

## **“Spirit” or “Heart” in Spiritual Theology**

### **I- One or More Meanings?**

**Question:** *You use the word "heart" in various moments in the Solid Foundations Course. What exactly is "Heart"? I thought I remembered you mentioning it as a synonym for "Spirit" very early on in the Course. I breathed a sigh of gratitude at the time. You see, I'd never quite knew what the theological meaning of "heart" was despite my attempts to learn. It always seemed like an amorphous thing. But in today's video on the Prayer of the Heart, where you are speaking in terms of romantic love, teenage love especially, "Heart" sounds like the emotions. So is the heart: the spirit... the emotions... the will... something else? I'm confused.*

**Answer:** This is indeed a complex question and difficult because we are constantly crossing between theory and practice, where theory could be too abstract, far from how we perceive and understand the reality of practice. We cross between what we do (will), what we feel (emotions), and what really happens deeply buried in our depths (spirit). We are crossing from the experiential style of St Teresa of Avila to the solidly built Theology of St John of the Cross, and back to her.

But, it is a legitimate question. Moreover, it is of the utmost importance to give a satisfactory, understandable and practical answer to it because at the end of the day it is a practical question: the reader, the student, the person being formed need to know exactly "what to do" and what really is happening in his or her depths.

Yes, I have used "heart" in three slightly different ways, in three different places of the Solid Foundations Course, covering slightly different meanings.

1- The first use I made of "heart", is a more general and anthropological way of describing the human being in these areas: body, soul and spirit. This description of what we are made of is met up with in different parts of the Course. It can be found near the beginning of the Course, in "Dogma and Spiritual Life" (you will have an extract of this presentation in the second part of this article) and then later, while explaining one of the diagrams of the Prayer of the Heart, the anthropological diagram.

It is important to add that I used an equivalent word to "heart", i.e. "spirit", at the beginning of the second part of the Course, right before the Theological virtues, underlining the fact that this reality called "spirit" is key to all the structure of the Spiritual Life and Spiritual Theology. The main aim of the graces we receive from God is to rebuild our spirit, to make it be reborn from above. This is why I talk about it just before the theological acts: they are meant to help in the growth of the spirit.

2- The second use occurs when in the third part of the Course (introductory lessons to the Prayer of the Heart) I explained that the "heart" of the human being could be seen as having two areas: the upper half and the lower half. And in this lesson I invite the student to love Jesus not only with the higher part, but with the lower part as well, which is probably new to the majority, because we usually keep this part of our heart for a human being (husband, wife).

3- We may add a third way of using the word "heart", which is where I explain the core movement of the Prayer of the Heart: offering our heart to Mary or to Jesus.

Nevertheless, one can't separate the two first uses of the word from the third - the context of the movement of the Gift of ourselves that characterises the Prayer of the Heart. The gift of ourselves, i.e. offering our heart to God, is explained, as mentioned above in the introductory lessons, where I describe the movement of the Prayer of the Heart, when I use the diagram of the sea.

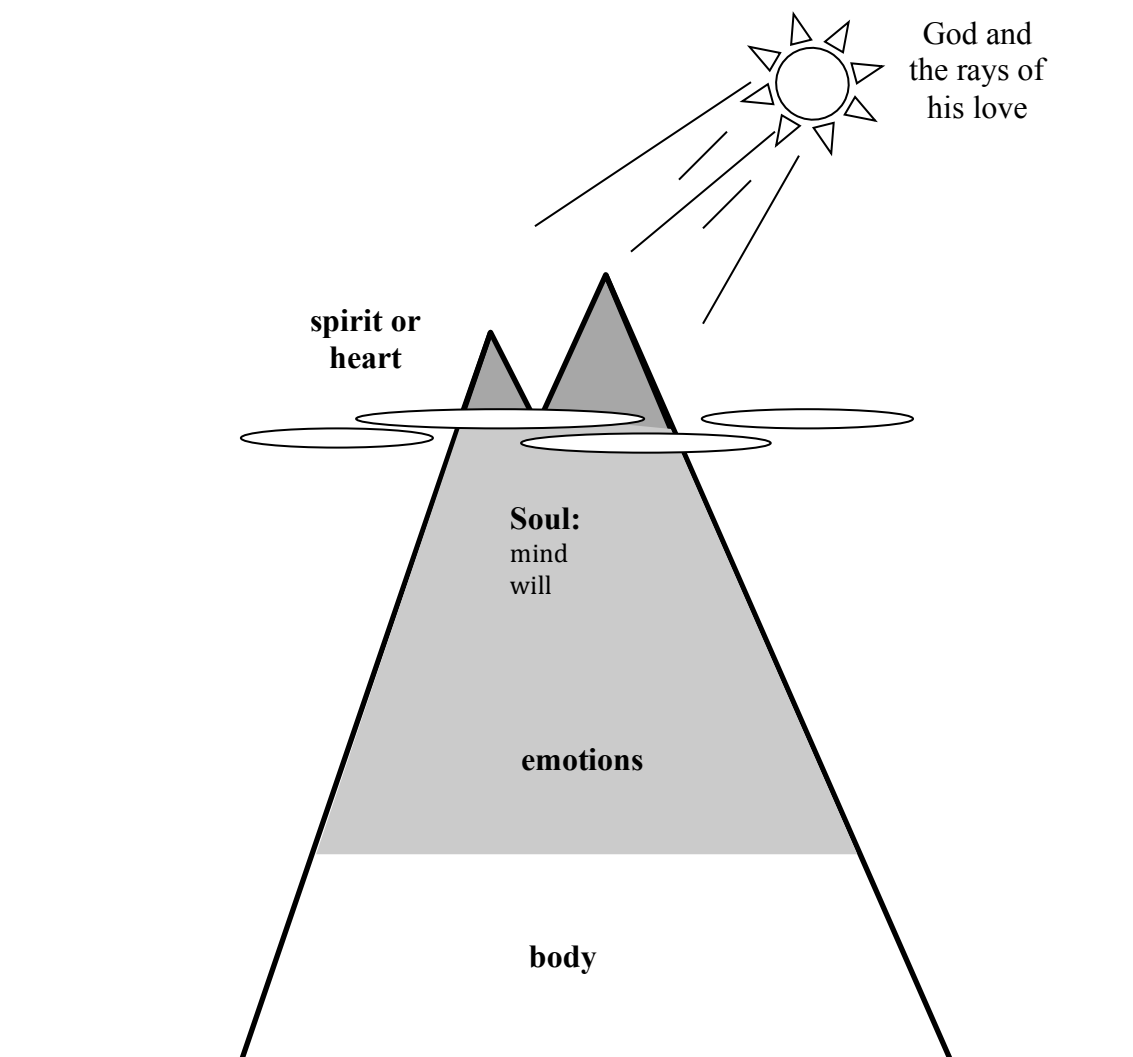
Offering ourselves to God is the core simple movement of the Prayer of the Heart that allows God, in response to the gift of ourselves, to act in us (in our spirit or heart). When the invitation is to offer oneself to God, I summarise the "oneself", i.e. our entire being, by the word "heart." In this case, "heart" covers everything, and still, covers the deepest part (the spirit), because it is this part that will be really taken directly by God and acted upon.

