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The pneumatology of Paul Tillich and Arnold van Ruler¹

ABSTRACT

Pneumatology is the link between Christology and eschatology. Pneumatology must be related to and distinguished from both Christology and eschatology. The Spirit is the power of the Word and the Word is the form of the Spirit. In this sense there is a point of identity between pneumatology and Christology: every manifestation of the Spirit stands under the criterion of the revelation given in Christ. But pneumatology cannot be reduced to Christology as, in the Spirit, we are not replaced but rather taken into a relationship with God. This relationship is to be understood eschatologically, because the work of the Spirit is to express God's eschatological intentions in us. However, pneumatology cannot simply be identified with eschatology. This relationship with God is a matter of the struggle of the Spirit with the flesh – there is no perfectionism. Tillich and Van Ruler complement each other in their discussion of this multifaceted understanding of the position and work of the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

As Christians we believe that we have received the full and complete salvation in Christ. But Christ was not only resurrected, he was also taken up into heaven. Our relationship to God must be understood in terms of the poured out Holy Spirit and not in terms of Christology.

Karl Barth (*Karl Barth's Table Talk* sa:28) wrote, "I personally think that a theology of the Spirit might be alright after AD 2000, but now we are still too close to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is still too difficult to distinguish between God's Spirit and man's spirit."

Well, we are now in the twenty-first century and it is precisely this pneumatologically worked out presence of God in creation that gives the theology of Tillich and Van Ruler relevance for today. Throughout their lives Tillich and Van Ruler were continually concerned with the relationship between creation and salvation. Specifically, they were concerned with how salvation is actualised in creation. Tillich is well known for his "theology of culture", and Van Ruler for his "theocracy". They both have a very well developed pneumatology and their ideas are remarkably similar. In an essay that favourably compares the pneumatology of Tillich and Van Ruler, B Engelbrecht (1989:39-40) writes,

1 This essay is based on my doctoral dissertation (*Ontology and the New Being: the relationship between creation and redemption in the theology of Paul Tillich and AA van Ruler*). This dissertation was done through the University of Stellenbosch, 2002, under the supervision of Prof PF Theron.

Ek is, hoe langer hoe meer, daarvan oortuig dat die waarheid of valsheid van elke teologie – ten minste van elke kerugmatiese teologie – wat hom as Christelik aandien, uitgemaak word op die punt van die pneumatologie ... Dit is juis dit wat, myns insiens, aan die teologie van Van Ruler en dié van Tillich so 'n blywende aktualiteit verleen. God wat in die hede met die mens, die wêreld en die geskiedenis worstelend handel om sy koninkryk 'n gestalte te laat kry, is God die Heilige Gees.

In this essay we will look at the pneumatology of Tillich and Van Ruler in order to draw some conclusions regarding a Christian understanding of life in this world, and to highlight the remarkable similarity between the theology of Tillich and that of Van Ruler. We will begin by looking at the trinitarian background of the work of the Spirit. Then we will look at the relationship between the Spirit and eschatology, and between the Spirit and Christ. The main concern, however, is to look at the work of the Spirit in the present. Thus we will discuss Van Ruler's idea of the *gratia interna* and Tillich's concept of the Spiritual Community. Finally, we will highlight some of the significant ideas and implications of this discussion.

THE TRINITARIAN BACKGROUND OF PNEUMATOLOGY

In order to properly understand the outpoured Holy Spirit, we must look at the background of the Spirit in the being of God and in his activity in the world.

In the first place, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. As such He is the bringing together of the Father and Son; He is the bond of love between Father and Son. The Spirit is the actualisation of power (the abyss of the divine, the Father) and meaning (the logos, the Son). "It is the Spirit in whom God 'goes out from' himself, the Spirit proceeds from the divine ground. He gives actuality to that which is potential in the divine ground and 'outspoken' in the divine logos. Through the Spirit the divine fullness is posited in the divine life as something definite, and at the same time it is reunited in the divine ground" (Tillich 1951:251). In this sense the Spirit is the principle of immanence immanent in God. The main idea is that of the *unio* and *communicatio* of the Father and the Son in the Spirit (Van Ruler 1973:27). The Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and the triune being of God is to be understood in this fully trinitarian manner. This protects theology from the notion that God the Father is the "true" God while the Son is the moment of God's going out from himself and the Spirit is the moment of God's return to himself. There is certainly the idea of return or reunion in the idea of the Spirit as the third person, but this is to be understood in terms of the idea of the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son. This leads us to the next point.

In the second place, the Spirit is in a sense the whole – God is Spirit. As the actualisation of power and meaning the Spirit is the entire Trinity. In other words, the Spirit is the unity of the ontological elements, the unity of power and meaning. As such the Spirit is the *telos* of the being of God. It symbolises God as living and as fulfilled in himself. It refers to the element of movement, continuation and consummation in the essence of God. Thus the idea of God as Spirit brings in the idea of a teleological directedness in God. This means that the primary function of the Spirit is that of consummation, of fulfilling the creative *telos* (Van Ruler 1973:15, 27; *Ik Geloof* sa:129-130; Tillich 1951:249-254; 1963:111-114, 283-286).

