism of the bread that is used in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar. Christian theology would assert that God has released by His continuing action in the world a new kind of humanity within the church that is moved by the Spirit of God. And although the church continues to be made up of sinning and fallible mankind, yet as it continues to accept the forgiveness and new life of God through Jesus Christ, it is what God intended it to be — a new creation.

As astounding as this belief in a new creation is, equally astounding is its incompleteness — the fact that Christian man remains as inadequate as he is. It is astounding that a creating God while making a new creation would yet leave man in the sad shape he is in. No Christian claim ever maintains that the Christian displays in his average daily living or in the totality of his life the kind of perfection one would expect of God's new creation. What Christian theology does contend is that there is a new man at work in the midst of the struggle of mankind to put together the pieces of a jumbled universe. There is a new relationship between the God who fills all things and the hollowness of man, a relationship which has been achieved through Jesus Christ and which must be reckoned with in any analysis of the spirit of man.

At the same time Christian theology

would assert that the Spirit of God is at work among all men. The doctrine of divine creation and the doctrine of divine incarnation and the resurrection of Jesus Christ all say such significant things about the dignity and worth and importance of every individual human being that no understanding of the spirit of man can fail to reckon with their implications. The outpouring of the Spirit of God upon all men is as significant as the fact that the Son of God was made man among us. Some of these implications have yet to be grasped by the church itself. It must learn to know humbly that it stands as a part of mankind, re-created by God in order to be God's servant for the reconstruction of all of creation. Any kind of self-seeking separation that causes the church to go into an exile, interested only in its own existence, denies all that has been said about God's intention for mankind or for re-created mankind. The church must take its place with all the men of the world in a greater concern for the totality of humanity. With the kind of "greater love" that no man has except by God's Spirit, the church must act for the rebuilding of a world as a part of the divine effort to free the spirit of man.

Cry Pax!

The peace of the Lord be with you always — with your spirit!

St. Louis, Mo.