So yes, "heart" is "spirit" absolutely, the highest part of the soul. In this case "heart" is used in its Biblical sense. St Paul only once uses the triple division of the human being "body, soul and spirit" in one of his letters (1Th 5:23) and here one can easily put "heart" instead of spirit. It is the deepest part of our being, the supra-conscious part.

### St John of the Cross' Explanation

And here, I do define "spirit" as St John of the Cross does: the deepest part of the soul, that is beyond the area of our consciousness. "Consciousness" covers the following activities: seeing with the mind, feeling with our emotions, sensing with our senses, and it is closer to God than the soul. Furthermore, it is the only area in us capable of dealing directly with the Uncreated very Nature of God.

One can use the following diagram in order to visualise the four areas: body, emotions, rational soul, and spirit (or heart).



Spiritual Anthropology Diagram

## The Composition of the Spirit

The spirit is composed, like the rational soul, of the three faculties: mind, will and memory, but they are above consciousness and rather *passive* in their dealing with God, in the sense that it is God who acts in them and through them. They participate in the very life (being) and operations of the Trinity.

In my drawing, above, I place the spirit/heart beyond the clouds, as it deals directly with the "sun", i.e. God Himself.

- **Counter Objection:** Now, why, while being the deepest part of ourselves, would we disentangle it from the deep emotions?

- **Answer:** Emotions are not always superficial. They can involve all our being. They are not superficial for they do involve active decision-making: to love is an act of the will, despite the fact that it can be described as an emotional act. As you can see then, it is an act and not just only a passive emotion!

It is true that emotions technically belong to a middle area between the "sense" (body) and the rational part in us (rational soul) as the diagram above illustrates, but still they are deeply connected with the spirit (or heart in the biblical sense). Aren't we called to love God "with all our heart"? Unavoidably then we can see that, to a certain extent deep emotions and the spirit overlap.

## St Teresa of Avila

If one is familiar with St Teresa of Avila's writings, one will notice that she describes the "Prayer of Quiet" (which is a supernatural intervention of God in us) as having our conscious "**will**" taken by God, and the "**mind**" and "**memory**" being left free. "Mind", "will" and "memory" are normally the three main faculties of the rational Soul representing the upper part of the soul, they are conscious.

I personally disagree, not with the contents of what she says (who am I to do so!), but with her anthropological choice of "will" here, describing what is taken by God during His supernatural action in us (i.e. when we enter a state of contemplation). I choose "heart" instead. Why? Because here, I rather think that the "part" that God takes from us and introduces in Him (or absorbs) during contemplation is not only our "will", but it is **all our being**, the **core of our being**, which cannot be characterized by "will" only, but involves the supra-conscious part (the spirit), not the conscious part (the soul).

But one can't say – as St Teresa does – that our "will" (i.e. the active conscious faculty of our soul) is taken by God during the Prayer of Quiet. Why so? Because technically our will is part of the conscious area in us, it is part of the rational conscious soul and only the spirit (passive supra-conscious mind, will and memory) can be touched directly by God says St John of the Cross.

Of course, even so, one can't deny the role our will has in loving (or giving oneself), or in the loving attention we offer to God during the Prayer of the Heart.

Since a part of our being is taken by God during the "Prayer of Quiet" (the supernatural action of God inducing contemplation), and since our conscious part is still really free.... (but if it becomes too active, of course we will come out of the encounter, so I see why she chose "will"), I prefer to follow here St John of the Cross and say: God takes our spirit (supra-conscious part of our being, the summit of the soul, the eye of the soul, or the bottom of the soul (depending how you look at it)).

In conclusion: I can't call it the "Prayer of the Spirit", so I slipped into the biblical use of "heart", that can replace "spirit", I preferred, therefore, to call it the "Prayer of the Heart".

## The Romantic Heart

When, in the *Solid Foundations Course*, in the introduction to the Prayer of the Heart, I speak about the necessity of loving God with the lower half of our heart, the part that we usually give to a husband or a wife, I divide our heart into two areas, the upper and the lower. Yes, I deal with Love, but love is not only emotions as we saw! That would be deeply wrong. You see, does this use of heart cover the one I use in the technical part explained above?

Let me answer by saying the following:

If I want to love Jesus totally, and open to Him the "eros" part of myself that usually I would give to a human being, while saying to Him: "Jesus I give you all my heart...." what does "heart" here entail for you here for you? I would simply say: everything. It can't be just emotions. Certainly, it covers emotions but goes far beyond them: it involves the will, but, more especially, it involves the gift of oneself! In the final analysis, to love is to give oneself to the one we love.