In the third place we must do justice to the consummating immanence of God in creation. Tillich (1951:250) writes,

The statement that God is Spirit means that life as spirit is the inclusive symbol for the divine life. It contains all the ontological elements. God is not nearer to one "part" of being or to a special function of being than he is to another. As Spirit he is as near to the creative

darkness of the unconscious as he is to the critical light of cognitive reason. Spirit is the power through which meaning lives, and it is the meaning that gives direction to power. God as Spirit is the ultimate unity of both power and meaning.

We need to understand this immanence of God in all creation. “Only then will it be possible, once and for all, to overcome the dualism between God and the world, in our approach to life and in our systematic theology, that has plagued Christianity through the ages” (Van Ruler 1973:27).

In Tillich’s idiom we could say that the Spirit is the ground of being of all the dimensions or levels of life and the aim to which they are self-transcendent. The Spirit is at work in all creation. Potentially or essentially the finite is an element in the divine life and everything finite is qualified by this essential relation. This means that, in itself, creation is good and cannot be ontologically separated from God. Thus the essential relation between the human spirit and the divine Spirit is mutual immanence. When these considerations are taken seriously, we can see that it is incorrect to say that the ultimate aim of humanity is to participate in the trinitarian being of God (the Roman Catholic view). Humanity, the world and all temporal reality have their own intrinsic worth next to God and exist for us and also for God. The ultimate goal of all things does not lie in a “vertical” sense in participating in the immanent trinitarian being of God, but in the realisation of genuinely creaturely existence and being, horizontally, before the face of God in accordance with his will (Tillich 1963:112-114). Thus there is a direct relationship between creation and God. There is a mutual immanence and this is to be understood in terms of the consummating work of the Holy Spirit.

But, in the fourth place, we must distinguish between the consummating immanence of the Spirit and the outpoured Holy Spirit. In both cases the work of the Spirit is that of consummation, of realising the *telos* of creation. But there is a distinct structural difference between the immanence of the Spirit in creation and his indwelling as a result of the fact that he was poured out on all flesh on the day of Pentecost. The pouring out of the Spirit is a fact of salvation that took place in Israel. The outpoured Spirit cannot be directly deduced from the creation immanence of the Spirit. Although the immanent Spirit is the same as the indwelling Spirit there is too great a difference between the work of the Spirit in creation and his work in sanctification to indiscriminately equate these two aspects. The *inhabitatio Spiritus Sancti* is motivated by sin and therefore must be distinguished from the creation immanence of the Spirit (Van Ruler 1973:16).

Because of the fall, the finite is no longer qualified by its essential immanence in, or essential unity with, God. Existentially, because of the fall, there is separation from God. The finite is no longer actually qualified by its “essential unity” with the infinite, but rather by separation from, and resistance to, this unity. Thus there is a “dualism” in the relation of the human spirit to the divine Spirit, but this dualism, says Tillich (1963:111-115), is preliminary and transitory. It is neither a “dualism of levels” nor is it of a supernatural, metaphysical endurance. The “Spiritual Presence” can manifest itself in the spirit of man by virtue of this essential relation between the two, that is the “mutual immanence” referred to above. The (fallen) human spirit, however, is unable to compel the divine Spirit to enter the human spirit. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in man is to be described as “breaking into” the spirit of man, by the traditional terms “inspiration” and “infusion”. Man can reach for the Spirit, but he cannot “grasp” it, unless he is first grasped by it.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE WORK OF THE SPIRIT

The work of the Spirit must be understood from an eschatological point of view, on the basis of the once-for-all work performed by Jesus as the Christ. The kingdom of God is soteriologically

transcendent² and the immanence of the kingdom is to be understood on the basis of this transcendence. The outpoured Spirit is the immanence of the kingdom. Thus the Spirit is not something alien to creation that is added to life, a divine seed or substance. Then there would be a true dualism between creation and salvation. Salvation would come into creation, but would be strange to it. Salvation would consist of transubstantiation, of changing the essence of creation into something else (Van Ruler 1947b:213; cf 209).

Thus Tillich (1963:114) writes, "... a dualism of levels logically leads to the destruction of the finite. For example, the human spirit for the sake of the divine Spirit. But, religiously speaking, God does not need to destroy his created world, which is good in its essential nature, in order to manifest himself in it". The presence of the Holy Spirit is not the addition of a kind of "matter" that is transmitted by a priest in the performance of the sacraments, "rather it involves an ecstatic, participation in the Christ who 'is the Spirit,' whereby one lives in the sphere of this Spiritual power" (Tillich 1963:117; cf 115-116). The structure of existence is not disrupted, but it is saved and this is to be understood qualitatively and functionally as the *unio mystica cum Christo*, as the forgiveness of guilt (Van Ruler 1947b:217).

Salvation is added to existence, not as a "thing", but as the reconciliation of guilt in Christ. And this reconciliation is expressed in existence as salvation. From a Christological point of view we can say that the Spirit spreads the reconciliation obtained in Christ to all existence. But from an eschatological point of view we must say that the Spirit expresses this salvation in existence,³ that is he expresses the image, or kingdom, of God in existence. This is his work of recreation. In other words, the Spirit "brings about the reunion of those elements in life processes in which actual being is the true expression of potential being, an expression ... which is realized only after estrangement, contest and decision" (Tillich 1963:129).