Again, as a response to our love, to our giving Him our heart (our entire being), He takes my heart, and usually, with the Prayer of Quiet there is a supernatural part of me that is acted upon and taken and introduced in God, submitted to a supernatural action of nourishment! So, now, how would you name it? If you gave all your being, symbolised by "heart"...., what is heart? Everything, the core of our being, and all together our very spirit because the soul and senses are still free, left free!

To return to your question, I would conclude by saying that you chose the word that better expresses the contents explained above.

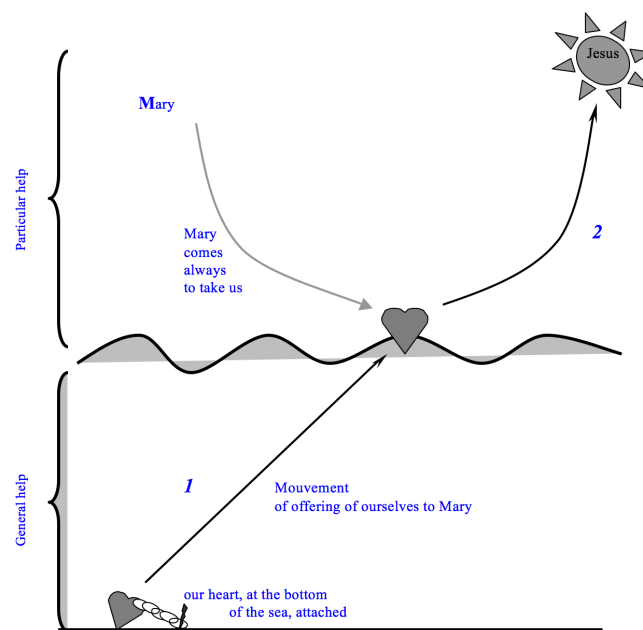


Diagram of the Sea

## II- Heart/Spirit from Scripture & Tradition

I would like to add two more uses of equivalent words in the Greek of the New Testament and in the Byzantine tradition, and finally in the Latin tradition.

Greek Philosophy uses the word Greek word "noûs" in order to talk about this highest or deepest part of the soul: the spirit. Amongst the use made by the Greek philosophers there is an ambivalent use: sometimes it may mean mind or intuition, and sometimes the eye of the mind, or better: the eye of the soul... which we also call "spirit".

(see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nous>)

The Greek fathers will do the same. Later on, St Augustine will use the Latin word "mens", to allude to the same part of our being. Followed later by St Thomas Aquinas. As an example, when speaking about Christ's Passion, St Thomas Aquinas will say that the Lord's "mens" was seeing his own divinity.

This is also why the Greeks say after Communion: "we have seen the true Light" (like in the Transfiguration). It means that a deep area in us (the spirit or heart) is seeing God! This is what Job says: "yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:26) We have also: "blessed the pure in heart, for they will see God" (Matthew 5:8). As one can see, the Lord used "heart" here!

In two of his letters, St Paul speaks about our spirit:

In one he invites us to keep our "mind" where God is, where Jesus is, risen and seated at the right hand of the Father. "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your [hearts] on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your **minds** on things above, not on earthly things." (Col 3:1-2). The Greek word "phroneite" is used in verse 2. Although it means mind, it could be translated either by "spirit" or "heart". Keep your minds all the time in God. It would be better to use "hearts". It is from this advice that we have the dialogue in the Anaphora: "lift up your hearts". The Byzantine Liturgy uses *cardia* (heart), while in Latin we have "sursum corda" (heart).

(see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sursum\\_corda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sursum_corda))

The second text is altogether more precise, but could be misleading: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind (noûs) is unfruitful." (1 Co 14:, the ambivalence of the meanings of noûs as mentioned above). But, he rightly used "pneuma" which is usually translated "spirit". What happens in the spirit is beyond consciousness. This verse is magnificent for its precise distinction between what is deep in us, beyond consciousness, the spirit, where the Holy Spirit acts and prays and what is happening in the conscious part: the mind and will (soul): "the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Rm 8:26-27), and what is happening in the conscious part: the mind (the soul).

Let us remember as well one of the texts that the majority of the New Testament writers had in mind, especially St Mathew, namely, the following: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws." (Ez 36:26-27) As one can see, the Holy Spirit is poured into the new heart!

In addition there are similar verses on the same theme: "Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." (Dt 10:16) and "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and

with all your soul, and live." (Dt 30:6) We can readily see the relationship between the circumcision (i.e. purification) of the heart and loving God with all our heart! Baptism is the new circumcision (i.e. purification), the circumcision of the heart! See: Col 2:4-12; Ph 3:3; Rm 2:28-29.

So too, St Luke, describing to us the depths of Our Lady's prayer and spiritual activity uses the word "heart": "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19. See also 2:51.) Then we have the Rhino-Flemish mystics who used other words to speak about the same area: "grunt."

Of course, we need to be careful to observe, as mentioned in the above explanation, that it is seen by some as the highest part of our being, and by other mystics as the bottom, the deepest part. We should never separate the two ways. They speak about the same thing, but it depends how one sees the depth, and therefore the closeness to God: either "high up", or in the "deepest part." The spirit or heart, is the second deepest part in us.

As I have indicated before, I personally follow St John of the Cross who uses "spirit". St Teresa of Avila uses perhaps once, the distinction between soul and spirit, when she writes (toward the end of her life) the Seventh Mansion, in her book: *Interior Castle*. Here she warns us that the distinction between *soul* and *spirit* is very subtle and difficult to be noticed if one doesn't have the experience (of being there). She gives two examples or images to illustrate it. In the Seventh Mansion, then, one is united with Jesus, which means that the spirit now is well formed and detached from its previous condition of purification and preparation (see diagrams below).

### **Spirit in Heaven and on Earth**

Here I feel I should mention something of great importance and rarely underlined by the commentators and the masters: it is the spirit only that has the faculty to deal directly with the very nature of God, as is illustrated at the end of the Spiritual Canticle of St John of the Cross. In the end of the Spiritual Canticle of St John of the Cross. The soul can't taste substantially and properly the very nature of God, neither in this life or in the life to come. St John of the Cross expresses it as follows:

*"The cavalry dismounted at the sight of the waters."*

7. It is to be observed that the cavalry did not dismount to taste of the waters, but only at the sight of them, because the sensual part of the soul, with its powers, is **incapable of tasting substantially and properly** the spiritual blessings, **not merely in this life, but also in the life to come**. Still, because of a certain overflowing of the spirit, they are sensibly refreshed and delighted, and this delight attracts them—that is, the senses with their bodily powers—towards that interior recollection where the soul is drinking the waters of the spiritual benedictions. This condition of the senses is rather a dismounting at the sight of the waters than a dismounting for the purpose of seeing or tasting them. The soul says of them that they dismounted, not that they went, or did anything else, and the meaning is that in the communication of the sensual with the spiritual part of the soul, when the spiritual waters become its drink, the natural operations subside and merge into spiritual recollection." (St John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* Stanza 40, 7)

## Image and Likeness

And last but not least, many fathers of the Church said that the *noûs*, the spirit, is the very image and likeness of God, adding that with the Adam's Fall, we lose the likeness but the image remains, even if damaged. This is why I do personally use a simple image to explain the form of the spirit in the beginning of the spiritual journey: plasticine. The "Image" of God in us is the matter of the plasticine and the "likeness" of God is the form the plasticine takes on. It should have God's form! We are like the half dead man on the side of the road in the parable of the Good Samaritan - our spirit is half dead! This can be symbolised by a squashed potato, far from God, deformed, waiting to be reformed, born again.

### III- The Creation of the Spirit

God is overflowing with love and creates a being capable of entering into communion with Him, capable of participating in his intimate life, in his two operations (1- the Father generates the Son from all eternity, and 2- the Father and the Son, as from one principle, spirates the Holy Spirit). The act of this creation is unprecedented. By creating a being "in his own image and likeness", God renders man capable of participation into his life. This happens essentially in the spirit (or heart) of the human being.

He has created man with three spheres or levels: the spirit, the soul and the body.

**The spirit** is the specific part of man which is capable of receiving God **as He is**, depending on his receptivity, capable of living his life and of participating in his operations.

**The soul**, on the other hand cannot participate directly in the intimate life of God (in his Uncreated being). The soul only receives a faint echo of the very being of God. What distinguishes the spirit from the soul is that the spirit is rather passive in its interaction with the being of God. It is God who impresses his being on it. This region of our being, the spirit, does not come down into the conscious part of our being, it is supra-conscious, that is to say, that it is not felt by the conscious part (the soul), being superior to the soul. This is why we frequently speak about the supra-conscious and not the unconscious<sup>1</sup>, when we are in a state of attentiveness.

Mind, memory and will reside in the spirit and in the soul. But mind, memory and will, passive in the spirit, are taken up by God (acted on by God), whereas in the soul these three faculties are active and conscious. The soul only receives crumbs, an echo of that which is received by the spirit. Quite simply the soul does not have the capacity to receive God's divine being, as He is. Even in heaven, the soul cannot receive God as He is<sup>2</sup>; certainly, she will receive fullness but fullness according to her measure.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Maritain uses this expression: cf. "De la grâce et de l'humanité de Jésus", Paris, 1967, p.51-52. He also uses the term 'supra-conscious'. The notion exists in the mystical Tradition of the Church, Cf. for instance: John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, III,26,4. St. Teresa of Jesus uses the same terminology (Cf. *7 Mansions* 1,11). There are also expressions such as: 'the soul's interior', the 'most intimate *interior* of the soul', 'something very

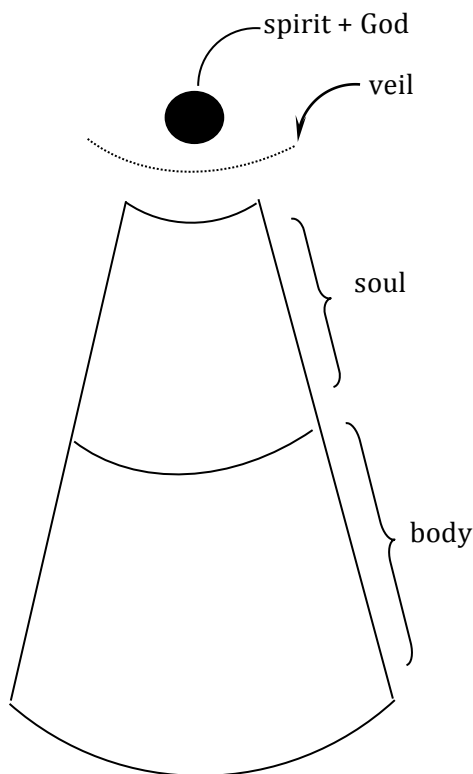
<sup>2</sup> Cf. The teaching of St. John of the Cross and the passage in *Spiritual Canticle* A 39,6 where he states that neither on earth nor in heaven can the soul receive God as He is: 'As this part is so sensitive and does not have the **real** power to **taste** the spiritual gifts **itself**, not being endowed with the capacity for it, **neither in this life, nor in the next**; but by means of a **redundancy** of the spirit, it receives the recreation and delectation by means of which these corporal powers and senses are drawn to interior recollection, in which the soul drinks from the spiritual good, which has rather descended to its level rather than the soul being able to savour them in essence. Thus it savours the redundancy which is communicated to it'.

In order to have a better understanding or rather have a glimpse of this region of the spirit, we can take the example of Holy Communion. We take communion and there we encounter the created body, blood, soul and spirit of the Lord. At the same time, we also receive his divinity which is uncreated, but we do not feel this divinity, this fire, God who is thrice Holy. Nonetheless, we know that there is contact, if not there would be no communion. That is to say, that there is an area in us, which is more profound than the conscious part of ourselves and which is capable of participating in the life of God, of touching and entering into contact with Him. This is the spirit.