The work of the Spirit is the realisation of the kingdom of God in existence. Thus Tillich (1963:165) writes, "Spiritual Life is Eternal Life in anticipation." And Van Ruler (1973:24) writes, "The outpoured Spirit is our relationship, in the present, with the world as it exists in the eschaton according to God's original and final intentions ... [In the Spirit] we experience the power of the future world."

This understanding of pneumatology from an eschatological perspective is a more encompassing perspective than the relation of the Spirit to Christ. This eschatological perspective allows us to see that it is not only the case that individuals are "saved", but that God is setting up his kingdom in this world. The purpose of the work of the Spirit is to be understood on the basis of eschatology.

Certainly the relation between Christ and the Spirit must never be forgotten. There is a close relationship between the Spirit and the Christ. In the Gospels we see how Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at the moment of his baptism. This event confirmed him as the elected "Son of God". The Spirit appears again and again in the gospels. Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. In the Spirit he returns to Galilee. He teaches as one who has authority. He overcomes

2 That is, the transcendence of the kingdom is bound to the resurrection (Mk 12:18-27) and rebirth (Mt 19:28). The kingdom stands on the other side of death, namely the death of Jesus. (Van Ruler 1947b:35). Jesus is himself the central manifestation of the kingdom, as in the resurrection he is victorious over the existential estrangement to which he has subjected himself. As such he is both criterion and source of the saving power in history (Tillich 1963:364; 1957:159, 118-119).

3 Pneumatology is that doctrine that holds Christology and eschatology together. The salvation we have in Christ is expressed pneumatologically in existence according to the eschatological intentions of God. Or, the eschatological intentions of God are expressed pneumatologically in creation on the basis of the work of Christ.

demonic powers in the Spirit. In the Spirit he is transfigured on the mount. And the Spirit gives him the certainty about the right hour for acting and suffering. He rises from the dead in the Spirit (Van Ruler 1973:18-19; 1947:169-173; Tillich 1963:144).

Everything the Christ does, he does in the Spirit. The story of the virgin birth expresses “that the divine Spirit who has made the man Jesus of Nazareth into the Messiah has already created him as his vessel” (Tillich 1957:160; cf 1963:144-145). Thus, “From all sides Christ is embraced by the *Pneuma*” (Van Ruler 1973:19).

The Spirit cannot be separated from Christ, who is the source and criterion of all salvation. However, the Spirit is not identical to the glorified Christ, and his work is different to that performed by Christ. The complete work of reconciliation was performed by Christ on the cross, but this reconciliation needs to be mediated to us and we need to appropriate it. This mediation and appropriation cannot be understood Christologically. Perhaps it does not sound too bad to talk of the Christ who proclaims himself, but if we speak of the Christ who believes in himself, it is clear that we are no longer within the bounds of Christianity (Van Ruler 1969:175). It is we who believe – faith is the gift and work of the Holy Spirit. In the present we experience salvation in the mode of the Spirit. Since the ascension the only access to Christ is through the Spirit. This access must thus be understood pneumatologically and not Christologically.

Nevertheless, the work of both Christ and the Spirit are to be understood from an eschatological vantage point. As the Christ, Jesus is himself the kingdom and in his work the kingdom has gained a firm foothold on earth. This work of reconciliation that has been performed by Christ is put into effect by the Holy Spirit.

It is precisely this “putting into effect by the Holy Spirit” that we need to examine. In order to do this we will look at Van Ruler’s concept of the *gratia interna* and Tillich’s idea of the Spiritual Community.

We will consider the different aspects of the Spiritual Presence, namely its kerygmatic, provisional, fragmentary, conservative, ambiguous, miraculous, internal, communal and multiform nature.

We must begin with a clarification of the terminology used by Van Ruler and Tillich. Van Ruler uses the concept *gratia interna*, which he clarifies with the help of two other concepts, namely *inhabitatio Spiritus sancti* and *unio mystica cum Christo*. The reality of salvation in the present is the mystical union with Christ by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The *gratia interna* is “our relationship in the present with the kingdom of God as it is present in Christ and on the basis of his work” (Van Ruler 1973:24; cf 1947b:197, 205).

Tillich (1963:150, 162, 163), on the other hand, uses the term *Spiritual Community* to refer to this relationship with the kingdom on the basis of the work of Christ. The Spiritual Community “is founded on the New Being as it has appeared in the Christ ... [It is] not a group existing beside other groups but rather a power and a structure inherent and effective in such groups ... [It is the invisible church as] the Spiritual essence of the visible church ... it is essentiality determining existence and being resisted by existence”.

The term *Spiritual Community* is identical to the Reformers’ idea of an invisible church. That is, the Spiritual Community is the presence of the New Being, as this has been manifested in Christ, and the *gratia interna* is God-in-Christ, in the Spirit entering into the forms of existence. The terms *Spiritual Community* and *gratia interna* both refer to the Spiritual Presence of the New Being in existence. Therefore they will be used synonymously.