This could be shown in a table:

<b>Spirit</b>	<b>Soul</b>	<b>Body</b>
Mind and will, both passive & supra-conscious	Mind and will, both active & conscious	Brain

In the diagram below, man's structure as he was meant to be from his inception (Adam):



Let us observe that the spirit (not the (Holy) Spirit) is whole, contrary to what happened after the Fall. The spirit is wholly dependent on God; it participates in his divine life according to God's own modality. The soul is in harmony with the spirit and obeys the movements of the Holy Spirit, who guides and directs it in daily life. The body, in turn, is dependent on the soul.



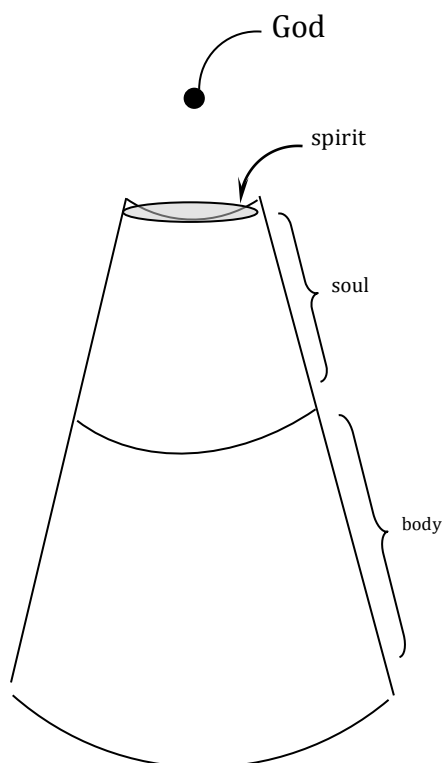
We can say therefore that the human being, as God desired, was thus formed<sup>3</sup>. Let us acknowledge the order and harmony which reigned in Adam's being: each region of his being was subject to the one above and the spirit was transformed in God (being completely docile to Him).

In conclusion, we can say that Adam, having been created in the image and likeness of God, is in communion with Him, praying constantly and that God is his respiration. God is present to him at every level of his being (spirit, soul and body). He participates in the Knowledge and Love which God himself has. We can perceive more clearly here, the first type of prayer, its spontaneity or its almost "natural" and constant character. It is a respiration, a communion between two beings: God and Adam; face to face in Light and love.

### The Spirit and the Fall

What happened at the Fall, when Adam was disobedient to God? The three levels in Adam's being: spirit, soul and body, each in its own way, underwent changes. Adam disobeyed in his spirit the order given by God, who wished him to surrender to Him. It was an act of the gravest significance, because that part of his being was in full contact with God. As a result, both his soul and body were attracted to created objects, turning now towards creatures. The order and harmony, which had reigned previously between the three levels of Adam's being are now broken. The spirit dies and descends towards the soul. It is from now onwards deprived of divine life and seeks divine life in vain amongst the creatures. Divine life alone can satisfy him. He is like a lifeless tree: he is there, but without life and without sap.

The Fall can be shown as follows:



<sup>3</sup> We will not go into the theological arguments as to whether Adam's perfection is less than that of the saints in Christ. That is to say, whether Christ's coming adds something to Adam's initial perfection. It is reasonable however to believe that the saints in Christ are more perfect than Adam, since out of his creation, owing to sin (the Fall), Christ has brought about a greater good (the sanctity of the elect).

We should note that the spirit is now within the soul, at its summit. The spirit is from now on separated from God. It is like a point situated at the centre of the human being, but man is no longer united to God. His spirit no longer participates in God's life. He has been banished from intimate communion with God. Furthermore, he has gone out from himself seeking his happiness in creatures and only finds the division of his own being, since love transforms the lover into the beloved. As the creatures have become the beloved, man is transformed into them. He is divided and dispersed, deadening himself in the process. He who was made for God: he, whom God alone can assuage, makes his way towards those who are crippled and impaired beings and who in turn maim others, which is calamitous.

### Some Scriptural Observations:

it is very interesting to examine the dialogue following the Fall: "*But Yahweh God called to the man. 'Where are you?' He asked. 'I heard the sound of you in the garden;' he replied 'I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.'*" *'Who told you that you were naked?'* he asked *'Have you been eating of the tree I forbade you to eat?'"* (Gen 3:9-11). Yahweh deliberately asks the question: *'Where are you?'* In fact, He asks the question of the spirit as to where it is! The spirit has left the Kingdom for the kingdom of the mind. The spirit is in fact dead! Here in the text the word used is "*naked*": *'I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.'* Why is he afraid? It is because he can no longer meet God face to face. He no longer has the means! He no longer has the capacity to bear the intensity of the presence of God: he is now stripped and naked. He no longer has the likeness of God to be able to bear the intensity of the divine light. He has been stripped of his glory (God).

Remember that in the parable of the Prodigal Son and in other passages in the Gospels, reference is made to a garment (wedding) which is given to man! This means that without it, he is naked and that he is only re-clothed through transformation! "*Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him*" (Lk 15:22). "*When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, 'How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?' And the man was silent"* (Mt 22:11-12). The garment or tunic can be interpreted as **the new man**, forged from faithful, daily, synergic acts. New man, who at the beginning was like a grain, the smallest grain, becomes like a tree! Therefore, to be naked, is tantamount to losing the wedding garment, to losing the divine form, the divine beauty which God impresses on the man united to himself. The spirit has left God, wanting to taste the lure presented to him in his soul, in his mind. He went out of himself, he was stripped, losing his glory. Before, man had access to glory, to God, he lived in Him. Man used to eat effortlessly of the tree of life! He drew from the depths of Life and his glory. He was in a state of spiritual childhood. He became an "adult", he has bitten into the mind. Spiritual childhood means using the mind in God. But leaving this state of friendship with God is to seek to know by one's own means, wanting to be independent from God, wanting to walk without God. This passage outlines for us the distance which exists between the two, God and man from now on. God posted angels to bar the way between Life and man (Gen 3:24). Man can no longer arrive, gather and eat there.

From now on he must decide to allow himself to be saved; he must work out his freedom in every act he makes. He must want to secure his health step by step, until one day he again has permission to draw from the Tree of Life in abundance, without restriction or prohibition.

## IV- More on the Spirit

### Spirit between Theory and Experience

Regarding the question of the spirit, there is something one can grasp intellectually and experientially and something that one can't.

Do we experience the "spirit", for instance? The answer can be yes and no. Thus in the context of the Prayer of the Heart, if we offer ourselves to God, what we offer is all our being, unconditionally, without conditions; this we can grasp. Say here we have a certain grasp over whether we are giving our being or not. In this sense, the core of our being is offered. As we have mentioned, St Teresa of Avila calls the part that is taken by God (and therefore what was offered) as the will. See the *Way of Perfection* Chapters 30 and 31 when St. Teresa describes what God does during the *Prayer of Recollection*.

The same applies with St. Therese of the Child Jesus in the act of oblation: she says that she offers herself totally, and in order to say that she uses the biblical expression "victim of holocaust." The specificity of the victim of holocaust in the Old Testament Temple liturgy was that it was totally given to God, and totally burnt (see Ex 29:38-42). Thus the core of our being, that is given to God is the heart or spirit.

In this sense we have an implicit experience of our spirit. However, by contrast and in order to grasp what is offered, let us say that we put conditions to our offering. In this case, some of our being is not trusting God totally and is reserving to itself a part of its being, regarding, for example, time or something we prefer to keep for ourselves (we are attached to). In this case our spirit is not given.

On the other hand, our conscious part doesn't have direct access to the spirit and therefore can't perceive this and, in addition, can't perceive directly and with immediacy what is happening in it. An example is when we receive Communion, where we do receive the Lord's Divine Nature, but we don't feel anything or sense or see with our mind. But we know that there is an area of our being that has entered into direct contact with the very essence of His Divine Nature. It is our spirit. This, therefore, is an example of the interaction of our spirit with the very Nature of God and the impossibility of experiencing it of it. Any experience we have is a second created grace that falls either into our mind, or emotions or senses. The core grace doesn't bear any direct possible experience. We can truly say after Communion: we have seen the True Light, meaning: our spirit/heart has seen the True Light i.e. Jesus' Divinity.

When the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says that the word of God reaches the junction between the soul and the spirit, the frontier between them, he is talking about something deep, and is rather talking about a possible experience. "For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (He 4:12)

Speaking about being able to discern the difference between the spirit and the soul, St Teresa of Avila seems to say that before the union with Christ (Spiritual Marriage) it is rather very difficult to "see" the difference (see *Interior Castle*, Seventh Mansions). Why so? Because in fact till that moment the spirit is not fully formed yet, not "born from the soul" yet, and is rather with the upper part of the soul. When before Union the grace of God works in us, it elevates not only the spirit but the upper part of the soul as well (the rational soul), this is why one might be in ecstasy or something similar. The spirit not being separated from the Soul, when the grace of God acts in the human being strongly, all the upper part (rational soul and spirit) is moved and absorbed in God.

Spiritual Marriage means that the spirit is now fully formed and transformed, and ready to be united continuously with the Lord. Therefore, the spirit leaves the upper part of the soul and remains constantly united with the Lord. Nothing extraordinary is felt such as being in ecstasy and the pain caused by it (dislocation between upper and lower part of the person). There is simply constant union and at the same time the rational soul can function normally, which is not the case before union.

As we can deduce therefore, one can only become capable of seeing the difference between spirit and soul after the liberation of the spirit from the soul and having it united with the Lord. Of course, it is the soul that sees here, and it sees the difference between spirit and soul as if through a veil, in "refraction", never directly seeing the very Nature of God.

### **Clarification Regarding the Spirit**

Let us remember that in the liturgy we constantly use the word "spirit". We consider that this is mostly the area that deals directly with God. It is place beyond perception, but this is where God dwells in us and touches us. Thus during the Mass, we have the following dialogue between the Priest and the Assembly of the Faithful:

- The Lord be with you (r spirit)
- And with your spirit.

This is the reason why we often speak about "faith". It is because the organs in us capable of seeing (sensing/perceiving with the senses, feeling with the emotions, understanding with the mind (mind)) cannot "see" the most essential part of the Liturgy: the action of God and His touching us, dwelling in us, acting in us and through us. This action occurs in the spirit. This is why, from time to time, during the liturgy, and mainly at key moments, the Priest reminds us of the invisible essential reality. All the visible elements of Liturgy (and the Eastern Churches have kept a lot of these signs) are here like signposts to remind us to look in greater depth. Not only this, but in all Liturgies (and the Mass is the most complete one), we are supposed to receive the special grace of recollection to help us "focus" on God, on the invisible God, to help our senses, emotions, mind go from the visible part to the invisible contemplation with the spirit. The dialogue with the Priest right before the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer is meant to remind us of this Grace of Recollection that God wants to give us:

- The Lord is with you(r spirit)
- And with your spirit
- Lift up your heart (spirit)
- We lift them up to the Lord (with the general help of His grace)
- ..... He comes, takes our heart, and takes it into Himself ... this is the Grace!
- (The Priest invites us to acknowledge the immense Grace of His taking us to Himself, and to thank God for it by saying) Let us give thanks to the Lord (because He took us to Himself.)
- It is right and just.

It is this heart or spirit that is at the heart of "Contemplation". It is by this immersion in God that the second part of the Mass, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, commences. It is the entrance into the divine circulation of the Trinity (Latin *Circumcession*, Greek *Perichoresis*) where Heaven opens in a very particular powerful way, where we join the Angels and the Saints in their unending hymn of Praise, Adoration and Liturgy.