The kerygmatic character of the *gratia interna*

The *gratia interna* is a kerygmatic reality. On the one hand we can say that “not the experience of conversion, but only the Word of God is the source of our knowledge concerning the work of the Holy Spirit” (Van Ruler 1947b:230). This denies the assertion that experience is the source of the knowledge of the *gratia interna*. This knowledge “is based on the unique event Jesus the Christ, and in spite of the infinite meaning of this event it remains *this* event and, as such, the criterion of every religious experience. This event is given to experience and not derived from it. Therefore, experience receives and does not produce” (Tillich 1951:46).

The knowledge that God is active in all history, saving it to his kingdom, is not something that we can know empirically. No analysis of existence can unambiguously derive from it the *gratia interna*.

On the other hand, we must go even further than the idea that the Spiritual Community is only known from the Word, and say that the Spiritual Community only comes into being through the Word (Van Ruler 1947b:230). Another way of expressing this would be to say that sanctification as the (preliminary) purpose of salvation is only put into effect by revelation. The kingdom of God is only expressed in existence in so far as revelation is given and received. The *gratia interna* is the presence of revelation, of the Word in existence, and this presence is caused by revelation itself.

There is an intimate relationship between Word and Spirit in revelation; in revelation outside the Bible, in revelation in the Bible and in revelation in preaching. Reformed theology (as opposed to Lutheran theology) speaks of this relationship in terms of the Spirit working *with* the Word (*cum verbo*). Thus the Word and the Spirit must be distinguished. “An identification of the Word and the Spirit would not only misunderstand the divinity of the Spirit, but also the essence of the Word. Such an identification would lead to a salvationless confusion in which both the Spirit and the Word are humanised” (Van Ruler 1947b:233).

The Spirit is the living power of the Word. “The Spiritual Presence elevates the human spirit into the transcendent union of unambiguous life” (Tillich 1963:128). It would be wrong to say that the Word has this power in itself. This would be akin to saying that the human spirit is not in bondage to sin and can appropriate the Word by itself – the Spirit is humanised and the revelatory character of the Word is not understood. Therefore,

... the Bible does not contain words of God (or as Calvin has said divine “oracles”), but it can and in a unique way has become the “Word of God” ... No word is the Word of God unless it is the Word of God for someone ... unless it is a medium whereby the Spirit enters the spirit of someone (Tillich 1963:124-125; cf 1963:121).

In other words, there is nothing, no word and no thing that is in itself *the Word* for us. “The ultimate power of the Word, that which touches and converts the heart, is the Spirit; only thus do the words of the Gospel become truth and reality for us” (Van Ruler 1947b:232-233). The Word cannot be separated from the Spirit.

The Spirit is the power of the Word and the Word is the form of the Spirit. In this sense, the Son *is* the Spirit. The Spirit does not himself originate what he reveals. Every new manifestation of the Spiritual Presence stands under the criterion of his manifestation in Jesus as the Christ (Van Ruler 1947b:239; Tillich 1963:148). This is the kerygmatic aspect of the *gratia interna* that the Word, in the power of the Spirit, goes into reality via the proclamation of the gospel. This implies an element of receptivity and passivity, of being opened up by the Spiritual Presence. Traditionally

this has been called “regeneration”⁴ and means that humanity is not only called to salvation, but that salvation is proclaimed as already applicable to humanity. In other words, all existence – individual, communal, human and cosmic – does not have its own ontological character but is that which God says about it (Van Ruler 1947b:242-243; Tillich 1963:133, 134).

The provisional character of the Spiritual Community

In order to understand the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of God we must look at the provisional character of the *gratia interna*. Tillich (1963:163) writes, “... the Spiritual Community ... is essentiality determining existence and being resisted by existence”.

This implies two important points: on the one hand, salvation is concerned with this world. The *gratia interna* erects the kingdom of God in the flesh. Ultimately, salvation is destined to go completely into existence. But this is an eschatological concept. We never get this far in the kingdom of Christ. Nevertheless, salvation is concerned exclusively with this world (Van Ruler 1947b:222; Tillich 1963:397)

On the other hand, salvation is also resisted by existence. This points to the provisional and paradoxical nature of the presence of the New Being. We are accepted by God in spite of being unacceptable. This is the central doctrine of the Reformation, the Protestant principle. The New Being is present as paradox (Tillich 1963:223-228). This means that Christianity is dominated by promise and expectation (Van Ruler 1971:42). We have not yet entered into the eschatological reality itself, we have not come out of the promise into the promised reality, out of the expectation to the life itself. The Holy Spirit is the promise of this eschatological kingdom. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee and the first fruit of the kingdom. But this idea of the Holy Spirit as the “first fruit” can never be understood in terms of a small beginning that develops into a full possession of the Spirit of Christ. Although there is progress, and even the approach to perfection, in sanctification, in history Christ never becomes superfluous for the Christian (Van Ruler 1947b:221-222; Tillich 1963:228-231).