Our spirit and the spirit of the Priest are immersed in this profound contemplation, immersed in God, in awe and beatitude filled by this Loving-Light that takes them into itself.

This happens throughout the Mass, even in the Liturgy of the Word. In the Armenian rite, for example,... (in the Armenian rite there is a similar dialogue before the Proclamation of the

Gospel), but this mostly occurs during the second part of the Mass. The Armenian Liturgy hides the Altar completely by a large veil (more even than the mere iconostases of the Byzantine and Coptic), to tell us where our spirit resides, united with God in divine liturgy, as we deal “mouth to mouth” with God’s Spirit (See Numbers 12:8). We need to awake our inner attention during the Mass to what is really happening, directing our inner eye toward the real action of the Mass, the core of the Worship. The Priest and the faithful offer themselves to God so they (their spirit) can become immersed in Him.

Significantly it is worth noting that the training of the Monk helps him focus during the entire day on this invisible reality. Hence the need to learn how to pray incessantly, the need to learn the *Prayer of the Heart* or *Jesus’ Prayer*.

As one can see, the spirit is the main and primary area where the Holy Spirit, the Uncreated Grace, comes to our encounter. It is the spirit first and foremost who has to be purified, transformed, acquiring anew the lost likeness with God, being born again.

A spiritual life without learning to pray incessantly, a prayer life without learning how to lift our heart are a loss of time and could result in our going astray toward the outer reality forgetting that the outer reality expresses the inner reality. One doesn’t choose however to become an angel neglecting the outer reality; no, on the contrary, we still have a body, senses, emotions and a mind that need to receive the Grace of God to become recollected and focused on the inner Altar as well, where God himself dwells.

The real and deep liturgy in fact is happening on the Altar of our spirit, the corner stone of any liturgy, where the Triune God dwells, where we use our Baptismal Priesthood that enables us to offer the Son to the Father in the Spirit. This is true worship, taking place in the spirit, “in Spirit and in Truth”, in the Holy Spirit and in Christ the Truth.

Faith is not the absence of the invisible reality. Faith is the eye of our spirit, enabled by the Grace of the Holy Spirit to “see” God himself acting in our life, in our prayer life and especially during the Liturgy and most importantly the Liturgy of the Mass. This is why in the Byzantine rite of the Mass we sing after Communion: “we have seen the true Light”, i.e. Christ himself, Light from Light, True God from True God. Who has witnessed Christ when he receives Communion? How does he see it? Only through the spirit.

By definition, the soul cannot see, the emotion and the senses cannot see. Our spirit on the other hand is higher, above the clouds and has this mysterious capacity of being able to deal directly with the very Uncreated nature of God.

### **Which Author is the Most Reliable?**

**Question:** *Who do you consider most reliable in determining the distinction between body/soul/spirit (as opposed? to limiting the understanding of the human nature to just body/soul)?*

**Answer:** The perspective and requirements of whoever asks this question is key. The question could be a general question, as dealing with Anthropological Philosophy (like Aristotle or St Thomas Aquinas a Philosopher); or it could be in general on Theological Anthropology (like for instance what St Augustine covers in his *De Trinitate*), or more specifically *Spiritual Anthropology* (St John of the Cross, St Teresa of Avila, etc).

My answer is specifically for the latter. Primarily because the reality of the spirit (and therefore a triune anthropology) is mainly essential for spiritual life. Without a spiritual life, the reality of

the spirit (as Kant would say) is noumenal, namely, it belongs to an unknown area in us, unknown to the space and time dimension (the conscious world). Descartes himself is by contrast the “founder” of “bi-polar” anthropology: body and soul. No spirit. Many philosophers follow Kant or Descartes, and in a way indicating they are not really interested to this meta-physical reality (beyond physical reality).

**(Note for the more specialised:** One might consider that Carl Jung’s effort to study the Archetypes and the deepest layers of the unconscious is one of the rarest human efforts to reach this reality that is beyond our grasp. He just worked by deduction, going from the manifestations of the Archetypes, to the assumption that they exist deeply hidden in us.)

When it comes to Theology, and if we go to St Thomas Aquinas, he certainly acknowledges its existence, and it helps him resolve difficult theological questions around Christ Himself, and His Passion. While St Augustine and St Thomas do acknowledge it, in the specific field of anthropology, or the *Secunda Pars*, we can’t really say that it has a huge place.

The main author in my view who focused on the spirit and talked about it is **St John of the Cross**. It is an undertaking that can only take place with a specific grace from God to help him “see” what is beyond the “visible” world of the body and the soul. One can almost say that all his work, and here we are talking about his four books, are in fact a description of the purification of the human spirit, illumination and the powerful reality the spirit is called upon to deal with at higher levels of union with God. In a way, all his work could be revisited by gathering all the information one can find about the human spirit.

What St Teresa of Avila mentions on very rare occasions is a constant concern which St John of the Cross considers and studies in greater depth. studies, deepens. It is true that it can take years before one can start to really understand and follow what St John of the Cross says, but it is worth the effort. When it comes to St John of the Cross, I wouldn’t easily trust commentators. There is often a tendency among the commentators to bring him down to their level and into what they are interested. He is rarely read for himself and understood in himself! This remains a real challenge in the Church.

### **Importance and Beauty of the Spirit**

It is noteworthy to remember that the Cartesian dual division (body-soul), a duality that we often find in Plato’s Philosophy, and that of his followers, is very damaging for a correct understanding of Spiritual Life. The absence of the triune division removes the most important piece of anthropology that can explain spiritual life! Spiritual Life is called “Spiritual” because of the Holy Spirit who gives life to our being but also because of our spirit which receives the very life of God.

Only our spirit is capable of receiving a direct participation of God’s being.

Being the indwelling place of the Trinity, created initially in God’s image and likeness, it is of such divine beauty... that some authors say that God hides our spirit from us, otherwise we risk, out of weakness, worshipping it.