The eschatological kingdom is the revelation of our present salvation. It is extremely important to recognise the difference between the kingdom of grace and the eschatological kingdom of glory. Certainly, the kingdom of Christ cannot be separated from the kingdom of God either in terms of content or in a temporal sense. There are not two different kingdoms but rather a difference in modality in one and the same kingdom. In Christ we have the full and complete salvation of God, but in the modality of concealment in the flesh, in the modality of the indwelling of the Spirit, of the *unio mystica cum Christo*, of the promise. In the eschatological kingdom the promise will become reality, our salvation will be revealed. The difference between the *regnum christi* and the *regnum Dei* “is not described by the category of fulfilment (*pleroma*), but by the category of revelation (*apocalypsis*). That is the eschatological category: revelation, un-covering – this is the final and new act of God, in which salvation is made visible as the glory of God that radiates from all reality, so that we can experience it as such” (Van Ruler 1945:139).

Tillich (1963:113-114) explains this “duality” between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of God: The finite is essentially an element in the divine life. But because of sin, the finite is no longer actually qualified by its essential unity with the infinite. Thus “the dualistic element implied

4 Regeneration is a state of things universally. It is the new state of things, the new eon that Christ has inaugurated. Individuals (and groups) are asked to accept this new state of being, and in so doing they participate in it and are reborn. But the objective reality of salvation precedes subjective participation in it (Tillich 1957:176).

in such a terminology is, so to speak, preliminary and transitory; it simply serves to distinguish the actual from the potential and the existential from the essential”.

The salvation that we have received in Christ is completely present in the Holy Spirit. However, it is present in a provisional or paradoxical manner. We are not yet in the eschatological kingdom of glory. Luther’s *simul justus, simul peccator* points to this provisional reality. This is the “in spite of” of which the cross of Christ is the symbol.

The fragmentary and conservative character of the *gratia interna*

Life at every moment is ambiguous, that is the positive and negative, or essential and existential moments are mixed in such a way that it is impossible to definitely separate them (Tillich 1963:32). In order to overcome this ambiguity, that which is existentially disrupted by sin must be reunited with the essential (that is, what creation should be). The human spirit cannot create this reunion. Essence and existence can only be reunited by that which transcends them both: the divine Spirit.

In justification the surrender of one’s own goodness occurs in him who accepts the divine acceptance of himself, the unacceptable. In it the paradox of the New Being is experienced, the ambiguity of good and evil is conquered, unambiguous life has taken hold of man through the impact of the Spiritual Presence. The spirit, a dimension of finite life, is driven into a successful self-transcendence; it is grasped by something ultimate and unconditional. It is still the human spirit, but at the same time it goes out of itself under the impact of the divine Spirit. This allows one to see all things in the light of eternity, in the light of the ground and the aim of all things. This is the overcoming of the ambiguity involved in the split of existence from essence (Tillich 1963:226, 112, 117, 119-120).

In other words, God the Holy Spirit indwells us. He witnesses not only to our spirit but also with it. It is in the Spirit that salvation is personally appropriated. The Spirit allows one to see that salvation is really given in Christ. This *persuasio* is one of the essential elements in the *testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum*. Therefore there is a real and full reciprocity between God and man. “Then we can also speak of an essential identity of the judgements of man with the judgements of God: man knows and wills and does the same that God knows and wills and does” (Van Ruler 1973:12).

The Spiritual Community or *gratia interna* is unambiguous; it is the New Being created by the Spiritual Presence. However, it is essentially fragmentary. As the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, we can understand this fragmentary character by looking at the faith of Christ. The dynamic picture of this faith that we receive in the Gospel stories expresses this fragmentary character, in which the elements of struggle, exhaustion and even despair often appear. But this never leads to a profanisation or demonisation of his faith. Christ remained in the state of being unambiguously grasped by the Spiritual Presence.⁵ Thus “fragmentary” means appearing under the conditions of finitude but conquering both estrangement and ambiguity. However, because the fragment appears under the conditions of finitude it is also anticipatory. “The fulfilled transcendent union is an eschatological concept. The fragment is an anticipation (as Paul speaks of the fragmentary and anticipatory possession of the divine Spirit, of truth, of the vision of God and so on). The New Being is fragmentarily and anticipatorily present, but in so far as it is present it is so

5 Faith is defined as the state of being grasped by the Spirit and through it by the transcendent union of unambiguous life. The faith of Christ must always be qualified by its unambiguous character (Tillich 1963:146).

unambiguously” (Tillich 1963:140; cf 32, 144-146, 150). The work of the Spirit shares this fragmentary character with the sacrament of communion. In communion we are given a piece (fragment) of bread. And the breaking of the bread is an essential sacramental act. It is a symbol of the breaking of Christ’s body. The sacrificial death of Jesus as the Christ on Golgotha stands squarely behind the Work of the Spirit (Van Ruler 1945:386).

The fragment is essentially anticipatory because it is paradoxical, it is not definitive but provisional, it is not the eschatological reality itself, it does not embrace all things in their interrelation, but only parts of the whole (Van Ruler 1947b:222). Thus, in itself the *gratia interna* is fragmentary, anticipatory, but unambiguous.

The Spiritual Community is the essence of the Church. But, the churches are both the actualisation and the distortion of the Spiritual Community. Thus we can remain aware of the fact that in the very acts of affirmation and commitment the ambiguity of life reappears (Tillich 1963:140; cf 155). This is because the ambiguities of religion are not eliminated but are conquered in principle. The phrase “in principle” does not mean *in abstracto* but means the power of beginning, which remains the controlling power in a whole process. Where the Spiritual Community is active, there is a point at which the ambiguities of religion are recognised and rejected but not removed. These ambiguities may even be present with demonic strength. “But at the same time, there is a power of resistance against the manifold distortions of faith – the divine Spirit and its embodiment, the Spiritual Community” (Tillich 1963:172-173). This leads us to the idea of the struggle of the Spirit with the flesh. Van Ruler (1947b:247-248) explains, “The new life is born in the slaying of the flesh ... Therefore the opposition and the struggle between the Spirit and the flesh is so characteristic of all of the work of the Spirit. And this opposition is total: it is the entire Spirit, it is God Himself as the Spirit that is in a radical opposition and struggle with the whole being of man, who is determined by the flesh.”

In this struggle an order is set up in which salvation and existence are preserved for each other.

But what exactly does it mean to say that an order is set up that preserves salvation and existence for each other? Tillich provides the answer: the work of the Spirit “stands in opposition to the predominance of the demonic” (Tillich 1971:66). The decisive manifestation of the divine is not a new religion or a new law, but only a protest against the claim of every finite form to be absolute, that is, the Word of the Cross (Tillich 1936:234). The definition of the demonic is the self-elevating claim to ultimacy. This claim takes the form of the claim to have or to bring the ultimate toward which history runs. This means that the Spirit “creates a certain order in the chaos of sin that makes life possible and especially: an order in which God is remembered and his name is praised in the midst of the chaos ... In this manner alone are we preserved from the demonic: we are kept within the confines of the relativity of our existence” (Van Ruler 1945:187, 319).

Precisely this is the point: that God is remembered and we are kept within the confines of the relativity of our existence. With Van Ruler (1947a:128) we must say that salvation is not an ideal but a reality. And with Tillich (1963:390) we can say that the Spirit unites the consciousness of the presence and the not-yet-presence of the kingdom of God.

But we must remember that this is the continual struggle of the Spirit with the flesh, it is a “voortdurend heksenproces”. Thus the *gratia interna* is anticipatory and fragmentary, but, as such, it is conservative. It is the only form of life in which life can exist in the midst of the chaos of sin. But there is no perfectionism in this, in the Spiritual Community there is a “narrow escape”, and a “harbour dredged out of the mud of sin” (Van Ruler 1945:46, 128, 140, 175; 1972:235; Tillich 1963:49, 391).

This idea is central to the concept of the *gratia interna*. This is how God saves his world. “This is how reconciliation occurs: in the complete and saving presence of God in the completely godless flesh” (Van Ruler 1945:33; cf 1973:40). A certain order is set up in the midst of the chaos

of sin, and life is only liveable because of this order. This is the presence of the Word in the power of the Spirit and leads to sanctification.

This brings us back to the idea of the provisional character of the *gratia interna*. The struggle of the Spirit with the flesh is provisional, and will fall away in the eschatological kingdom.

Our reception of the salvation in Christ, through the Holy Spirit is essentially fragmentary and anticipatory. Although in itself unambiguous, salvation posits itself in existence in a contradictory (“tegenstrijdige”) manner, and is, continually at odds with “the flesh”. It is therefore present ambiguously, but in order to understand this ambiguous presence properly we need to look at the following characteristic of the Spiritual Community.

The miraculous character of the *gratia interna*

Van Ruler (1947b:251-252) writes, “I myself am a miracle when I have faith. I can not understand how I *can* believe. The only thing that I can partially understand is that I *can* not believe, because in my sinfulness and enmity towards grace I do not *want* to believe. Even less can I understand why I believe. I can not provide a single natural or rational foundation for my faith.”

This means that the Spiritual Presence must grasp me and create faith in me. Faith can neither be identified with nor derived from any of the mental functions. Faith cannot be created by the procedures of the intellect, or by endeavours of the will or by emotional movements. But, second, faith comprehends all this within itself, uniting and subjecting it to the Spiritual Presence’s transforming power. The human spirit cannot reach the ultimate, that toward which it transcends itself, through any of its functions. But the ultimate can grasp all of these functions and raise them beyond themselves by the creation of faith (Tillich 1963:223, 133). Thus there are three aspects of the miracle character of the Spiritual Community that we must look at.

In the first place, the *gratia interna* is a reality that is dependent on God. Faith and rebirth are gifts of the Spirit (Van Ruler 1947b:252). Tillich (1963:135) refers to this as the “Protestant principle” – in relation to God everything is done by God. This implies, in the second place, that this miracle of the *gratia interna* is essentially hidden. Revelation is an ecstatic reality – it transcends the subject-object structure of creation. Revelation does not add to our knowledge of reality but shows us our relation – in our entirety – with God. Thus faith determines our life but does not add “something” (that is, some thing) to it. Therefore it is not subject to verification by experiment or trained experience. The *gratia interna* can never be analytically or empirically proved to exist (Tillich 1951:108-118; 1963:131; Van Ruler 1947b:252-253).