In the order of Creation and in the order of Redemption, our spirit is the most beautiful creation. Who can fathom God’s beauty? We received the image and likeness of God’s beauty!

Without any hesitation the main master who talks the best about the spirit is St John of the Cross. He describes its purification (Ascent book II and III, and Dark Night books 1 and 2), what is needed from our part to achieve it and what God does realise from His side in order to purify it and transform it in Himself, to give it His own beauty (or form).

He also describes the participation of our spirit in the very nature of God and how he/He participates in His two operations: 1- the Father begets the Son from all eternity 2- the Father and the Son actually spirate the Holy Spirit (last five Stanzas of the *Spiritual Canticle*). We may add, also, the participation in the exterior invisible operations of the Trinity : sending the Son and sending the Holy Spirit (he says in the *Living Flame* that the Soul gives God to whoever she wants). He describes the reflections in our deep caverns of the Flames of the attributes of God (in *Living Flame of Love*). It is noteworthy to state that Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity also talks a lot about the Fortress of Recollection...

## Spirit and New Man

**Question:** *is the spirit equivalent to the expression St Paul uses: the New man (New self)? Examples: Romans 6:6: "For we know that our **old man** was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin"*

*Ephesians: 4:22-24: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off **your old man**, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds and to put on **the new man**, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."*

*Colossians 3:9-10: "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your **old man** with its practices and have put on the **new man**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."*

**Answer:** the New man or New self as is often translated covers the new behaviour of our soul and spirit, mainly led by the new three acts of Faith, Hope and Love, and all the virtues that blossom from them. In this sense the new man covers our spirit and our upper soul, but in their new mode of behaviour.

## V- A Text from St Teresa of Avila

In her book *The Interior Castle* St Teresa of Avila talks about the beauty of the human soul, because it is nothing less than the dwelling place of God Himself. It is fairer to say that in fact she is talking about the spirit, more than anything else.

"WHILE I was beseeching Our Lord to-day that He would speak through me, since I could find nothing to say and had no idea how to begin to carry out the obligation laid upon me by obedience, a thought occurred to me which I will now set down, in order to have some foundation on which to build. I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions. Now if we think carefully over this, sisters, the soul of the righteous man is nothing but a paradise, in which, as God tells us, He takes His delight. For what do you think a room will be like which is the delight of a King so mighty, so wise, so pure and so full of all that is good?

**I can find nothing with which to compare the great beauty of a soul and its great capacity.**

In fact, however acute our intellects may be, They will no more be able to attain to a comprehension of this than to an understanding of God; for, as He Himself says, He created us in His image and likeness.

Now if this is so - and it is - there is no point in our fatiguing ourselves by attempting to **comprehend the beauty of this castle**; for, though it is His creature, and there is therefore as much difference between it and God as between creature and Creator, the very fact that His Majesty says it is made in His image means that we can hardly form any conception of **the soul's great dignity and beauty**.

It is no small pity, and should cause us no little shame, that, through our own fault, we do not understand ourselves, or know who we are.

Would it not be a sign of great ignorance, my daughters, if a person were asked who he was, and could not say, and had no idea who his father or his mother was, or from what country he came?

Though that is great stupidity, our own is incomparably greater if we make no attempt to discover what we are, and only know that we are living in these bodies, and have a vague idea, because we have heard it and because our **Faith tells us so, that we possess souls.**

As to what good qualities there may be in our souls, or Who dwells within them, or how precious they are - those are things which we seldom consider and so we trouble little about carefully preserving **the soul's beauty.**

All our interest is centred in the rough **setting of the diamond**, and in the outer wall of the castle - that is to say, in these bodies of ours.

Let us now imagine that this castle, as I have said, contains many mansions, 22 some above, others below, others at each side; and **in the centre and midst of them all is the chiefest mansion where the most secret things pass between God and the soul.**

You must think over this comparison very carefully; perhaps God will be pleased to use it **to show you something** of the favours which He is pleased to grant to souls, and of the differences between them, so far as I have understood this to be possible, for there are so many of them that nobody can possibly understand them all, much less anyone as stupid as I.

If the Lord grants you these favours, it will be a great consolation to you to know that such things are possible; and, if you never receive any, you can still praise His great goodness.

For, as it does us no harm to think of the things laid up for us in Heaven, and of the joys of the blessed, but rather makes us rejoice and strive to attain those joys ourselves, just so it will do us no harm to find that it is possible in this our exile for so great a God to commune with such malodorous worms, and to love Him for His great goodness and boundless mercy.

I am sure that anyone who finds it harmful to realize that it is possible for God to grant such favours during this our exile must be greatly lacking in humility and in love of his neighbour; for otherwise how could we help rejoicing that God should grant these favours to one of our brethren when this in no way hinders Him from granting them to ourselves, and that His Majesty should bestow an understanding of His greatness upon anyone soever?

Sometimes He will do this only to manifest His power, as He said of the blind man to whom He gave his sight, when the Apostles asked Him if he were suffering for his own sins or for the sins of his parents.

He grants these favours, then, not because those who receive them are holier than those who do not, but in order that His greatness may be made known, as we see in the case of Saint Paul and the Magdalen, and in order that we may praise Him in His creatures.

It may be said that these things seem impossible and that it is better not to scandalize the weak.

But less harm is done by their disbelieving us than by our failing to edify those to whom God grants these favours, and who will rejoice and will awaken others to a fresh love of Him Who grants such mercies, according to the greatness of His power and majesty.

In any case I know that none to whom I am speaking will run into this danger, because they all know and believe that God grants still greater proofs of His love.

I am sure that, if any one of you does not believe this, she will never learn it by experience.

For God's will is that no bounds should be set to His works.

Never do such a thing, then, sisters, if the Lord does not lead you by this road.”

(St Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, Mansions 1, Chapter 1)

**Jean Khoury**