Therefore, “[The] Spiritual Community is also Spiritual in the sense in which Luther often uses the word, that is ‘invisible’, ‘hidden’, ‘open to faith alone’, but nevertheless real, unconquerably real. Everything Spiritual is manifest in hiddenness. It is open only to faith as the state of being grasped by the Spiritual Presence ... Only Spirit discerns Spirit” (Tillich 1963:150, 161; cf Van Ruler 1947b:251).

This means that the Spiritual Community is only ambiguously present. “Who can prove that the sermon is not idle chatter, that the sacraments are not empty symbols, that good works are not sin dressed in bright garments and that the experience of conversion is not a pure fiction” (Van Ruler 1947b:253). Thus, in the third place we must look at the certainty of faith. Does this ambiguity not introduce a dangerous insecurity into the thought and life of the church and of every individual Christian? Could this not lead us into a complete scepticism regarding the presence of the New Being? (Tillich 1957:113). Van Ruler (1947b:252) refers to the doctrine of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*, which expresses the truth that the knowledge and certainty of faith is simply evident to one in a direct and supernatural manner. Tillich (1957:114; cf 1963:151) writes that faith is able to guarantee the presence of the New Being “because its own existence is identical with the presence of the New Being. Faith itself is the immediate (not mediated by conclusions)

evidence of the New Being within and under the conditions of existence". Where the Spirit is present ambiguity is overcome. We can say that the Spirit is only ambiguously present but this is, so to speak, looking at things "from the outside". From the inside or existentially it will never do to say that the Spirit is only ambiguously present. If ambiguity was not overcome, if I was not certain of my faith then there would be no *gratia interna*.

The internal character of the *gratia interna* and the communal character of the Spiritual Community

The phrase *gratia interna* points to the internal nature of the work of the Spirit, while *Spiritual Community* points to its social nature. Certainly there is no *gratia interna* without a community. Faith needs its language, as does every act of the personality; without language it would be blind, not directed toward a content, not conscious of itself. This is the reason for the predominant significance of the community of faith. Only as a member of such a community (even if in isolation or expulsion) can man have a content for his ultimate concern. Only in a community of language can man actualise his faith (Tillich 1958:23-24). The term *gratia interna* or the term *inner word* can have the connotation of not being related to a community. Tillich's *Spiritual Community* helps us to see that this is not the case. Another danger threatens if we see the Spiritual Community as the community of those who have experienced the *gratia interna*, but where the *gratia interna* is cut off from the revelatory tradition and is internal in the sense of a mystical inwardness, where the soul is itself divine, or a part of God. This would then be a spiritualising or mysticising of the *gratia interna*; then the kingdom of God is only established in the mystical inwardness of the individual, or the divine substance of the soul is in itself the kingdom (Van Ruler 1947b:226-227).

This is a denial of the doctrine of creation, as well as of the Protestant principle. The *gratia interna* would not be *gratia* if it were not a gift from one "being" (God) to another being (a human person). It is, therefore "added" to existence, however not in the sense of "something". If God speaks to us, this is not our inner subjectivity rather, it is the Spiritual Presence grasping us from "outside".

We have seen that the *gratia interna* is not an objective "something" inside the person. But we must also say that it is not *interna* in the sense of the subjectivity of the person (Van Ruler 1947b:229). The *gratia interna* unites the subjective and the objective side of the act of faith. The ultimate of the act of faith and the ultimate that is meant in the act of faith are one and the same. God never can be object without being at the same time subject (Tillich 1958:10, 11). Certainly, the *gratia interna* is subjective, but this is the subjectivity of God (Van Ruler 1947b:229). This means that "Spiritual Community" does not refer to the "spirit" of a community but rather to the communion of a community (and of an individual within the community) with the Spirit (Tillich 1963:126-127, 155-156).

Thus far we have seen how the *gratia interna* is not *interna*. It cannot be separated from the community. It is not an objective inward part of an individual or group. It is also not a subjective inwardness. In what sense, then, is the *gratia interna* internal in mankind? The answer is that it is internal in the sense of being existent in the present – it is the eschatological future of God that is already present in history. It is the state of being grasped by that towards which self-transcendence aspires, the ultimate in being and meaning. The eschatological kingdom of God is already existent in the present in the mode of the Spirit (Tillich 1963:130; Van Ruler 1947b:226).

The terms "inner" and "outer" only lose their meaning when they are thought of in an anthropological manner. When understood in an eschatological manner they not only make sense, but also point to the provisional nature of the *gratia interna*. In the eschatological kingdom there will be no "inner" and "outer" but only mutual immanence (Tillich 1963:114; Van Ruler 1947b:226).

Thus the *gratia interna* is *interna* in that it is the immanence of the transcendent kingdom, and the Spiritual Community is communal because it is communion of a community with the Spirit.

The multiformity of the *gratia interna*

In order to properly understand this immanence – in contrast to the rejected ideas of its mystical inwardness or subjectivity – we must look at the multiformity of the *gratia interna*. “The Spirit works in individuals, in the church and in the state. In all three He sets up structures of the kingdom of God in the present. The *gratia interna* has mystic – ethical, churchly – sacramental, and political – cultural aspects” (Van Ruler 1947b:253).

This can only be understood correctly when we remember that the *interna* of the *gratia interna* is the presence of the kingdom (in a pneumatological manner) in the present, it is essentiality determining, and being resisted by, existence. In their essential nature, morality, culture, and religion interpenetrate one another. They constitute the unity of the spirit – these elements are distinguishable but not separable. Morality, or the constitution of the person as person in the encounter with other persons, is essentially related to culture and religion. Culture provides the contents of morality – the concrete ideals of personality and community and the changing laws of ethical wisdom. Religion gives to morality the unconditional character of the moral imperative, the ultimate moral aim, the reunion of the separated in *agape*, and the motivating power of grace. Culture, or the creation of a universe of meaning in *theoria* and *praxis*, is essentially related to morality and religion. The validity of cultural creativity in all its functions is based on the person-to-person encounter in which the limits to arbitrariness are established. Without the force of the moral imperative, no demand coming from the logical, aesthetic, personal and communal forms could be felt. The religious element in culture is the inexhaustible depth of a genuine cultural creation. One may call it substance or the ground from which culture lives. It is the element of ultimacy which culture lacks in itself but to which it points. Religion, or the self-transcendence of life under the dimension of spirit, is essentially related to morality and culture. There is no self-transcendence under the dimension of the spirit without the constitution of the moral self by the unconditional imperative and this self-transcendence cannot take form except within the universe of meaning created in the cultural act (Tillich 1963:95). Thus Van Ruler (1973:32; cf 1947b:256-257) points out,

There are many ways in which salvation is mediated and appropriated. There is no monistic principle in which all the aspects of salvation are involved and from which they can all be deduced. There is also not a hierarchy in which they can be bound together in an above-and-below relationship. There is only multiplicity, and in this multiplicity only synthesis and participation, a mutual grasping, association and, above all, a passing of the one salvation reality into the other.

Human existence can be divided into the personal or moral, the religious and the cultural or political. The Spirit is not closer to any of these areas compared to the others. The Spirit works in all reality. Morality, culture, and religion interpenetrate one another, and one of these elements cannot be singled out as *the* dwelling place of the Spirit. The Spirit leaves nothing alone; He goes into everything.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

1) The *gratia interna* is not an ideal to be attained. The reality of salvation is simply proclaimed. It does not refer to the essential nature of reality, but to what God says about it. As such, it is a

paradoxical reality. An idealistic understanding of the Spiritual Community is essentially idolatrous. It gives the quality of ultimacy to something preliminary. It makes unconditional what is conditional and at the same time disregards the always-present existential estrangement and the ambiguities of life and history. It is important to note that this has its consequences. Every idolatrous reliance on something finite and disregard for sin results in a profound disappointment.

2) The Spiritual Community cannot be reduced to the ethics of the individual. It is simply wrong to limit salvation to the ethical “consequences” of the *kerygma* for the individual. The *kerygma* is broader than this. The *kerygma* is soteriological. But “soteriological”, in the biblical sense, does not mean “absolutely transcendent”, “inner” and “individual”, but rather: the saving truth that is spoken over all reality. We are not saved from the world. We are saved in the world, or: we are saved with the world.

3) In the Spirit, God enters history and struggles with the flesh. In the Spiritual Community there is the struggle of the kingdom of God against the forces of demonisation and profanisation. Within this duality there is therefore a mixture of the divine and the demonic, of revelation and existence. But there is not some sort of static mixture of revelation and the flesh. The Spiritual Community is the elastic waging of war against the flesh. This does not only imply a mixture of the divine and the demonic, it is against the predominance of the demonic.

4) There is no pneumatological docetism. “In the manner of the Spirit of God” means “in the manner of the Spirit of man or woman”. In the Spirit we can come to know, will and act with God. This is the meaning of faith, and, as faith, it is not empirically verifiable, it is hidden. But this does not mean that the *gratia interna* is concealed in the sense that it is hidden in the hearts of believers. It is not the mystical “inwardness” of religious people. This becomes clear when we realise that the deepest root of salvation is the reconciliation of guilt, and that this is to be understood eschatologically as the realisation of the kingdom of God. Then all spiritualisation of the work of the Spirit is rejected. There is the struggle of the Spirit with the flesh. Christ is proclaimed, and this means that, in principle, the power of the demonic is broken, all things are relieved of their demonic “depth”, and revealed to be a part of God’s creation. There is no dualism, the Spirit leaves nothing untouched, but enters into all things. This means that wherever there is salvation, traces of the impact of the Spiritual Presence are *visible* because existence is experienced in a new and different way.

This understanding of the *gratia interna* implies the concepts of theocracy (Van Ruler) and a theology of culture (Tillich), because the struggle of the Spirit with the flesh is not confined to the inwardness of believers. It is the struggle of God with all the demons found in individuals, communities, culture, politics and religion.

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